

Volunteers as Enablers or Disablers of Community Development in Chegutu District, Zimbabwe

Itai Kabonga

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6533-996X>

Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti University

vakabonga@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper analyses the potential contributions of volunteers to community development. Little is known about the contribution of volunteers to community development although almost every non-governmental organisation in Zimbabwe relies on volunteers. This research used a qualitative approach with in-depth interviews, key informant interviews and focus group discussions to collect data from community volunteers, officials of non-governmental organisations, and government officials. Community volunteers play an important role in driving and sustaining community development. The researcher established that volunteers act as an intermediary between the community and non-governmental organisations. Moreover, activities like the targeting of beneficiaries and the implementation of activities are unthinkable without the involvement of volunteers. Despite volunteers' importance, there are serious drawbacks that influence the effective contribution of volunteers to community development. Volunteers disable community development through corruption, polarisation, falsifying reports and a lethargic approach to work. These drawbacks contradict the ubuntu value system that underlines the concept of volunteerism. Some of the drawbacks can be rectified by incentivising community volunteers, and by recruiting volunteers with acceptable levels of literacy.

Keywords: volunteers, community development, Chegutu

Introduction

Volunteerism remains an important strategy to enhance community development in Africa (Atta and Anam 2017). For Govo (2015), volunteers have been used to fight development challenges for many years. It is a reality that Zimbabwe just like any other southern African country faces a myriad of development challenges. These challenges include poverty, HIV and AIDS, underdevelopment, fragile economies, fragile social systems, environment degradation, and peace and security problems



(Atta and Anam 2017; Caprara et al. 2012). These challenges are further exacerbated by deplorable service provision and the lack of economic resources (Kabonga and Marime 2017). Thus, the survival of communities in Zimbabwe and other African countries depends a lot on citizens volunteering to complement the state's efforts. This makes volunteers important development players.

Madziva and Chinouya (2017) submit that hitherto there are few studies that have devoted attention to the role of volunteers in community development. In Zimbabwe, Botswana, Malawi and Zambia there are limited data on volunteerism. Also, Govo (2015) submits that volunteerism as a field of academic enquiry is still underdeveloped. Academic inquiry into volunteerism particularly regarding its role in community development remains scant. This is supported by Caprara et al. (2012) that while volunteerism has been part and parcel of the African community's social organisation, the contribution of volunteerism to community development has not only been underestimated but also undocumented. In Zimbabwe the lack of attention to volunteers is surprising given that non-governmental organisations (NGOs) rely in one way or the other on volunteers (Kabonga 2016).

The aim of this paper is to interrogate the contribution of volunteers to community development in Chegutu district, Zimbabwe. This is discussed in the context of NGOs' contribution to community development through poverty and illiteracy reduction, economic strengthening of households, fighting HIV and AIDS, enabling access to agricultural markets, and ensuring gender equality (Kabonga 2016). After the introduction, the paper discusses the history of volunteerism in Zimbabwe from the colonial period to the current period. This is followed by the conceptualisation of volunteerism and community development and a discussion of the factors that motivate volunteerism. After the methodology section, the findings of the study are presented according to themes that emerged from the data analysis. Conclusions and recommendations round off the paper.

Summarised History of Volunteerism in Zimbabwe

Volunteerism is part of African culture and has always existed in Zimbabwean societies (Kaseke and Dhemba 2006). Traditional support systems that are based on the principles of solidarity and reciprocity have always provided a medium for volunteering. Culturally, it is expected that when a family member encounters problems relatives will chip in to assist (Caprara et al. 2012). In South Africa this amounts to *letsema* that is free services to others in difficult situations (Twala 2004). In Kenya, there is the tradition of "harambe" which means let us pull together. Throughout Africa, it is common for community members to build a house for an elderly member of society or weed the fields of a community member who is not feeling well (Samkange and Samkange 1980). In Zambia, Malawi, South Africa and Mozambique, informal volunteerism is underpinned by ubuntu, where community

members help those who are in need. In Zimbabwe, volunteerism is often undertaken since there is hope of reciprocal assistance in the future (Bhiri et al. 2014; Kaseke and Dhemba 2006). For Caprara et al. (2012), volunteerism in African countries forms the basis of social organisation.

Before the formalisation of volunteerism in NGO-led programmes, informal volunteerism was always part of the Zimbabwean culture (Caprara et al. 2012). Therefore, when compounded by community problems, community members always come together and confront the challenges. The coming of colonialism to Zimbabwe and the attendant urbanisation saw volunteerism being extended from kinships groups to community settings in urban areas. Volunteers assisted migrants and victims of economic hardships in urban areas. This was underlined by the principles of solidarity given that all Africans were victims of colonial brutality (Kaseke and Dhemba 2006). With time volunteerism shifted from being informal to being institutionalised particularly within NGOs. The once informal services transformed into structured services, though volunteers were still offering services without payment (Kaseke and Dhemba 2006). Before that Damon (2007) argues that activists that participated in the struggle for independence in Zimbabwe were volunteers who fulfilled a voluntary action without expectation of payment.

The early years of independence in Zimbabwe saw the government introducing the National Youth Service. This programme was predicated on the realisation that the youths were not using their energy to build the nation. The programme was designed to tap into the youths' abundant energy, and to channel their abundant energy into a national development drive (Kaseke and Dhemba 2006). The programme calls upon the youths to volunteer and become essential paraphernalia for nation-building. This programme has continued since independence albeit with a plethora of challenges. Its main challenge has been the episodic nature of the programmes owing to financial constraints. The tendency to use the graduates of the programme as a quasi-ZANU-PF militia has attracted criticism from various human rights defenders (see Caprara et al. 2012). This tainted image of the National Youth Service has resulted in few young people volunteering to join the programme.

Social dynamics also played an important role in the evolution of volunteerism in Zimbabwe, particularly the HIV and AIDS scourge that raged the country since the late 1980s (Rodlach 2009). The late 1980s and the 1990s saw the health system burdened by the HIV and AIDS pandemic. Owing to pressure exerted on the health system, the government together with NGOs and churches embarked on a home-based care programme for the terminally ill. The programme was heavily dependent on volunteers (Rodlach 2009). The home-based care programme in Zimbabwe was and remains institutionalised in various NGOs and at times is informal in various communities (see Kabonga 2016; Rodlach 2009). A myriad of donor-driven development initiatives and government initiatives continue to rely on volunteers. Volunteers work in a number of programmes in the welfare sector in Zimbabwe such

as education, health, poverty reduction, women empowerment, and child protection. This kind of volunteering is more structured and requires long-term commitment.

Conceptual Issues

Volunteerism

The author concurs with Madziva and Chinouya (2017) that volunteerism is a multifaceted concept that defies easy definition. It cannot be pinned to a precise definition (Kabonga 2016). The understanding of volunteerism benefits from McBride, Benítez, and Sherraden's (2003) encapsulation of civil service "as an organized period of substantial engagement and contribution to the local, national or world community, recognized and valued by society with minimal monetary compensation to the participant." The prominent conceptualisation of volunteerism particularly in Zimbabwe and other SADC countries centres on dedication to a certain cause without pecuniary benefits to the volunteer (McBride, Benítez, and Sherraden 2003).

For Kaseke and Dhemba (2006), volunteerism amounts to the provision of a service to benefit the community by the free will of the volunteer and without coercion. The volunteer does that without expectation of payment or reward for such service provision (Atta and Anam 2017; Shah et al. 2014). There is consensus in the literature that volunteerism is about dedication to helping the community without the desire for financial gain (see Kabonga 2016; Cnaan, Handy, and Wadsworth 1996; Smith, 1996). Shah et al. (2014) identify two types of volunteerism; formal and informal volunteerism. Formal volunteering is done through a group or an organisation. In many cases this type of volunteering is structured in NGO programmes (Shah et al. 2014). Informal volunteering is usually done by an individual. This type of volunteerism has always existed in African communities and is underpinned by the ubuntu value system (Van Norren 2014).

Community Development

Community development under the community work method is usually applied to communities that are disenfranchised and marginalised by unjust global, national and local level policies (Goel 2015). For instance, neoliberal policies and other policies have widened the gap between the rich and the poor as well as increased poverty, social unrest, crime levels and hunger (Goel 2015). Therefore, community development is about community-based solutions to the problems of poverty, inequality, crime, hunger, illness and violence (Goel 2015). A similar view is provided by Bandung (2017) who argues that community development encompasses a range of practises to improve the effectiveness of community life, to improve living conditions of those who are disadvantaged, to facilitate people's participation in decision-making, and to ensure greater long-term control over circumstances. Community development

is distinguishable from large scale bureaucratic structures and governance that are far removed from the community it plans to serve. For Kenny (2011), community development is “a method for empowering communities to take collective control and responsibility for their own development.” As community development is more about collective action than individualised action (see Bandung 2017; Mugumbate and Nyanguru 2013), community volunteers work for the good of the community.

The Theory of Ubuntu in Community Development

The theoretical orientation guiding this paper is the theory of ubuntu. As a philosophical orientation, ubuntu places emphasis on being human through others (Mugumbate and Nyanguru 2013; Van Breda 2019). Ubuntu is captured by the phrase “I am because of who we are all” (Van Norren 2014). Moreover, ubuntu captures African beliefs in good behaviour and acceptable deeds (Mugumbate and Chereni 2019; Mugumbate and Nyanguru 2013). When volunteers participate in community development activities, this ought to be seen through the lenses of good behaviour and acceptable deeds.

Underlying the concept of ubuntu is a principle of bonding with others (Van Norren 2014). Further, Samkange and Samkange (1980) argue that ubuntu is African humanism classified into three maxims of valuing human well-being, people-centred leadership, and respectable relationships. For Maphalala (2017), there are three pillars that underlie ubuntu, namely interpersonal values (regard for others), intrapersonal values (regard for oneself), and environmental values (regard for the environment).

In African communities the presence of ubuntu is described preponderantly using terms such as benevolence, sympathy, kindness, sharing, affirming, hospitality, obedience, caring, harmony, consensus, solidarity and availability (Mugumbate and Nyanguru 2013; Van Breda 2019). A review of literature such as Kabonga (2016) and Madziva and Chinouya (2017) shows that the above descriptors are associated with motivational factors for volunteers. For instance, concepts such as kindness, sympathy, benevolence and collectivity motivate volunteers to be involved in NGO-led community development activities (Twala 2004). The ubuntu value system underpins the participation of volunteers in community development.

Motivational Factors for Volunteers

Normative Value System of Ubuntu

Volunteerism in Africa is underpinned by a normative value system of *hunhu* (Shona) and ubuntu (Nguni) (Govo 2015; Twala 2004). Ubuntu refers to values that govern Africans in so far as mutual relationships are concerned (Govo 2015). Ubuntu resonates with essential human virtues, compassion, and humanity (Caprara et al.

2012). Guided by the ubuntu value system, society should be characterised by peace, harmony, and understanding (Mugumbate and Chereni 2019). Volunteerism fits perfectly into the ubuntu value system since volunteerism is about having compassion for others, and having empathy for the suffering and deep understanding of the difficult conditions that constrain society. Kaseke and Dhembha (2006) show that volunteerism has traditional connotations as it fits into the broader culture and norms of the community.

Ownership of Community Challenges

Madziva and Chinouya (2017) posit that when the community is cognisant of and accept the challenges that affect the community, volunteers emerge. In a study that focussed on HIV and AIDS and orphanhood, it emerged that community members of the Buhera district in Zimbabwe accepted orphanhood as a community challenge. This is motivating community members to partake in volunteerism. Furthermore, Shah et al. (2014) posits that individuals may volunteer because they feel they should assist in fighting community problems. For Bhiri et al. (2014) this reflects the solidarity approach to volunteerism where individuals volunteer for the benefit of the common good.

The Role of Christianity

Christianity plays a significant role in volunteerism (see Atta and Anam 2017; Madziva and Chinouya 2017). Many volunteers are motivated by Christian ethics of showing love towards others without expecting reward and payment. The study by Rodlach (2009) shows that the majority of volunteers in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, were members of various Christian churches and were supported by their churches. Volunteers when asked what motivates them to volunteer the majority of them refer to the Bible. The Bible encourages showing love. The reward may not be attained here on earth but there are promises in the afterlife (Mkandawire and Muula 2005). In Malawi, volunteers saw themselves as assisting God in caring for the underprivileged (Mkandawire and Muula 2005). Similarly, studies by Atta and Anam (2017) and Kaseke and Dhembha (2006) show that volunteers in Zimbabwe and Nigeria respectively tend to be guided by religious faith.

The Study Area: Chegutu District

Chegutu district is in the north-central part of Zimbabwe in the Mashonaland West province (see Figure 1). Chegutu district is bordered by the Kadoma district to the east, the Zvimba district to the west, and Mhondoro-Ngezi in the south. It is approximately 107 kilometres south-west of Harare. Currently, the district has an estimated population of 60 000 people (Magure 2015). Some of the problems that affect Chegutu district include poverty, child marriages, food insecurity and the high

HIV prevalence estimated to be 15 per cent by the Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (2016).

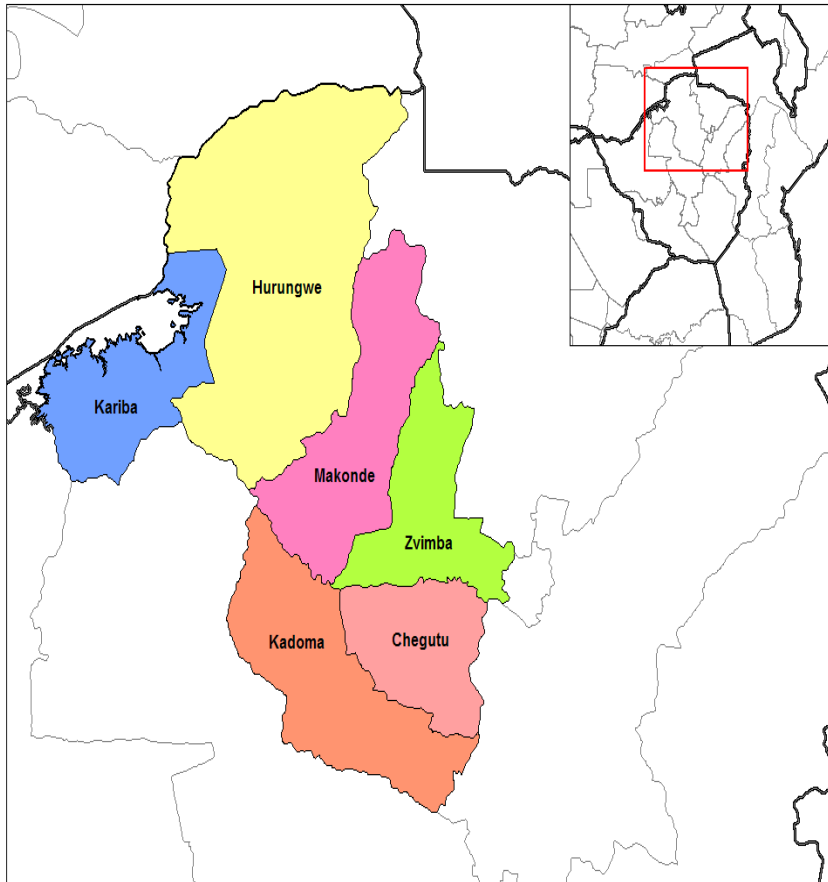


Figure 1: Location of Chegutu district (source: Google maps)

Methodology

Research Approach

This is a qualitative study of how volunteers enable or disable development. A qualitative research approach relies heavily on non-numeric data, usually in the form of words encompassing textual analysis (Mohajan 2018). The use of a qualitative research approach allowed the researcher to use different data collection methods; in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), documentary analysis, and

observation. The qualitative research approach allowed the gathering of rich and thick descriptions of the contribution of volunteers to development.

Sampling

The population for the research consists of two NGOs that operate in Chegutu district. Only development-oriented NGOs with a community network of volunteers were selected to participate in the study. The NGOs are hereby referred to as NGO A and NGO B. NGO A has programmes that focus on education, health, child protection and economic strengthening. NGO A has over 200 volunteers spread over 20 wards of Chegutu district, whereas NGO B has over 50 volunteers working in health programmes. These two NGOs were sampled using judgemental sampling. In judgemental sampling the researcher has direct control over elements included in the study (Etikan and Bala 2017).

After the sampling of the two NGOs, the researcher sampled 30 volunteers, 15 from each NGO to participate in the in-depth interviews. The age of the participants ranged from 40 years to 75 years. Almost all the respondents were females. This confirms that volunteerism in NGO-led development programmes in Chegutu is dominated by women. The researcher also sampled 10 participants from the already sampled 30 participants to participate in the FGDs. These were also sampled using judgemental sampling.

For key informants, the researcher used expert sampling. Five NGO officials were sampled from the two NGOs, and five government officials were selected from the Ministry of Health, Social Welfare, Gender and Women Affairs to participate in the study. These were selected based on their interaction with volunteers and their knowledge of the work of volunteers. The age range of the key informants ranged from 18 years to 65 years and 55 per cent of the key informants were men.

Data Collection Methods

In-depth interviews with volunteers

Ryan, Coughlan, and Cronin (2009) argue that in-depth interviews are used to gather information, beliefs, and perspectives regarding a specific phenomenon. In-depth interviews allowed the researcher to clarify expositions tendered by the respondents. Simply put, in-depth interviews allowed probing. A total of 30 participants (volunteers) were interviewed. They were asked various questions that included the role they are playing in community development. In conducting the in-depth interviews, the researcher relied on an interview guide. The in-depth interviews lasted for an hour and the responses were audio recorded.

Key informant interviews

Key informant interviews are usually conducted with people who know what is going on in the community (see Kun et al. 2013). The role of key informant interviews is to collect data from a wide range of people that include professionals, community leaders and community members with information of an event. A total of 12 key informant interviews were held with officials of NGOs and government officials. The key informant interviews lasted for 45 minutes and they were also tape recorded. These key informants were asked to elaborate on the contribution of volunteers to community development and volunteer practises that retard community development.

Focus group discussions

Two FGDs were conducted, one with volunteers working with NGOs and the other one with the key informants. Each FGD consisted of 10 respondents. The purpose of the discussions was to understand how volunteers are contributing to community development in Chegutu district. The discussions lasted for 50 minutes and the responses emanating from the discussions were tape recorded. During the discussions the respondents voiced their opinions on how volunteers disenable community development.

Documentary analysis

Besides relying on literature to sharpen understanding of the concept of volunteerism and theoretical underpinnings of volunteerism, the researcher relied on documents of NGOs such as reports (quarterly and annual narrative reports), programme meeting minutes, policies and strategic plans. These documents were vital in encapsulating the relationship that exists between NGOs and the volunteers. Moreover, the assortment of the above documents complemented the primary data that were gathered using in-depth interviews and FGDs.

Data analysis

In-depth interviews, key informant interviews and FGDs were conducted in Shona (the local language in Chegutu district). The recordings were then transcribed into English. The data were analysed using Miles and Huberman's (1994) five stages of reading, coding, displaying, reducing, and interpreting. The themes that emerged from this process are discussed below in the section on the presentation and discussion of findings.

Ethical considerations

Research can be potentially harmful to participants, thus steps should be taken to protect the respondents (see Etikan and Bala 2017). Informed consent was obtained before the interviews and FGDs were conducted. Verbal consent was obtained before data collection. The respondents participated in the study fully aware that they were

going to be asked questions concerning the contribution of volunteers to development. Participation in the study was voluntary, and the participants were told that they could withdraw from the study without even giving notice. Those that were not willing to participate in the study were never criticised for their decision. Finally, throughout the study the researcher showed respect to the participants. The researcher never criticised the respondents for tendering contradictory responses, but rather used probing to get clarity.

Rigour and trustworthiness

For research in social sciences to be scientific, it must pass the test of rigour and trustworthiness (Anney 2014). To increase dependability, the researcher used multiple data collection methods (triangulation). Thus, the data were collected using in-depth interviews, key informant interviews, FGDs and documentary analysis. This allowed corroboration, thus moving away from relying on a single data point. Rigour was also ensured by using different interviewing techniques such as probing to get clarity on areas of interests. Some questions were repeated though worded differently to corroborate earlier responses. A review of literature was also done by the researcher to sharpen the orientation of the study. To ensure credibility of the findings, the researcher employed member checks by taking the findings to the participants to confirm the results before writing the paper (Anney 2014).

Presentation and Discussion of Findings

The State of Volunteerism in Chegutu District

The study discovered that the NGOs that participated in the study were heavily dependent on volunteers. NGOs rely on volunteers to do various development-oriented tasks. That is why an interviewed project officer of one the NGOs reiterated, “... volunteers are the extension of the organization.” This coincides with the findings of Caprara et al. (2012) that volunteers form the backbone of NGOs’ activities in southern Africa. Volunteers are the ones that implement development work as discovered by other studies (see Caprara et al. 2012; Govo 2015; Kabonga 2016; Vivian and Maseko 1994). The duty of NGOs from the observation that was done is to coordinate, manage and direct what is being done by volunteers. For instance, in savings groups, it is the volunteers that train and mentor the group members. The NGO is only responsible for coordinating and seeing if everything is going well.

Remarks of the project officer of NGO B support the findings of the study when he said:

It is very true that most of the work is being done by community volunteers. For instance, they carry out behaviour change sessions, HIV awareness campaigns in communities and refer clients to health facilities.

This was also supported by a volunteer who said:

We do lot of work in the community, though under the supervision of NGOs officials. Some of our duties include community mobilisation, conducting support groups for HIV-positive children, training communities in village savings approaches, monitoring school attendance of school fees beneficiaries and many other duties.

In terms of the characteristics of volunteers, the study discovered that the majority of the volunteers were females. In South Africa, studies also show that volunteerism is dominated by women (see Govo 2015), and in Malawi the situation is the same (see Mkandawire and Muula 2005). Literature is not clear on why volunteerism tends to be characterised by more females than males, but, however, the suggestions border on the gendered nature of the community of Chegutu. Volunteers in Chegutu tend to deal with issues that require love, empathy, and understanding, attributes that are considered feminine (Govo 2015); no wonder many people in the district believe that volunteerism is for women. “Zvekuita mavolunteers ndezvemadzimai” (volunteerism is for women), remarked one of the community members.

The researcher observed that most of the volunteers were middle-aged or older women. This can be supported by Shah et al. (2014) who discovered that in Malaysia the majority of volunteers tend to be retired persons. This is so because professionals and the younger generation may be constrained by time. In many African communities, volunteerism in NGO-led activities tends to be dominated by women (Caprara et al. 2012; Kabonga 2016). The majority of the middle-aged or older women experienced difficulties when reading and writing. This had a significant impact on the capacity to deliver as lately development has become too technical (see Vivian and Maseko 1994).

The lethargic approach to work by some volunteers reflects technical inadequacies. When asked about why maintaining these older and at times illiterate women when most of the NGOs’ projects required technical capabilities, one NGO official remarked that:

These old women were there when the organisation was going through difficult times. We cannot just dump them. As a humanitarian organisation, we feel it is inhumane to just drop them.

One of the visibly older women was asked why she was involved in volunteerism when she was advanced in age and she said, “...I have a duty to help my community. My community needs me.” This reveals ubuntu in action, the desire to do good to others despite individuals’ circumstances (see Van Breda 2019). In line with this philosophy, volunteers in Chegutu district are motivated by the desire to improve the conditions in their community.

Volunteers as Enablers of Development

Implementation of activities

Volunteers are implementers of development given the various activities that they conduct within the context of NGO-driven development. Caprara et al. (2012) said that volunteers are the backbone of NGO-led community development. NGO A implements a project for orphans and vulnerable children in more than 20 wards of Chegutu district. Because the organisation has less than 10 full-time staff working in the district, it is functionally impossible for the NGO to service the district without relying on the network of volunteers. Some of the development activities that are implemented by volunteers include the training of participants in saving clubs, monitoring of saving groups, HIV case management (home visits), conducting support groups, school attendance monitoring, progression monitoring, and case management of child protection cases.

The case of Volunteer X

Volunteer X joined NGO A in the late 1990s. It was the period that HIV was ravaging societies before the advent of antiretroviral therapy. Volunteer X recalls vividly, "... when I joined NGO A, it was that time when people were dying in large numbers because of HIV and AIDS." Volunteer X joined to become a community home-based carer so that she could provide physical, spiritual and emotional support to the victims of HIV and AIDS. Her motivation to become a volunteer was underlined by her desire to assist the suffering. She said, "... what motivated me to join NGO A was a burning desire to assist my community. I just wanted to help families that were infected and affected by HIV and AIDS." From the ubuntu philosophy, community members are expected to join hands with others in dealing with community problems. When she joined NGO A, she was trained in community home-based care together with other selected volunteers from her ward. After the training, she was given the tools to enable her to do the job. These included gloves, basic medication, and reporting forms. Volunteer X recalls that during that period she had about five bedridden clients that she had to service. These clients were spread in many villages in her ward such that she had to walk every day to service those clients. The package of services that she offered to her clients included bathing the clients, counselling, nursing body sores and ensuring the general well-being of the clients.

Almost two decades later, Volunteer X is still working with NGO A under different conditions. Very few clients are bedridden and the majority are active clients. She said now she is involved in HIV case management of children. Currently, she has three clients and her duties include making sure that her clients take their medication regularly. Thus, she makes regular home visits to the homestead of the clients where she encourages the primary caregivers to ensure that her clients take their medications.

Volunteer X explained her working relationship with NGO A. She said most of the work is done by the volunteers, but the NGO officials regularly come to check progress and adherence to the project models. A monthly meeting is convened with the NGO when all community home-based carers are required to attend and report on the work that they are doing. Normally, during these meetings, all volunteers submit reports detailing the social, spiritual, physical and mental well-being of the clients they are managing. Volunteer X added that:

As volunteers we use the monthly meetings to air our grievances to NGO staff and also advise where the project must be improved. Because we are in the community, we know the impact of the project more than anyone else.

Evidence given by Volunteer X shows that volunteers are important in the implementation of development work. This finding resonates with Caprara et al. (2012) who submit that in southern Africa responses and coping mechanisms with HIV and AIDS rely heavily on the work of community volunteers. Caprara et al. (2012) agrees that in response to HIV and AIDS the work of volunteers in Zimbabwe include the provision of care, ensuring that the infected persons take their medicines, providing psychosocial support and advocating for provision of assistance to orphans and vulnerable children. Bhiri et al. (2014) when studying the role of volunteers in poverty reduction agree that volunteers have an implementation role, thus in SOS Villages (an NGO in Zimbabwe) volunteers were involved in providing educational, health, and psychosocial support, and community economic empowerment. These activities relate to the work done by Volunteer X (see above). Tyler (1965) established that the work of volunteers includes encouraging and reassuring community members in difficult circumstances, which dovetail with the work of Volunteer X as she was working with those affected and infected with HIV and AIDS.

Volunteers as intermediaries between NGOs and the community

Volunteers are the community face of NGOs. They represent the NGOs in their communities. Communication from the NGO to the community is done through the volunteers. If a community member needs assistance and the volunteer does not know how best to assist, the volunteers always provide the information to the NGO. Govo (2015) captures how volunteers act as intermediaries: “If things are not well at the child’s home for example, maybe the child is being abused we report to the social workers.” A project officer for NGO B indicated that, “we get to know of what is happening in the community through volunteers. Whether the community is happy or dissatisfied with our services we get to know that information through the volunteers.” Volunteers during the FGD articulated how they act as intermediaries, “...one of our important roles is to link NGOs with the community. We disseminate the information that NGOs want to reach the community and vice versa.”

By integrating volunteers in their activities, NGOs get to understand community problems better since volunteers are aware of development problems that affect the community (Bhiri et al. 2014). Tyler (1965) argues that volunteers serve a communication purpose between the NGO and the community. This is important because more often than not communities lack understanding of community development programmes and often have misconceptions about them. Also, NGOs have little understanding of the aspirations and desires of the community. Volunteers come in to ensure that projects do not miss the mark by redressing the faulty communication that often exists between communities and NGOs.

Targeting

Volunteers are important because they help to ensure correct targeting. Volunteers live in the community and they know people with characteristics that fit specific project requirements. Therefore, volunteers help NGOs to target beneficiaries correctly and bring about the desired effect. One NGO official explained:

In our targeting, volunteers are an essential component. Initially, after pitching our projects, it is the volunteers that advise whether the target group exists in the community. For us, the recruiting and registering of beneficiaries is done by volunteers.

This view was corroborated during an FGD when a volunteer said, “... as we are resident in the community, we are knowledgeable on beneficiaries that suit NGOs’ selection criteria.”

In education assistance the important role of volunteers is clear. Education assistance that is rolled out by NGOs in Chegutu district is geared towards assisting orphans and vulnerable children with the payment of school fees and stationery. The selection process is done by a structure introduced by the Ministry of Education called the Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) selection committee. This structure is composed of the community leadership, school authorities, volunteers and general parents. An enquiry into the inclusion of volunteers in the committee resonated with the need for correct targeting. One key informant explained:

Community volunteers exist for the good of the community. They are the ones that make sure that selection committee selects the correct children in need. Otherwise, without them, teachers’ children and businessmen’s children would end up benefiting from education assistance disadvantage those in need.

That volunteers are involved in targeting of community beneficiaries is also supported by Kaseke and Dhemba (2006) who argued that the roles of volunteers include “identifying beneficiaries in communities, making home visits and liaising with community leaders regarding the progress of development programmes.” In a study done in Malawi by Mkandawire and Muula (2005), community-based volunteers

played an important role in identifying “chronically ill people, including those with HIV/AIDS, the aged, young people and orphans as vulnerable groups that they would serve.”

Volunteers Disenabling Development

Fragmentation and competition

The current situation in Chegutu district is that each NGO has its own volunteers. Though it is common to have one volunteer affiliated to several NGOs, the majority of the volunteers tend to work with one NGO. Competition ensues when volunteers compare themselves with volunteers from other NGOs. Volunteers from NGO B and those under the Ministry of Health and Childcare receive monthly stipends and various regalia whereas volunteers from NGO A do not receive stipends. Volunteers from NGO A were clear that they are being looked down upon by other volunteers mocking them that “they are being used”. Volunteers can feel that they are being used when parts of their expectations are not met (Bhiri et al. 2014). Paying stipends can play an important role in dealing with issues of dissatisfaction that may occur in volunteers (Govo 2015). In Chegutu district, there is a polarisation between the volunteers. The volunteers submitted that there are very few occasions when they cooperated and worked together even if they were servicing the same clients. One volunteer remarked that,

... thus far we just concentrate on our work as directed by our superiors from the head office. As volunteers, we know each other and the NGOs that we work under. As of now, we have not had situations where we work together as volunteers from different NGOs.

The existent fragmentation is antithetical to community development particularly in the current discourse of sustainable development. For Bhiri et al. (2012), volunteer fragmentation jeopardises the continuity of care as services tend to be provided in a piecemeal fashion.

Falsifying reports

Volunteers in Chegutu district are accused of falsifying reports. This was highlighted by NGO officials who interact with volunteers in their programmes. This is shown by several factors. When volunteers produce their reports in most cases they are required to attach attendance registers as evidence of the number of people reached. In most cases, these reports are submitted with missing attendance registers ultimately bringing into doubt whether such activities ever occurred. At times the reports and the attendance registers are submitted with missing information, as said by an interviewed NGO official. On their part, the volunteers begged for constant capacity building because “some of the forms that we are instructed to use are too complex, even people with degrees will struggle. We need constant mentoring.” Because volunteers may not be bound by the values and norms of the organisation (Bhiri et al. 2014), they may pay

less attention to the requirement to report and follow the bureaucratic instructions of the organisation (Milligan et al. 1987). Moreover, evaluating the work of volunteers appears as questioning and doubting their work countervailing the essence of volunteerism (Allen 1987).

Lethargic approach to work

All NGO officials that participated in the study lamented the lethargic approach to work by some volunteers in the district. One NGO official summed it all when he said:

We are failing to meet our targets because some of these volunteers tend to abandon what we would have agreed during our meetings. Because we are not paying them it is difficult to put pressure on them.

The lethargic approach to work by volunteers is also revealed by their failure to submit reports timeously. A clear example of the lethargic approach to work is reflected by the low attendance at meetings. The meeting attendance rate of volunteers is as low as 20 per cent as observed from NGOs' documents reviewed. Bhiri et al. (2014) argue that volunteers may be affiliated to many organisations, consequently short-changing others in the process. Furthermore, "the degree of loyalty and commitment to an organization varies according to how central the organization is to one's life" (Bhiri et al. 2014). Volunteers in Zimbabwe exist in a society that has broader structural problems like poverty. The economy is not performing and there is widespread unemployment. The district lately suffered from bouts of drought. The volunteers receive little or no incentives from the NGOs. The incentives that some volunteers receive are tantamount to nothing as Zimbabwe is currently experiencing economic challenges (Nhapi 2019; Mowawa 2013). Attempting to eke out a living in these difficult conditions versus NGO demands may not balance, and this is sometimes construed as a lethargic approach to work. Volunteers, despite their motivations (such as Christianity, ubuntu normative values and reciprocity), at times tend to prioritise households' livelihoods at the expense of volunteer work.

Corruption

Volunteers are accused of corruption and misuse of project resources for self-aggrandisement. The view is that volunteers at times are self-serving and opportunistic. A key informant who participated in the study submitted that:

Some of these volunteers take materials meant for the orphans and vulnerable for their own personal purposes. The majority of these volunteers have wandered away from the spirit of volunteerism.

One community leader who participated in the study added:

I have heard several complaints that the community volunteers are putting their children in projects meant for the poor. Some of the volunteers are opportunists who seek every opportunity available to benefit their own households.

The findings of the study agree with those by Shah et al. (2014) that people may join formal volunteerism to meet their own needs. Perhaps the involvement in corruption is part and parcel of meeting individual needs. This shows that not all volunteers are motivated by the ubuntu value system. Rodlach (2009) similarly posits that though volunteers may be motivated by Christian ethics, there are also volunteers who are motivated by selfish interests. McCurley (2007) explains corruption by volunteers as a function of economic decline. Though not justifying their behaviour, the precipitous fall of the Zimbabwean economy (Nhapi 2019) is driving many volunteers to be corrupt. A volunteer said:

It is true that there are some volunteers who are engaged in nefarious activities. Those volunteers joined volunteerism anticipating benefits, because no benefits are coming, they are the ones who are involved in corruption.

Volunteers that are not motivated by ubuntu have the propensity to engage in corruption.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study focused on volunteers as enablers or disablers of development in Chegutu district, Zimbabwe. The study was motivated by the desire to explain the contribution of volunteers to development given the lack of academic literature that specifically focuses on the contribution of volunteers to community development in the Zimbabwean context. The study determined that volunteers play important roles in NGO-driven community development. NGO programming is unthinkable without the contribution of volunteers. This is because volunteers are significantly involved in the implementation of the project activities. In Chegutu district, volunteers are involved in home visits of children living with HIV, training of households in saving groups, monitoring of school attendance, and conducting support groups. For NGO projects to succeed there is a need for correct targeting. Volunteers, besides identifying deserving beneficiaries, conduct the actual process of registering the beneficiaries. In Chegutu district, volunteers are the link between NGOs and the community. In other words, they represent NGOs in the community. They convey information from the NGOs to the community and vice versa.

Despite these important roles that volunteers play in NGO-led community development, there are drawbacks that tend to obscure their contribution to community development. Volunteers who joined volunteerism hoping for benefits, and who are frustrated by the lack of benefits are involved in corruption. These volunteers register undeserving individuals and get paid for doing that. Not all

volunteers are guided by ubuntu. As each NGO has its own volunteers, there is fragmentation and competition even if the volunteers are serving the same clients. This contributes to wastage of development funds. The study recommends the incentivisation of volunteers. Many volunteers are involved in community development without any form of motivation. The lack of motivation fuels corruption and a lethargic approach to work. What NGOs are construing as the falsification of reports, reflects the lack of technical competency of volunteers. Recent development has become too complex, thus there is a need for continuous capacity development for volunteers. The study recommends investing in the human development of volunteers.

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