



Youth Volunteerism: What do Young People want from Volunteerism?

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ABSTRACT

This paper establishes an understanding of youth volunteerism, the young mind's perception of volunteerism, how beneficial volunteering is, and the challenges one has to go through the process. The paper will discuss volunteerism trends from an Indian perspective and the issues where the young generation is interested. The global estimate shows that there are almost 970 million volunteers worldwide. People from varied and distinguishing backgrounds come forward to volunteer eagerly. As we all know, youth are the assets of a nation. They have the potential needed for the overall development of a nation. They are always in the forefront of innovation or fighting for any new genesis. Youths with their talent and creativity can build a better world for everyone with their principles of freedom and acceptance. Volunteerism in India is a growing phenomenon; after the international year of volunteers in 2001 government of India brought in a few policy changes to involve volunteers in their flagship programs. In the past 18 years, the government of India has improved the participation of volunteers in its flagship programs. As we all know, the volunteers work not only in government programs but also in volunteer-involving organizations, non-profit organizations, corporate social responsibility programs, and youths through colleges and schools.

Keywords: Youth volunteerism, volunteering, teamwork, volunteer

Youths are the builders of a nation while being subjects of history, and being a youth volunteer is like being an artist in the service of others in need of help and support. There is a famous line by Mahatma Gandhi who said, 'Be the change you wish to see in this world.' Youth become agents of that change when they volunteer themselves to make their world a better place to live in.

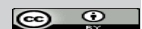
Volunteerism means voluntary service, deliberate service to others over time and without any expectation in return. A key important aspect of volunteering is that a person freely offers their service or chooses to help others. It is a voluntary

service when the volunteer meets the needs of the people.

Volunteering can be conscious as well as an unconscious act. A vast population of society unconsciously volunteer in some way or the other almost every other day. Such acts are an essential foundation in the formation of various socio-cultural institutions, whereas the conscious act of volunteering is often defined by culturally evolved values (Kundu, 2012). For example: When a person

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helps an elderly woman to cross a busy road or feeds needy people, all these acts can be considered a set of culturally evolved values. If we cultivate the habit of doing service deliberately, our desire for service will steadily grow more robust and will be not only a source of our happiness but that of the world at large.”

For a volunteer, it is essential to realize the connectivity between the self and society. It is only when people work for others that they realize the inter-connectedness. This also leads to self-encouragement and makes them better human beings. In addition, this enhancement of self-realization gives them the impetus to work further with perseverance. The realization of the interconnectedness of an individual with the society leads to insightfulness. Hence, the act of volunteering is the best way for the realization of one’s self and the path of awakening. Mahatma Gandhi had pertinently said, “The best way to find our self is to lose our self in the service of others.” It is also significant to point out that all religions promote the spirit of volunteerism and service towards others as a path of getting nirvana and being one with God.

Our time on this planet is concise, and people with integrity are well aware that time is best spent in the service of others. It is an act of improving the quality of life for no financial or social gain.

There is no age bar to volunteer for a right cause. Young people have the potential to bring a kind of energy to teamwork, and at the same time volunteering broadens their experience and exposure to life. When it comes to youth volunteers, they have a hold on a broad range of skills and ideas, especially with regards to technology.

There are ample benefits to volunteering, both for self and others. Volunteering gives a way to help others and make a change in society. Young people can strengthen their resumes and college applications. It is also a way to meet new people and learn about different types of culture and traditions. It often results in personal growth too. Student gets a way to gain work experience and learn more about society. Volunteerism also helps in dealing with stress, anger, and anxiety.

We tend to romanticize youth, and overlooking the challenges a large section of our youth face is not a good idea. Youth today face challenges from social exclusion to gender-based violence and the lack of access to rights and opportunities.

Youth also goes through a lot of physiological and psychological changes. A large percentage of the youth deals with life-threatening experiences like depression, suicidal tendencies, and other mental health problems that alter their entire belief systems. It is in this backdrop that promoting volunteering amongst young people is critically essential. This chapter will delve into what young people want from volunteering.

The essence of what the young people think has evolved following a study of 50 students in Guwahati.

The objectives of the study were:

1. To understand the approach of youth towards volunteerism.
2. To develop an idea on the interest areas of young volunteers.
3. To understand what young people think about the benefits of volunteerism.
4. To discuss the challenges that young people face while volunteering.

Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher has collected the data for the study from primary and secondary sources. Secondary data is research data that has previously been gathered and can be accessed by researchers. The term is opposite to primary data, which is data collected directly from its source. Secondary research data are always available for re-analysis. Secondary analysis is done to use existing data to develop conclusions in addition to or different from those resulting from the original analysis of the data. Secondary analysis can be qualitative and quantitative in nature and may be used by itself or combined with other research data to reach conclusions.

The researcher had surveyed 50 students and took their responses in a series of open-ended questions.

Volunteerism

Volunteerism is one of the ancient and most conventional expressions of human behavior based on mutual exchanges and sharing. The outlook on volunteerism has been changing, widening the meaning of volunteerism and its meaning to society. Volunteerism is an essential component of many civil society organizations social and political movements. Volunteerism is an integral part of education, health, and environmental programs as well as in many public & private sector programs worldwide.

Besides the fact that it is a formal voluntary engagement, volunteerism has also been a key element and a holistic component in many cultures and religions. The core values of volunteerism are build-up solidarity, mutual understanding, mutual trust, and promoting social inclusion and the empowerment of vulnerable people.

Being kind, caring, compassionate, and sharing, creating alliances and establishing cooperation based on unanimity rather than having a profit-making mindset are the core elements of volunteerism which can be expressed in a wide range of situations and across different classes, caste, ethnicity, sex, religion, community, and nation.

Volunteerism is an act of kindness in which people share their valuable time for a good cause. It is about investing their time for the service of the needy ones. It is about working out of the free will because of the satisfaction and happiness that the work provides them. A volunteer coming forward willingly to offer help to needy ones is an example of volunteerism.

Whenever a person is helping others, he is helping himself as well. A person with a quality of empathy and compassion naturally gets the urge to help people in need of help and support. It is about helping others to help themselves. And by helping others, they are bound to develop qualities like compassion, love, and empathy. A volunteer, by helping others, feels a sense of joy and, over time,

develops a sense of self-control and calmness. This, in turn, helps the volunteer to remain calm and later develop into a self-righteous individual. The topmost level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs can be attained. Self-actualization is the level where people strive to be at, and that is possible with the qualities of compassion and empathy. Volunteering can make an individual peaceful not only within the intrapersonal level but also implant qualities of peaceful and calm behavior in their daily interactions with other people.

Today, people are highly consumed by the materialistic world. People migrate from rural to urban areas to better opportunities to feed their families. And inner peace and tranquillity are lost to some extent in all human beings, and selfless service is helping a volunteer to find inner calmness. Volunteering is also a way to build social connections. It is through volunteering that one can build meaningful relationships with others.

Volunteering is a way to instill a continuous learning process. Learning is a -ending process, and volunteering can be a way to learn about new and innovative things, life processes, and finally leads to self-actualization.

Youth volunteerism

Youth in today's generation are getting opportunities to put forward their ideas and opinions to a more significant cause in which they are interested. In reality, they are also considered potential volunteers and organizers. Young people are also encouraged to participate in the decision-making process, and those who do are more socially involved have undoubtedly increased confidence and self-belief. They are seemingly more career-oriented and are more responsible in the future. Young people with good decision-making skills tend to cultivate leadership skills as well.

There are countless benefits of volunteering from younger ages. People volunteering from a younger age tend to develop positive social behaviors. They are more inclined toward the betterment of society. With increased engagement in civic life, they develop confidence and self-esteem, belief in

their worth and abilities, expand their career paths, develop good networking and communication skills, and are healthier physically and mentally.

Youth who do volunteer presumably do not have at-risk behaviors such as drinking alcohol from a younger age or doing drugs out of lousy influence or curiosity. They are less likely to skip school than those who do not volunteer. Volunteerism positively impacts their lives both socially and personally. Issues like teen pregnancy, drop-out, substance abuse, and violence are increasing, but it can be reduced through active participation from the youth in volunteering for a cause. Volunteering instills a sense of purpose in young people's life.

The 21st century is the age of digitalization and technological advancement. Today people are more involved with advanced technology, modernization, and globalization. With the following advancements, people can volunteer from their comfort zone using the internet, computer, laptop, mobile phones, and social media. With technology and social media, people can start their campaigns on various issues from their comfort zones. If the young people engage themselves effectively, the world's volunteering sector will bloom. The youth can play a pivotal role in fund-raising as well through the use of social media and technology. Fund-raising can be done for a global cause in a much better way by the active participation of young people. It can lead to human rights activism. Early volunteering experiences empower the youth. The youth of today are the future of tomorrow. People with volunteering experience since childhood and early adolescence have a positive outlook toward life and develop a sense of purpose from a younger age.

Volunteerism is therefore geared toward self-improvement being a tool for youth development. Volunteerism should not be considered a choice; it rather should be a responsibility of each one of us.

Challenges of youth volunteerism

Today's world is home to 1.8 billion young people, the largest generation of youth in history. And investing time and funds for youth can be a key to building a better tomorrow with their innovative

skills, energy, and learning abilities. With the advancement in technology and social media, people are more connected with each other compared to the past, invigorating in them a perception of power and potential.

Nevertheless, young people also face obstacles in their journey. They are denied various rights, benefits, facilities, opportunities, and resources that are conventionally available for other age groups. Lack of rights leads to lack of active participation in the significant decision-making process. Gender-based violence and discrimination is other challenges that many young people face. Poverty, lack of good transportation facilities, lack of knowledge of digital technology, uncooperative family, and environment are other obstacles that one must overcome to be successful in their life, and volunteering is one such significant way for young people to go ahead despite these obstacles.

In many countries, the right to participation by youth is not acknowledged. In the present competitive and aggressive world, there is a sleek chance for many youths to even have a thought of committing as a potential volunteer. Young people are burdened with the competitive world and studies. They are more into getting a degree with their good grades rather than practical knowledge. In such a situation, it is strenuous to instill the spirit of real volunteerism amongst people.

Youth Volunteerism in India

India is considered the youngest country in the world. With its highest young population, this group will either be an asset or a vulnerability of India. To make them an asset, it is critical essential for India to invest in them by upskilling them, creating a favorable working environment, creating more jobs, and providing them with opportunities (through volunteerism) to develop their professional as well as interpersonal skills, teach them about time management, provide them a platform to present their innovative ideas and all other important skills to help them evolve into an ideal citizen of the nation. Young people are the future leaders, and they will represent our future. Simultaneously,

through volunteerism, India can also grasp the massive capability of its youth to address various obstacles that it faces.

Volunteerism as a concept is not new to India. Since time immemorial, India has been contributing in the field of volunteerism to overcome various challenges. Volunteerism is the art of providing services to people in need, which is deep-rooted in Indian society. India is known to have a rich past of people's active participation through volunteerism through religious commitments, philanthropy, and also a rich value system implanted within the Indian society. Volunteerism also leads to many social reform movements in India, be it for the removal of Sati Pratha, widow remarriage, gender equality, free education, and health facilities, or for meeting basic human rights.

With the active participation of young people, India is able to meet its development challenges, and there is no doubt about it. This trend is seen in rural India amongst the youth who are relentlessly working on the issues they believe in. Volunteerism can also be seen amongst the urban youth with an increase in interest to work with NGOs, join fellowship programs like Gandhi fellowship, and some of them are even starting their own social organizations. Urban youth are also seen actively spreading awareness on various social issues that they want to change. Many are also indulged with (corporate social responsibility) activity, some of them are seen working for value-added projects that they believe.

Government of India also provided opportunities to the younger population to get accustomed to health and education-related issues. With time, young people are getting more socially conscious with better working opportunities than in the past. They are involved with public services and are attached to these services, making them "people-powered". Volunteerism as art is growing in India, and young people are considered as agents of social change. This is a growing area in the age of digitalization, advanced technology, data science, and social media. Active participation by young people in different movements like the Nirbhaya movement in 2012, the

anti-corruption movement by Anna Hazare in 2011, which was against corruption, and also the Chipko movement, Narmada Bachao Andolan, and many as such instilled an idea of self-awareness amongst the young population. These event inspired them to become socially productive and made them better human beings.

Findings from the Survey

The survey was conducted with an open-ended questionnaire among 50 students interested in volunteering activities. Following are the responses that have been classified and filtered:

1. 68 percent of the students have volunteered, and all of them are well aware of the concept of volunteering.
2. All of them are aware of the positive impact of volunteerism and are eager to volunteer but have no idea where to start with.
3. 80 percent of the students are interested in imparting education among the disadvantaged population. They are also concerned about the severe climatic conditions frequent floods that take away thousands of lives every year in Assam.
4. From the survey, it can be concluded that most of the students are not aware of the opportunities that are available to volunteer.

Excerpts from the Discussion

Though most of the respondents were well aware of youth volunteerism, they were unsure of sharing their views initially. So the researcher at first introduced the topic in brief and shared her intriguing volunteering experiences. The respondents were comfortable in the meantime. One of the respondents was randomly selected and requested to share her views on volunteering. The respondent said she is from a remote village of Assam, is well aware of the issues of the rural population; she seeks to work in an organization as a volunteer gain experience in the field that will allow her to meet new people from varied cultures. She wanted to work in urban areas said she would love to work in a place that is not of her origin,

to understand varied cultures and different ways of seeing and doing things, enhance skills such as learning leadership skills cooperating skills, and have an experience of organizing things. Another respondent shared the challenges he went through in volunteering, like the difficulty of working as a team in this individualistic culture that prevails among the young generation. He said once he proposed a project within his peer group, but there was a lack of enthusiasm from his friends, he decided to go forward with his project. His view was that people should learn to work as a team as people are still very individualistic in their work. Volunteers experience a tension between the want to withdraw to their own individual interests, on the other hand, and the necessity to cooperate and collaborate as a group on the other. For instance, another respondent said that once when she was part of a cleaning drive in her area, she recognized that some volunteers used to have a competitive attitude instead of a cooperative attitude.

Out of all the respondents, three of them were keen to know about the volunteering opportunities in Guwahati. They shared their views on the current issues of Assam related to flood, cleanliness, and drastic climatic changes. One said choosing an organization to get associated with is a difficult task. The researcher said there are numerous opportunities in Guwahati to volunteer individually. Ngo's generally prefer volunteers who apply in advance and have been approved for the kind of work involved. Reputable organizations will insist on a background check at first. There are international organizations, local charities, and non-governmental organizations that often have opportunities, though it can be harder to assess the work that these organizations are doing.

Further, the researcher encouraged them to join volunteer programs to develop life skills become well-rounded individuals and grow into valuable members of society. People develop life skills as they get immersed in outside their comfort zones. One of them said that volunteering as a student helped her to become competent, and it served as a training ground to enhance her skills.

Recommendation from research findings

Volunteering empowers the younger generation and lets them have a fun-filling experience at the same time. There are numerous ways to use people's unique qualities in the form of volunteering and at the same instant amplifying one's perceptions, networking skills, and also experiences.

Volunteering is an art. One can work as a volunteer in their locality or work in a local non-profit organization. One can volunteer in a hospital under doctors and nurses, provide free counseling sessions to the patients and make them feel taken care of. Schools are also a perfect place to work at. One can play games with elementary or middle school children and teach them basic skills. Non-formal education is such a field where volunteers can be of utmost importance. They can teach by conducting a workshop field trips teaching them essential life skills, and widening their knowledge at the same instance. Joining a local club and encouraging others to join for a more significant cause is another such area where one can work at.

Today, when covid-19 is spreading like a menace requires more helping hands. Masks, lockdown, and quarantine are the common words that are part of the covid-19 pandemic, demanding togetherness and volunteering. Hospitals, NGOs, and many organizations will welcome experienced volunteers in this need of the hour. Volunteering in person is possible during Covid-19 with a few extra precautions to guarantee volunteer safety. Food distribution and spreading awareness are required at this time. Those activities can be done by ensuring physical distance and all necessary safety standards.

It is easy to find volunteer opportunities, and one can search in various websites that are looking for experienced volunteers. One can look for volunteering opportunities that are located nearby, and the feeling of contributing something is heart-touching. A volunteer shall know their limits and shall not feel uncomfortable to accept what they are capable of and interested in. It is essential that as a volunteer, one enjoys what they are doing else it will not be a triumphant accomplishment. Following

one's heart, interest and passion is the key while volunteering.

Young people who are animal lovers are naturally inclined toward helping the homeless animals, and one can start a shelter home. Many organizations give volunteering opportunities while conducting a blood donation camp, collection of food supplies, cloth distribution, and charities gathering donations for poor and the needy. They are teaching for free and starting tuition classes in another volunteering area. Homeless children, children from low-income families can be provided with informal education free of cost. And one must remember that to be a helping hand for the needy; one is not required to have an excellent academic record, volunteering demands one's interest and passion toward the said work.

There are ample opportunities for everyone, and volunteering is a way of making a positive impact in society. Many NGOs are keen to hire volunteers for office work, and it can be considered an opportunity to learn administrative work and develop one's insight into how NGOs function. For example- one can learn how to write project proposals, research proposals, fundraising proposals, etc.

Whether it is about working for disabled people, elderly people, homeless children, people from difficult families, climate change campaigning or sustainable development, or helping people to improve their economic condition, there is a range of different fields available to work for. One must have self-awareness and have a clear mind to work for such causes.

Becoming a member of an NGO, being a trustee can be a good point in one's curriculum vitae, and eye-catchy curriculum vitae should have volunteering experiences. Many organizations and institutes welcome people with volunteering experiences, and it can be a stronghold while applying for a scholarship for higher studies.

Research is a field where one can also volunteer. Having an impressive research background is a key toward a better career, and many organizations provide such opportunities to volunteer.

There's no shortage of opportunities to volunteer if one is interested. There are numerous ways to engage in one's interested area. There is a demand for virtual volunteerism as well, and today many organizations will welcome potential volunteers to share their experiences and work collectively.

CONCLUSION

Volunteering can be considered a way of life, and youth who volunteer are more likely to accomplish better in schools, colleges, and work and eventually become better human beings in the future. One shall support youth volunteerism to better their society and feel positive transformational changes in themselves. Evidence show that people who volunteer tend to develop a feel-good factor about themselves as well as the society as a whole. In other words, everyone benefits from volunteering.

India is a country with unity in diversity. People, culture, and religion in India have shaped the meaning of volunteerism over the years. In India, varied cultures and religions have played an immense role in bringing up the concept of volunteerism. Active people's participation is the core principle of volunteerism. In pre and post-colonial India, people's participation was supreme to bring a positive change. These types of activities were designed by the government in the later part, and various welfare schemes and policies were introduced and used for the betterment of society. The active participation from the rural and urban youth can be seen in meeting India's developmental challenges with the government's help. India is a young country, and youth are the builders of a better future with their help, many public policies and schemes can be introduced to the needy ones in India. With the advancement in technology and social media being a powerful weapon can be used effectively to reach nook and corner of India with their welfare activities. Youth today in India are socially more responsible and are well connected with their surroundings while being more engaged in social and political actions whether offline or online.

While the concept of volunteerism is understood by many many also lack the understanding of their

own interest area. India's young population can be molded and used for positive social changes. It is the responsibility of people in power, stakeholders, NGOs, government, and people to guide the younger generation to be a better individual in the society while keeping an open mind by looking into on-ground realities, use of technology, and interests of today's youth.

What we do in our youth shapes the way our life pans out. Needless to say, then, if the world's most prominent young population starts focusing on becoming more socially aware and responsible, our country would be in very safe hands.

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