

Promoting Volunteerism and Social Entrepreneurship in TVET for Accelerated Sustainable Development: The Kwara State University Model

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Abstract

The menace of endemic poverty has resulted in a dearth of volunteerism in many African nations and communities. Skilled workers spend all their time at work often in futile efforts to make ends meet. Yet, organized volunteering and social entrepreneurship, especially in TVET, may provide the silver bullet with which to slay the dragon of penury and national underdevelopment. Volunteerism is an altruistic activity where an individual or group provides services for no financial gain to benefit another person, group or organization. It is a policy or practice of volunteering one's time or talents for charitable, educational or other worthwhile activities especially in one's community. Social entrepreneurship is the use of the techniques of startup companies and other entrepreneurs to develop, fund and implement solutions to social, cultural and environmental issues. This paper examines the concepts and practices of volunteerism, social entrepreneurship and Technical and Vocational Education and Training. It posits that individual TVET practitioners and institutions are not doing enough to provide pro bono TVET services to their immediate communities. The paper shows how TVET professionals can be organized with the assistance of social entrepreneurs for volunteer TVET services for the benefit of the communities and their nations. The paper presents the example of Kwara State University, Malete, Nigeria, which by building volunteering into its curriculum, is having enormous impact on its immediate environment.

Key words: *TVET, Social entrepreneurship, volunteerism*

Introduction

The need for sustainable, accelerated development in African countries demands that individual creativity should be continually nourished for optimal productivity and national economic progress. Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is designed to give its practitioners technical knowledge and skills needed to ginger creativity in psychomotor competencies. However, to much of the general public, TVET undertakings are regarded as the exclusive preserves of the flotsams and jetsam of academic life; those who cannot secure admission into more respectable courses like medicine, pharmacy and law. This misguided public perception is one of the banes of national development in Africa.

There is also the fact that in many African countries, including Nigeria, there is the urgent need to reduce youth unemployment by giving youths the knowledge and

skills needed for self- sustenance and economic productivity. The streets of Lagos and Johannesburg, for instance, are inundated with “Area Boys” - scores of idle youth whose aggressive energy could be channeled away from constituting public nuisance and menace into productive vocational and technical activities. Such waifs, mainly school drop-outs, would not ordinarily endeavour to acquire vocational skills; they may even be contemptuous of it, preferring the proceeds of petty crime. Yet persistent efforts by government and volunteers can be effective in steering a good number from crime to creativity.

One major challenge of TVET in most African countries, especially Nigeria, therefore is to get the public to accept that TVET programmes, being indispensable to personal progress and national development, deserve the greatest attention and respect. Public education by TVET practitioners can go a long way to meet this challenge. Volunteerism can be an effective aspect of this education, while social entrepreneurship can inject the capital and expertise needed to accelerate and optimize the process.

The Concept and History of Volunteerism

Volunteerism is the willingness of people to work on behalf of others without expectations of pay or other tangible gains (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2015). According to the Fair Labour Standard Act, a volunteer is an individual who performs hours of services for a public agency or organization for civic, charitable or humanitarian reasons without promise, expectation or receipt of compensation for services. Voluntary employment refers to unpaid employment which may be undertaken for altruistic purposes or for the purpose of gaining experience. The term, skill-based volunteerism refers to a situation in which volunteers use their professional skills for altruistic purposes. In traditional African societies, perhaps the most basic of all values is people helping others, and in that process, helping themselves. Mutual self-help remains vital to the survival of rural African communities. They help one another to till the land, to harvest, to build houses for the aged and to care for the sick. In times of crisis, like flood or fire disaster, the community comes together as one to address the problem. However the advent of western values, with emphasis on pecuniary rewards and materialism has helped suppress Africa’s traditional community orientation. Also, organized volunteering is not as deep rooted in most African countries as they are in Europe and America.

One of the earliest recorded instances of organized voluntary action was in Canada. In 1688, when the great fire ravaged Quebec City, citizens created an office for the poor, composed of volunteers who provided food, money and clothing for the destitute (Winerman, 2006). In the west itself, the first formal institutions for volunteering were the monastic orders of the early Christian church and their equivalents in other religions. While the community generally helped out of a sense of mutual dependency, monastic orders like the Franciscans and Poor Clares, accepted it a duty to go into needy communities to serve. They worked with lepers and victims of landslide and earthquakes. And during the outbreaks of plague in mediaeval times, it was often only the Franciscan monks who would go into

victims' homes to take care of them (Winerman, 2006). The current culture and practice of volunteering, characterized by the activities of the Red Cross and Mother Theresa's work in Calcutta, India sprang from both the western notion of good neighborliness and as reaction to the challenges of industrialization (Buunk & Vugt, 2013).

Skills based volunteerism uses individual or collective volunteers to assist a non-profit cause. It utilizes skills, experience, talents and education of volunteers to meet the needs of a community. Most skills-based volunteers use their work experience as part of their volunteer work. According to Hager (2004), skills based volunteerism finds the intersection of corporate values and skills and then matches them to the need of society.

There are three major types of skills-based volunteers. These are:

1. Companies and businesses which sometimes allow whole departments, teams or specific individuals to engage in pro bono work
2. Teams or professional groups and colleagues seeking to work together or teams within an organization; and
3. Individuals, who may be using their leisure time, or working between jobs, or retired people. Skill based volunteers engage in activities like strategic planning, information technology assistance, nursing, training and skill development (Deaux & Snyder, 2012).

There are two major benefits of volunteerism: Economic activities undertaken by volunteers would otherwise have to be funded by the state or by private capital; thus, volunteering enhances the overall economic output of a society and helps to reduce public expenditure. Volunteering also helps to build more cohesive communities, fostering greater interaction, interdependency and trust among citizens. This, in turn, helps to build the norms of solidarity and reciprocity which are indispensable to societal progress.

Deaux and Snyder (2012) further identified five motivators for volunteering. These are: personal values, community concerns, self-esteem enhancement, need to understand others and desire for personal development.

Social Entrepreneurship

Social Entrepreneurship is about applying practical, innovative and sustainable approaches to benefit society in general with an emphasis on the poor, the weak, the oppressed and the marginalized. It captures a unique approach to economic and social problems by focusing on education, health, welfare reform, human rights, workers right, environment, economic development, agriculture, among others. Social entrepreneurs seek to drive social innovation and transformation in various fields including education, health, environment and enterprise development (Eggers, Wong & Cooney, 2015).

They pursue poverty alleviation goals with entrepreneurial zeal, business methods and the courage to innovate and overcome traditional practices. A social entrepreneur, like business entrepreneur, endeavours to build strong and sustainable organizations which are often established for altruistic purposes.

There are three major organizational models for social entrepreneurship. These are:

1. **The leverage non-profit ventures.** Here, the entrepreneur sets up a non-government organization (NGO) to drive the adoption of an innovation that addresses a market or government failure. To achieve his aim, the entrepreneur engages a wide spectrum of society including public and private organizations to drive forward the innovation through a multiplier effect. While the NGOs depend on philanthropic funding, their long term viability and sustainability is assured since the partners have vested interest in durability of the project (Eggers, Wong & Cooney, 2015).
2. **Hybrid non-profit ventures.** The proprietor sets up a non-profit organization but achieves a measure of cost recovery through the sale of goods and services to a cross section of institutions, as well as to target population. However, to be able to sustain its activities, and to address the needs of its clients, who are often the weak and marginalized the entrepreneur must mobilize funds from other sources including public and philanthropic sectors. Such funds are obtained as grants, loans and quasi-equity.
3. **Social business ventures.** The entrepreneur sets up a business to provide a social or ecological product or service. While profits are generated, the main purpose is not to make money but to grow the social venture and reach more people in need. Wealth accumulation is not the priority and the profits are ploughed back to fund the business' expansion (Eggers, Wong & Cooney, 2015).

In Nigeria, while there are social entrepreneurs with focus on education, there are very few with focus on Technical and Vocational Education and Training. Yet, there are yawning gaps yelling to be filled in the areas of vocational skill development, ICT training and entrepreneurship development. NGOs with focus on ICT development can be established, using the social business ventures model to impart much needed knowledge to the hordes of youth wasting in idleness. Technical and vocational education can also be introduced to youth in the rural areas. Non-profit organizations can employ psycho-social techniques to wean young men and women away from crime to furniture making, shoe making, printing, music making, film making, dancing - and arrays of other skills with great potentials for great contributions to society.

The Concept of Sustainable Development

The New World Encyclopedia (2014) defines sustainable development as balancing the protection of the natural environment with the fulfillment of human needs so that the needs can be met not only in the present but also in the indefinable future. The term was prompted by global recognition of the close linkage between

environmental health and human development as well as the need to alter social and economic policies to minimize the human impact on the planet.

The term sustainable development was first coined in 1980 by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and came into general usage following the publication of the 1987 report of the Brundtland Commission. The report cast sustainable development as economic and social growth that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 1987). The concept integrates social, economic and environmental policy. It perceives development as both a political and economic goal, while sustainability is conceived as an ecological goal. The document identifies the “independent and mutually reinforcing pillars” of sustainable development as economic development, social development and environmental protection.

The United Nations Division for Sustainable Development (2005) identifies several areas as falling within the scope of sustainable development. These include agriculture, biodiversity, capacity building, climate change, education and awareness, poverty, sanitation, technology, trade and environment, sanitation, water and waste among others. The common principles guiding action programmes of sustainable development include:

- Dealing transparently and systemically with risks, uncertainty and irreversibility
- Ensuring appropriate valuation, appreciation and restoration of nature
- Integration of environmental, social, human and economic goals in policies and activities
- Equal opportunity and community participation in developmental efforts
- Conservation of biodiversity and ecological integrity
- Ensuring inter-generational equity
- Recognizing the global integration of localities
- A commitment to best practice
- No net loss of human capital or natural capital
- The principle of continued improvement
- The need for good governance

Sustainable development is a TVET concern because while TVET is all about personal progress and national development, unbridled development portends danger to future generations and to mankind as a race. For instance, while logging is necessary for construction and other creative tasks, reckless logging could damage the ecosystem, impair biodiversity accelerate desertification and ultimately

affect the quality of life on earth. These concerns have helped introduce in TVET, concepts like green TVET characterized by activities like reforestation and environmental protection.

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)

According to the United Nations International Centre for Vocational Education and Training- UNESCO-UNEVOC (2016), Technical and Vocational Education and Training is concerned with the acquisition of knowledge and skills for the world of work. Skills are vital for poverty reduction, economic recovery and sustainable development. Consequently, governments and all those concerned with development efforts throughout the world are paying closer attention to TVET than ever before.

The UNESCO Convention on TVE (1989) describes TVE as a comprehensive term referring to those aspects of the educational processes involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of the economic and social life. TVET is further understood to be (a) an integral part of general education, (b) a means of preparing for occupational fields and for effective participation in the world of work; (c) an aspect of life- long learning and a preparation for responsible citizenship; (d) an instrument for promoting environmentally sound sustainable development; and (e) a method of facilitating poverty reduction.

TVET is also defined as a type of education or training designed to prepare the learner to earn a living or increase his earnings (Amao-Kehinde, Nwagugo and Odumosu, 2010). It is a type of education in which technical information and an understanding of the laws of science and technology as applied to modern design, productions, distribution and services are essential for success.

TVET comprises formal, non-formal and informal learning for the world of work. Young women and men learn knowledge and skills from basic to advanced level across a wide range of institutional and work settings in diverse socio-economic contexts.

Deploying Volunteerism, Social Entrepreneurship and TVET for Accelerated Sustainable Development

Accelerated development is the common goal, indeed, the nexus, of volunteerism, social entrepreneurship and TVET. Volunteers seek to drive development or bridge a gap by volunteering their time and resources; social entrepreneurs seek to solve developmental problems by targeting their actions on areas or aspects that have not been adequately covered by government actions or business efforts. TVET seeks to impart knowledge and skills which will enable young men and women to become viable members of society capable of contributing their quotas to national and human development. The nexus can be sharpened if the three are deployed systematically, in synergy.

TVET institutions can build the spirit of volunteering into their students. Arguably, the deepest gap in the development equation is the dearth of technical skills at community levels. TVET practitioners can volunteer at community level to build, to supervise, to assess, evaluate and to impart knowledge and skills. A class can be organized into groups, each of which endeavours to fill one of the skill or facility gaps in the community. Are there street kids who can be organized to learn computing or cobbling? A group can volunteer to take care of that. Do secondary school children need to be orientated on the wisdom of going into TVET, a counseling oriented group can take that on. Are there potholes to fill; street bush to clear, different groups can work on those. Does an old woman need help with her harvest, a group of young men and women can help her out.

The objective would be not just to achieve the set goals, but to build a spirit of volunteering in TVET graduates and practitioners. The skill and knowledge gap is often so wide that the few experts available may need to make out time to help out on pro bono basis. This is particularly necessary in the effort to orientate the youth to get involved in vocational and technical training. One student can volunteer to teach school girls dress making, cake baking or hair dressing; or the training may be on how to make or invest money with those skills (entrepreneurship training). The statement: “I come to teach you new ways of baking cake” would immediately attract the attention of a good fraction of young women in any class. The TVET gospel needs many more disciples and the apostles must venture out into the world to recruit new adherents. The task of national development needs many more hands. The more young people are brought into TVET, the fewer the number of street urchins, political thugs, bomb-throwing militants and terrorists and the fewer the women in the brothels.

Social entrepreneurship should also be deployed for accelerated sustainable development. In the first place, every major corporation should have a social entrepreneurship arm or foundation, doing pro bono work on community development. The most impactful community development effort would be to give vocational training to youths in the neighborhood or the home region and to encourage their business startup and success by patronizing them. Two questions every company should be asked is “How many youths have you trained pro bono in your community” and “How have you followed up on their training”??

The example of Songhai Farm in Porto Novo, Benin Republic is salutary. The proprietor, a Nigerian, trains members of the local community on new farming and animal husbandry methods, provides seed money for the graduates and buys back their products. Everyone smiles to the bank. But the objective of Songhai Farm is not to make money. Yet, it is making money and having tremendous salutary impact on its community.

Every TVET institution or department should also run a social entrepreneurship arm, which operates like an NGO for the development of their immediate community. Each institution should teach, train and inspire a targeted number of youths annually, pro bono. Such youths may not be awarded the regular school diploma, degree or certificate. They may be awarded certificates of participation

or attendance. But the real goal is not certification. It is empowerment manifested in capacity to perform and make profit. Get community leaders to nominate indigent youths for such programmes which target training in the community's area of skills need. The institution should follow up. The potential impact of such a scheme on community poverty alleviation could be tremendous. The inevitable ensuing romance in institution/community relationship would be the icing on the cake.

The Kwara State University Model

Kwara State University is a young institution, founded in 2008 by the Kwara State Government in North Central Nigeria. The university takes pride in its mantra: University for Community Development and it seeks in its operations to have the greatest impact on its host communities.

Volunteering is built into the curriculum. One day every month, the students go into the neighbouring villages, to dig wells and boreholes, till the land, help with the harvest, construct wooden chairs for the local schools, construct barns on the farmstead and teach in the local schools among other efforts. Credits are awarded for these efforts which may be conducted solo or in groups. At the end of each semester, each person or group arranges for its supervisor to visit the community to assess its impact while also interacting with the villagers. A report is written at the end of the exercise. Assessment is based on the final report as validated by the beneficiaries and the institutional assessors. The result is that the students, from different parts of the country, have a good sense of self-worth; they learn to impact their communities and they build relationships some of which may last for life. The community benefits by enjoying the training and the students' contributions with the harvest and the boreholes, and the young children for whom they work are motivated. The institution, too, has the satisfaction of achieving its mandate to positively affect its environment. The university enjoys with the community a level of fraternity very rare in Nigerian institutions. No sense of alienation; villages walk freely into the campus, while students saunter into the villages at all hours. The jury is still out on the enduring impact of the programme, but the portents are great.

Conclusions

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) has been identified as a major weapon in the war against poverty and want. Every effort must therefore be made to get TVET students and practitioners to spread the message to all the nooks and crannies of Africa. This can be achieved using volunteerism and social entrepreneurship as instruments. Volunteering must be built into the curricula for students to understand the relationship between their training and national development. They must therefore, not be shy in the efforts to get more youths on the TVET board. Institutions should also regard themselves as social entrepreneurs and have programmes specifically designed to impact the indigent, the weak and the women in their communities. While institutions have to charge fees, for self-

sustenance, they need to also offer pro bono services whose value is not in the statement of account but in the impact on communities.

Big corporate bodies must also have non-profit arms which aim to give the youth vocational training for personal progress and national development. In all these, the focus should be not just on development, but sustainable development.

Kwara State University Malete in Nigeria has provided a mini-model on which other institutions can build on with appropriate modification. If TVET is the silver bullet for slaying endemic poverty and want, volunteerism and social entrepreneurship may be the future of technical and vocational education and training.

Recommendations

Volunteerism must be built into TVET curricula. This will make TVET practitioner to have greater impact on their societies. Every TVET institution must consider itself a non-profit organization for the betterment of its immediate environment. TVET institutions must organize pro bono training activities for citizens who are too indigent to attend the regular programmes. Corporate bodies should be rated not only on the money they have made but also on the degree of their impact on their host communities: the number of youths they have given vocational training, the facilities they have provided for youth empowerment.

TVET training should renew the emphasis on sustainability of development efforts. Students should understand the environmental impact of their efforts and take into cognizance the need for sustainability. Institutions should study and modify the KWASU community service model so that every TVET institution will have enduring salutary effect on its environment.

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