



# SDG 16+17 Band-Aid Solutions: My Shift from Charity to Solidarity

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Six years ago, I entered my last year of high school without a concrete direction for my future. Whereas most of my friends were planning to set sail for university, I was still floundering for ideas. On a whim, I decided to go abroad to volunteer after graduation. Based on scant research and a vague notion that I was interested in medicine, I applied for a two month volunteer position with a hospital in Kenya.

When I arrived in the city of Nakuru, Kenya, I was 18-years-old and without so much as a first aid certificate. What I lacked in training, though, I made up for with confidence that I would change the world for the better.

**Of course, my experience varied dramatically from my expectations.** Most of the people I worked with at the hospital were doctors, nurses, or other highly trained professionals with years of experience, not to mention fluency in more languages than I could count. I spent most of my time cleaning, wheeling around patients, and attempting to learn a little bit of Swahili in my downtime.

After visiting what were termed “slums” to provide some basic first aid services, it became clear that my amateur efforts to apply dressings for patients failed to bandage the real needs identified by those living in these communities: affordable health care and health insurance, better access to nutrition, and improved education. By the end of my trip, I had not changed the world for others. The world, however, had changed for me.

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What I had failed to recognize in Kenya was the capacity of the people who live there to change their world themselves. Who is better suited to the task of helping a community suffering from injustice or poverty: An eighteen-year-old with no real knowledge of the country and its languages? Or the people who actually live in the community and who best understand its politics, culture and capacities?

When I returned to Edmonton, I realized that the difference I had hoped to make overseas was in fact something

that I was more suited to work towards from home. It was at this time that I was introduced to Development and Peace – a Canadian social justice organization that supports its partners in the Global South as they address unjust social, political, and economic structures.

**Development and Peace supports grassroots organizations throughout the world as they work towards social justice in their respective communities.** They also educate Canadians, like myself, about the ways in which their everyday actions impact the lives of others, at home and abroad. For the past four years, I have volunteered with Development and Peace, organizing events for youth across Canada with the hope that we can mobilize to be part of a more just and sustainable world.

You don't need to fly across the world to make a difference. There are countless ways at home to be a part of a more sustainable world.

*To get involved check out [devp.org](http://devp.org).*

