

Exploring Practical Strategies for Promoting Youth Voluntary Participation in Rural Community Development: The Case of Mutoko District, Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT Youth volunteering has become a vital tool for development in recent years. Worsening challenges that afflict communities such as HIV/AIDS, Unemployment and poverty, among others have increased the demand for volunteers. However, despite this high demand for volunteers, voluntary participation of youth is decreasing. Yet, it is not clear why this is happening. Consequently, failure to address this problem might deepen poverty, youth irresponsibility and curtail development efforts particularly in developing communities. This paper explored strategies which can be implemented to increase youth voluntary participation in Mutoko District. A qualitative approach involving focus group discussions and individual interviews was employed. Youth participants were selected using a multistage stratified random sampling technique. The qualitative data was analysed using the thematic system and matrix ranking technique. Results indicated that the strategies for promoting volunteering varied with geographical locations and gender. It was therefore deduced that strategies for volunteering must be crafted taking into consideration gender and distance from the urban area. The need for target oriented strategies was therefore apparent.

INTRODUCTION

Effective service delivery has increasingly become a challenge especially in under resourced developing countries. For this reason many African countries have turned to volunteering as a more sustainable way of supplementing human resources in community development (Voluntary and Service Enquiry Southern Africa (VOESA 2010). To date, various policy frameworks, legal frameworks and advocacy organisations have been established particularly in the SADC region in order to promote youth volunteering. However, despite the noble efforts, the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) and VOESA (2011) revealed that voluntary participation has not yet met its potential for development in the region. Likewise, youth volunteering in Zimbabwe is not satisfactory. Anyway a critical question that remain unanswered is whether the strategies in place address practical issues on the ground? Do they reflect the voices of youth? Finding answers to these questions might help to unlock youth zeal to actively participate in voluntary work. As

such, this paper sought to explore the strategies for promoting youth volunteering. This was done in order to gather youth perspectives from their own lens. This assists in amplifying youth voices and thus establishing practical strategies that can unlock volunteering prowess.

Broader literature highlights that strategies for promoting youth volunteering are mainly related to interests, behavioural change and modification of recruiting ways (NYDA 2013; VOESA 2011; Perold et al. 2011). Based on this body of knowledge, particularly in the Southern African region, it is critical to understand contextual motives to youth volunteering. In addition to the aforementioned facts, Vallinas et al. (2012) suggests that volunteering programmes should be based on youth interest in order for them to attract more volunteers. As such, motivations should be need based age and gender inclusive (Dunn et al. 2016). This is due to the fact that youth have different preferences hence their motives to volunteer vary. Therefore, there is need to match volunteers' motives and available tasks. Allen and Shaw (2009) also highlighted that the Maslow's hierarchy of needs should be considered in understanding youth volunteering needs. It is also essential to provide autonomy to young volunteers in executing their

tasks. When youth are involved in decision making they feel empowered and enticed (Allen and Shaw 2009). Given this background, it is crucial to understand area based strategies while considering age and gender disparities.

In Zimbabwe, literature on youth volunteering is still limited. However, a few recent studies revealed critical area specific hindrances to youth volunteering that require customised strategies. Kativhu et al. (2017) revealed major deterrents to youth voluntary participation in development work that encompasses unfavourable mobilising techniques, insufficient knowledge on volunteering, lack of rewards and lack of recognition. Worth noting is the fact that the hindrances varied with gender and distance from the urban area. To this effect, it is clear that strategies to enhance youth volunteering are likely to vary with gender and geographical location.

History of a country or community influences youth volunteering trends. As a result, it is essential to understand the background of youth volunteering in the Southern African region. Understanding the past provide insight into the future of youth volunteerism. The concept of volunteering is part of the African traditional philosophy of Ubuntu, which entails sharing, caring and humanity. The United Nations Volunteers (UNV 2011) emphasizes that volunteering forms the backbone of African people's survival through sharing of scarce resources and helping each other in difficulty times. In the African context, youth voluntary participation is a reciprocal activity which is a way of expressing social responsibility and humanity (VOSESA 2010).

Although African youth have traditionally been volunteering informally, political and social changes which occurred in the past reconstructed the way they perceive volunteering. During the colonial era, youth volunteering was largely perceived as forced cheap labor. It was characterized by manipulation by the imperialist governments that sought survival in hostile political situations. During that time, voluntary service was formalized and streamlined to suit colonialist developmental system rather than as a network for social support as it used to be (Patel and Mupedziswa 2007). As such, formal volunteering structures as well as financial and non-material incentives were introduced. However, the reconstruction upset the African sys-

tem of mutual help, kinship and togetherness as individualism became apparent (Patel and Mupedziswa 2007). In the post-colonial era, many African governments reconfigured youth volunteering through providing Africanised strategies to support youth and public volunteering. This was necessitated by escalating service delivery challenges faced by the newly established black governments. The establishment of National Youth Service programmes (NYS) in most SADC countries typified strategies for promoting youth volunteering in the region (Patel 2007). However, most of the initiatives such as policies are not directly related to youth volunteering. Instead they generally cover public volunteering without considering regional differences, age variations as well as gender distinctions.

Like other SADC countries, Zimbabwean also established the National Youth Service established in 2001 (VOSESA 2011). The NYS programme was aimed at renewing the spirit of citizenship, patriotism and community responsibility among youth (Dhemba and Kaseke 2006). In its broadest meaning, the NYS program spells out the need for young people to volunteer and serve their communities in order to manoeuvre development, especially in remote rural areas. However, Patel and Mupedziswa (2007) and Perold (2006) argue that NYS programmes have been in most cases, criticized as being militaristic and a weapon for furthering political interests of the ruling party. This was also typified by the militarist training of the youth as opposed to the idea of instilling the sense of volunteerism. These programs were also designed without engaging the youth, hence they had very little support from the youth. Besides, the NYS program, direct initiatives to promote youth volunteering in Zimbabwe are limited. Based on this observation, Kativhu et al. (2017) recommended the need for direct policies and initiatives for guiding youth volunteering at national and local levels in Zimbabwe.

The current paper sought to establish practical strategies that are informed by youth views. The main aim of the paper was to identify strategies for promoting voluntary participation of youth in community development work. The findings of this study would be the first step towards gathering area based strategies. This in turn informs a national strategic framework for promoting youth volunteering.

Objective

The specific objective of the paper was to explore strategies for promoting youth participation in voluntary community work with regard to age, gender and distance from the main urban area.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Mutoko District which is located in Mashonaland East Province of Zimbabwe. Four Wards, namely Nyamuzuwe, Nyamakoho, Nyamakope and All Souls were earmarked for the study. Mutoko District is situated about 143 km East of Harare which is the capital city of Zimbabwe. The District is inhabited by the Buja Shona speaking people. Its main business center is Mutoko which was established in 1911. Nyamakope and All Souls wards are located 5 kms from Mutoko centre. Their proximity to the town centre provides them easy access to the Non-Governmental organisations and other governmental organisations providing volunteering opportunities in the area. On the other hand, Nyamuzuwe and Nyamakoho Wards are located about 25kms and 48 km to the North and east of Mutoko business centre, respectively.

A qualitative research approach was utilised. This was due to the fact that it allows for a qualitative in-depth description and understanding of actions and events (Babbie 2010). Therefore, it was ideal for discovering strategies and their underlying meanings. The study utilised a case study design. Bearing in mind that in-depth information was required, a small sample was essential for obtaining expansive data. Forty participants were drawn from four wards. The Wards were clustered according to their proximity to the urban centre. Thus two Wards were within 5 km of Mutoko urban area and two were about 25 km and 48 km respectively from the urban area. This was done in order to determine if distance from the urban area had any influence on the preferred strategies for volunteering. Participants were selected using a multistage sampling technique. Firstly, both volunteering and non-volunteering youth were purposively selected from the four wards. They were then clustered into groups of male and female; young youth and older youth. This was done in four selected

data collection centres. Semi-structured interview guides were then administered to participants in reflection circles. This instrument was ideal because it allows for asking pre planned questions with the flexibility of probing until clarity is achieved. While in the groups participants were ranked their responses according to significance. All participants voluntarily participated after the study objectives were explained to them. They were also not required to fill in their names on the response sheet in order to protect their privacy.

Key informant interviews were also conducted with representatives from youth civic leaders, voluntary work youth facilitators and community youth officers who were responsible for youth development. Data were analysed using the thematic analysis and matrix ranking techniques. The thematic analysis method was ideal for establishing how participants deduce meaning of a specific phenomenon by analysing their perceptions, attitudes, understanding and experience of the phenomenon (Maree 2007). The Matrix scoring technique assisted in ranking and determining the significance of strategies from the responses. Data were then categorised into themes and sub-themes.

RESULTS

Biographical Information

Forty male and female youth who were 16-30 years old participated in the study. Wards situated far from Mutoko town centre contributed fifty-five percent of the participants and the remaining were from two wards situated within 5 km of Mutoko urban area. Regarding gender, fifty-seven percent were male youth while forty-three percent were female. With regard to education achievements, thirty percent of the participants were out of school, forty percent were at secondary school level and the remaining were at colleges.

Introduction

Results revealed diverse potential strategies for promoting youth voluntary participation in community development work. The strategies included provision of incentives, societal recognition of volunteers, launching information dissemination campaigns, provision of favour-

able volunteering environment, establishing gender inclusive opportunities and provision of supportive resources. What follows is a detailed explanation of the above mentioned strategies.

Strategies for Promoting Youth Volunteering

Provision of Incentives

The majority of respondents (87%) widely regarded incentives as a significant motivation for volunteering. The introduction of rewards such as money, clothes and food were reportedly crucial motives for recruiting and retaining youth volunteers in the District. Consequently, incentivised projects attracted more volunteers in the area. The view did not vary with gender, age and distance from the urban area. The economic hardships prevalent in the district compelled youth to seek volunteering projects providing incentives. Although the majority of youth preferred immediate rewards and benefits, ten percent of the respondents opted for future oriented benefits such as acquisition of skills and work experience. This was common especially among young youth who had less home responsibility and much willingness for personal development. Worth noting is the fact that there was no substantial change in opinions as distance increased from the urban area to the periphery. Thus showing that youth in the District are generally motivated to volunteer by rewards and incentives. To elaborate the aforementioned facts, selected participants had the following to say:

"We need money to survive, things are tough here so we need something because working without money looks like wasting time I should have been doing part time job." Male, 24 years, All Souls Ward.

"As youth we are used to working without money but for how long should we be working for nothing, we need just something to thank us be it food or something for survival because life is difficulty in the villages." Female, 22 years, Nyamukoho Ward.

Launching Information Dissemination Campaigns

Fifty percent of the responses also illustrated the need to increase dissemination of voluntary related information to youth in rural com-

munities. Required information included advertising volunteering opportunities and illustrating the significance as well as benefits of volunteering. The need for volunteering education was echoed by eighty-two percent of the women. This attest to the fact that female youth require more education than men in the area. The view was common in urban peripheral rural areas. The fact that female youth did not often volunteer in community work might explain their lack of knowledge about various volunteering aspects.

"In this community girls need to be educated on the importance of volunteering because they think it is for man, (Taneta nekushanda vakagara), meaning we are tired of working while they are sitting." Male, 20 years, Nyamukope Ward.

"As girls we need education and awareness campaigns about the importance of volunteering and to be included in the community development programming process were men are only called." Female, 21 years, Nyamukoho Ward.

The statements above reflect that, while male youth felt burdened by volunteering, female youth felt frustrated by their omission in volunteering. This was an indication that stereotypes and cultural beliefs that prohibited female from volunteering negatively affected youth voluntary participation in the area. In this respect, provision of education to the whole community can lead to change of attitude and loosening of beliefs and thus increasing youth volunteering. Responses also highlighted the need to move to instil gender equality in philanthropy so as to promote balanced youth participation in voluntary work.

Societal Recognition of Youth Volunteers

Regardless of the provision of incentives and knowledge, thirty-two percent of the youth were concerned about lack of respect and recognition. It was reported that community members were disrespecting volunteers'. This precipitated feelings of uselessness and manipulation among youth. Consequently, this curtailed their willingness to engage in voluntary community development work as they consistently felt like inferior onlooker stakeholders. The view was echoed by male and female respondents from peripheral areas of the district. Below are statements which reflect some participants' views during interviews.

"We need to be respected, that is proper communication whenever leaders are talking to us or when we are volunteering in order for us to be proud of our work." Male, 26 years, Nyamukoho Ward.

"Good treatment, acknowledging their work, awarding young people with certificates after completing their projects are some of the main things youth cry for." Female, 28 years, Ward Youth Officer, Nyamuzuwe Ward.

Despite the quest for respect and recognition, fifteen percent respondents required certificates of participation. Evidence of voluntary engagement was crucial for future job prospects. This view was universal across gender and distance. In support of the above mentioned view, a frustrated female youth had the following to say:

"I wouldn't volunteer knowing that there is no appreciation of my sweat, working for free can only be beneficial if I will have a certificate of appreciation at the end of it. Without a certificate, I rather sell fruits than work for nothing." Female, 25 years, Nyamuzuwe Ward.

The above statement illustrated the frustration reserved by youth due to lack of certificates and appreciation after volunteering. The provision of certificates might therefore significantly motivate youth to volunteer.

Provision of Favourable Volunteering Environment

Another fifteen percent of respondents from the urban periphery advocated for a change of attitude among community members and community leaders towards youth volunteers. Coercion by community leaders to volunteer was largely regarded as a setback to volunteering. The use of more persuasive volunteer recruitment strategies as opposed to authoritarian methods was alternatively suggested. Additionally opportunities are supposed to be offered based on interest rather was also mentioned as a way increasing voluntary engagement. Female youth residing in urban peripheral rural areas further demonstrated the need for gender sensitive opportunities. The following extract illustrates a suggestion made during interviews:

"As a girl, it is difficult to work in repairing roads and bridges, I can work happily in soft tasks such as sewing, home based care or even

office work if it becomes available." Female, 23 years, Nyamukoho Ward.

Seven percent of male respondents were in favour of job placement assurances after volunteering. A particular male illustrated his concern in the following quotation.

"It surprises us that you work daily in the roads and dams for nothing, people laughing at us. But when jobs opportunities come, only those in town are called to fill them. Please our leaders should consider us for jobs because we are able to work also." Male, 28 years, Nyamukoho Ward.

Provision of Supporting Resources

Results also indicate that seventeen percent of respondents suggested the need for supportive resources. Required resources included, transport, safety clothing and other task related necessities. Therefore, organisations recruiting volunteers need to provide resources such as transport, safety equipment especially for health related tasks and other relevant materials. This would reduce the burden on volunteers. The universality of the aforementioned view across the district indicated its relevance as a motivating aspect.

Establishment of Gender Inclusive Opportunities

The majority of female youth (60%) also suggested the need for gender sensitive opportunities as opposed to stereotypically male tasks only. Suggested opportunities included care giving prospects for the sick and orphanage, sowing and other female related activities. It was indicated that the current opportunities were suitable for male youth. Bridge and road repair, school infrastructure repair and farming activities were some of the existing opportunities.

DISCUSSION

There were more volunteers in projects where incentives were being provided in the area. This attest to the fact that youth prefer incentives in order for them to volunteer. The prevailing economic hardships in the district prompted youth to prefer incentives in order to survive (Kativhu et al. 2017). This is in line with observations by UNV (2011) that some young people perceive

voluntary participation as a way of earning a little income in the form of stipends given the escalating rates of unemployment and poverty in various communities. Despite the situation, Lewis (2014) warned that there is growing criticism of the pitfalls of paid volunteering. The pitfalls include manipulation of volunteers as cheap labor by some organizations. Given the pitfalls, the provision of incentives should be treated with caution in order to make sure that rewards are given as token of appreciation rather than compensation. Similarly, Hazeldine and Baillie (2015) highlighted the urgent need to find ways of rewarding volunteering without exposing traits of cheap labor and exploitation particularly among the poor. One way this can be achieved is through understanding the needs of the volunteers, proper explanation of the meaning of rewards and respecting volunteers.

It was also revealed that female were largely not volunteering due to lack of information. Thus, most of them required information regarding volunteering opportunities, benefits of volunteering as well as its importance to the community in order for them to actively participate in charitable work. The need for dissemination of volunteering information confirms Kativhu et al.'s (2017) findings that lack of knowledge is a major deterrent to youth volunteering in Mutoiko District. Perold et al. (2011) also emphasised that young people who are not involved in charitable work lack knowledge and understanding of its significance. Besides availing volunteering information, creating enabling environment for volunteering to flourish is critical. This encompasses, provision of resources, recognition of voluntary work, policy establishment and volunteer market research. Hazeldine and Baillie (2015) concurrently recommended the need to invest in building enabling environments in order to address barriers to volunteering. This can be achieved through active engagement of all volunteering stakeholders in the processes of voluntary planning and implementation.

Gender inclusive opportunities are required. Opportunities in the community were believed to be stereotypically suitable for male youth. This limited female youth voluntary engagement. McCloughan et al. (2011) also argue that men participate more in voluntary work more than women in Europe because of the availability of opportunities in fields such as sports and rescue services which are favorable to men.

It was also revealed that preferences for strategies varied as distance increase from the urban area. Among the main strategies which were not universal to the whole district were the need for recognition and appreciation of volunteers by the community, provision of information regarding volunteering, and availability of lenient and persuasive recruitment strategies by community leaders. These strategies commonly applied to youth situated far from the urban area. Similarly NYDA (2013) reported motives to volunteering for youth in grassroots communities of South Africa that included, recognition, learning opportunities and provision of employment. The current paper established that the variations of strategies between urban and rural areas were due to the fact that youth residing in different geographical areas had different experiences, exposure and needs. Hence their perceptions and expectations varied accordingly. Given this testimony, it holds water to comment that strategies to promote youth volunteering should be situation based. This will enable them to efficiently curb the declining rates of youth volunteering. In line with this view, Bussell and Forbes (2002) and Perold et al. (2011) suggest that voluntary recruitment requires a clear understanding of the target group needs.

Male and female youth have diverse needs hence strategies to attract them to volunteer must vary respectively. For instance, female youth revealed their preference for soft and caring opportunities like home based care while male youth were attracted to manual and adventurous work. In line with this view, Kativhu et al. (2017) highlighted that motivations to youth volunteering vary with gender. Another crucial reason for the variation in the choice of strategies was the type of skills required by various youth. Male youth who inspired to follow the construction career preferred building opportunities while female youth interested in pursuing health related careers preferred home based care activities. In line with the above mentioned fact, McBride et al. (2011) suggests that volunteering programmes should be based on youth interest. It is therefore crucial to match volunteering opportunities to youth interest.

CONCLUSION

Various strategies for promoting youth voluntary participation in development work were

sought. The major strategies included, provision of incentives, dissemination of volunteering related information, recognition of youth volunteers and creation of conducive volunteering environment. While male youth were in favour of incentives and recognition, female youth favoured the introduction of more soft and care related opportunities as well as volunteering education and awareness campaigns. Youth from the urban periphery advocated for more lenient recruitment strategies. Variably, those residing near urban areas preferred the introduction of a wide range of opportunities and provision of job opportunities after volunteering among other benefits. It was clear that the currently applied strategies were not appropriate for enhancing satisfactory youth volunteering. Hence, the paper provided practical strategies that can be utilised in the area going forward. The strategies are also a useful point of reference in other related communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that public and private sectors offering youth volunteering opportunities should provide diverse opportunities to increase the choices available for youth. Volunteering opportunities should also be gender inclusive in order to attract both female and male youth. The study gave a snapshot of opportunities that are suitable for either male or female. More so volunteer organisation should increasingly absorb youth volunteers after completion of engagement. There is also need for the provision of volunteering related awareness campaigns across the District. This would help to disseminate voluntary related information which seem to be currently lacking. Policies for youth volunteering should be informed by bottom up approaches in order to address realities at grassroots level. There is also need to increase philanthropy research in rural communities in order to understand the target group.

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