

Chapter 12

Youth Volunteerism

At its most basic level, volunteerism can be thought of as an expression of solidarity and societal cohesion, typically derived from long-established traditions of sharing and reciprocal exchange (UN Volunteers, 2016). More formally, the UN has defined it as unpaid, non-compulsory work done outside of the household for the general public good (UNESCAP, 2018). Volunteering, or the idea of providing service, has deep historical and cultural roots, whereby societies built on ideas of mutual communal support or labour, kinship and cultural practices encouraged collective responsibility, solidarity, and reciprocity (Patel, 2007). Unfortunately, the service ethos or the practice of volunteerism is disappearing gradually (ibid.).

12.1 Volunteerism in the context of sustainable development

Volunteering has gained increasing traction in the context of globalisation and the SDGs. Volunteerism enables youth to engage and participate in their own sustainable development and peace-keeping by strengthening social cohesion and trust through the promotion of individual and collective action (UN Volunteers, 2016). Furthermore, volunteer organisations can play an active role in working with youth towards achieving the SDGs through progress monitoring, raising awareness and facilitating knowledge-sharing by leveraging local expertise, modelling behaviours and complementing essential basic services (UNESCAP, 2018). By connecting initiatives at the institutional or policy level with volunteer action at the community level, organisations can strengthen youth civic engagement, social inclusion, solidarity and ownership and increase the reach, scale and inclusiveness of action from the local to national level, as well as work to mitigate conflicts at all stages and foster reconciliation in post-conflict situations (Caprara et al., 2016). Not only does volunteerism let individuals and communities build capacity and ownership but also it can provide avenues for young women and other minorities to engage in spaces outside traditional norms; and to hold authorities accountable and ensure responsiveness to their needs and those of their communities. In this way, it works to reduce social exclusion as a result of poverty, marginalisation and other forms of inequality (ibid.).

12.2 Volunteerism among Ghanaian youth

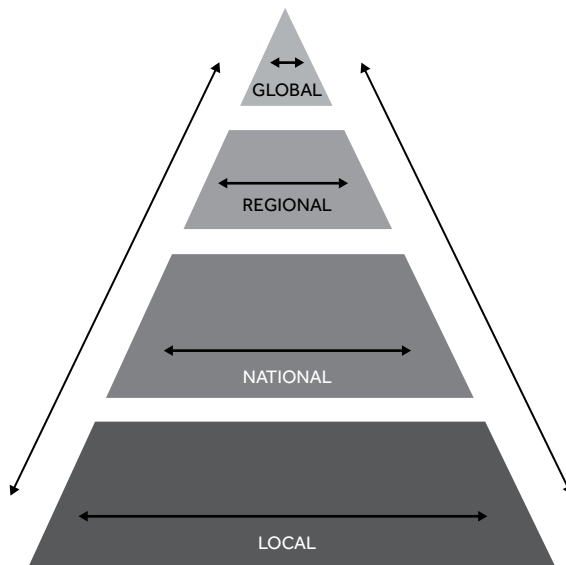
The Ghana National Service Scheme, an initiative established in 1973, requires that all Ghanaians graduating from tertiary educational institutions must participate in a mandatory service year. This initiative enables youth to participate in critical

development initiatives, such as rural health and education, while giving them skills that could advance their personal and professional development. In this context, volunteering in Ghana can be seen as a post-graduation mandatory requirement (Caprara et al., 2016). This equally raises the question of what avenues exist for young people to continue volunteering beyond national service.

[My motivation for volunteering was that]... I will get a lot of access. Like how I am with you right now and you are trying to educate me on certain things... Female, 15–20 years

Renewed support at the government level would encourage Ghanaian youth to take the opportunities well-facilitated volunteerism provides and directly engage in their own development to have an impact locally, nationally and globally (UN Volunteers, 2016) (Figure 12.1). Expanding the participation of youth in volunteerism is critical to the long-term sustainability of development initiatives. It would also strengthen the social integration and sense of belonging of youth while at the same time enhancing the skills and capacities necessary for personal development and employability (Caprara et al., 2016; UN Volunteers, 2016). Government can build on the idea that volunteerism can align education, training and learning with real-world needs, facilitate access to quality information and strengthen inter-generational connectedness by providing youth and adults opportunities to learn from one another and enhance their mutual understanding. In this way, support to cross-sectoral collaborations and policy frameworks that allow for expanding volunteerism would further work towards the goals of peace, social cohesion and sustained development (Patel, 2007; Caprara et al., 2016).

Figure 12.1 Youth participation at local, national, regional and global levels



Source: Author.

12.3 Summary points

1. Promoting volunteerism provides opportunities to align education, training and learning with real-world needs.
2. Volunteerism can strengthen youth–adult relationships.
3. Volunteering can facilitate social inclusion of youth while contributing to national development.

12.4 Recommendations

1. Scale up local volunteering and national service to enable youth to consider volunteering as a life-time opportunity to serve.
2. Contribute to increasing the prevalence and effectiveness of in-country programmes that can support long-term partnerships and produce far greater returns in terms of peace, social cohesion and sustained development.
3. Encourage cross-sectoral collaboration around policy frameworks to ensure opportunities for expanding voluntary service, with a particular focus on inter-generational programmes that can improve the prospects of youth as active citizens.
4. Incorporate volunteering and volunteerism into school curricula at all levels.

References

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