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How can volunteering and service promote the social and economic participation of youth in the SADC region?

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Contents

Acronyms			
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome	NYS	National Youth Service
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo	PRB	Population Reference Bureau
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio	SADC	Southern African Development Community
HDI	Human Development Index	SAYM	Southern African Youth Movement
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus	UN	United Nations
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council	UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
IAVE	International Association for Volunteer Effort	UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
ILO	International Labour Organisation	UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
IMF	International Monetary Fund	UNV	United Nations Volunteers
MDG	Millennium Development Goal	VOSESA	Volunteer and Service Enquiry Southern Africa

Abstract

The African Youth Charter upholds the right of every young person to participate in all spheres of society, but socio-economic challenges such as poverty, youth unemployment, the HIV epidemic and education systems that do not adequately equip them to take part in the knowledge-based economy, limit young people's opportunities for participating in mainstream society.

In the face of these challenges, findings ways to foster opportunities for youth participation becomes ever more important. Youth volunteering and service programmes provides one way in which young people can be engaged and drawn into society. Youth volunteering and service spans a broad range of activities in the social, cultural, political and economic spheres that enable young people to assist others and contribute to the development of communities and countries, while also developing their own skills, abilities and experience so that they can develop their potential.

Where youth volunteering and service programmes and activities are well-managed and draw on young people's talents in a meaningful way, they can foster increased participation, civic engagement and active citizenship. The paper explores ways in which youth volunteering and service promotes social, political and economic participation amongst youth, as well as some aspects of personal development that support further participation and engagement. The paper also includes recommendations for ways in which participation through volunteering and service can be promoted and supported.

1   Introduction

The African Youth Charter upholds the right of every young person to participate in all spheres of society (African Union, 2005:6). That is, every young person has the right to be actively involved in their communities and society at large – to take part in community and social groups and participate in cultural activities, engage with politics and issues of public concern, participate in the formal economy through employment or entrepreneurship and be a part of decision-making processes that impact on their lives. In short, the African Youth Charter recognises the right of all young people to have access to a range of opportunities to participate to the extent that they wish in the social, economic, political and cultural life of their societies.

In practice, many young people in the South African Development Community (SADC) region, as in much of Africa, face various socioeconomic challenges – including poverty, youth unemployment, the HIV epidemic and education systems that do not adequately equip them to take part in the knowledge-based economy – that limit their ability to participate in mainstream society and build a better life. Where young people are marginalised and frustrated, they are often viewed as a problem to be solved and a source of potential social unrest.

In the face of these challenges, findings ways to foster opportunities for youth participation becomes even more important. Fostering opportunities for youth participation contributes to human development, as it expands the choices young people have to lead lives they have reason to value (United Nations Development Programme, 2010). Expanding opportunities for youth participation also empowers young people to become a source of hope and energy for tackling these challenges and creating a new future for their communities and for themselves. The conviction that youth are assets for development is evident in the African Youth Charter (2005:1) statement that "Africa's greatest resource is its youthful population, and that through their active and full participation, Africans can surmount the difficulties that lie ahead."

Youth volunteering and service programmes provide a way for young people to become more involved and engaged in society. Youth volunteering and service spans a broad range of activities in the social, cultural, political and economic spheres that enable young people to assist others and contribute to the development of communities and countries, while also developing their own skills, abilities and experience so that they can develop their potential.

Defining youth

Youth is generally understood as the period of transition between 'childhood' and 'adulthood', marked by events such as completing schooling, starting further education, entering the world of work, achieving financial autonomy and sometimes marriage and children (Panday, 2005).

However, these life stages are understood differently across cultures and contexts. In situations of poverty, children may take on responsibilities at an early age, while in many African countries the transition to adulthood has been extended due to prolonged involvement in political conflict and difficulties in earning a living (Panday, 2005; United Nations, 2011a). The range of age-based definitions of youth in SADC reflects the different understandings of how long this stage of life lasts.

In this paper, unless otherwise specified, **youth refers to people aged 15 to 35 years**, in line with the African Union's African Youth Charter. This broad definition encompasses a diverse group with a variety of needs and circumstances.

Definitions of youth in SADC	
Angola	15 – 24 yrs
Botswana	12 – 29 yrs
DRC	15 – 35 yrs
Lesotho	15 – 35 yrs
Madagascar	18 – 35 yrs
Malawi	14 – 25 yrs
Mauritius	16 – 25 yrs
Mozambique	18 – 35 yrs
Namibia	14 – 29 yrs
Seychelles	...
South Africa	14 – 35 yrs
Swaziland	14 – 30 yrs
Tanzania	15 – 24 yrs
Zambia	15 – 25 yrs
Zimbabwe	10 – 30 yrs

Source: Graham, Bruce and Perold (2010)

This paper explores the range of ways in which youth volunteering and service can promote youth participation in the SADC region. Youth volunteering and service takes many forms, and the benefits and impacts of participating in these activities vary accordingly. However, where youth volunteering and service programmes and activities are well-managed and draw on young people's talents in a meaningful way, they can foster increased participation, civic engagement and active citizenship – all of which form the basis for vibrant democracy in the region.

The paper begins by noting why *youth* participation deserves particular attention, and outlines some of the challenges in the SADC region that currently constrain young people's participation. After considering definitions, the range of ways in which youth volunteering and service can provide opportunities for young people to participate socially, politically and economically, while also developing personally, is explored. The paper concludes with recommendations for ways in which participation through volunteering and service can be promoted and supported.

1.1   Why focus on participation amongst youth in particular?

Promoting the participation of youth deserves particular attention for a range of reasons, not least because youth in the SADC region represent a substantial and growing segment of the population that have much to contribute but have a limited voice in the public domain.

A large and growing segment of the population

On average, youth aged 15 to 34 years make up more than 35% of the population in SADC countries; in Swaziland, Lesotho, Botswana and Zimbabwe, 40% or more of the population fall within this age group (UN, 2011b). Sub-Saharan Africa has the world's most youthful population and is also the fastest growing region in the world, which means that the number of young people is set to grow in coming years, despite the effects of the HIV epidemic (Population Reference Bureau, 2007).

The sheer numbers of young people, therefore, make addressing the needs of youth particularly pressing in this region. Neglecting their needs would result in an enormous waste of human potential with serious consequences for the region both now and in the future. As Alessi (2004:1) notes, "the values, attitudes and skills acquired by today's youth will influence the course of current events and shape the future".

The potential for a demographic dividend

Secondly, only by expanding opportunities for young people to participate socially and economically, and enabling them to realise their potential, can Africa take advantage of the 'demographic dividend' or 'bonus'.

The theory of the demographic 'dividend' is this: as large youthful populations become older and have fewer children than previous generations, the size of the working-age population will increase and they will have fewer dependants to support. This provides a window of opportunity for countries to save money on health and other social services, improve the quality of education, increase economic output, invest in technology and skills and create the wealth needed to cope with the future aging of the population (Ashford, 2007). This would provide an opportunity to significantly improve the quality of life in the region.

However, a youthful population alone does not produce this dividend. The experiences of regions such as East Asia that have "reaped the demographic dividend" suggest that several factors are required to achieve these economic benefits. These include: strong public health systems that

improve child survival and health in general; widespread availability and acceptability of family planning; rapid and steady declines in childbearing; improvements in educational enrolments and quality; and stable economic conditions conducive to growth and job creation that will allow young people to be absorbed into the workforce (Ashford, 2007).

Where such conditions are not in place, countries are unlikely to be able to take advantage of the demographic dividend. Ashford (2007:3) notes that to address this, "the key policy actions needed throughout sub-Saharan Africa are those that expand youth opportunities, give them the skills to participate fully in the economy and public life, and promote healthy behaviours". From this perspective, exploring strategies to promote the social and economic participation of youth should be an essential part of the development agenda in the region.

Giving greater voice to youth needs and perspectives

Thirdly, promoting youth participation is important to ensure that young people, as the future of the region, have more of a voice in the public domain and feature to a greater extent in public policy and policy-making in the region.

The African Youth Charter is an important statement of the rights, freedoms and responsibilities of young people in Africa and provides a framework for states to develop supportive policies and programmes for young people. However, the implementation of the charter is dependent on governments and civil society at a national level. A study by United Nations Volunteers (UNV) in 2006 found that while more than two-thirds of the 36 African countries surveyed had youth policies in place, only one third of responding countries had drawn young people into the process of policy formulation (UNV, 2006).

While young people make up a large proportion of the population and have a great deal to contribute, their voice in the public domain is often limited in comparison. Expanding opportunities for youth participation and leadership is essential for increasing the opportunities for youth to be heard and to become actively involved in their own development. Youth volunteering and service programmes create a range of opportunities for participation, and where they involve youth in decision-making, planning, implementation and advocacy, they enable young people to become actors in society, rather than recipients dependant on other role players (Eberly and Gal, 2006).

1.2   Youth in the SADC region

Promoting youth participation is particularly important in developing regions, where youth face a range of social and economic challenges that **constrain their opportunities for participation** in society. This section outlines some of the challenges that face youth in the SADC region.

The 15 member states that make up SADC share historical and cultural links but they also vary widely, including in terms of population size, political context, the structure of their economies and levels of development. Within countries, there are also differences based on gender and type of area. It is therefore difficult to make **generalisations** about the region, and this is exacerbated by the uneven nature of the data available on the situation of youth. This points to a need for further research on youth issues in member states, both for the benefit of the states and to inform a more accurate and balanced understanding of the status of youth in the region.

Despite this, and bearing in mind that the following may not apply to member states in all cases, it is possible to identify several challenges that limit the choices of young people in the region.

The social, economic and political context of youth in the SADC region

Some of these challenges are societal, while others are specific to youth.

- Over the last decade, most SADC member states enjoyed a period of positive economic growth, but this trend was disrupted by the sharp increase in food and fuel prices in 2008 and the global financial crisis (IMF, 2011)[1]. The effects of these crises were evident in the food and fuel price-related riots in Mozambique in late 2010 and more recently in Malawi. While the region appears to be recovering, the period of economic growth was not sufficient to substantially reduce **poverty** in the region. Progress has been made in meeting the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of reducing by half the proportion of people living below the poverty line; however, this progress has been uneven and high levels of poverty remain a challenge in several countries.[2]

  Addressing poverty in all its dimensions is a priority for SADC. As well as a lack of income, living in poverty involves hunger, malnutrition and limited access to health facilities, education, safe drinking water and sanitation. These circumstances impact negatively on human development by limiting young people's opportunities and capabilities for building a better life in future (Sen, 1999).

Progress in reducing proportion of population living below $1.25 per day (1990-2008)

	1990	2008
Angola	76%	37%
Botswana	31%	15%
DRC	80%	48%
Lesotho	56%	33%
Madagascar	73%	63%
Malawi	83%	67%
Mauritius	...	...
Mozambique	81%	69%
Namibia	49%	22%
Seychelles	...	...
South Africa	8%	13%
Swaziland	12%	6%
Tanzania	...	...
Zambia	63%	66%
Zimbabwe	33%	78%

Source: Overseas Development Institute (2010)

- This is reflected in the **low levels of human development** in the region. On the 2010 Human Development Index (HDI) – an index that combines measures of health, education and living standards – Mauritius was the only SADC country classified as having 'high' levels of human development (UNDP, 2010). Levels of human development in Botswana, Namibia, South Africa and Swaziland are classified as 'medium', while the other SADC member states displayed 'low' levels of human development.[3] Of the 169 countries considered in 2010, Mozambique was ranked 165th, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) was ranked 168th and Zimbabwe was ranked last.

- Access to quality **education** is essential for human development and ensuring that young people are able to access and take advantage of economic opportunities. Countries in the SADC region have made progress towards meeting the MDG of ensuring universal access to primary education, assisted in many cases by the abolition of primary school fees (ODI, 2010). However, getting children into primary school is only the first step; further challenges include ensuring that there is adequate teaching and schools are sufficiently resourced; and that children attend school consistently and continue to secondary education. Furthermore, there are concerns lack of alignment between the education system and the needs of the economy, but further research is required to understand the complex relationship between the labour market and education and training.[4]

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1 The exception to this being Zimbabwe.

2 Adopted by world leaders in 2000 with a deadline of 2015, the eight MDGs provide concrete targets that include halving extreme poverty, halting the spread of HIV and providing universal primary education.

3 No HDI ranking was available for the Seychelles.

4 The Education Policy Unit at the University of Witwatersrand has developed a research agenda on this.

In addition, tertiary enrolment rates in the region are low, which has implications for the competitiveness of the region in an increasingly knowledge-based global economy. According to a study by the Southern African Regional Universities Association, gross tertiary enrolment ratios (GER) in the region ranged from 0.4 percent in Malawi to 17 percent in Mauritius (SARUA, 2008). This is compared to an average GER of 17 percent for developing countries in general, 56 percent for countries in transition and 66 percent for the developed world (Global Monitoring Report, cited in SARUA, 2008).

- A further challenge for the SADC region is the **HIV epidemic**. Southern Africa remains the most severely affected region in the world, with a third of all people living with HIV worldwide in 2009 living in just 10 SADC member states (UNAIDS, 2010).[5] Young people, and especially young women (15 to 24 years), are particularly vulnerable to infection. Whether living with HIV or AIDS themselves or taking on additional responsibilities as a result of others being infected, the impact of the HIV epidemic reduces the scope for young people in the region to participate fully in society.
  The Indian Ocean islands are an exception to this, as the epidemic in these areas tends to be concentrated in high-risk populations. It is also worth noting that there are signs of a decline in the proportion of new HIV infections, with UNAIDS (2010:17) stating that young people are "leading a revolution in HIV prevention" by adopting safer sexual practices.[6]

Proportion of population in SADC member states living with HIV (HIV prevalence, 2009)			
	Adult (15-49)	**Young women (15-24)**	**Young men (15-24)**
Angola	2.0%	1.6%	0.6%
Botswana	24.8%	11.8%	5.2%
DRC	...	...	...
Lesotho	23.6%	14.2%	5.4%
Madagascar	0.2%	0.1%	0.1%
Malawi	11.0%	6.8%	3.1%
Mauritius	1.0%	0.2%	0.3%
Mozambique	11.5%	8.6%	3.1%
Namibia	13.1%	5.8%	2.3%
Seychelles	...	...	...
South Africa	17.8%	13.6%	4.5%
Swaziland	25.9%	15.6%	6.5%
Tanzania	5.6%	3.9%	1.7%
Zambia	13.5%	8.9%	4.2%
Zimbabwe	14.3%	6.9%	3.3%

Source: UNAIDS (2010)

- Although data for the member states is very limited, **youth unemployment** remains a key challenge. Internationally, the recent economic crisis has had a negative impact on youth employment prospects, with the period between 2008 and 2009 seeing the largest annual increase in the youth unemployment rate on record (International Labour Organisation, 2010). The political uprisings of the 'Arab spring' started largely against a backdrop of grievances by unemployed youth in Tunisia in December 2010.
  There is little current data on employment for youth in most SADC states. One exception is South Africa, where a study based on 2007 data found that some 2.8 million young people aged 18 to 24 years – more than 40% of this age cohort – were not employed, were not attending an educational institution and were not severely disabled (Sheppard and Cloete, 2009). The lack of employment opportunities is likely to be worse in low income and post-conflict countries in the region. Furthermore, **underemployment** is a challenge, with young people worldwide being prone to working longer hours under informal, intermittent and insecure work arrangements that are characterized by low productivity, low earnings and reduced social protection (ILO, 2010).

- Access to **infrastructure** and **information and communications technology (ICT),** such as computers, the internet and various social media, varies both within and across countries in the

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5 Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia, Zimbabwe

6 Five SADC countries – Botswana, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe – showed a significant decline in HIV prevalence among young women or men in national surveys, at least in part because they adopted safer sexual practices.

region. Limited access to ICT further reduces the opportunities for youth to participate in an increasingly networked and globalised world.

- Lastly, from a political perspective, **civil war, regional conflict and unstable political environments** affect youth in Africa to a great extent (UNV, 2006) and the SADC region is no exception. However, the end of the twentieth century saw most SADC member states adopting multi-party democratic systems, with young people contributing to political change in many cases (just one example is the 'young lions' in the anti-apartheid struggle). Several countries in the region, including Zimbabwe, Swaziland and Malawi, continue to face economic difficulties and provide limited opportunities for political participation.

Implications for the participation of youth in the SADC region

These socio-economic challenges, whose impacts vary across and within countries, impact on young people's ability to take part in mainstream society – that is, their ability to participate meaningfully in society "is inescapably qualified and constrained by the [available] social, political and economic opportunities" (Sen, 1999: xii; cited in UNV, 2011).

For example, poverty and limited access to information and communications technology excludes young people from engaging in an increasingly globalised and networked world. Poor quality education limits young people's life choices and impedes their ability to access and take advantage of opportunities in the formal economy. The inability to access opportunities in the formal economy can demoralise young people and lead to a sense of "frustration and idleness" (ILO, 2010:1) and creates the potential for social unrest. In the absence of opportunities to build a better future, youth may become vulnerable to engaging in risk behaviours such as substance abuse and violence (Alessi, 2004). A study into youth violence in the SADC region suggests that the marginalisation of youth is one structural factor that contributes to youth violence in the region (Graham et al, 2010).[7]

The importance of opportunity

"[The National Youth Service is] informed by an understanding that: young people are disengaged because of a sense of powerlessness and irrelevance as opposed to apathy or disinterest; overcoming this sense of powerlessness and irrelevance requires access to opportunities for participation as individuals as well as a generation; their sense of efficacy increases when they are connected to issues that matter and key civic actors and institutions are encouraged to see young people as valuable resources; and meaningful opportunities to participate must be provided today to secure tomorrow."

(Source: South African National Youth Commission, 2003:8)

This summary of potential impacts of marginalisation conjures up the prospect of youth as 'ticking time bombs'; however, as noted by a youth service programme in South Africa, "when appropriately engaged and adequately prepared for roles in the work, family life, and civil society, youth often become key actors in the strengthening and transformation of their nations" (Nogueira Sanca et al, 2009).

In this context, youth volunteering and service emerges as means by which young people can be re-engaged and drawn into the social, political and economic lives of the societies in which they live. Youth volunteering and service has the potential to open up a range of opportunities for young people to become participate in society and the economy, and to develop themselves while also contributing to the development of their communities.

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[7] The study found that in the DRC, high levels of youth unemployment (upwards of 80%) and chronic poverty create an environment that increases youth vulnerability to violence.

2 The role of volunteering and service in promoting youth participation

Youth volunteering and service covers a wide range of activities that provide opportunities for young people to participate in society by directing their energies toward helping others and tackling development challenges, while at the same time developing their own skills, experience and confidence, and enhancing their ability to take advantage of opportunities in the future.

2.1 What is youth volunteering and service?

There are a number of interpretations of the terms 'volunteering' and 'service', which are shaped by the different settings and experiences from which they emerge (CIVICUS, IAVE and UNV, 2009).

The United Nations defines **volunteering** as "an act of free will, carried out for the benefit of a third party or society at large without the primary concern being financial gain. Actions are categorised as mutual aid or self help, formal service delivery, civic engagement, and campaigning; these categories may overlap" (UN Secretary-General, 2001; cited in UNV, 2006:6).

A source of debate about the definition of volunteering comes from the perception that the term implies activities undertaken freely for the benefit of others – that is, that volunteering is undertaken out of *choice* and that participants expect (and receive) *no reward*. However, there is debate about how narrowly or broadly volunteering should be defined – whether only unpaid activities undertaken out of choice constitute volunteering, or whether activities that involve some degree of financial compensation or an element of compulsion should be included.[8]

Petriwski and Waburton (2007) suggest that volunteerism is characterised by four key features:
1. It involves an element of 'useful service' or 'productive work'.
2. It is directed at other people outside the immediate family/household.
3. It is not compulsory, or coerced or forced externally by law, contract, or other social influences.
4. While there may be some reimbursement or other financial payments, it is not undertaken primarily for monetary gain, and the payments in monetary terms are usually less than the economic value of the volunteer work done.

Given these debates, some prefer to use the term **service** to include a broader range of activities undertaken for the benefit of others, from narrowly defined voluntary activities to programmes that include some degree of compulsion, such as a service requirement as part of an educational course or compulsory national youth service, or compensation, such as reimbursement of expenses, a stipend or educational credit (Moore-McBride, Benítez, Sherraden and Johnson, 2003).

In this paper, both terms are used to capture the broad range of youth volunteering and service activities.

Youth volunteering and service activities vary in duration and structure, from ad hoc or occasional volunteering at one end of the spectrum to structured and intensive civic service programmes at the other (Moore McBride et al, 2003). These activities and programmes also vary in purpose – from

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[8] Other debates in the definition of volunteering revolve around issues of informal versus formal activity, whether or not volunteering benefits the individual volunteer, and whether the activity is undertaken collectively or on an individual basis (CIVICUS, IAVE and UNV, 2009).

charitable or philanthropic service activities to those that aim for social transformation (CIVICUS, IAVE and UNV, 2009).

Civic service

Civic service lies at the formal, intensive end of the service continuum and can be defined as "*an organised period of substantial engagement and contribution to local, national or world community, recognised and valued by society, with minimal monetary compensation to the participant*" (Sherraden, 2001:2).

Civic service requires sustained commitment and generally takes the form of a structured programme with social or community development objectives. A study of civic service in five SADC countries – Botswana, Malawi, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe – highlighted five common elements of service in the region (Patel, 2007:14):

- Service should provide tangible and intangible benefits to individuals, families, neighbours, the community and the wider society, and such benefits should accrue to the most disadvantaged;
- Service involves giving of oneself freely with limited or no expectation of financial gain;
- Service is strongly associated with a philosophy of reciprocity between the server and the beneficiaries, the achievement of self-reliance, the empowerment of individuals and communities, and the fostering of civic responsibility;
- Civic service should be related directly to national development goals; and
- Service has a social meaning that is shaped by the wider historical, socio-cultural, economic and political reality of the societies in which it operates.

Volunteering and service, often through collective action, forms part of the history of the region, but little formal research has been conducted on the nature of youth volunteering and service in recent times. An exception to this is a recent study of civic service in five SADC countries – Botswana, Malawi, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe (Patel, Perold, Mohamed and Carapinha, 2007). The study found that, in contrast to the philanthropic approach common to industrialised countries, mutual aid and self-help groups are a distinguishing feature of volunteering and service in these SADC countries, where poverty is more prevalent and where both servers and beneficiaries come from impoverished and vulnerable backgrounds. For this reason, the debate about whether or not incentives should be provided to those involved in volunteering or service is particularly contentious in this region.

Types of youth volunteering and service

As indicated, youth volunteering and service can take a range of forms. **National Youth Service** is a structured form of service that takes place in line with national goals and is defined by the International Association for National Youth Service as follows (cited in Eberly and Gal, 2006):

> *"National Youth Service (NYS) is an organized activity in which young people serve others and the environment in ways that contribute positively to society. NYS participants have opportunities for reflection, normally serve full-time for six months to two years, and receive support – whether from government or NGOs – sufficient to enable them to serve. NYS also embraces service-learning, where students utilize their education to serve others and where students reflect on their service experiences to inform their learning."*

The nature of national youth service programmes differ from country to country and are strongly influenced by the history and conditions of the countries in which they evolve. Some of the rationales behind the design and implementation of national youth services around the world include: providing an alternative to military service, promoting nation building, meeting service delivery obligations, providing opportunities for learning and work experience and developing young people's skills (National Youth Commission, 1998).

Some examples of national youth service programmes currently operating in the SADC region include:
- The recently launched *National Volunteer Corps Project* In **Lesotho** provides a mechanism for young (<35yrs) unemployed graduates from universities and third level technical training institutions to build their capacities through volunteer opportunities in workplaces in the private and public sectors in support of development goals.
- **Namibia's** national youth service was introduced in 2005 and consists of three phases: (1) a three month period of civic training; (2) a six month period of national voluntary service anywhere in the country; (3) a period of skills training in which participants participate in accredited skills training programmes (Republic of Namibia, undated).
- The national youth service in **South Africa** is based on an integrated model that consists of (1) community service, (2) structured learning and individual development, and (3) exit opportunities for self or formal employment, or further learning. Participation is voluntary and programmes delivered through government departments as well as civil society organisations.
- The **Zambian** National Service was established in 1963 (then known as Land Army) to support the fight for independence. The function is now to provide Zambian youth with basic skills like carpentry, plumbing, brick work, tailoring, domestic science, leather work, agriculture and other skills.
- **Botswana** and **Malawi** had national youth service programmes that have since been disbanded.

It is worth clarifying that national youth service is **not the same as military service**. In many countries in the twentieth century, military service was accepted as a responsibility of citizenship and referred to as 'national service' (Eberly and Gal, 2006). For example, in South Africa, 'national service' referred to the conscription of young white men into military service under apartheid. Similarly, a study of civic service in Zimbabwe found an aversion to the term 'service' amongst respondents because of the connotations of state compulsion; the term 'volunteering' was more acceptable (Kaseke and Dhemba, 2007). In practice the distinction between youth service and the military is not always clear, with a number of African national youth service programmes employing military characteristics in their organization and training, ranging from incorporating physical training and the use of army-style uniforms, through to the arming and militarisation of national youth services (see box for examples).

Secondly, national youth service programmes **do not replace employment**, since servers are usually provided at most with a stipend that does little more than cover expenses or meet basic needs and is not equivalent to market wages. Other structured forms of youth service include:

- **Service learning,** which refers to service programmes that form a part of a curriculum or a field of study and are compulsory in nature. Here service is intended to complement the classroom experience, and service learning programmes must balance the service objectives with ensuring that the desired learning outcomes are achieved (NYC, 1998).
- Some professional qualifications require a compulsory community service component to be completed as a **prerequisite for professional practice**. Health professionals in South Africa must complete a year of community service before they register as practitioners.
- Youth who are in conflict with the law may have to undertake compulsory service as an alternative to serving time in a correctional institution. This generally involves some form of community service as **reparation** (NYC, 1998).
- **International service programmes** enable young people to contribute to service activities in countries other than their own. Improved understanding among people of different countries is often a key goal here (Eberly and Gal, 2006).

A brief history of service in Southern Africa[*]
The five-country study of civic service in the SADC region found that the nature of volunteering and service in the region today is a reflection of traditional cultural norms and practices as well as the contemporary circumstances in which it has emerged (Patel et al, 2007).
For example, prior to colonialism, **traditional and cultural norms** tended to encourage and value collective responsibility, reciprocity and community solidarity (Patel et al, 2007). Examples include traditional practices such as 'mafisa' (the lending

of cattle to the poor) and 'molaletsa' (a principle of mutual self-help to enable people to be productive and self-reliant) in Botswana; or the practice of *thangata*, the moral obligation of age mates to work together in individual household's fields, in Malawi (Rankopo, Osei-Hwedie and Moroka, 2007; Wilson, 2007). The concepts of *ubuntu* in South Africa, *letsema* in Botswana and *hunhu* in Zimbabwe are just some examples of a tradition of humanity through mutual self-help and community solidarity.

While some of these practices and community support systems were eroded under colonialism or manipulated to meet the needs of colonial powers, the service ethos gained prominence once more as countries in the region achieved independence (Patel et al, 2007). Youth service formed a key feature of **nation building strategies and national development** in this period. Such programmes tended to be government-driven and compulsory, but were later constrained by the decline in public funding following the oil crisis in the 1970s and the adoption of structural adjustment policies in the 1980s. Other factors that contributed to the decline of these programmes were maladministration, corruption and financial and political troubles (Patel and Wilson 2004; cited in Patel et al, 2007).

Patel (2009:10) notes that national youth service programmes in the post-independence period have been criticized for "being militaristic and for furthering the political aspirations and interests of ruling elites". Examples include the Malawi Young Pioneers, the Zambian National Youth Service which was later disbanded and the militant National Youth Service of Zimbabwe, who have been referred to by the media as 'Mugabe's milita' and whose role in promoting support for the ruling party is well documented (Patel, 2009; Graham et al, 2010).

The five country study on civic service also found, however, that "where states have failed, service has flourished" (Patel, 2007:22). For example, the declining political and economic situation in Zimbabwe has resulted in a marked increase of service activities outside of the state. A similar phenomenon was observed in the provision of social services under apartheid in South Africa; this service ethos has since been supported by national policies aimed at transformation, reconstruction and development (Patel, 2007). National youth service programmes are once again gaining prominence as means to harness the energy of young people to achieve development goals.

* Sources: This overview draws heavily on Patel et al (2007) as well as the articles describing findings from this study in the March 2007 joint issue of *The Social Work Practitioner-Researcher* and *Journal of Social Development in Africa.*

2.2   Promoting youth participation through volunteering and service

With this understanding of youth volunteering and service in mind, we now turn to consider the various ways in which these activities and programmes open up new spaces for youth participation. This discussion draws on experiences from around the world and outlines the role that well designed and well managed youth volunteering and service programmes can play in fostering opportunities for increased youth participation in the SADC region.

The following four sections explore the ways in which youth volunteering and service contribute to increased **social, political and economic participation and personal development**; each of these is discussed in more detail below.

2.3   Social participation

Promoting social participation involves increasing the active engagement of young people with others around them, in their communities and in society more broadly. Youth service and volunteering does this by enabling youth to build connections with others and empowering them to contribute to the social development of their communities and countries.

This section discusses three ways in which service and volunteering can promote the social participation of youth:
1.   Youth service and volunteering helps to build social capital and promote social cohesion
2.   Youth service and volunteering programmes provide young people with a chance to contribute to the social and human development of the communities in which they live
3.   Youth service and volunteer programmes have the potential to promote tolerance.

Building social capital and social cohesion

By simply undertaking voluntary or service activities for the benefit of others outside their own households, youth are brought into contact with others they may not otherwise encounter. Youth volunteering and service brings people together, opens up a new network of people and experiences and enables marginalised youth to begin to build bridges with others, making both the young participants and the beneficiaries of volunteering and service activities less isolated and more connected to others. It can provide a means of escaping the 'ghettoisation' or restrictions of poverty (UNV, 2011:6).

Youth volunteering and service activities such as volunteering as part of a team, attending community development meetings or participating in mutual aid groups can help to enhance this social 'connectedness'. Alessi (2004) notes that service supports the development of social capital by fostering trust between citizens, and promoting norms of solidarity and reciprocity.

The value of this 'social connectedness' has received a great deal of attention in the literature, and has been developed through concepts such as social capital and social cohesion. Simply put, **social capital** refers to the extent to which people are connected to others in society and the degree to which they have developed networks and bonds of trust or obligation that they can draw upon in times of need (Putnam, 1993).

Robert Putnam is a leading scholar in this area, and at a workshop in 2000 he discussed the relationship between social capital and youth service (in Perold, 2000). He argued that taking part in youth volunteering and service:

* *Creates the skills* within young people for building social capital;
* *Underscores the value* of social capital or social 'connectedness'; and
* *Ingrains in young people* the habit of "paying attention to and acting on what is going on in one's community".

In his opinion, **"All societies need more social capital ... in my view the single most promising area of initiative is youth service"** (in Perold, 2000:20).

Social cohesion is a similar idea and refers to the "glue" that binds people together. Where youth are excluded or marginalised, volunteering and service can foster social cohesion **both within and between communities** by providing opportunities for youth to work together for a common cause and feel a sense of belonging. In addition, when young people participate in service and are able to reflect on their experiences, they develop a sense of responsibility for the well-being of that community, further enhancing social cohesion (Youniss and Yates, 1997).

The use of local volunteers contributes to bringing communities together. A survey conducted by VSO and RAISA (2011:15) of 107 South African non-profit organisations found that, "significantly, most surveyed organisations use **local volunteers** of the same community or municipality as the beneficiaries. Some 58.3% have stated: "In the last year, they mostly used local volunteers from the same community or municipality as the beneficiaries they are serving".

Youth volunteering and service can also be structured to bring together youth from different backgrounds. In many newly independent African countries, or countries that have a history of internal conflict, national youth services have been established with the explicit goal of contributing to **nation building**. The National Youth Service Corps in Nigeria was established after the civil war in Biafra with the express purpose of nation building and integrating the disparate peoples of Nigeria. Although Nigeria is outside the SADC region, it nevertheless provides an interesting example of a

programme that aims to achieve nation building by sending young people from the south to serve in the north and vice versa (the North being dominated by Muslim culture and the South being predominantly Christian). In another example, a newly democratic South Africa introduced a national youth service with transformation and nation building as explicit goals.

In addition to state-driven programmes, Camay and Gordon (2004, cited in UNV, 2006) indicate that public participation can be an important avenue for addressing the challenges of nationality and xenophobia that may come to the fore in regional initiatives, as it brings **diverse groups** into close contact with one another and provides opportunities for young people to understand and learn from one another (cited in UNV, 2006). South Africa experienced a wave of horrific xenophobic attacks against foreign nationals in 2008, and a study into the volunteer response to these attacks noted the immense potential for social solidarity and participation that the volunteering effort provided (Graham, Perold and Shumba, 2009).

Tolerance and respect for diversity

Youth volunteering and service, if properly structured and managed, has the potential to contribute to young people's knowledge and

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An example of the role of volunteering in response to xenophobic attacks in South Africa

"Linda Twala, a community leader in Alexandra felt he had to respond to [the xenophobic attacks that took place] in his community. He loaded groceries into his car and drove to his neighbours asking them to contribute. As a community leader, people respected him and when they saw him assisting, they also joined him.

Felicitas Maphuta who volunteered at the Alexandra Police Stations said in an interview, "We all came together as members of the community and volunteered at the Alex Police Station. We gave out blankets, sanitary pads, disposable nappies and food to the victims. Other members of the community cooked food for the victims and also encouraged and comforted them. We volunteered because of the Ubuntu spirit that we had. We believed in humanity, that these people that were being victimised were also human." Many of the people were afraid of the perpetrators but wanted to support the victims and so got involved in volunteering."

Source: Graham, Perold and Shumba, (2009:12)

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acceptance of other groups (UNV, 2011). Youth volunteering and service programmes provide an opportunity for young people from different backgrounds to interact with one another and build trust and greater understanding (Alessi, 2004). In exposing young people to others from beyond their immediate circle, youth volunteering and service can broaden their social networks and challenge their preconceptions.

In recent study on the volunteering experience of students in the United Kingdom, students identified the opportunity to **burst out of their 'bubbles'** as one of the most valued aspects of volunteering; it provided them with a rare chance to meet people from backgrounds different to their own outside of the university environment and helped **challenge stereotypes** they might have held about others (Brewis, Russell and Holdsworth, 2010).

Another study, described below, showed that youth in the United States who participated in a structured youth service programme where they had regular contact with children from a very different background to their own, showed **increased racial tolerance** compared to others who had not participated in the programme. This is an area that would be useful to research further in the SADC region – the extent to which youth volunteering service programmes contribute to social cohesion and respect for diversity within members states and across the region.

Service programmes can increase racial tolerance

Teach For America (TFA) is a service programme that involves sending a college educated young adult, whose parental income is above the national average, to teach children in a predominantly poor and minority neighbourhood. The majority of service corps members are white; in contrast, roughly 80% of the students taught by corps members qualify for free or reduced-price lunch and more than 90% are African-American or Hispanic.

TFA service involves a considerable degree of contact between these two very different groups over two years. A recent study (Dobbie and Fryer, 2011) has found that for corps members, participating in this programme increases racial tolerance, makes individuals more optimistic about the life chances of poor children and makes them more likely to work in education. The authors of the study argue that youth service, particularly service involving extended periods of intergroup contact, may not only help disadvantaged communities, but may help create a more socially conscious and racially tolerant society (Dobbie & Fryer, 2011).

Service as a tool for human and social development

In addition to providing new ways for youth to connect and engage with others, youth service and volunteering provides opportunities for young people to participate directly in the development of communities and their countries.

This outcome depends on the purpose of the volunteering or service programme, as programmes can range from charitable work on one end to programmes that address the root causes of underdevelopment on the other (UNV, 2006). For many programmes, social development (that is, **the development of people and communities** rather than the economy) is the intended goal or outcome. Volunteering and service programmes that place educated youth in underprivileged school to assist school children with their learning; provide volunteering opportunities for communities to work together to build housing; support community health volunteers to act as resources of health information for their communities or campaign for social services in rural areas are all examples of service and volunteering that impact on social development needs.

In the SADC region, many young volunteers are living in poverty themselves. By participating in service projects that address social and human development issues, they can contribute directly to improving living conditions in their own communities and **addressing the socio-economic challenges** in the region more broadly. In doing so, they are able to tackle some of the obstacles that limit participation in their communities, while also developing their own skills, experience and capabilities so that they are in a better position to take advantage of the social and economic opportunities that come their way.

Youth volunteering and service can assist governments to address pressing and sometimes overwhelming social challenges such as meeting basic needs and tackling the underlying causes of poverty. For example, a common rationale for establishing youth service programmes in developing countries is their potential to **assist governments in meeting national development goals**. Young people are viewed as resources that can be drawn upon to meet state obligations to deliver basic services and development programmes in areas that may otherwise not have access to such services (NYC, 1998). An example of a national youth service programme designed with this purpose in mind is the now defunct *Tirelo Setshaba* in Botswana (see below).

Service for development: A personal reflection on Botswana's Tirelo Setshaba

Dr Rankopo, a former participant in Botswana's national youth service – Tirelo Setshaba – and later a field officer, noted that the programme had the following benefits for the nation (Rankopo, undated:3):

"It is my view that Tirelo Setshaba achieved its objective of providing manpower, though unskilled, to many rural areas that needed them the most. In their study of the impact of Tirelo Setshaba in educational settings, Molefe et al (1997) found that [participants] who had chosen that sector were innovative and greatly assisted, especially primary school teachers, in the subjects of mathematics and science in the upper classes which the teachers gave the impression were difficult to teach.

In my experience, [participants] provided extra human resources which effectively delivered needed extension services where there was proper supervision by the host agencies. Also, exposure to the realities of development and diverse cultures through Tirelo Setshaba has created an appreciation for national unity among former [participants]. This was very evident when [participants] exchanged their experiences at tertiary level institutions, of which I was a part.

Another example of an approach that views **young people as assets or resources in development** is a programme in Mozambique which provides youth with an opportunity to volunteer in under-resourced district offices, thereby building capacity within local government while also providing the youth with work experience and exposing them to the possibility of a career in the public service (UNV, 2006).

Attracting youth into voluntary service in districts in Mozambique

"One of the key development issues for Mozambique is the need for skilled people to live and work in rural areas. Like young people in many countries, the skilled youth of Mozambique are attracted to the towns and cities where they are looking for interesting jobs and a comfortable lifestyle.

Through an initiative called Férias Desenvolvendo o Distrito (meaning 'youth developing districts'), the National Youth Council and the University Students' Association have devised a means of addressing this issue. Supported by the government, they are using volunteering for development to build the skills of graduates whilst opening up possible alternative employment paths for them. Graduate students have the opportunity to volunteer at district offices (where working conditions are normally deemed not good) through volunteer vacation programmes. The initiative assists the government of Mozambique to fill in the posts that have been vacant and improve the level of service provision for development at district level.

The programme began with the placement of 200 undergraduate and postgraduate students from all public universities in Maputo into 18 district offices that deal with issues such as agriculture, education, health, social action, fishing, public administration, decentralised planning, environment and justice. Before their placement, the volunteers were trained in community based participation and public administration.

This programme has been successful in at least three ways: it has ensured that skills are brought to offices that are otherwise under-resourced; it has taken some steps towards addressing the major problem of youth unemployment in Mozambique by giving young people skills and practical experience and opening up opportunities they may not have previously considered; and it has helped change young people's perceptions of working in district offices. Before the project, research found that 45% of the students thought that the working and living conditions at district level were very bad; by the end of the project the number of students who felt this way had decreased to 2.5%.

The programme addresses some of the key development issues as identified by government and demonstrates the possibilities for aligning volunteer programmes with national development goals and policies."

(Source: UNV, 2006:22)

2.4   Political participation

The second area in which youth volunteering and service can increase the participation of youth is in the political sphere. Where social participation referred to engaging with other people and contributing to social development, political participation refers to politics and governance, relationships of power and engaging with issues in the public domain.

One of the fundamental principles of a well-functioning, viable democracy is that citizens participate in the life of their communities and nation. Encouraging the political participation of youth is not confined to involvement in youth wings of political parties or voting in elections, however; it also extends far beyond this to include encouraging young people to become active citizens who engage in civic actions. Here the term civic is used to describe "action that is in the public sphere and that yields positive benefits to individuals, communities, a nation or the world" (Patel et al, 2007:10). Both civic engagement and political participation are essential for vibrant democratic societies in the SADC region.

The pathways by which youth volunteering and service can increase political participation and that will be discussed in the following section are:

1. Deepening democracy by encouraging active citizenship and a robust civil society
2. Providing opportunities for youth to reflect on the status quo and take a stand, find their voice
3. Increasing participation in formal governance and political processes.

Encouraging active citizenship and a robust civil society

Being an **active citizen** is not only about voting at election time; it involves participating actively in the public sphere. The participation of all citizens in civic life, including the youth, is essential for a healthy democracy and is important in a region where multi-party democracy is relatively young. The type of participation referred to here includes involvement in communities and civil society, as well engagement in more formal democratic processes.

Youth volunteering and service provide diverse opportunities for citizens to play an active role in the public domain, ranging from traditional forms of volunteering through to social activism (CIVICUS, IAVE and UNV, 2009) – from volunteering for an organisation that supports the elderly through to contributing time to a campaigning for increased access to treatment for those living with HIV or raising awareness about the importance of voting in local elections.

> **The political nature of volunteering**
>
> *"Volunteering can be political in a range of ways, including in the power relations it emphasises or creates, the judgements it implies about the social or welfare system in a community, the action or lack of action by governments on a given issue, the life choices of community members, or simply in the emphasis it places on the role of individuals within the functioning of society".*
>
> (Source: Petriwskyj (2007), cited in CIVICUS, IAVE and UNV, 2009:7)

By participating in volunteering and service opportunities offered by civil society organisations or groupings, youth are also contributing to a more vibrant civil society by taking the initiative in tackling a range of social and economic issues and so become **actors** in society rather than recipients who are dependant on government or other role players (Eberly and Gal, 2006).

Furthermore, civic engagement through volunteering and service is also an important means of holding governments **accountable**. For example, the Treatment Action Campaign, a civil society organisation with thousands of volunteer members, was successful in holding the South African government to account for providing access to treatment for people living with HIV/AIDS through the public health system. In authoritarian states, wide-ranging civic participation is discouraged, leading to little accountability of the state to the people. As noted in a study on the links between volunteering and social activism, it is important to "recognise the contribution of citizen action, no matter how small, to reclaiming and opening up the space for the creation of a more just, inclusive and equitable social reality" (CIVICUS, IAVE and UNV, 2009:9).

Finding a voice

Where youth volunteering and service programmes are structured to provide youth with a chance to reflect critically on the activities they are involved, young people have an opportunity to reflect upon and perhaps to **question the status quo**. A study into the links between service and social activism noted that volunteerism can prompt a personal transformation, whereby individuals change their beliefs, perspectives and daily behaviours after developing a new awareness or understanding about a situation or set of circumstances (CIVICUS, IAVE and UNV, 2009). Indeed, some respondents in the study observed that volunteering and social activism share a common basis in the **desire to achieve change** in communities.

In addition, through volunteering and service, young people **build the skills and confidence** required to challenge the status quo. The same study found that volunteering can help women and other marginalised groups gain the confidence and skills to advocate for their interests in the public domain (CIVICUS, IAVE and UNV, 2009). Similarly, young volunteers in the loveLife groundBREAKERS programme, an HIV prevention programme focusing on education and youth mobilisation at a community level in South Africa, indicated that among the most important skills they gained through participating in the programme were increased self-confidence and the ability to stand up and speak to others about critical issues (VOSESA, 2008).

There is also another link between volunteering and social activism, namely that existing activist organisations or social movements rely on the **passion and energy of volunteers** to drive their campaigns and advocate for their cause (CIVICUS, IAVE and UNV, 2009). The potential power of youth in bringing about political change can be seen in the role young people played in the political changes in North Africa and the Middle East in the past year.

Increasing participation in politics and governance

Lastly, youth volunteering and service can also play a role in increasing participation in formal democratic processes and governance issues. As already noted, the end of the twentieth century saw the emergence of multi-party democracy in most SADC countries, although in some countries such as Zimbabwe, Swaziland and more recently Malawi have restricted the civil and political space for citizens to participate.

Youth volunteering and civic service can play a role in promoting involvement in democratic processes and institutions. A study on links between volunteerism and social activism noted that people who participate (in civic engagement) are more likely to be involved in a range of civic activities, and those are involved in volunteering and service during their youth more likely to **sustain their participation in adulthood** (CIVICUS, IAVE and UNV, 2009). In this vein, a 2007 study reported in the American Educational Research Journal found that both voluntary and school-required community service in high school were **strong predictors of voting and volunteering in later life** (Hart, Donnelly, Youniss and Atkins, 2007).

Furthermore, according to Alessi (2004), the participatory aspect of service can contribute to a better understanding of the forces that shape governments and societies, and so lead to greater transparency, accountability and improved governance.

The relationship between youth volunteering and service and involvement in democratic processes such as voting is most likely to be strengthened in cases where service programmes are designed with this outcome in mind, and are themselves democratic in structure and encourage youth to take part in decision-making (Perold, 2000).

2.5   Economic participation

A third area in which youth volunteering and service can increase participation is in the workplace. The potential benefits of youth volunteering and service for increasing participation in the economic sphere are particularly relevant in the context of high levels of structural unemployment in the region. The challenges and questions raised by the potential economic benefit of youth volunteering are explored in more detail in a background paper by Dickhudt. This section will therefore touch only briefly on two aspects, namely:

1. The potential for youth volunteering and service to promote economic participation by building skills and work experience and therefore increase 'employability'; and
2. The issue of stipends in a developing country context.

Contributing to skills development and work experience

Both at the national and local level, many youth volunteering and service programmes aim to provide young people with **exposure to organisational or working environments** that provide them with experience of these settings that will stand them in good stead for future employment. Such programmes enable young people to gain experience of different types of work, build basic skills, confidence and 'soft skills' that make them more employable and strengthen the networks that help them to find jobs.

Some programmes, particularly those based on the service-learning model, include **formal (often technical) skills** training as part of the programme, and combine this with service which enables young people to apply what they have learnt. The National Youth Service programmes of Namibia and South Africa are just two national programmes that have increasing economic participation through training as a specific goal. Therefore youth volunteering and service programmes have the potential, both **directly and indirectly**, to increase the ability of young people to participate in the economic sphere as employees or as entrepreneurs.

A recent study on the relationship between civic health or engagement and unemployment in the United States (National Conference on Citizenship, 2011) found that states with higher levels of civic engagement – defined as volunteering, working with neighbours on community problems, attending meetings, registering to vote and voting – experienced less unemployment. The pathways by which civic engagement contributes to avoiding unemployment requires more research, particularly in the southern Africa context, but the study suggests that youth volunteering and service and active citizenship can have tangible benefits for increasing economic participation.

Service for development: A personal reflection on Botswana's Tirelo Setshaba

The Bunda Agricultural College at the **University of Malawi** has responded to the challenge of graduate unemployment by developing a pilot volunteer programme which will provide graduate volunteers with work experience in their areas of specialisation while also providing capacity to civil society organisations, government departments and private companies (described in Gaza and Mloza-Banda, 2009).

The primary motivation for the programme is to provide graduates with work experience and to close the gap between the vital but mainly theoretical knowledge that the graduates have, and the needs of potential employers.

Students are placed for a 12 month period and work within six thematic areas in line with the Malawi Growth Development Strategy and the Millennium Development Goals. The programme seeks to benefit the rural communities and the organisations or departments in which the student volunteers are placed, while also increasing cooperative efforts between the university and government, the private sector and civil society to deal with development issues in the country.

These findings are consistent with the findings of an evaluation of the South African programme groundbreakers (VOSESA, 2008), a loveLife programme in which young people are trained to lead education and youth mobilisation programmes focusing on issues of HIV-prevention at a community level, and take part in a year of voluntary service in a community site. The evaluation, conducted at the end of 2007, found that participants who had graduated from the programme between 2001 and 2005 had improved employment prospects as follows:

- Approximately 60% of groundBREAKER graduates were employed at the time of the study, which compared favourably with the national data which showed that 36% of youth who had matriculated were employed;
- Most of the groundBREAKER graduates who had found employment stated that their jobs offered good opportunities for the future, suggesting that groundbreakers are able to find meaningful employment; and
- Ninety per cent of the graduates who were employed stated that the groundBREAKER programme had strongly influenced their ability to secure employment.

Given the challenges of high levels of unemployment and underemployment in the region, further research is required into the potential link between volunteering and service and improved employment prospects. In addition, the design and management of such programmes is clearly important in achieving increased economic participation, and therefore robust evaluations of national youth service programmes and other forms of youth volunteering and service programmes in the SADC region – and their impacts on economic participation through employment, further education or entrepreneurship – are essential for understanding how the potential of these programmes can be maximised in the SADC context.

Reimbursement in a developing country context

A contentious issue identified in the five country study on civic engagement in the SADC region (Patel et al, 2007) regards the provision of incentives or stipends to volunteers, and the extent to which this motivates participation in voluntary and service programmes. There is a concern that in a context of high poverty, the notion common in developed countries that financial incentives should not be paid to volunteers or servers is not appropriate, since in regions such as SADC it is common for both servers and beneficiaries to be poor and disadvantaged. Bearing this in mind, some argue that an approach that includes multiple incentives of a financial and non-financial nature should be adopted in under-resourced developing countries (Wilson, 2007; Patel, 2007). However, this raises a number of **questions around the issue of volunteering and economic incentives in the SADC context** that deserve to be debated and researched further.

2.6   Personal development and building capabilities

The last area in which youth volunteering and service promotes participation is in personal development. Through participation in volunteering and service, young people are able to develop personally and gain the interpersonal skills, confidence and sense of agency required to participate more fully in society. This section considers two aspects of personal development that enable youth to participate more fully:
1. Building confidence and developing a sense among young people that they can make a difference
2. Developing a sense of social responsibility and a pro-social identity.

A sense of agency

Through participating in activities that benefit others and improve their lives in some way, youth have an opportunity to feel a sense of accomplishment and agency, or the belief that they are **capable of making a difference** in society. Service enables young people to experience themselves as contributing to positive change in their community, which in turn builds their confidence and self-esteem as lays the foundation for building their leadership skills.

Gillette (2003) observes that engaging in volunteering and service can benefit excluded individuals or groups – such as young people with few opportunities to participate in society – in at least three ways:

- The first, as discussed above, is that volunteering and service programmes provide a rare chance for excluded individuals or groups to experience achievement and to develop faith in their own ability to accomplish tasks and effect change in their world. This is turn promotes a sense of agency or **empowerment**. As Gillette (2003:67) observes, "to begin to contribute to society, rather than chiefly or solely receive from or depend upon society, can be an exhilarating bridge-crossing."
- The second benefit is that that these feelings of empowerment build a sense of **self-worth** and confidence.
- And thirdly, the sense of empowerment and improved self-worth, as well as the skills and experience gained during service, provide the **basis for further civic engagement and increased participation** in the future.

Building this sense of agency or a belief among young people in their capacity to act and change their own lives and the lives of others is **central to promoting youth participation** (UNV, 2011). This sort of empowerment is most likely to be fostered by volunteering activities and service programmes that involve youth directly in decision-making or planning, give them substantive responsibilities during implementation and allow them to experience positions of leadership.

Developing a pro-social identity

Furthermore, it is argued that youth volunteering and service can play a part in building a pro-social identity amongst young people. Essentially, the argument is that those who participate in volunteering and service as adolescents or youth are likely **to adopt the values of participation and service as part of their identity** and therefore continue to participate later in life.

From a theoretical point of view, developmental theory suggests that youth is a particularly critical time for developing identity – that is, figuring out who we are and how we fit into society (Erikson, 1968: cited in McIntosh, Metz and Youniss, 2005). According to this **theory** of development, adolescents develop a sense of themselves and their place in the world by looking for an ideology, or a set of beliefs and values, with which to identify. These beliefs or values connect them with other generations; simplify their world and giving meaning to their present experiences.

Youniss and Yates (1997; cited in McIntosh, Metz and Youniss, 2005) argue that this is the route through which youth volunteering and service can have a positive influence on identity formation, since these activities usually takes place with an organisation or a group of people that promote the norms and values (ideology) of a social cause. Participating in volunteering and service exposes young people to environments that value engagement, social responsibility and helping others (IANYS, 2010), and by adopting values and beliefs, young people come to see how they can fit into society in a positive way, both as youth and later as adults.

Some evidence of the positive impact of youth volunteering and service on identity formation in **practice** comes from a review of 44 studies from 1952 to 1994 (Youniss and Yates, 1996; cited in McIntosh, Metz and Youniss, 2005). The reviewers found that community service enhanced identity formation in three developmental areas:

- agency (self-directedness, self-competence, self-understanding)
- social relatedness (family and peer relationships and institutional affiliations)
- moral-political awareness (moral feelings and reasoning, and civic activism)

Thus, those who had participated in volunteering and service activities appeared to have a more positive sense of themselves in these three areas. It is important to note several cautions here, however. Firstly, volunteering and service activities vary in structure, duration and purpose and so do not all impact on identity formation to the same degree; it appears that service that involves a social 'cause' (e.g. helping at a soup kitchen rather than volunteering to coach a local soccer team) is more likely to impact on identity formation as described above; and lastly it is possible that the type of young people who tends to participate in service may already possess some of these identity characteristics (McIntosh, Metz and Youniss, 2007).

Thus both in terms of theory and in practice, it appears that youth volunteering and service provides significant opportunities for personal development and identity formation provided the young volunteers are supported by opportunities for reflection and participation.

3   Conclusions

As the youthful population of the SADC region continues to grow, and in the face of socio-economic challenges that constrain young people's participation in mainstream society, youth volunteering and service provide a means of opening up new opportunities for young people to engage in their societies while also developing their own potential. While programmes and activities vary and their impacts vary accordingly, this discussion has shown that youth volunteering and service can build confidence, skills and networks that enable young people to participate in the social, political and economic lives of their societies.

What can be done to foster youth service and volunteering in the region, and thereby **make the most of its potential** to increase participation amongst youth? Firstly, programmes and activities should be well-designed and well-managed, with structured support and opportunities for reflection and participation (UNV, 2006). There is also a need for diverse and varied opportunities for youth volunteering and service that meet the range of needs and circumstances of youth in the SADC region (CIVICUS, IAVE and UNV, 2009); and this requires an enabling environment in which youth service and volunteering is supported and promoted by the combined actions of civil society, government and the private sector (IANYS, 2010).

Much of the evidence presented here comes from countries outside of SADC, or from one or two countries within the region. **More research is required** that takes into account the specific contexts of members states and the region as a whole – on the status of youth in the member states, the nature and scope of youth volunteering and service in the SADC region, and the impacts and benefits of these activities in this context, both for the youth and the beneficiaries. This is a broad and ambitious agenda, but specific areas of focus could include:

- The relationship between youth volunteering and service and future success in learning and work (whether employment or entrepreneurship);
- The meaning of volunteering in the face of high levels of unemployment; and
- The extent to which promoting youth volunteering and service can contribute to active citizenship and social cohesion in the region.

Lastly, some **recommendations** are provided regarding ways in which civil society, government, the private sector and regional bodies and initiatives can all play a role in fostering youth volunteering and service as a means of increasing opportunities for youth participation.

Civil society and institutions

- Civil society organisations – whether formal institutions such as universities or informal community-based organisations and groupings – have for years fostered diverse opportunities for youth volunteering and service. They continue to play a vital role in widening the opportunities for youth participation through voluntary service at various levels, promoting youth exchange programmes and building youth leadership.
- Civil society organisations, together with youth, have role in advocating for supportive policies on youth participation and youth volunteering and service, and increasing awareness of youth volunteering and service opportunities amongst young people.
- Civil society organizations in the SADC region have experience in developing and managing youth volunteering programmes in local and national contexts. Where possible, opportunities for national and regional networking should be identified to share information and good practice about youth volunteering and service; facilitate training for volunteer management and capacity building; and identify potential areas for working together.
- Higher education institutions have gained experience of service through service learning programmes and lessons learnt from this experience should be shared with others.

National governments

- Governments in the region have a role to play in fostering youth civic engagement through the development and adoption of youth policy frameworks that support and enable youth volunteering and service and youth participation. Young people should be actively engaged in the development and implementation of such frameworks.
- Where appropriate, governments also have a role in promoting and funding national youth service programmes and supporting the development of capacity building programmes.
- National governments also have an 'indirect' role in promoting volunteering and service at a local and national level. One way to do this is to support a national programme to develop awareness of the importance of youth volunteering and service, and provide national recognition for those who provide outstanding voluntary service to their communities, both formally and informally.

Private sector

- Many examples of good practice programmes have strong public and private institutional partnerships supporting youth participation (Unicef and ICP, 2010).
- Companies can partner with civil society organisations and/or government to establish collaborative initiatives through which volunteers can access opportunities to serve in organisations and local communities. Large and small private sector enterprises can support volunteering and service programmes through their corporate social responsibility strategies, either by involving their employees in programmes that support development, or providing financial support for service programmes as a form of social investment.
- Partnerships between government or civil society organisations and the private sector have the potential to facilitate the subsequent employment of young participants once they have completed their service experience.

Regional or international initiatives

- Regional bodies have a role in providing youth policy frameworks for the region that incorporate a recognition of the role that volunteering and service can play in the development of youth and their communities in the region.
- Facilitating a regional civic service network across SADC countries would advance the cause of volunteering and service in the region by enabling the sharing of lessons and good practice, the development of cross-country programmes and advocacy for a regional volunteering and service agenda. It could also contribute to coordinated strategies for addressing the shared challenges of the region, such as the impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, issues of climate change and conflict resolution and peace-building.
- Promoting the exchange of volunteers between countries and organisations through structured volunteering and civic service projects has the potential to foster mutual understanding and respect in the region. New organisational structures should be created through which youth participation can be supported to develop a regional identity through a range of means, including volunteering and civic service (e.g. the formation of an IANYS/SADC regional body).

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