

Stakeholders' Conference

*“Fresh Thinking to Promote Development:
The Case for National Volunteering”*

VOLUNTEERISM AND DEVELOPMENT IN KENYA

Paper Prepared

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1.0. Introduction

This paper discusses volunteerism and development with a special focus on *What is Volunteerism, The Value of Volunteerism in Kenya, and Volunteer Legal and Policy Framework in Kenya*. The paper is largely based on a research done by Susan K. Kiuna, "***Voluntarism and Development in Kenya: A Study of the Perceptions of Voluntarism Among Selected Stakeholders***". In addition, the paper has benefited immensely from the experience of formulating and drafting the ***Kenya Red Cross Society Volunteer Policy*** done jointly by Isabella K. Munandi and Susan K. Kiuna at end of the year 2003.

2.0. Definitions

2.1. Philanthropy

Philanthropy can broadly be defined as: *“Love of mankind, especially shown in kindly and helpful acts”*.

2.2. Volunteerism

The word *“volunteerism”* is related to the word *“volunteer”*. A volunteer can broadly be defined as: *“One who freely and willingly offers to do something without payment”*. The *“something”*, is described as a *“voluntary act”*, while the process of doing the *“something”* is described as *“volunteering”*.

2.3. Philanthropy and Volunteerism

Philanthropy and volunteerism are related in the sense that in acts of philanthropy, volunteerism is one of the parts of which it is composed of. In this sense, they are non-coercive choices made by man who reaches out beyond the confines of his responsibilities to perform something of value to the society.

2.4. Development

Development can broadly be defined as: *“The process of progressing from one state to another”*. Within the context of societies, development is the process of progressing from identified societal needs to their fulfillment. In this regard it implies increased living standards, improved health and well-being for all, and the achievement of what is regarded as general good for society at large. Indeed, development is viewed as freedom.

2.5. Philanthropy, Volunteerism and Development

Volunteerism, within the context of philanthropy, is widely used today in the development of especially vulnerable individuals and communities. This is in the form of pulling and pooling of resources to contribute towards meeting identified needs. The resources can be monetary, in-kind or both.

**An emerging institution
in human development
is philanthropy or
volunteering (UNDP,
2003).**

3.0. Value of Volunteerism in Kenya

The value of volunteerism in Kenya can best be described by the “*Harambee*” spirit, a phenomenon that is uniquely Kenyan. It has officially been used since independence as a principal way of taking development to the people, through mobilisation of private resources to supplement the available but meagre government resources. To quote the “Report of the Task Force on Public Collection or *Harambees*”, 2003:

At independence, with the many problems facing the young nation, the founding President of the nation in his Madaraka Day speech in 1963 said:

“As we participate in pomp and circumstance and as we make merry at this time, remember that we are relaxing before the toil is to come. We must work harder to fight our enemies: ignorance, sickness, and poverty. Therefore, I give you the call Harambee. Let us work together for our country”.

Indeed the call was received as a symbol for all forms of collective efforts for the betterment of society. Public

This concept did not however begin at independence; it has always existed amongst the Kenyan communities. For example, amongst the Kamba, it was (and still is) known as *Mwethia*; amongst the Kikuyu, *Ngwatio*; amongst the Meru, *Gutuma Ngugi*; and amongst the Luhya, *Obusangi*. Traditionally, amongst the communities, whenever an individual or family was faced with a need beyond their capacity to fulfil it, the community members would pull and pool resources towards meeting the fulfillment of the identified need. The same applied to community needs.

The concept too existed at a national level during the colonial era in Kenya, e.g. the establishment of the Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organisation (MYWO).

The Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organisation (MYWO) was established in 1952. The original constitution indicated that the movement was “formed to develop and improve Africans living conditions through *social intercourse* by bringing the women together, encouraging neighbourliness and cooperation and education which could be largely informal and practical in scope”. Membership was “confined to women and girls over sixteen years and without distinction of religious beliefs”. The original membership fee was 30 cents, and later subscriptions rose to two Shillings annually. These subscriptions were used to facilitate the running of the Organisation. Additional funds were obtained from cooperative efforts like sales, concerts, and the Government. The Government subsidy provided the bulk of the Organisation’s expenses. Today, the MYWO is still a voluntary national women’s Organisation registered as

Today, many works of volunteerism in Kenya are registered variously as non-profit organisations, (*e.g., Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Community Based Organisations (CBOs), Self Help Groups, and Youth Groups*) and, their numbers have increased significantly since independence, {*e.g. registered Community Based Women Groups have increased in number since 1963 from 171 to 122,441 groups in 2002 – see Table 1 and 2 below*}. This is largely in response to the failure of traditional government institutions in delivering services to the communities, and development agents increasingly engaging voluntary organisations in the development process of the country. The failure of traditional government institutions in the provision of services was broadly attributed to the use of the top-down approach in the development process, a concept that results in inadequately addressing community needs. To adequately address these community needs, the communities have pulled and pooled resources as a survival strategy. In addition, the external development agents stressed the need to use these institutions in the delivery of services to the communities. In the country today, these social institutions are widely considered as alternative development institutions through which development programmes are carried out at the grass-root levels. They are actively involved in the identification, design, implementation, management, and maintenance of community interventions.

Table 1: Distribution of Registered Women's Groups in Kenya by Province, 1963-1998

Province	1963	1970	1975	1980	1991	1997	1998
Nairobi	8	10	18	65	568	1882	2486
Central	26	407	623	1170	3783	12206	12974
Coast	13	73	255	670	1357	4517	5236
Eastern	80	115	305	685	5077	18755	20465
North Eastern	0	1	3	16	225	927	1218
Nyanza	4	21	113	576	5120	14859	18585
Rift Valley	28	55	140	847	4568	20541	22567
Western	21	39	99	393	2916	11518	13786
Total	171	721	393	4422	23614	85205	97317

Source: Mitullah et al, 2001

Table 2: Registered Women Groups, 1995-2002

Year	Number of Women Groups	Membership
1995	54,635	1,746,083
1996	63,599	2,032,564
1997	85,205	3,096,102
1998	97,317	3,900,548
1999	107,080	4,287,701
2000	111,688	4,419,474
2001	115,884	4,250,178
2002	122,441	4,766,625

Source: GoK, 2003

4.0. Volunteer Legal and Policy Framework in Kenya

4.1. Existence of a Legal and Policy Framework in Kenya

Kenya currently has no legal and policy framework on volunteerism. To directly quote the “*Report of the Task Force on Public Collections or Harambees*”, December 2003,

..whereas it is accepted that the spirit of giving is generally inherent and ingrained in the African psyche and character, there has not, in Kenya, been any effort in the past to institutionalise and incentivise philanthropy.

4.2. Identified Need for a Legal and Policy Framework in Kenya

There is a need for a legal and policy framework on volunteerism in Kenya. This is so, because:

- a) Many voluntary organisations are registered variously in the country, (*e.g., the NGO Act, the Societies Ordinance Act, the Companies Ordinance, the Trustee’ Incorporation Ordinance, the Cooperative Societies Act/Ordinance, the Trade Union Act*) without any legal or policy framework in the coordination of their activities and resources. This is highly regrettable and its culmination is well illustrated in the “*Report of the Task Force on Public Collections or Harambees*”, December 2003.

Since the Government has never systematically collected data on *Harambee* projects, there is no official data covering the years 1963 to 2003 which would enable a disaggregated analysis of type of project, group, and impact (GoK, 2003).

- b) It is of a major concern to donors that are funding programmes. These donors have in the past either withheld their donations or given to bogus and unsustainable projects, (GoK, 2003).

- c) It forces the consideration of values frequently discarded as purely subjective into focus. For example:

Women's groups in the country are exposed to a number of internal and external problems.... Some of the external problems Community Women Group Organisations (CWGOs) face largely emanate from the linkages they have with other agencies. For example, the MYWO, to which many CWGOs in Kenya are affiliated, suffered from the undue influence of the previous ruling party (KANU) and politics. Secondly, in the same era, the Women's Bureau, which was a division in the Department of Culture in the Office of the Vice President and Ministry of Home Affairs, Heritage and Sports, which should have provided support to women's groups, had inadequate resources and personnel to effectively provide support

- i. Putting community values into the volunteerism equation to make them legitimate items for negotiations;
- ii. Making the volunteer organisations and the approving authorities accountable for community values, which are just as legitimate; and
- iii. Protecting the welfare of a community that is inarticulate or politically weak. For example, the involvement of a social scientist or anthropologist in a volunteer process may help to ensure community considerations are more fully recognised and addressed.

Philanthropy should not be viewed as a form of refuge for the unemployed. Even if the unemployed have to venture into philanthropy, the motivation should be skill sharing and not income earning (UNDP, 2003).

4.3. How to Get the Government Involved in Volunteerism

The voluntary organisations operating in Kenya should collectively seek to promote cooperation and partnership between themselves and the Government. This

relationship should be used in influencing the development of positive legislation and policy for volunteering in the country.

Today, the Government of Kenya has recognised the need for a legal and policy framework on philanthropy in the country. This was recently expressed in the appointment of a Task Force on Public Collection by the Minister for Justice and Constitutional Affairs, through a legal Gazette Notice No. 2700 of 17th April 2003. This culminated in the publication of the “*Report of the Task Force on Public Collection or Harambees*”, in December 2003. Public collections are just but one form of volunteerism practiced in the country.

The proposed cooperation and partnership amongst the volunteer organisations and the public sector should seek to build on this Government initiative, to include wider volunteering concerns in the recommended legal and policy framework on philanthropy in the country.

The cooperation and partnership between the volunteer organisations and the public sector would be greatly enriched with the inclusion of the private sector. Large resources for philanthropic purposes in the country are, and will continue to be, mobilised from the private sector. For example, the corporate organisations in the country practice philanthropy that is conceptualised as “*Corporate Social Responsibility*”. This takes in the form of donations, (monetary, in-kind, or both) to identified causes. Examples of causes that have benefited from this are health and medical services, children and people in difficult circumstances, sports and recreation, and education and training.

Voluntarism in Kenya has been extensively abused and marred by the lack of credibility and trust. How can our society cultivate positive conviction about voluntarism for the good of society? There are certain distinctions in life that are responsible for the negative environment we find ourselves today such as insensitivity, selfishness, intolerance, greed etc. How can our society shift to integrity, authenticity, accountability, commitment and generosity among other positive values? It is in these values that voluntarism is embedded.

The challenge is to mobilise the civic society to own these distinctions, instead of just knowing them (Kiuna, 2003).

Other benefits that would accrue from the cooperation and partnership amongst the volunteer organisations, and the private and public sectors are:

- i. Sharing development experience and technical expertise;
- ii. Development of best practices in volunteer management;
- iii. Mobilising increased national support for volunteering; and
- iv. Influencing the development of strategic volunteering issues of an international character.

4.4. Role of the Government in Volunteerism

Generally, the role of the Government in volunteerism is to provide a legal and policy framework within which voluntary organisations shall operate under. Specifically, the legal and policy framework should:

- i. Give direction;
- ii. Enable the Government play its leadership role in development, hence harmonising the activities and resources for a more effect; and
- iii. Provide for an appropriate institutional framework for effective management and coordination of volunteer activities and resources.

5.0. Conclusion

To directly quote Kiuna 2003:

- i. Perceptions about voluntarism are diverse and factors that influence volunteerism and characteristics of volunteers are interwoven.
- ii. There are various motivations for volunteering, social responsibility, publicity, humanitarianism and religious activities, which attract volunteer extensively.
- iii. Voluntarism as mutual social responsibility is ingrained in the African Societies.
- iv. Granted the deterioration of living standards in Kenya today and many other parts of the world, volunteer efforts have created a paradigm shift in development in the recent past. This is manifest in re-emergence of the voluntary sector in development space. This explains the mushrooming of numerous CBOs and welfare associations based on voluntary effort following the failure of state-led development in Kenya. However, voluntarism has deviated from the norm of mutual social responsibility and has become an enterprise as demonstrated by perception of some of the international and local volunteers.
- v. In the Kenya situation voluntarism for humanitarian reasons, for example, during the US Embassy bomb-blast is spontaneous. However when the need is not urgent people have to be prompted by the media, churches or opinion leaders to volunteer. This notwithstanding, there is a group of people driven by their own conscience.
- vi. Craving for publicity is a strong motivation for volunteering especially in the private sector and by politicians. This could be tapped for endowment funds to facilitate volunteer work.
- vii. Institutions that use volunteers to implement their projects encounter logistical difficulties. They have to address issues of management of volunteer and sustainability of volunteer work.
- viii. One pertinent emerging issue is lack of legislation and policy in the sphere of volunteerism in the local context. A clear legislative and policy framework streamline aspects of management and sustainability of institutionalised volunteer work including facilitation to enable voluntarism, ethics to guide volunteerism, and the issue of credibility and trust with regard to funds involved.
- ix. Research into indigenous philanthropy could generate information on voluntarism in the African context. This could be the beginning of revitalising volunteering by looking at the traditional practices and past experiences that worked well. This could serve as the basis of conceptualising volunteering in the East African context.

- x. Research would also make it possible to compile an inventory of philanthropy regarding – types, models, best practices, and experiences. Research would also enable the quantifying of other non-financial attributes of voluntarism and also find ways of measuring the impact of philanthropy.
- xi. Voluntary organisations should institute an umbrella association that would serve as an organ that provides an avenue for cooperation and partnership with the Government and other stakeholders in popularising volunteerism, and influencing positive legislation and policy in volunteering.

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