

Hindrances to Volunteerism in Ethiopia: A Qualitative Analysis of Organizational and Systemic Challenges

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Abstract: Barriers to volunteerism within organizations in Hawassa, Ethiopia were explored using a qualitative approach. Data were collected from diverse stakeholders, including volunteers, youth volunteerism officers, and sub-city heads, through questionnaires and interviews. Content analysis revealed significant barriers to volunteerism, such as resource shortages, inadequate budgets, lack of awareness, negligence, and disrespect. Challenges like insufficient skilled manpower, an unsupportive social environment, and poor follow-up mechanisms further hindered volunteer efforts. Trends indicate that these barriers have worsened over the past 2–5 years, with a majority of respondents reporting increased severity. The study also identified systemic causes, including low community awareness, fragmented strategies, lack of motivation, and insufficient institutional support. These barriers resulted in low morale, emotional distress, conflicts, and inefficiencies among volunteers and organizations. Comparisons with prior studies confirm similar trends globally, emphasizing the need for strategic interventions to address these issues. The findings underscore the importance of fostering supportive environments, enhancing awareness, and implementing comprehensive volunteer management practices to mitigate barriers and promote sustainable volunteerism. This research provides a foundation for future studies and practical insights to improve volunteer programs in Ethiopia.

Keywords: Volunteerism, Barriers to engagement, Youth participation, Volunteer motivation

1. Introduction

While traditional methods of aiding those in need have deep roots in Ethiopian culture, this sector has received minimal attention from successive Ethiopian administrations, and scholarly literature lacks substantial information on it. During the Dergue era, considerable efforts were undertaken nationally to combat illiteracy, engaging hundreds of thousands of Ethiopian volunteers. However, despite these governmental endeavors, Ethiopia's volunteerism rate remained among the lowest in sub-Saharan Africa. According to the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) State of the World's Volunteerism Report [1], while Africa as a whole boasts high volunteer rates—exceeding other regions with monthly volunteer rates of 17.5%—Ethiopia struggles with lower engagement levels. This report highlights significant volunteer participation in countries like Kenya and Senegal, but Ethiopia does not match these high levels of volunteer activity [2].

2. Research Question

How prevalent are barriers to volunteerism in the Misrak and Mehal Ketema sub-cities in Hawassa, Ethiopia, and what trends have these barriers shown over time?

3. Methods

3.1. Youth volunteerism officers' and Volunteers Representatives' Questionnaire

These questionnaires, prepared from the literature, comprised seven open-ended and closed-ended items. The questionnaires for both youth volunteerism officers and volunteer representatives were alike in form and content, apart from a small number of items that requested facts from the youth volunteerism officers' viewpoints of the barriers to volunteerism and from the volunteer representatives' own viewpoints. In these questionnaires, the

participants were requested to list out the barriers to volunteerism, specify the magnitude of the barriers to volunteerism, describe the major causes of the barriers, and state the effects of these barriers on the volunteerism service.

3.2. Interviews

To solidify the data found from the youth volunteerism officers, volunteer representatives, and volunteers, interviews were conducted with the youth personality building officers, youth center resource collection officers, and youth and sports office heads of the two sub-cities.

The interview items were six in number, and they were identical for all the respondents, apart from semi-occasionally when probing was compulsory. Accordingly, when the respondents were unwilling to respond or when they tried to change the direction of a question, efforts were made to convince them and bring them back to the topic in order to focus on the issue posed.

3.3. Data Analysis

Data gathered from youth volunteerism officers, volunteer representatives, youth personality-building officers, youth center resource collection officers, and youth and sports office heads were analyzed qualitatively through content analysis.

The qualitative data analysis in this research utilized a content analysis approach, as outlined by [3]. The analysis involved examining text-based data, including responses from questionnaires and interviews, to identify core consistencies and meanings regarding barriers to volunteerism within organizations. To begin, responses from structured questionnaires distributed to volunteers, volunteer representatives, and youth volunteerism officers were collected and categorized. These questionnaires contained a blend of open- and closed-ended items, allowing for both structured responses and rich qualitative insights. Similarly, interviews conducted with key stakeholders, including sub-city heads, youth center resource collection officers, and youth personality-building officers, provided additional perspectives on the barriers to volunteerism. Through content analysis, recurring words and themes were identified, shedding light on the major barriers, causes, trends, and impacts within the volunteerism community.

Moreover, trends in the prevalence of the barriers over time were examined, offering insights into the evolving landscape of volunteerism challenges. Additionally, the analysis delved into the negative impacts of the barriers on youth volunteerism officers and volunteers. Through systematic coding and interpretation of qualitative data, this research provided a comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding volunteerism within organizations, contributing valuable insights for future interventions and initiatives aimed at overcoming these barriers.

4. Results

This part of the study aimed to explore the barriers to volunteerism within the community by employing a comprehensive qualitative approach. Various stakeholders, including volunteers, volunteer representatives, youth volunteerism officers, and sub-city heads, provided insights through questionnaires and interviews. Content analysis was used to process the qualitative data, allowing the identification of recurring themes and core consistencies. This approach helped uncover the significant challenges faced by the volunteerism community, causes of barriers, and impacts of these barriers on both youth volunteerism officers and volunteers.

One major qualitative finding of the study highlighted several prevalent barriers to volunteerism that hinders its effectiveness. Among these, a shortage of materials and inadequate budgets emerged as critical logistical issues, impeding the ability of volunteers to perform their tasks efficiently. Additionally, a widespread lack of awareness about the importance and benefits of volunteerism contributed to low participation rates and enthusiasm. Other significant obstacles identified included negligence and disrespect, which undermine the morale and motivation of volunteers. The lack of skilled manpower further exacerbated these challenges, as volunteers often lacked the necessary training and expertise to carry out their roles effectively. An unsupportive social environment,

characterized by insufficient encouragement and recognition from the broader community, also played a role in discouraging volunteer efforts. Moreover, there were difficulties in identifying whom to support, which led to misdirected efforts and inefficiencies. The absence of follow-up on volunteer activities resulted in a lack of accountability and continuity, while partiality and a lack of transparency in volunteer management fostered mistrust and dissatisfaction among volunteers. These barriers were consistently identified by respondents as the primary obstacles to effective volunteerism, highlighting the need for comprehensive strategies to address these multifaceted issues.

The study also delved into the causes of these barriers, uncovering several systemic issues that contribute to the challenges faced in volunteerism. One prominent issue was the lack of community awareness about the importance and impact of volunteer work, which led to low engagement and support from the public. Additionally, there was an absence of a comprehensive strategy to engage diverse volunteer groups, resulting in a fragmented and inefficient volunteerism landscape. Low motivation among volunteers was another critical factor, often stemming from poor discipline and a lack of personal investment in the volunteer activities.

Furthermore, officials showed insufficient initiative and commitment, failing to provide the necessary support and leadership to sustain volunteer efforts. The lack of recognition and appreciation for volunteers' contributions further demotivated them, making it difficult to retain and attract volunteers. Misunderstandings and mistrust among stakeholders, including volunteers, officials, and the community, created a toxic environment that hampered collaboration and effective communication. Apathy from officials, who often appeared indifferent to the challenges faced by volunteers, exacerbated these issues. Finally, the shortage of skilled manpower meant that volunteers were frequently ill-equipped to handle their responsibilities, leading to inefficiencies and frustration. These factors collectively contributed to the pervasive barriers to volunteerism, indicating the need for targeted interventions to address these root causes.

To identify the trend of barriers in organizations, the respondents were requested to answer the following question: Compared to the situation in the last couple of years (5 years for youth volunteerism officers and 2 years for volunteers), what does the trend of the barriers look like in the organization? The answers provided were as follows:

- a) increased highly = 75% youth volunteerism officers
50.00% volunteers
- b) increased slightly = 25.00% youth volunteerism officers
33.33% volunteers
- c) unchanged = 16.67% volunteers

The trend analysis indicated a worsening of these barriers over recent years, with a significant proportion of respondents noting an increase in the severity of these challenges. Youth volunteerism officers and volunteers, in particular, highlighted this growing concern, emphasizing that the issues have become more pronounced and pervasive. This trend reflects an escalating problem within the community, as the barriers to effective volunteerism have intensified, making it increasingly difficult for volunteers to carry out their roles and for organizations to maintain effective volunteer programs. The deterioration of these conditions underscores the urgent need for strategic interventions and solutions to address and mitigate these barriers to foster a more supportive and efficient volunteerism environment.

Furthermore, the study examined the impacts of these barriers on both youth volunteerism officers and volunteers, revealing a range of detrimental effects. The barriers significantly reduced motivation among volunteers and officers, leading to a pervasive sense of dissatisfaction with the working environment. This negative atmosphere often resulted in intentional misunderstandings and conflicts, further complicating volunteer efforts. Volunteers reported experiencing emotional distress and feeling overwhelmed by the excessive demands placed on them, which led to a sense of being overburdened. Irresponsibility became a common issue, as the lack of support and resources discouraged volunteers from fully committing to their roles. Coordinating regular working hours also

proved challenging, as the cumulative effect of these barriers disrupted schedules and hindered effective collaboration. These findings highlight the profound and multifaceted impacts that barriers to volunteerism have on individuals involved in these efforts, emphasizing the need for systemic changes to improve the volunteer experience and organizational outcomes.

Overall, the qualitative finding provides a detailed picture of the barriers to volunteerism, their underlying causes, and their detrimental impacts on the volunteerism community. These insights are crucial for developing strategies to address and mitigate these barriers, thereby enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of volunteerism efforts.

5. Discussion

This section of the study demonstrates a discussion of the results acquired. The discussion presented follows the major research question posed at the beginning of the study. The research question was as follows:

How prevalent are barriers to volunteerism in the Misrak and Mehal Ketema sub-cities in Hawassa, Ethiopia, and what trends have these barriers shown over time?

Prevalence and trend of barriers to volunteerism in organizations

All the interviewees reported that barriers to volunteerism were the major problem at their organizations. The youth volunteerism officers, youth personality building officers, youth center resource collection officers, youth and sports office heads, and volunteer representatives recounted that both volunteers and youth volunteerism officers run into barriers to volunteerism virtually on a daily basis. According to them, the regularly occurring forms of barriers to volunteerism comprised a scarcity of resources to facilitate volunteerism, the condition of being negligent, apathy towards the needy, an absence of transparency, disrespect, a lack of skilled human resources, and a lack of awareness for volunteerism. The problem of lack of awareness about volunteerism may be the result of carelessness that could ensue from the different levels of understanding of the concerned bodies about volunteerism. The problem occurs when the volunteers come to volunteer and the youth volunteerism officers try to coordinate. One of the youth and sports office heads informed this researcher that "lack of awareness for volunteerism is a serious problem. There has to be a clear and similar understanding of volunteerism among each and every concerned body at different levels. Since different concerned bodies at different levels do not have a similar understanding of volunteerism, I think due to this reason, workers are becoming careless." Results from prior studies [4] showed that barriers to volunteerism were the problems of organizations in Ethiopia, particularly in Oromia and Tigray Regions. The results of this study affirmed these findings.

In a broader context, studies from other regions also reflect these barriers. For instance, research conducted in a comprehensive healthcare center in Shiraz, the capital of Fars Province in southwest Iran, found that lack of awareness, inadequate support and supervision, role confusion, and inadequate volunteer training significantly hinder volunteer effectiveness [5].

Moreover, a Saudi-based study examining barriers to volunteerism among healthcare students during the COVID-19 pandemic further supports these findings. It identified a lack of knowledge about volunteer roles and insufficient institutional support as significant barriers [6]. This reflects the current research findings on the need for a clear and consistent understanding of volunteerism among all concerned bodies to prevent carelessness and enhance coordination.

It was found that the barriers to volunteerism had increased in the last couple of years. About 75% of youth volunteerism officers and 50% of volunteers said that barriers to volunteerism have increased significantly in the last two to five years. Moreover, 25% of the youth volunteer officers and 33.33% of the volunteers reported that the increase was only slight. Nonetheless, 16.67% of volunteers said the trend of barriers to volunteerism was unchanged.

They reported that the trend of the problems had just remained the same for the last couple of years. This could happen, possibly because they may not be able to certainly determine the trend of the problems as a result of a lack of knowledge, or they might not be interested in thinking deeply to respond to the question.

The trend analysis showed that these obstacles have worsened in recent years, with many respondents noting an increase in the severity of these issues. Youth volunteerism officers and volunteers, in particular, expressed growing concern, emphasizing that the challenges have become more significant and widespread. This trend signifies an escalating problem within the community, as the barriers to effective volunteerism have intensified, making it increasingly difficult for volunteers to fulfill their roles and for organizations to sustain effective volunteer programs. The decline in conditions highlights the urgent need for strategic interventions and solutions to address and alleviate these barriers, fostering a more supportive and efficient volunteerism environment.

If the existing conditions of Ethiopian organizations are left unchanged, the possibility is very high that barriers to volunteerism in organizations will increase. Strictly speaking, it is highly probable that the rate and seriousness of the barriers will increase with an increase in the cost of living and destitution, a shortage of materials, a university student-focused volunteering system that was brought up without constructive moral values, highly self-interested volunteers, and a lack of reward for their contribution.

Summary and Conclusions

The present investigation aims to investigate the prevalence of barriers to volunteerism within an organization. In order to obtain a thorough grasp of the study problem, the researcher used qualitative methods. The present study lays the groundwork for future investigations on the origins, scope, and consequences of volunteerism barriers.

Research has pinpointed various reasons that contribute to the development of volunteer behavior. It has been demonstrated that volunteering behavior develops from an amalgamation of reasons related to individuals, families, organizations, and communities. These factors could rub off on cultures and organizations. Research undertaken somewhere else in the world displayed those individual factors including personality traits, self-esteem, meeting people, personal obligation, intrinsic satisfaction, empathy, making a difference, self-efficacy, seeking their own happiness, social responsibility, gaining life experience, commitment, keeping busy, and biological factors were identified as some of the factors that favor volunteering.

Family and community-related factors such as community expectations, being invited, holidays, family traditions, natural disasters, participation, seeking a better professional image, support, being recognized by society, and identification with other volunteers from the group were also figured out as factors that augmented the possibility of volunteering behavior among volunteers. Also, organizational reputation, having a volunteer-friendly environment, a sense of identification with the organization, organizational attitudes and values, needing the organization for the future, structural features of the organization, supportive supervision, volunteer management practices, and the presence of a thank-you culture were found to be organization-related factors that result in volunteering behavior.

The majority of the research "center of gravity" resided in the United States or somewhere else in Europe, and little is known about the hinderances to volunteerism in the Ethiopian context. Thus, the study was conducted to explore the barriers in two organizations in a city in Ethiopia, Hawassa.

Maybe the most essential step in removing the barriers to volunteerism is to bring the attention and dynamism of volunteers, volunteering coordinators, the organization's personnel, and society together establishing connections with others, taking on social responsibilities, and participating in communal endeavors to address the problem. One major factor that exacerbates organizational barriers to volunteerism is a lack of attention from the concerned parties and society at large. It is completely pertinent that combined efforts be made to raise the consciousness of the entire public that organizations need backing to prevent the level of barriers to volunteerism, which is on the rise, and that solutions should be sought.

The barriers to volunteerism are a multifaceted phenomenon that could emanate from a wide range of sources. Researchers in the years ahead may employ focus-group discussions, observations, and other in-depth data-

gathering methods to uncover those contributing circumstances at organizations, thoroughly understand the motivation to volunteer along with the barriers to volunteerism and the causes for both and investigate effective strategies for change. Additional inquiries should be planned to encompass how the shared fundamental traits within and around the organizations, social connections in the organizations, and the whole society withstand the barriers to volunteerism.

Recommendations

In order to promote social cohesion, community development, and personal wellbeing, voluntarism is essential. For interventions and policies to be effective, it is essential to comprehend the obstacles that impede volunteer participation. Within this framework, this study offers insightful information about the barriers to volunteerism. Based on these results, the recommendations that follow provide scientific, scholarly, and professional direction for future study, policy, education, and intervention aimed at enhancing and promoting volunteerism in communities and organizations.

Policy Recommendations:

Formulate regulations that encourage volunteer organizations to be inclusive and to respect various values.

Create regional or national policies that encourage and value volunteering. This may entail offering volunteers and volunteer organizations monetary incentives, tax advantages, and legal safeguards.

Establish regulatory frameworks to ensure the transparency, accountability, and ethical practices of volunteer organizations. This can help build trust among volunteers and the wider community.

Work together with pertinent governmental bodies, charitable organizations, and neighborhood stakeholders to create and carry out policies that tackle the obstacles to volunteerism mentioned in this study.

Allocate adequate budgets and resources to address the shortage of materials and lack of an adequate budget as barriers to volunteerism.

Implement policies that promote transparency, accountability, and recognition for volunteers to address issues of negligence, disrespect, and lack of recognition.

Intervention Recommendations:

To overcome the identified barriers to volunteerism, develop and put into action focused interventions. This can involve providing training and capacity-building programs for organizational leaders and staff to enhance their understanding of volunteerism and create a supportive environment.

To improve volunteers' engagement and retention, mentorship programs should be developed that link seasoned volunteers with novices and offer advice and assistance.

Create volunteer recognition programs that inspire a sense of belonging by recognizing and appreciating the contributions made by volunteers.

Develop strategies to address the causes of barriers, such as lack of motivation, lack of discipline among volunteers, and lack of initiation and commitment by concerned officials.

Establish effective communication channels and mechanisms to address misunderstandings and mistrust among concerned officials, volunteers, and the community.

Provide support and resources to address the feeling of apathy among concerned officials and volunteers.

Design interventions that target specific value orientations to enhance volunteer motivation and engagement.

Future Research Recommendations:

Investigate the role of cultural and societal factors in shaping motivations and barriers to volunteerism. Studies that compare various nations and areas might offer important insights into the cultural dynamics of volunteerism.

Explore the potential of technology and digital platforms in facilitating and enhancing volunteer engagement. Research can focus on understanding the impact of virtual volunteering and the use of social media platforms in mobilizing and coordinating volunteers.

Conduct further research to explore the specific factors that contribute to the devastating motivations of volunteers, intention to quit volunteering, and psychological harm leading to apathy.

Investigate the impact of barriers on volunteer motivations in different organizational contexts and settings.

Explore innovative approaches and interventions to overcome barriers and enhance volunteerism.

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