



DEATH OF VOLUNTEERISM, DEVELOPMENT IN DOLDRUMS IN NORTON TOWN OF ZIMBABWE

Itai Kabonga*

Abstract: *A volunteer is an individual who provides services to the community without any stated form of payment or benefit. Since time immemorial volunteerism has existed in Africa, it has existed in one form or another. The role of volunteerism in Norton developmental trajectory cannot be underestimated. Volunteers are vital in the operation of NGOs. Consequently, in Norton a quantum of volunteers exists doing multifarious activities with the ultimate goal being to help the community. A plethora of activities that are being done by volunteers include conducting informational sessions on HIV and AIDS and similar concomitants like STIs, contraceptives, medical male circumcision and gender based violence. However, there has been a death of volunteerism of great proportion. Death of volunteerism manifests through neglect or abandonment of duty, a lethargic approach to duty, cheating and falsification of reports. The tumbling of the local economy and the attendant difficulties is one of the reason that has been proffered to explain the death of volunteerism. This is further aggravated by the fact that volunteers themselves are poor and vulnerable, actually in need of help. The wider community believes that volunteerism is not compatible with socio-economic environment has also worsened the situation. The paper is heavily reliant on qualitative research that was conducted in Norton. Key informant interviews and in-depth interviews were utilised to extricate data on death of volunteerism. Documentary review played an invaluable role in unpacking the concept of volunteerism.*

Keywords: *Volunteerism, Volunteers, Development, Non-Governmental Organizations, Death, Allowances*

*A Development Practitioner and a holder of Master of Arts In Development Studies



1. INTRODUCTION

Volunteerism has existed since time immemorial. It is not a new concept, in Africa it has existed in some form or another. Kaseka and Dhemba (2005) are of the conviction that it is quintessence of African culture. A quantum of scholars has proffered multifarious definitions on volunteerism. However, one of the formidable definition of a volunteer is the one tendered in Fair Labour Standards Act, defining a volunteer as an individual who performs hours of service for a public agency [or organization] for civic, charitable, or humanitarian reasons, without promise, expectation or receipt of compensation for services rendered. Zimbabwean scholars like Kaseke and Dhemba (2005) emphatically defines volunteering as giving one's time to provide services to society or community without expectation of being paid. Lucidly, volunteerism is dedicating one's time to providing services to the community without pecuniary or any other form of payment.

In Zimbabwe, the NGO sector is heavily reliant upon volunteerism. It is not an enigma to find each NGO having volunteers in society. In Norton volunteers are involved in a plethora of activities that include home based care, behaviour change facilitation, child protection, home visits and case management. It is not a fallacy to argue that given a myriad of activities that they are engaging in, they are a vital cog in the development trajectory of Norton.

Despite the importance of volunteerism, paradoxically, there has been what this author terms the death of volunteerism. A quantum of reasons helps to explain the death of volunteerism. Prominently, it is the general economic hardships that is causing the death of volunteerism and the general belief amongst the populace that volunteering is a thing of the past and does not make sense in this epoch of ever soaring economic challenges. It is also fair not to myopically blame the free falling economy as the genesis and nemesis of volunteerism. NGOs even though they hysterically lament the death of volunteerism they are also to blame for this cancerous problem.

Given, the conspicuous innuendos and insignias of the death of volunteerism this paper is premised on interrogating and unpacking the causes of waning volunteerism. More importantly, the paper will delve on the ramifications of the dearth of volunteerism on development.



2. METHODOLOGY

This paper is heavily reliant upon qualitative research that was conducted in Norton which is part of Chegutu district. Typologies of volunteers were interviewed using in depth interviews to extricate dynamics in the discourse of volunteerism. Key informant interviews were also utilised to understand the death of volunteerism. Volunteers were asked in detail about the services that they are rendering to communities. Documentary review buttressed data from qualitative techniques. Documentary review was invaluable in interrogating the concept of volunteerism.

3. UNPACKING THE CONCEPT OF VOLUNTEERISM

In literature and practise defining volunteerism is a contested terrain. It is a herculean task to define volunteerism. There is no universally accepted definition of volunteerism. Different scholars define volunteerism differently. There is a schism in defining volunteerism. Despite the insurmountable challenge and difficulties in defining volunteerism, McBride et al. (2003:5) refers to Sherraden (2001) who defines civic service “as an organised period of substantial engagement and contribution to the local, national or world community, recognised and valued by society with minimal monetary compensation to the participant”. Sherraden (2001) illuminates an interesting concept in volunteerism. Though the general understanding from multifarious definitions is that volunteers provides services to the community without payment, Sherraden, (2001) however, submits that at times minimal monetary compensation is paid to the volunteers. In the context of Norton NGOs principally do not provide incentives to volunteers, it is only a few organizations who have been consistent in providing incentives.

Kaseka and Dhemba (2005) suggests that the overarching feature of volunteering is that the activity is not undertaken primarily for financial gain or reward, the activity is undertaken at free will without coercion; and the activity is undertaken to benefit someone or the society at large rather than the volunteer herself or himself. Across literature the stupendous consensus is that volunteerism is about dedicating oneself to helping the community through provision of services without intention to get financial benefit.

Conspicuously, there is marked differences between volunteerism in Third World countries and in the First World countries. This distinction is inherent in kind of people that dedicate themselves to volunteers. The difference is entrenched in the socio-economic conditions of



the individuals volunteering. In the West volunteering is dominated by the rich who have amassed a significant amount of wealth and are able to give up their time to the less privileged. In African the volunteer tend to be poor and less privileged (The Strive Times 2004). In most cases the volunteers are wallowing in staggering poverty that they actually themselves deserve to be bonafide beneficiaries of donor aid.

Though this paper will discuss volunteerism in the context of Non-Governmental Organizations, volunteerism cut across different sectors in society. Young (2004) notes that in USA the past century has seen many notable examples of volunteerism, particularly those associated with federally sponsored programs. State governments also actively recruit volunteers to help in providing essential services to the citizenry. For instance, volunteers provide various integral emergency services in the wake of natural disaster. Local governments additionally utilize volunteers. Volunteers provide valuable services to local schools and libraries, parks and recreational programs, senior citizen centres, police, ambulance and firefighting units. (Young 2004) Non-governmental organizations significantly utilize volunteers as well. Churches, civic groups, neighbourhood associations, philanthropic organizations, and a host of other non-profit groups provide a wide-range of volunteer opportunities and services.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

4. DUTIES OF VOLUNTEERS

The duties of volunteers are multifarious. Volunteers in Norton are engaged in a plethora of activities. Behaviour change facilitators are engaged in promoting positive sexual behaviour amongst the generality of the community. They do this by making home visits teaching the community about HIV and AIDS and similar conjectures like STI's, medical male circumcision, cervical cancer, contraceptives and gender based violence. During, the visits, they conduct a session on topics chosen by the person visited. They collect data on the address of the household visited and the number of people reached by the information. During home visit sessions, where there is a need referrals are made to service providers. For instance a behaviour change facilitator can refer one to the police in case of a gender based violence. The referral form issued is then redeemed by the NGO to ascertain whether service was received. Basically, the behaviour change facilitators are tasked with teaching the community about protection from HIV as well as promoting positive behaviours with



respect to uptake of contraceptives and medical male circumcision. It is also pertinent to note that behaviour change facilitators receive a monthly allowance. This coincides with assertions of Dhemba and Kaseke who aptly demonstrated that though volunteerism is usually associated with no financial gain to the person who is volunteering, some organizations however pay a financial amount to the volunteer.

Secondary Caregivers also referred as Community Home Base Care Facilitators are another type of volunteers operating in Norton. These volunteers are engaged in multifarious activities. In Norton, the number of AIDS bed ridden individuals has drastically plummeted due to the ineffable success of the ART programme. This does not obliterate the fact that in the community there are still bed ridden clients. Secondary Caregivers provide physical care to the bed ridden clients. They visit them regularly caring for them through bathing them and dressing them. Secondary caregivers inherently provide psycho social support to the individuals affected and infected with HIV and AIDS. Counselling is an essential component of the psycho social support that is provided by secondary caregivers. Essentially one can argue that secondary caregivers epitomize case management.

Case management that is provided by secondary caregivers is not limited to adults who are infected with HIV. It emerged that secondary caregivers also work with children who are living with HIV. They visit the children assessing their physical, social, spiritual and emotional well-being. After, the assessment they are mandated to map the way forward so that the child can get assistance. In most instances secondary caregivers are referring children for assistance to NGOs and government departments in Norton, like Social Welfare. Children living with HIV meet on a monthly basis. The meetings are referred to as children support group meetings. It is the secondary caregivers that facilitate the children support group meetings. Children support groups are used as a platform to provide children with psycho-social support. Secondary caregivers are used as a platform to offer adherence support to children. Children are encouraged to correctly and consistently take their medication. Children also get the opportunity to play games during the support group meetings.

The NGOs that is working with the secondary caregivers in Norton in its programming has a component of child protection. Consequently advocacy for birth registration is embedded within the child protection component. In Norton a myriad of children do not have birth certificates. The problem is pervasive. Secondary caregivers are in touch with the



community, they encourage the guardians to acquire birth certificate for their children. They create demand for birth registration. The NGO mandate is just limited to create the demand for birth certificates. This is done by secondary caregivers. It is also important to note that the secondary caregivers who are conducting a plethora of activities do not get allowances or any pecuniary recognition for the work that they do.

5. MORALITY OF VOLUNTEERISM

A look at volunteers in the society reveals that they are idiosyncratic. The volunteers are inherently poor, old aged and semi-literate largely. This is not essential to Norton volunteers but also peculiar to other volunteers based in Chegutu district. SAFAIDS (2004) patronizes that a typical volunteer in Zimbabwe is very vulnerable and would personally qualify to be a beneficiary of the programmes he/she serves. Given the ever plummeting economic challenges that are prevailing in the country one has to question the morality of volunteerism. Is volunteerism compatible with prevailing economic conditions? The answer to the question explains the indefinable death of volunteerism. Given, the ever increasing economic challenges volunteerism has come under the spotlight as volunteers themselves and the generality of the community believes the epoch of the volunteering is long gone.

It is not diabolical to ponder of volunteerism having undertones of exploitation especially in the context of prevailing economic hardships. The community generally believes that volunteers are being exploited by NGOs as they do not get pecuniary benefits. The secondary caregivers have been incessantly arguing that they are at times using their own resources to do NGOs work. Impeccable examples include scenarios in which they have to fork transport money to travel when they are making home visits. One can appreciate that though subtle and voluntary, volunteers are being exploited as they fork their money to fulfil organizations business. Having realized despite their pleas to the organization to emphatically respond to the needs of the clients to respond the challenges compounding their clients especially food requirements the organisation has not been forthcoming. The volunteers end up using their money to respond to the needs of the clients.

In recognition of the above mentioned factors it is lucid that volunteerism embodies exploitation. This is so in multifarious ways, firstly, a volunteer is typically poor and vulnerable in Zimbabwe and in need of assistance. When that poor volunteer ends up using his or her resources to accomplish erstwhile NGO's business this epitomises exploitation. As



tendered above a volunteer in Zimbabwe is typically poor, when that volunteer end up using his or her resources this in a way aggravates the vulnerability of the volunteer. Secondary caregiver's vulnerability has been exacerbated by volunteerism. This whole conundrum questions the applicability of volunteerism in Zimbabwe in the wake of incessant hardships. It is a paradox that NGOs claim to champion the rights of the poor when they are at the fore front of "poorizing" volunteers in the community.

6. DEATH OF VOLUNTEERISM

In Norton, there has been indescribable death of volunteerism. A quantum of reasons can be proffered to explain the death of volunteerism. Insignias of the death of volunteerism can be pinpointed. By death of volunteerism this paper means that the volunteers no longer do the work that they pledged to do for no monetary gains. Therefore, essentially, volunteers have disastrously departed from the work that they initially pledged that they will do for no payment. Implications of the death of volunteerism on NGO work are herculean and intractable.

To get a clear glimpse of the death of volunteerism it is important to outline the signs that shows that there has been indeed the death of volunteerism in Norton. Firstly, it is the explicit abandonment of duty. In short the volunteer just stops whatever he or she agreed to be doing. This is the most scenario that is happening with volunteers. They are neglecting their duties. A good case in point is of ward 7 in Norton where the volunteer stopped making monthly home visits for children living with HIV. Poignantly, this withdrawal from duty is done without giving notice to the organization. The project officer of one organization notes that one get to know of the withdrawal from duty at the end of the month or at the end of the quarter. The project officer lamented hysterically, this withdrawal from duty without giving notice. The secondary caregivers in Norton are ward based, the implication is that when a volunteer decides to unexpectedly withdrawal from duty that ward will go for some time without service. As submitted by NGOs it is a difficult process to replace a volunteer. The new volunteer require training so that he or she can effectively discharge his or her duties effectively. Since it is volunteering it also takes time to get one to volunteer to work in that ward. In most cases the volunteer from the next ward will be called to step in in the meantime waiting for the new volunteer to be recruited.



Explicitly, the volunteer will be overwhelmed tremendously by work since he or she will be working in two wards.

Secondly, death of volunteer is not only typified by clear abandonment of duty. Evidence in superfluity shows that some volunteer have resorted to cheating antics through doctoring of reports. Instead of clearly showing that she or he no longer wants to work for free some volunteers have diabolically resorted to hoaxing antics. Behaviour change facilitators as shown above are mandated to make household visits teaching the community about HIV and AIDS and similar concomitants like STIs, contraceptives and medical male circumcision. They are required to record the household number of the household visited as well as recording the number of people and their names that would have been reached during the visit. Poignantly, some volunteers are falsifying home visits made. In actual fact some house numbers written do not exist in the whole town of Norton. Though at times the house numbers do exist but the name of people recorded to have been reached are regrettably non-existent. It is unequivocal with this antics one can argue of waning volunteerism. Volunteerism is about dedicating oneself to serving reservedly the community. However, when one masters the above mentioned antics it is problematic. Rampant and blatant cheating that is happening is an antithesis of the spirit of volunteerism.

Thirdly, death of volunteerism is also exemplified by poor attendance at meetings that these volunteers regularly convene. The behaviour change facilitator conducts behaviour change facilitator review meetings on quarterly basis. The behaviour change facilitators are expected to attend together with stakeholders in the community. The attendance by behaviour change facilitators is erratic and deplorable. Given the blatant fact that the meeting is the platform that the behaviour change volunteers have to review their performance paradoxically the behaviour change facilitators shun these meetings. The reasons are unclear but only resonates of waning volunteerism. Poor attendance at meetings is not only peculiar to behaviour change facilitators but also to secondary caregivers meetings. The secondary caregivers conducts their monthly reporting meeting the last Tuesday of every month. Attendance is erratic and deplorable just as that of behaviour change facilitators at behaviour change volunteers review meeting. There are no justifiable reasons that have been submitted to account for the disastrous attendance at meetings by the volunteers. As long as this cancerous death of volunteerism persists



unabated, development will remain in the doldrums. This so because volunteers are important in the development matrix of Norton.

Fourthly, it is the indescribable poor reporting that characterises the work of volunteers that signifies the death of volunteerism throughout the whole of Norton. The whole phalanx of volunteers in Norton are required to submit reports to the NGOs that they interface with. Behaviour change facilitators are required to submit reports detailing the number of sessions conducted as well as the number of people reached by the sessions. They are required to submit these reports on a monthly basis. Each behaviour change facilitator is required to make sixteen home visits each month. They are provided with registers that they compute the data. The project officer has however, blasted the volunteers for failing to submit reports consistently. The project officer lamented that when they come to collect the reports one usually notice that some volunteers had not submitted their registers. Trying to call the relevant volunteer one can get responses like I am away and I am not available, noted the project officer. What is happening with behaviour change volunteers is also reminiscent with what is happening with secondary caregivers. The secondary caregivers converge the last Tuesday of every month to consolidate the statistics for home visits made. More importantly, they report on case managed clients. This is usually done by using case management plans. The case management plans are then filed by the organization in the case files. The project officer noted that they are having challenges to update their case files as there is poor reporting by the secondary caregivers.

A quantum of reasons have been tendered on the death of volunteerism. The economic challenges that Zimbabwe has been experiencing for the past decade illuminates the death of volunteerism. Zimbabwe for the past decade has hogged international headlines for a free falling economy and other concomitants like general hardship of life. Given the economic challenges and ever spiralling cost of living it has resulted in volunteers either lackadaisically performing their duties or altogether withdrawing their services. The prominent argument, hitherto, has been advanced by volunteers is that they want pecuniary recognition for the work that they are doing in community. Others are also of the view that even other forms of recognition in kind is of paramount importance. This could include food hampers. This paper has managed to show that in Norton there are volunteers who are receiving pecuniary rewards for the work they are doing. These are the behaviour



change facilitators. Other volunteers are not receiving any financial recognition for the working that they are doing. These are secondary caregivers. Whilst the caregivers are blatantly lamenting the lack of motivation for the services that they are providing, paradoxically the behaviour change facilitators that receive a monthly allowance of US\$15 are clamouring for an increase arguing that the money is insignificant considering a plethora of challenges compounding them.

It is clear that the volunteers are still aware of the implication or the definition of volunteerism that of serving the community for no financial rewards. They still identify with the definition of or concept of volunteerism. The pervasive argument is that the volunteers have fallen on hard times given the economic challenges characterised by liquidity challenges. In such a scenario, it is imperative that the NGOs do something for the volunteers. In the context of secondary caregivers the NGOs is yet to do anything resulting in death of volunteerism characterised by low attendance at meetings, poor reporting and ignominy cheating. In Norton the preponderance of the volunteers are poor, vulnerable and some semi-literate. Economic challenges have only aggravated the living conditions of the volunteers. This gives moral credence to the demand of volunteers that they must be recognised pecuniary or otherwise.

The wider community has also contributed in a way to the detestable death of volunteerism. The community has in a way buttressed and patronized the belief of volunteers that volunteerism is not suitable in the current era of torrid economic challenges. The community harbours the belief that in the current epoch volunteerism is out of touch with what is happening in the wider socio-economic environment. It is the interaction of volunteers with the wider community that has resulted in the death of volunteerism. It is the unwavering backing from the community that has somehow justified the incessant calls by volunteers that they be incentivised. Responding to the death of volunteerism is a herculean task given the fact the wider community has also contributed to the death of volunteerism. Concerted efforts to tackle death of volunteerism implicationally have to direct to the community as well as the volunteers.

Changes in the dynamics of donor aid that are usually misinterpreted by the community and the volunteers themselves can also be tendered as another contributory factor to the death of volunteerism. A closer look at the operations of NGOs in Norton just before the new



millennium and a few years after the new millennium shows NGOs were paying the volunteers some form of allowances. During that period volunteerism was heavily dominated by home based care facilitators who were providing care and support to clients with HIV and AIDS. It is important to note that the home based care facilitators are the current version of secondary caregivers. 98% of the secondary caregivers were actually part of the home based care facilitators back then. Home based care facilitators would receive stipends, food hampers on a quarterly basis, end of year hampers and t-shirts. The home based care programme was funded by the IrishAID. The programme ended in 2009. The current programme that is utilising the services of volunteers is funded by USAID. The community and the volunteers fail to understand that different donors have different requirements. The community and the volunteers fail to understand that different donors have different operating conditions. Some donors pay allowances to the volunteers and other donors do not pay volunteers. Like currently, National AIDS Council pay allowances to behaviour change facilitators while HOSPAZ do not pay volunteers. The community and the volunteers must be able to understand the dynamics in the donor aid. The onus is inherently upon the NGOs to educate the community on the dynamics in donor aid.

There seems to be a nexus between volunteerism and the concept of the sustainable development. The argument that NGOs have put forward to patronise why they are not paying volunteers is that paying volunteers is antithetical to sustainable development. NGOs have inherently argued that paying NGOs though it is undeniably morally right to some extent it is unsustainable. Evidence in superfluity suggests that volunteers tend to work during the duration of the project once the project ends that is where their work ends because no allowances are coming. It is important to note that donors or projects come and go but communities remain forever, therefore failure to continue with work after NGO exists the community is problematic. Paying volunteers creates donor dependency which is antithetical to sustainable development.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

As amply demonstrated above volunteerism in Norton embody elements of exploitation. This is vindicated by the fact that poor and vulnerable volunteers are ending up using their own resources to complete and carry out NGOs work. They use their funds to make home visits. NGOs must ensure that volunteers do not use their money to do NGOs' work. Where



volunteers have used their funds they must be reimbursed. Failure to do so will cause death of volunteerism to reach staggering levels.

The community as shown above contributes ineffably to the diabolical death of volunteerism in multifarious ways. NGOs are recommended to mobilise the community and their volunteers and educate them about the dynamics in the donor aid industry. NGOs must educate the community about the undeniable benefits of volunteerism not only to the NGO but to the community as a whole. Importantly, the NGOs must inherently educate the volunteers that different donors have different requirements. Some donors pay allowances while some donors do not pay allowances. It is of paramount importance for volunteers to understand the differences.

Motivation of volunteers is not limited to pecuniary benefits. There are a plethora of ways that NGOs can use to motivate the volunteers working in the community. Firstly, volunteers must be capacitated. This means that NGOs must have all the paraphernalia that are required for one to do volunteer work. Enough stationery is required. Where they have bona fide concerns they must be addressed. Small items like T-shirts have proved to go a long way in the motivation of volunteers.

8. CONCLUSIONS

Volunteerism is an important cog in the development trajectory of Norton Town. The very clear fact that every NGO has some form of volunteers of some sort is impeccable evidence that testifies to the importance of volunteers. It is not an overstatement to argue that in Norton there has been a death of volunteerism of unrivalled intensity. Death of volunteerism is embodied by poor attendance at meetings, lackadaisical approach to work by volunteers and outright abandonment of duty. A plethora of reasons can be proffered to explain the diabolical death of volunteers. The economic challenges that the country has faced since the genesis of the new millennium has been blamed for the death volunteerism. Given the current economic challenges volunteerism is viewed as incompatible in this epoch. Wider community misinterpretation of volunteerism as exploitation has justified neglect of duty to work by volunteers. It is the response of NGOs to the cancerous death of volunteerism that will shape the development trajectory of Norton.



REFERENCES

1. Kaseke, E. and Dhemba, J. 2005. Community Mobilization, Volunteerism and the Fight against HIV and AIDS. Special Issue on Civic Service in the Southern African Development Community
2. McBride, AM. Benítez, C. & Sherraden, M. 2003. The forms and nature of civic service: A global assessment research report. St Louis. MO: Centre for Social Development. Washington University.
3. Strive Times. 2004. Newsheet of the support to replicable innovative village/community level
4. SAFAIDS. 2004. Community interventions in Zambia: Faith-based responses to OVCs. SAFAIDS: Harare
5. Young. R.D. 2004. Volunteerism, Benefits, In the Public Sector. University of South Carolina. College of Liberal Arts