

Why Kenya Needs National Volunteering Policy

By National Volunteer Network Trust (NAVNET) of Kenya

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1. Climate change threatens to undo past development gains and is increasing vulnerability, especially among the poor hence the need to highlight the role and contribution of volunteer action in this vital area. It is increasingly apparent that local volunteer engagement in such areas as climate change and desertification monitoring, biodiversity and heritage conservation, environment policy implementation and comprehensive recycling is critical to the world's sustainable future.

2. Research plays a vital role in policy-setting. Studies mapping domestic volunteerism can help in contributing to the development of volunteerism policies. Governments should encourage academic and community research partnerships to advance knowledge of the social, cultural and economic impact of volunteering and itself undertake or support quality such studies.

3. Developments in communication technologies such as digital villages through the introduction of fibre optics will create a platform for spreading awareness about volunteerism and cater for the growing interest in short-term, flexible volunteer assignments, especially among young people. Advances in communication technology and changing lifestyles are resulting in a growth of online volunteering.

4. National Volunteer Centres - There is need to facilitate volunteerism in order to ensure that the maximum number of people from the broadest range of backgrounds have access to volunteer opportunities. Policies for inclusion call for a diversity of structures, mobilization schemes and management strategies to reflect country-specific situations and creating National Volunteer Centers and platforms will play a critical role in facilitating volunteer contributions to development. Volunteerism as a route out of social exclusion for marginalized groups, greater attention has been given to strategies promoting inclusive volunteerism for socially marginalized groups, including disabled people, people living with HIV/AIDS, ethnic minorities and the poor. With the numerous retrenchment, down-sizing and right sizing strategies in the recent pasts, many senior citizens who are "retired but not too tired" willing to make their contributions to the country through volunteerism.

5. Employee Volunteering Programmes - Private-sector interest in volunteerism through Employee Volunteering Programmes such as that practiced by General Motors East Africa, Safaricom Foundation, Barclays Bank and Kenya Commercial Bank among others are ways of building employee skills, increasing employee loyalties to their companies and raising company profiles in the communities they serve and this will supplement the Government and the CSOs effort in building a better Kenya through the volunteerism strategy that is all inclusive and encompassing. Volunteerism offers the private sector an opportunity to enhance workforce morale and boost its image vis-à-vis consumers while displaying socially responsible behavior. The private sector has

enormous potential to mobilize volunteers in its workforce and this resource should be factored into official policy on volunteerism.

6. Vision 2030 - The Government launched the country's blue print of Vision 2030 towards realization of the country's dream of becoming a globally competitive and prosperous nation by the year 2030 last year. Through volunteering, the citizens will better understand the need to support Government in its development agenda through "Attitude change campaign" to ensure that *wananchi* don't look up to the Government for support but the vice versa as President F. Kennedy said, "*Don't look at what the Government can do for you but rather what can you do for your Government*". The Government recruitment processes for civil servants posts in should take into account volunteerism background of applicants.

7. Youth Volunteering Programme - The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports is in the process of developing a National Volunteer Service Scheme to give the 15 million youth between the age of 15 -30 years a chance to contribute effectively to their society through volunteerism and community service. The National Youth Service has been in existence since early 1980s but has been absorbing 3,000 Kenyan youth aged 18-22 years. Promotion of volunteerism should continue for all population groups. Young people remain the primary target although there are indications of growth of promotional work aimed at older persons. The Government is currently is preoccupied with the vulnerability of the young people in the current economic climate and its potential consequences for society, compounded by rapid growth in the proportion of young people in the overall populations.

8. Measuring the Volunteer Contribution - Recognition of the impact of volunteering on marginalized and disadvantaged groups such as women and children has been overlooked so far. Valuing the contribution that volunteerism contribute to women, children and youth would help guide policies designed to encourage and support volunteer action. The current effort by International Labour Organization in cooperation with Johns Hopkins Centre for Civil Society Studies in collaboration with the United Nations Volunteers to develop a manual to guide labour force statisticians in measuring volunteer work as part of official labour force surveys throughout the world will help to quantify the contributions made by volunteers.

9. Coordination and Promotion of Volunteerism - The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Development that is charged with coordination and promotion of volunteerism in Kenya should spare no effort in bringing together the Civil Societies, Private sector and the Government to have a National Volunteering Policy framework that will help the spirit of volunteerism to be re-build, re-kindled and promoted across the country as a key driver towards social and economic development in order to achieve the Vision 2030.

10. National and Local Volunteering - In the past, the Government focused only on International volunteering which has represented a special dimension of International solidarity and transfer of skills from developed to developing countries as part of

capacity-building. However, National Volunteering (Kenyans for Kenya) has been given very little or no attention. Kenyans in diaspora continues to play a very significant role in the growth of Kenyan economy. To enrich to this contribution, volunteer diaspora networks can also offer opportunities for expatriate nationals to return to their homeland as volunteers for a fixed period.

11. International Volunteer Day (IVD) - Last and not the least, the Government should lead from the front in coordinating and organizing International Volunteers Day both at national and district levels to ensure the vibrancy of volunteerism in Kenya with the involvement of more people, from a broader cross-section of societies in continued.

12. Volunteer Involving Organizations (VIO) Network of Kenya - The Government will not work in isolation as Volunteer Involving Organizations (VIO) Network of Kenya is determined to bring all the volunteer players together and this will enhance a coordinated and harmonized way of carrying out the volunteer activities in Kenya.

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