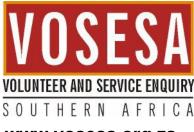
# Volunteering, youth and civic participation in southern Africa

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# Overview

- Introduction
- A historical perspective
- Challenges facing youth
- What voluntary service offers youth
- Transition to democracy and youth
- Renewed interest in volunteering
- Conclusions



### Introduction

- A five-country study was conducted in 2005/6 to establish the form and extent of civic service and volunteering in five SADC countries:
  - Botswana
  - Malawi
  - South Africa
  - Zambia
  - Zimbabwe
- Focused on structured and informal communitybased service and volunteering programmes
- Study supported by the Global Service Institute at Washington University, St Louis, Miss, USA



### A historical perspective

- The concept of service and volunteering is part of the African philosophy of *ubuntu* (Isizulu), *letsema* (Setswana) and kujitolea (Kiswalihi)
- Impact of colonialism
  - completely different value systems
  - failure to invest significant resources in the development of African communities
- The spirit of cooperation and reciprocity persisted in indigenous communities; citizen activism flourished in the struggle for independence and in the anti-apartheid struggle
- Voluntary activity contributed significantly to development in newly independent/democratic countries



## A historical perspective 2

- Post independence:
  - Some policies rooted in tradition of self-reliance
  - rapid investment in social development and absence of pluralist economies fostered expectations that government would provide in all respects
  - impacted negatively on the spirit of volunteerism
  - national youth service programmes established
  - some became strongly militaristic, used to entrench political parties
  - 1970s: structural adjustment shifted burden of development to communities – revitalised traditional voluntary action
- Today: significant layer of NGOs active in development



# Challenges facing youth

- Individual and collective identity
- Feel caught in forces over which they have no control
- Face conflicts between the values preached and those practised
- Globalisation and modernisation changing youth culture
- Challenges for young women seeking to break out of traditional constraints
- Unemployment and poverty
- Inadequate education and health challenges
- Poor access to information and modern technology
- Civil war and political instability



#### What voluntary service offers youth

- Opportunities to play an active role
- "Increased employability, social capital, and social and civic skills" (Johnson et al, 2006)
- Enhanced educational performance (Tapia, 2004)
- Seven out of eight MDGs have outcomes that relate to young people
  - Where youth are not the focus, they are instrumental in the achievement of the MDGs (World Bank, 2006)
- Youth volunteering for development
  - broadens world view
  - reduces xenophobia
  - enhances participation in national and global development



#### Transition to democracy and youth

#### Botswana

- Self-reliance informed national development strategy
- But self-reliance was eroded by expectations that government must provide for all citizens
- Today youth volunteering is driven by the need to develop skills for the labour market and acquire contacts for employment
- Malawi
  - Post-1994: rapid changes in the concept of volunteering
  - Communal voluntary service floundered as communities waited for government to solve local problems
  - Today volunteering responds to donor initiatives



### Transition to democracy and youth 2

#### South Africa

- Young people were central to the anti-apartheid struggle
- Democracy brought the expectation of a better life for all
- Now volunteering widespread in the face of unemployment
- Some preference for community-based volunteering
- Emerging policy framework for youth service:
  - Unemployed youth
  - Higher and further education students
  - Youth in conflict with the law
- Integrated youth service model (service, skills, learning)
- Youth volunteering strategy to reach more young people



### Renewed interest in volunteering

- Evidence of increasing interest in youth volunteering in African countries (UNV, 2006)
  - Governments: concerned about large, uninvolved, unemployed youth populations
  - Young people: look to volunteering as a means of getting ahead, getting employment
  - Relationship between public policy and volunteering?
- Botswana:
  - Government is urging citizens to do more largely to cut costs and reduce dependency on state provision
  - Government increasingly relying on volunteers to provide needed services in home-based care and people-centered rural development policies



### Renewed interest in volunteering 2

- Malawi:
  - Donor funding for HIV/AIDS, rights and governance and orphan care - youth clubs proliferate
  - Community-based volunteering targeting schools, but 'food for work' incentives are discouraging unpaid volunteering
- South Africa
  - Education system is not delivering the skills required by the economy
  - 40% of young people unlikely to find employment
  - Volunteering and youth service are filling a gap
  - Programmes are driven by the understanding that voluntary service can contribute to national development



## Conclusions

- The growing interest in youth volunteering in African countries is a significant opportunity for public policy and for young people
- Young volunteers in southern Africa can become active contributors to national and global development
- The relationship between public policy and the extent of volunteering must be monitored – can have unintended consequences
- More collaboration, regional networking and research is needed to share, understand and document the field of volunteering

