

Examination of the Determinants of Youth Voluntary Participation in Rural Community Development: The Case of Mutoko District, Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT The increasing challenge posed by HIV/AIDS and poverty coupled with limited government service delivery have increased the reliance on youth volunteers in Zimbabwe. Ironically, youth continue to lose interest in voluntary work and the reasons for this are not clear. Therefore, this paper explored factors that either promote or inhibit the involvement of youth in voluntary work. Perceptions of youth towards volunteering were also sought. A case study design involving focus group discussions and individual interviews was utilised. Youth participants were selected using a multistage stratified random sampling technique. The data was analysed using the Atlas Ti version 6 software. The desire to develop communities, for the hope of getting incentives and the quest to develop networks, motivated youth to volunteer. Results also showed that youth voluntary participation in community development vary according to gender. Likewise, the factors of volunteering differed as distance increased from the main urban area.

INTRODUCTION

The determinants of youth voluntary participation are mainly shaped by culture, prevailing situations and the history of volunteering worldwide. For instance, European youth did not experience the same cultural and political situation as African youth. Thus, they have different perceptions towards volunteering. For instance, African youth volunteering went through the pre-colonial, colonial and the post-colonial phases (United Nations Volunteers 2011). It is therefore not surprising that these phases of African history have greatly shaped youth views and opinions towards volunteering (Volunteer and Service Enquiry in Southern Africa: VOSESA 2010). African youth volunteering was only largely formalised during the colonial period. On the other hand, European youth volunteering has a longer history. As such, the determinants of volunteering vary with geographical location, age and gender of the youth (Bender and Freytag

2013). Despite this fact, little has been documented regarding how various demographic variables influence youth volunteering in Mutoko District and Zimbabwe at large. This has led to the implementation of misinformed strategies in many instances. Consequently, youth voluntary participation in the country is evidently declining (Aislinn 2011). Therefore, this paper sought to establish area based determinants for youth volunteering.

Due to limited information regarding determinants of volunteering in Zimbabwe, the paper largely reviewed literature from other countries. For instance, Brayley et al. (2014) reported that volunteers are generally motivated by the desire to help those in need. Beder and Fast (2008) and Dunn et al. (2016) argue that there is a gender distinction regarding the determinants of volunteering. For instance, men are more dominant in voluntary work than women (McDougle et al. 2011). However, Gibson (2008) argues that female youth have positive perceptions towards voluntarily participating in community work than males especially in African communities. The above arguments reflect the lack of consensus among scholars regarding the influence of gender on youth choices to volunteer. However, the arguments demonstrate the significance of gender disparities relative to the factors of volun-

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teering. Hence factors promoting youth volunteering in Mutoko District can largely be understood based on gender perspectives.

There is also a gap in knowledge regarding factors that deter youth from volunteering. Randle and Dolnicar (2009) are among the few scholars who have highlighted some barriers to youth volunteering. They claimed that lack of clearly defined roles and positions in voluntary organisations frustrate young volunteers. This implies that youth have different interests and aspirations for volunteering. That is why they only prefer to volunteer for specific opportunities that match their interests. This concurs with Bussell and Forbes (2002) suggestion that an understanding of the target group's needs is crucial to successful recruitment and retaining of youth volunteers. Therefore, this paper sought to establish if the above assessment also applies to Mutoko district in Zimbabwe.

In Zimbabwe, the absence of well-defined volunteer related policies and legal frameworks are some of the aspects that derail initiatives to promote youth volunteering (VOSESA 2010). The situation makes it difficult to implement initiatives that are meant to promote youth volunteering. Moreover, youth may not see the value of volunteering if there are no serious initiatives that highlights the significance of altruism in the country. Likewise, the United Nations Volunteer Programme (2011) observes that the absence of clearly defined policies and legal frameworks, particularly in Southern Africa, derails the agenda of stimulating youth philanthropy. Instead, the situation creates confusion in terms of strategies on recruiting and managing volunteers as organisations are not led by common guidelines. However, Dickhudt and VOSESA (2011) suggests that the situation is gradually changing. For instance, Southern African countries are embarking on establishing volunteering supportive policies and legal frameworks. A few examples include the National Youth Service and Home Based Care programmes in South Africa and Zimbabwe.

Nevertheless, Patel and Mupedziswa (2007) criticised the NYS program as militaristic and tailored to further the interest of the ruling parties. Perhaps this explains why the programs did not increase youth voluntary participation. Similarly, Aislinn (2011) points out that youth volunteering continues to decline in the Zimbabwe. However, bearing in mind the challenges posed by HIV/AIDS and poverty coupled with poor service delivery issues, increasing youth vol-

unteering becomes a top priority for the country. Thus, this paper establishes specific area based practical factors that influence youth volunteering. This will inform feasible strategies for promoting youth involvement in voluntary work.

Objectives

The main objective of this paper was to explore factors that determine voluntary participation of youth in rural community development in Mutoko District of Zimbabwe. The focus was on determining factors that either promote or inhibit voluntary participation of youth in community development. The paper also explored whether voluntary participation of youth in community development varied due to age, gender and distance from urban areas.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

A qualitative research approach was used. The approach allowed for in-depth exploration of the determinants of youth volunteering. It entailed the use of a case study design. A case study design was ideal due to the fact that the researcher was interested in obtaining in-depth data from a small section of the population. An exploratory approach was followed in order to unearth and explain the views of youth in four wards of Mutoko District. This approach also enabled an in-depth collection of qualitative data regarding unknown feelings, thoughts and opinions of youth towards voluntary participation. Moreover, it assisted in discovering underlying meanings and patterns of relationships between youth variables and their choice of volunteering. Youth between the ages of 16 and 30 from Nyamuzuwe, Nyamukoho, Nyamakope and All Souls wards of Mutoko District participated in this study. This is the age group that is likely to understand the importance of involvement in voluntary work.

A multi-stage stratified random sampling was employed to select 40 participants from the District. Participants were drawn from two wards situated near the urban centre and two wards situated far away from the urban centre. This was done to determine if distance from the main service centre (Mutoko centre) had an effect on the voluntary participation of youth in community work. From the four wards, 12 villages were further randomly selected and clustered. In each cluster of villages, youth meetings were arranged through youth mobilization by community lead-

ers and the researcher. Participants were selected to represent various villages. The number of participants was determined by the number of attendances from each village. In cases where some village clusters were totally not represented, other data collection meetings were arranged to ensure representation of those villages. However, given the fact that this was a qualitative study, a limited number was sampled. Participants were grouped according to gender and age. This means that male and female youth were categorized into 16-20 year olds and 21-30 year age groups. These groups were then given a set of semi-structured interview guides to answer in reflective circles. Semi-structured interviews were preferred in this study due to their flexibility in allowing for probing and clarification of questions. As such, they allowed for a thorough exploration of the research questions. Reflection circles were ideal for discussions as they created a conducive and power balanced environment for the participants to open up and actively participate in the discussions. After the group discussions, participants were also interviewed individually using the same set of questions in order to get a deeper understanding from each of them.

Qualitative data was analysed using the ATLAS ti 6 version software. Firstly, data from the field was entered into excel sheets. It was then coded and organized using the ATLAS ti version 6 software. This software was ideal due to the fact that it was able to systematically organise complex data into themes. In addition, the software enabled the researchers to establish the relationships between voluntary choices and variables such as age, gender and location. This is due to the fact that the software was able allow the grouping of data into families and then build relationship linkages among various codes and quotations. Pictures and tape recorded data was also analysed using this software. The results were then exported from the software and presented in the form of themes and sub-themes.

RESULTS

Profile of Participants

Forty male and female youth who were 16-30 years old participated in this study. Eighteen participants were from two wards situated within 5km of Mutoko urban area. Twenty-two par-

ticipants were drawn from wards situated about 25km from the urban centre. This was due to the fact that they responded more positively to the call for participating in the study than their urban counterparts. The study consisted of 23 males and 17 females. This shows that male participants responded more positively to the call to participate than their female counterparts.

Desire to Contribute to Community Development

In this subsection, factors promoting volunteering, taking into account age, gender and distance from Mutoko town, are described. The desire to contribute to development was the major factor motivating youth to volunteer in the district. Twenty-five participants reported their desire and passion to upgrade local areas as a motive for volunteering. Participants defined it as a process through which the standards of living as well as infrastructural improvement of the community are raised. While adult male youth echoed the aforesaid view, younger youth generally claimed that their motive was the desire for skills development. The age difference was probably due to the fact that older youth better understood their community development responsibility. Articulating this view, one participant said:

"I take volunteering as an opportunity to develop my community and change the poor situation apparent in this area."

Male youth, 26 years old, Nyamukoho Ward
On the other hand, although supportive of the aforementioned developmental motive, 15 female youth stated that the sense of caring and Ubuntu is what motivated them. This was an indication that females assumed more caring responsibility. Regarding this view, distance from the urban centre did not play a crucial role in the responses since most participants' echoed similar sentiments. Therefore, the desire for development by the youth was not necessarily influenced by their location but rather by their gender and age.

Lack of Job Opportunities

The high rate of unemployment also emerged as one of the major contributing factor to youth volunteerism in Mutoko District communities. Sixteen out of twenty three male youth

cited their lack of formal employment as a reason for turning to voluntary work. They hoped to get more employment opportunities as a result of work experience gained from volunteering. A gender disparity existed regarding this view as female youth did not consider it as a motive. The patriarchal belief which compels males to seek job opportunities while females remain at home especially in deep rural areas of the district may explain this discrepancy. The responsibility placed on men to provide for their families impel male youth to volunteer in anticipation of future paid employment. Volunteering in expectation of future employment increased as one moved further away from the urban centre. This is mostly due to the diminishing rates and expectations of job opportunities and limited industries in the rural areas. The words of the participant below capture this view:

“Most of us are unemployed and volunteering work opens paths for getting to other jobs in big cities like Harare where you can get more money.”

Male, 22 years old, All Souls Ward.

Developing Social Networks

Nineteen participants were volunteering due to their desire to socialise with other people. In fact, the desire to meet new people was a key motive for female volunteers. Female youth also indicated their desire to develop social networks, share gossip and develop personal relationships with other youth. Notably, the significance of socialising as a factor of youth voluntary participation was more apparent in peripheral rural areas. In these areas, occasions for entertainment are limited, thus volunteering is an ideal opportunity for socialising away from parents. In support of this motive, a participant said:

“I usually have good time to talk to my friends without being shy of my parents and relatives when I am volunteering with other youth.”

Female youth, 21 years old, Nyamukoho Ward.

Desire for Benefits and Incentives

There was general consensus among youth regardless of gender and age that attaining material and non-material incentives was a motive for voluntary involvement. Twenty-nine out of

forty youth indicated their desire for material rewards as a pre-requisite to volunteering. Despite the knowledge that volunteering did not entail payment, youth were largely attracted by hopes for some incentives. Financial rewards, food parcels, clothing and skills attainment are some of the main benefits which reportedly attracted youth participation into volunteering. Thus where incentives were given, youth engagement was greater than in other areas. For instance, at All- Souls, voluntary engagement was high due to the fact that youth were given clothes and food to participate in community health care services. These rewards were viewed by youth as mere gestures of appreciation rather than real payments for volunteering. The economic hardships that prevail in the district were singled out as a trigger for their quest for incentives after volunteering. However, the aforementioned observation was made in peripheral areas of the district thereby revealing the influence of distance from the urban area on the factor. This is mainly due to the high intensity of economic hardships moving further away from the town. Articulating this view one participant said:

“Getting money after volunteering is always good. We want to buy some good phones so where will we get money if they do not give us some money.”

Male, 25 years old, Nyamuzuwe Ward.

Out of the 29 participants who mentioned their desire for incentives, 19 were male while the remaining were females. Community beliefs place family responsibility on male youth. This explains male youth's quest for incentives.

Quest to Attain New Skills

Apart from above factors, the prospect of gaining new skills such as home based caring, bridge and road construction and soft skills from working in community based organisations motivated 12 youth to volunteer. For instance, in Nyamuzuwe Ward, youth were largely involved in road construction. Youth residing near the urban area showed more desire for skills development than those residing further away from the urban area. Youth seemed only interested in activities that match their skills of preference. Thus, while in peripheral areas more male youth were largely attracted to construction opportunities, youth in the urban area were more inter-

ested in office work, campaigns and health care opportunities. This is due to the fact that youth in the urban area largely viewed construction work as strenuous and of low status as compared to office work.

Factors Inhibiting Youth Voluntary Participation

Despite the existence of many motivating factors, the study results showed that there were various factors discouraging youth in Mutoko District from voluntarily participating in community development work. In most cases these factors varied with sex, age and distance from the urban area. The main factors included unfavourable mobilising techniques, lack of rewards, lack of knowledge and lack of recognition by community members. However, among the minor factors is restriction by husbands and guardians, lack of employment prospects after volunteering. The factors are discussed in the following sections.

Unfavourable Mobilising Techniques

Results demonstrated that pressure by community leaders was among the major factors disheartening young people from volunteering. In fact, 14 participants indicated that they felt manipulated by their community leaders. This is due to the fact that most of the volunteering activities were initiated by elders and youth were only informed on what to do regardless of their interest. Worth noting is the fact that this view was common among youth residing further away from the urban centre. This highlights the fact that unfavourable recruitment strategies were seemingly dominant in deep rural areas where traditional leaders were situated as indicated by the responses. Out of the 14 participants who echoed this concern, only 4 were female. This was mainly due to the fact that male youth were expected to volunteer more than females in rural communities. Below are selected quotes from interviews that illustrate youth frustrations:

“Youth need to be persuaded instead of being forced by community leaders to volunteer, we are tired of being treated like kids.”

Male, 21 years old, Nyamukoho Ward.

“Use of force by community leaders demotivates us from volunteering, we feel used.”

Male, 28 years old, Nyamuzuwe Ward.

Apart from the above mentioned facts, 8 older youth of different genders indicated that lack of community appreciation for volunteers discouraged them. Proximity to the urban centre did not have any influence about how youth felt regarding the lack of appreciation by their community leaders. This attests to the fact that lack of recognition of volunteers contributed to the decline of youth involvement in voluntary work in the district. Expressing this view, one participant said:

“Sometimes the communities fail to respect the job well done by the youth that’s why we dodge volunteering when they need us to volunteer.”

Male, 24 years old, Nyamukoho Ward.

Youth were also discouraged from volunteering by the lack of incentives. It was apparent that most of them were interested in paying opportunities. Thus non-paying opportunities had very little power to attract volunteers.

Insufficient Knowledge on Volunteering

Nine female youth reported that they did not have information regarding the benefits and opportunities for volunteering. Regardless of distance from the urban area, 13 participants noted that they did not value volunteering as a helpful aspect in their lives. The recipients of the idea were mainly female youth. Below is what some participants said:

“Female youth lack knowledge about the good things of volunteering. This makes us lazy to participate in community work when we are supposed to do something.”

Female, 19 years old, Nyamakope Ward.

“I don’t even know if there is any opportunity to volunteering in this area, maybe when I know I will try to volunteer.”

Female, 20 years old, Nyamuzuwe Ward.

Other minor factors which were reported include lack of time due to occupation with home chores, disapproval by husbands especially for married youth as well as disapproval by parents who believe volunteering was for males. These factors applied to female youth regardless of their geographical location. Below is what one female youth said:

“For us who are married, our husbands banned us from volunteering as they believe volunteering is for man.”

Female 22 years old, Nyamukoho Ward.

This implies that patriarchal beliefs in the community were playing a part in discouraging

females from volunteering. Peer pressure, lack of volunteering resources such as transport and lack of job prospects after volunteering were also some of the factors affecting a minority of youth in Mutoko district.

Youth Perceptions towards Voluntary Participation in Community Development

It was revealed that male youth volunteered more than female youth. Variations in their perceptions indicated the aforementioned fact. While 30 participants reported that male youth volunteered more in community work, only 10 believed women volunteered more. The study observed that male youth perceive volunteering as their patriarchal social responsibility while female youth do not carry that responsibility hence their limited involvement in voluntary work. It was also apparent that the availability of more manual work-related volunteering opportunities favours male volunteers. Female youth indicated that they preferred care related opportunities such as home based care which were limited in the district hence their limited participation in voluntary work.

Youth residing far from the urban area participated more in community development projects than those residing near the urban area. In this regard, 31 participants believed that youth residing far away from urban areas were volunteering more than their urban counterparts. Social togetherness, norms and caring values which are the basis for volunteering were still more apparent in communities far from the urban centre. This instilled a sense of responsibility in youth residing in those areas. However, cultural diversity, lack of community ownership and eroded community norms, reportedly enhanced individualism among youth near the urban area. This ultimately reduced community responsibility and voluntary participation among youth residing near urban areas. Limited job opportunities in areas situated far from the urban area also create ample time for youth to volunteer. In light of the above facts, it was clear that the variation of volunteering among youth residing far and near urban areas was due to their different conditions and circumstances.

DISCUSSION

The study revealed that gender influenced the choice of youth to volunteer. Dunn et al. (2016) also suggested that there is a gender dis-

inction regarding the factors of volunteering. For instance, male youth are more motivated by incentives and the desire to contribute to development. The socialization of male youth as breadwinners prompted them to favour paying volunteering opportunities than the entirely free ones. This is in line with Binder and Freytag's (2013) assertion that economic factors such as incentives and material rewards motivate volunteers. Similarly, past findings by Melville and Museveni (2008) and Torgler (2008) also support that men usually become more involved in adventurous, incentive-oriented activities and in decision making positions. This research further found out that youth in Mutoko District prefer incentive oriented opportunities due to the economic hardships that compel them to fend for their families. On the contrary, female youth are motivated by the desire to socialise and provide care services. Valinas et al. (2012) also echoed that social norms put pressure on young people to impress and gain social approval and acceptance by community members. This might be the case in the district because normally female youth are expected by norms to be caring.

Significantly, male youth volunteered more than female youth in the district. McCloughan et al. (2011) also found that men are more dominant in voluntary work than women. Worth noting is the fact that in the case of Mutoko, the reason behind this trend was mainly the manual nature of volunteering opportunities which favoured males. Moreover, the prevailing patriarchal beliefs encourage male volunteering than female volunteering. However, Gibson (2008) claimed that female youth have positive perceptions towards voluntarily participating in community work than male youth especially in African communities. These differences in findings suggest that the influence of gender on volunteering varies relative to geographical locations. Perhaps cultural beliefs, values and norms might also be playing a role in the evident differences.

The decision to volunteer in community work was reportedly not primarily influenced by the age group of an individual within the youth age bracket. This observation is different from van Goethem et al.'s (2012) findings that older youth are more likely to volunteer than younger youth regardless of their educational level. It is also interesting to note that youth residing far away from the urban area appeared to volunteer more than their urban counterparts in the district. This

is due to the fact that the responsibility to develop local areas was instilled through enhancing community beliefs and norms of togetherness as distance increased from the urban area. Even though the spirit of caring is fading, communities situated far from urban areas were still influenced by the idea togetherness and caring for each other. This validates the claim that the concept of extended families has traditionally facilitated community solidarity and togetherness in both difficult and good times in most African countries (VOSESA 2010).

Unfavourable mobilising techniques, lack of incentives, lack of interesting opportunities and lack of knowledge were the main barriers to youth voluntary participation. Moleni (2006) also found that projects which were not providing incentives attracted less volunteers in Malawi. Randle and Dolnicar (2009) concurred with the fact that lack of opportunities hinder voluntary involvement. Therefore, understanding the target group becomes critical in the recruitment and retaining of youth volunteers (Bussell and Forbes 2002). For instance, one of the reason why most female in Mutoko were not involved in voluntary work was the lack of sufficient caregiving opportunities. On the other hand, male youth were mainly frustrated by lack of incentives, coercion by community leaders as well as lack of recognition. Most importantly is the fact that a combination of all these factors was leading to the decline in youth voluntary participation. It is also vital to note that gender is a key factor in the barriers to youth voluntary engagement. Hence, efforts to overcome these hindrances should consider gender differences.

Hindrances to youth volunteering also seemingly differed with distance from the urban area. Youth residing far away from the urban area volunteered more than those residing around Mutoko urban centre. This was due to the fact that youth in those areas reported more community solidarity and the internalisation of the spirit of caring which compels them to help in community development. The elderly also still upheld the social norms that support the need for community responsibility to work for free in times of need. Valinas et al. (2012) also concurred that social norms put pressure on young people to impress and gain social acceptance by community members. This is unlike in urban areas where people of various backgrounds meet and the sense of togetherness is being replaced by individualism.

CONCLUSION

The factors promoting and hindering youth volunteering varied primarily due to gender and distance from the urban area in the district. While male youth volunteered mainly for developing local areas and gaining incentives, female youth volunteered mostly for socialising and caring purposes. There was also a gender disparity regarding the factors inhibiting youth volunteering. For instance, while female youth were mainly inhibited from volunteering by the manual nature of volunteering tasks and insufficient information, male youth were demotivated by lack of incentives, lack of recognition by community members and coercion by community leaders. The paper also established that most male youth were volunteering to do community development work in the district apparently due to the manual nature of the work and patriarchal nature of the communities which in turn instilled a sense of responsibility. Worth noting was the fact that as distance increased from the main urban area, youth volunteering seemingly increased. Community togetherness which is still apparent in those areas fostered social responsibility to volunteer among youth.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper recommends that the strategies to enhance youth volunteering should take into consideration the fact that factors of volunteering differ mainly with gender and distance from the urban area. Thus, in order to successfully promote youth volunteering, strategies need to be target-oriented. Direct policies targeting youth voluntary promotion should also be put in place in Mutoko District and Zimbabwe at large. Organisations offering volunteering opportunities should also conduct need assessment studies before recruiting youth volunteers. This way, organisations will be able to provide the right motivation for youth to volunteer. Future studies should explore factors inhibiting and promoting volunteering for all age groups across regions with geographical differences. This will likely confirm whether factors of volunteering vary due to gender, age and geographical location.

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