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DYNAMICS OF VOLUNTEERING AND VOLUNTARY WORK IN GHANA: CAN IT BE SUSTAINED?

INTRODUCTION

Volunteering is a social development concept which has received a lot of attention. It is an act performed out of free will. In defining volunteering, personal dispositions and affiliations play a role. State and societal relations now define the type of volunteering that exists. In volunteering there is no payment or remuneration. Again there is no force or coercion. It must be noted that some receive some sort of income or allowance to cover their living cost. Others are only reimbursed based on a standard amount. One of the main challenges is the lack of database on voluntarism in Ghana. This policy brief shares information on the dynamics of volunteerism and volunteering activities in Ghana. It looks at the scope, structures and challenges of volunteer establishments providing recommendations for the sustainability of volunteerism in Ghana.

STRUCTURE AND MOBILIZATION

There are many volunteer groups with international affiliations in Ghana. There are frontline volunteer groups such as Volunteer Services Organization (VSO), Peace Corps and Red Cross. Volunteering for some individuals in these groups is often strongly linked to tourism and career development. They possess a lot of recognition and are sometimes a state led initiative. There are also registered NGOs who can also be called front liners but are not state led. These are more affiliated with individual and group initiatives and often recruit local and international volunteers but are limited in international assignments. Voluntary organisation/activities could come in various forms such as religious groups, para-church organisations, ad-hoc and corporate groups. Voluntary organisations often have structures which are mandatory for members of the organization. However, with the NGO based volunteer groups there is often less

structure. Resource mobilization and funding sometimes limits the ability of volunteering groups to function.

MOTIVATION

Research on the motivations of volunteerism shows a gradually shift from the “religious service to the nation notion” to self- interest and individual choice. To this end governments and non-profit organizations are creating new structures in attempt to attract and encourage more volunteer work. Some of these have called for an elevation of volunteer work to income earning status so more benefits are earned from engaging in volunteer work. This has raised many criticisms since it defeats the altruistic underpinnings of volunteerism. On the International level, it is quite clear that many volunteers are attracted by the tourist opportunities and also the desire to support needy and deprived areas.

CHALLENGES

- Safety and security remains at the forefront especially in conflict regions.
- Funding is seen as a major challenge affecting the sustainability of many volunteering organisations
- Recruitment processes are sometimes competitive
- Language barrier for international volunteers
- Lack of structure and weak contractual arrangements increases volatility in numbers of volunteers

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Volunteering must be seen as a necessary part of skills development and employment of human capital to encourage political buy-in and ensure the sustainability of volunteer organisations.
- Funding should be improved through the recruitment of fund raisers.
- Volunteerism should be added to the curriculum as has been done in the past to foster the spirit of national unity.

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