

Editorial

This collaborative study was conducted to learn more about civic service in the Southern African region – its nature and scope, its uniqueness in the African context, and the implications for service policy and action. Civic service as a field of enquiry internationally and regionally is underdeveloped. Its meaning, concepts, methodology, best practices, pitfalls and challenges are not well understood in developing contexts. Much of the literature on service has emerged in developed societies, and the applicability of this body of knowledge and practice to developing societies is receiving increasing attention.

The Global Service Institute at the Center for Social Development at Washington University, St Louis, initiated a programme to study service across national contexts in order to identify common patterns and differences between countries. This special issue of *The Social Work Practitioner-Researcher* and the *Journal of Social Development in Africa* reports on the *Five-Country Cross-National Study on Civic Service and Volunteering in Southern Africa*, a study that could make a significant contribution to building service as a field of enquiry. This is particularly relevant in the context of globalisation and regionalisation where civic service is emerging as a growing social phenomenon and institution.

The articles in this special issue demonstrate how different actors in the region are co-operating to address the human development challenges in the five countries – Botswana, Malawi, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The service initiatives reported on contribute to developing knowledge and best practice, and demonstrate the role that service and volunteering can play in promoting the achievement of national social development goals and priorities. The direction that service is taking in the region is also consistent with the key objectives of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) which is aimed at achieving regional co-operation, eradicating poverty, and reaching high levels of social and human development.

The study was conducted through a unique North-South partnership between a non-governmental organisation, academics and higher education institutions that resulted in the pooling of expertise and resources. Partners included the Centre for Social Development in Africa at the University of Johannesburg, the Global Service Institute at the Center for Social Development, Washington University in St Louis, USA, Volunteer and Service Enquiry Southern Africa (VOSESA) based in Johannesburg, and the universities of Botswana, Malawi and Zimbabwe. Research networks were built between colleagues in the SADC region and through this process the research team expanded their knowledge about the shape of research

on service in the region. The study highlighted the lack of published literature and academic resources on the subject in the countries where the study was conducted. It showed that a substantial collection of documentation, knowledge and practical experience exists, which is not published in scholarly publications. This situation demonstrates the importance of research partnerships to bridge the divide between researchers located in academic institutions and society at large. A rich learning experience awaits the researcher who is willing to traverse this terrain.

This special issue attempts to disseminate information about service in the region to a wider audience for scholarly review and to encourage debate, foster an exchange of ideas about the future development of service policy, and prompt an agenda for action in the region. In this way it aims to stimulate the development of knowledge about civic participation through service in Southern African countries.

The article by Leila Patel, Centre for Social Development in Africa, University of Johannesburg provides an overview of the study titled *A Cross-National Study on Civic Service and Volunteering in Southern Africa*. The author argues that service and volunteering is both formally and informally organised, and is an emerging phenomenon in the SADC region. While similar trends in the development of service have been observed internationally, the social development approach is emerging as a distinguishing feature of service in the region. This approach is considered to be a viable and appropriate direction to inform regional service policy, further research and an agenda for action.

This article is followed by five articles that address particular service themes in the SADC. Morena J Rankopo, Kwaku Osei-Hwedie and Tirelo Modie Moroka from the Department of Social Work at the University of Botswana, address *Issues in service and volunteerism in Botswana*. This article discusses the relation between the growth of service, the role of the state, and implications for service policy. Significant shifts in public policy are identified from a state-dominant model of social provision to one which incorporates state-community partnerships, participation in development, mutual social responsibility and social justice. This new approach has, to some extent, been influenced by neo-liberal thinking and models of the developmental state. The gender, class and age profile of servers raise questions about the shifting of state responsibility for service on to poor women, older persons and disadvantaged communities.

The growing focus on voluntary youth service programmes in African countries is part of a wider international trend, with the benefits of youth service being increasingly recognised through civic education and programmes promoting youth development and action. The article by Catherine M Moleni and Brenda M Gallagher challenges prevailing assumptions about low levels of service in Malawi, and demonstrates that youth service is a growing field as young people seek

opportunities for personal development. The authors point to the importance of moving from an approach that stresses the benefits of service for beneficiaries only, to one that recognises reciprocity and the mutuality of benefits for beneficiaries and servers alike.

In their article on *Civic service policy in South Africa*, Helene Perold, Leila Patel, René Carapinha and Salah E Mohamed show how the service field has benefited from the enabling policy landscape in post-apartheid South Africa. While there is extensive informal service at community level and in the non-governmental sector, the country report focused on national structured service programmes, namely youth service, community service in secondary schooling, service learning in higher education, and compulsory community service for health professionals. These initiatives are directly linked to national social development policies and priorities, but a number of critical policy and delivery challenges are identified if the potential of service is to be fully realised.

Incentives emerged as a critical issue in the development of service policies and programmes in the study. This issue is highlighted by Theresa Wilson, a social development consultant, in the article *Incentives and volunteerism in Zambia: A review*. Wilson challenges the notion that financial incentives should not be paid to volunteers in a society where both servers and beneficiaries are poor and disadvantaged. She argues for an approach that includes multiple incentives that are both of a financial and non-financial nature in under-resourced developing countries. The role and impact of incentives need to be better understood, including implications for the sustainability of service programmes, the benefits derived from service for all parties, and service policy and legislation.

Community mobilisation, volunteerism and the fight against HIV/AIDS in Zimbabwe by Edwin Kaseke and Jotham Dhemba from the School of Social Work at the University of Zimbabwe, speaks to a national and a regional issue. Community-based care, development, education and prevention emerged as significant local-level interventions in partnership with larger and established non-governmental organisations to address the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Zimbabwe. Voluntary initiative has increased due to state failure in the ongoing escalation of conflict in the country. Community mobilisation strategies and volunteering are viable indigenous social development interventions in this context.

Together, these articles provide a rich overview of service in the region and mark the start of a deeper exploration of civic participation in development in Southern Africa. The full country reports and the overall report are available at www.vosesa.org.za.