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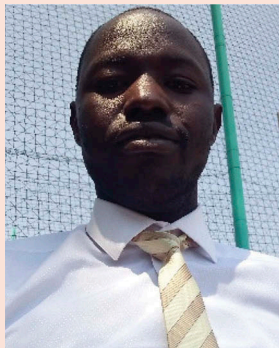
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SOCIOLOGY | RESEARCH ARTICLE

The contribution of volunteerism to monitoring and evaluation of NGO projects in Chegutu district, Zimbabwe

Itai Kabonga^{1*}

Abstract: The study discusses the contribution of volunteerism to monitoring and evaluation (M and E) of NGO projects using the case study of a NGO in Chegutu district, Zimbabwe. While there is significant body of literature on contribution of volunteerism to social development in Zimbabwe and elsewhere, there is no literature that specifically discuss the nexus between formal volunteerism and monitoring and evaluation. The study was limited to formal volunteerism organised in Non-Governmental Organisation. It emerged that volunteers perform several M and E roles that include data collection, reporting, feedback of project success, peer to peer mentoring and beneficiary verification. These roles are embedded in the broader project functions. While performing these roles several challenges affects the outcomes of M and E roles. Low literacy levels affect effective performance of M and E roles. Similarly, desire to sustain households' livelihoods conflict with performance of M and E roles resulting in little commitment by some of the volunteers. Data in the study were collected from volunteers and NGOs officials. Data were collected using in-depth interview. The findings are presented and discussed thematically.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Itai Kabonga holds academic qualifications in Development Studies, Sociology, Project Management and Monitoring and Evaluation (M and E). He has also taught several courses in Development Studies that include Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Civil Society in Africa, Gender Studies and International Development Corporations at Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti University (ZEGU) and ARUPPE Jesuit University in Zimbabwe. Itai's research interests include NGOs and development, Civil society-state relations, volunteerism in Africa, Zimbabwe's development crisis since 1980.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

In Zimbabwe, there are several studies that focuses on the roles of volunteers in social development. There is scant literature on the contribution of volunteers to monitoring and evaluation of NGO led development projects. This research sought to cover the gap. Using a qualitative approach, the research discovered that volunteers perform the following M and E functions; data collection, targeting of beneficiaries, peer to peer mentoring, providing feedback to NGOs, source of information for external evaluators and beneficiary verification. While volunteers are indispensable to M and E of NGO projects, relying on them presents several challenges. The commitment of volunteers to M and E is declining owing to economic pressures. Low literacy levels of volunteer population in general contribute to low data quality. The study recommends continuous capacity building to improve data quality emanating from volunteers as well as giving stipends to volunteers as they exist in Zimbabwe context of economic difficulties.

Subjects: Development Studies; Development Policy; Development Theory

Keywords: monitoring and evaluation (M and E); volunteers; Zimbabwe; volunteerism; NGOs

1. Introduction

Volunteerism is about helping someone or the community without expectation of financial reward (Caprara et al., 2012; Kaseke & Dhemba, 2006; Van Norren, 2017). In Africa, volunteerism has always been part and parcel of society usually guided by the Ubuntu value system (see Akintola, 2011). Though individuals may help relatives or other community members in need, it is structured volunteerism dispensed through NGOs that is the focus of this paper. The contribution of structured or formal volunteerism to development is enormous (Burns et al, 2015). CIVICUS study of volunteering patterns in Africa, confirms the growth of formal volunteerism (Graham et al., 2006). The Johns Hopkins Centre for Civil Society (CIVICUS, 2011) study of 37 countries shows that around 37 million people volunteer in a typical year. This represents an equivalent of more than 20 million full time jobs (Atta & Anam, 2017). Globally, volunteerism contributes 400 billion USD to the global economy. In US alone, volunteerism contribution to the economy is significant contributing between 113 billion USD to 161 billion USD (Yoga, 2006). In Zimbabwe, though, there is lack of data on contribution of volunteers to the economy, the belief is that they contribute significantly to the economy.

A review of literature shows no study has focused on the contribution of volunteers to M and E of NGO projects in Zimbabwe. Consequently, this research extends the frontiers of knowledge in this area. It is well documented that funding for development in Zimbabwe has been in decline since the year 2000 (Kabonga, 2018). This is as a result of Zimbabwe's isolation emanating from decade long unresolved political crisis (Kaseke & Dhemba, 2006). Consequently, funds made available for development are being utilised sparingly. Many NGOs in Zimbabwe rely on volunteers to perform M and E roles since they do not have financial resources to hire M and E personnel to fulfil their M and E requirements. To this end several M and E roles like data collection, reporting, low level data analysis, feedback and targeting of beneficiaries are performed by community volunteers. Kabonga (2015) establishes that volunteers working on behaviour change programmes while they perform a plethora of activities like conducting sessions, one of their duties is to collect data on number of beneficiaries reached and documenting the impact of behaviour change communication. It is very difficult to separate M and E from the work of volunteers as they are involved in data collection and reporting process. Volunteers play an important role in reporting particularly through their data collection function (Govo, 2015). Also, Kabonga (2018) argues that volunteers are important in participatory M and E. Since, volunteers are knowledgeable about their communities, they assist NGOs with information regarding what the community needs to development. Volunteers are a credible source of information when evaluating a development intervention (Smith et al., 2013). Kabonga (2018) observed that volunteers are involved in identification of project success stories. Put in other words volunteers are involved in documenting the impact of development interventions.

In Zimbabwe, the targeting process in NGOs is led by M and E Officers. In recruiting the project beneficiaries, the role of volunteers is prominent. Besides the actual registering of beneficiaries, volunteers ensure correct targeting. As they are resident in the community, volunteers are knowledgeable about people who should benefit from different NGO projects. Involving volunteers in targeting eliminates top down programming, considered by Burns et al (2015) as one of the contemporary failures of the development sector. Depending on the organisation, Kaseke and Dhemba (2006) notes that volunteers have some data management roles to play for instance, in Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) programmes, volunteers are expected to maintain an up to date register of OVC. Moreover, volunteers represent NGOs in the community (Tyler, 1965). In this vein, Kaseke and Dhemba (2006) submits that volunteers maintain links between beneficiaries and

service providers (NGOs). Whereas volunteers perform important roles in M and E roles, the context in which volunteers exist may militate against effective performance of M and E duties. Volunteers in Zimbabwe provide services in a difficult economic environment (Kaseke & Dhemba, 2006). Without remuneration practises like falsification of reports and abandonment of duty has affected M and E processes. Thus, for volunteers to be effective M and E cadres, there is need for adequate motivation and support (see Caprara et al., 2012; Govo, 2015).

2. Statement of problem

There is sizeable literature focusing on the contribution of volunteerism to social and community development in Zimbabwe (see Kaseke & Dhemba, 2006; Madziva & Chinouya, 2017; Rodlach, 2009). This literature appreciates the importance of volunteers in development. Hitherto, there are few (if any) studies that devote attention to the role of volunteers in monitoring and evaluation of NGOs projects in Africa, Zimbabwe included. Because of the scantiness of studies, there is little knowledge on the roles of volunteers in monitoring and evaluation. Mainstream literature on monitoring and evaluation (Kabonga, 2018; Kariuki, 2014; Mthethwa & Jili, 2016) depicts the practice of M and E as a preserve for professionals. Consequently, there is silence on the roles of volunteers in M and E. Thus, this research sought to document the contribution of volunteers to M and E using a case study of an NGO in Chegutu district, Zimbabwe.

3. Debating the conceptual framework

3.1. Volunteerism

Though volunteerism has existed for ages in African societies, defining the concept of volunteerism comes with a measure of difficulty. Thus, there is no universally accepted definition of volunteerism (CIVICUS, 2011). This is because the concept of volunteerism is heavily influenced by religion, politics and culture (see Smith, 1999). Because of this, the way volunteerism is perceived in the global South is different from global North (Kabonga, 2015). Volunteerism is about dedicating oneself to a certain cause without expectation of payment. This resonates with McBride et al. (2003) encapsulation of civil service “as an organized period of substantial engagement and contribution to the local, national or world community, recognized and valued by society with minimal monetary compensation to the participant”. For Kaseke and Dhemba (2006) volunteerism amounts to provision of services without coercion to benefit the community. Similarly, other scholars see volunteerism as dedication to helping the community without anticipation of financial benefits (see Cnaan et al., 1996; Govo, 2015). Recently, the International Labour Organisation and Johns Hopkins University defined volunteerism as “unpaid non-compulsory work; that is, time individuals give without pay to activities performed either through an organization or directly for others outside their own household” (CIVICUS, 2011).

Shah et al. (2014) identifies two types of volunteerism; informal and formal volunteerism. Formal volunteering is done through a group or an organization. This type of volunteerism is structured and embedded in NGO programmes. Informal volunteering is done by an individual to help a fellow community member in need. Govo (2015) defines informal volunteerism as “engaging in some activities without the umbrella of a formal organization”. This type of volunteerism has always existed in African communities underpinned by the Ubuntu value system (Van Norren, 2017).

For Govo (2015) volunteerism has always been part of society, though developed societies were at the centre of the development of formal volunteerism (Damon, 2007). For African societies, Zimbabwe included, informal volunteerism is part and parcel of culture and value systems. No wonder African societies are characterised by the mutual aid which amounts to self-help. Take for example, the tradition of *harambe* in Kenya which simply means lets pull together. In Zimbabwe, there is the concept of the *Zunde ramambo* (chief's granary) drawn from Shona culture as part of measures to address food shortages for the poor and those in need (Patel et al., 2012). These various forms of indigenous volunteerism are underpinned by Ubuntu, a traditional African culture that demands that society assists whenever someone is in need (Caprara et al., 2012). This study

mainly focused on formal volunteerism looking at community volunteers linked to NGOs for delivery of specified projects.

3.2. Monitoring and evaluation (M and E)

The dominance of monitoring and evaluation particularly as an imperative for effective development is well established in literature (see, Kabonga, 2018; Kariuki, 2014; Mthethwa & Jili, 2016; World Bank, 2011). Despite this, the concept of monitoring and evaluation has generated immense debate. Thus, a panoply of definitions of monitoring and evaluation exists in literature. For Kariuki (2014) monitoring is a continuous assessment of the function of project activities in the context of implementation schedules and the use of project inputs. Similarly, the World Bank (2011) argues that monitoring is a continuous function based on systematic collection of data on specified indicators to provide management and stakeholders with indications of progress of an ongoing development intervention. Both the World Bank (2011) and Kariuki (2014) agree that monitoring is a continuous activity—more of day to day activity.

For Mthethwa and Jili (2016) monitoring is about comparing actual performance versus planned performance. There are several types of monitoring in literature (see Kabonga, 2018; Kariuki, 2014). A good monitoring system should be capable of producing early warning signals that trigger a corrective response. Different organizations talk of different monitoring types. For instance, United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) (2003) makes reference to situation monitoring and performance monitoring. Situation monitoring measures change in a condition or set of conditions or the absence of change whereas performance monitoring seeks to measure progress in achieving specific objectives about an implementation plan. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) (2011) identifies seven types of monitoring and these are results monitoring, process or activity monitoring, compliance monitoring, situation or context monitoring, beneficiary monitoring, financial monitoring, and organizational monitoring (see Table 1 for detailed explanations).

Table 1. Showing seven types of monitoring	
Type of monitoring	Explanation
Results monitoring	Tracks effects and impacts
Process(activity) monitoring	Tracks the use of inputs and resources, the progress of activities and the delivery of outputs
Compliance monitoring	Ensures compliance with donor regulations, expected results, grant, contract requirement, local government regulations and ethical requirements
Context(situation) monitoring	Tracks the setting in which the project/programme operates, especially as it affects identified risks and assumptions, but also any unexpected considerations that may arise.
Beneficiary monitoring	Tracks beneficiary perceptions of a project/ programme. It includes beneficiary satisfaction or complaints with the project/programme, including their participation, treatment, access to resources and their overall experience of change.
Financial monitoring	Accounts for costs by input and activity within predefined categories of expenditure. It is often conducted in conjunction with compliance and process monitoring
Organizational monitoring	Tracks the sustainability, institutional development and capacity building in the project/programme and with its partners. It is often done in conjunction with the monitoring processes of the larger, implementing organization

Source: Kabonga (2018)

Table 2. Showing evaluation types

Evaluation according to timing	Evaluation according to who conducts the evaluation	Evaluation according to technicality or methodology
<p>Formative evaluations Take place during project implementation to improve performance and assess compliance.</p> <p>Summative evaluations Takes place at the end of project/programme implementation to assess effectiveness and impact.</p> <p>Mid-term evaluations Are formative in purpose and take place midway through implementation.</p> <p>Final evaluations Are summative in purpose and are conducted (often externally) at the end of the project/programme implementation to assess how well the project/programme has achieved its intended objectives.</p> <p>Ex-post evaluations Are conducted sometime after implementation to assess long-term impact and sustainability</p>	<p>Internal or self-evaluations Are conducted by those responsible for implementing a project/programme. They can be less expensive than external evaluations and help build staff capacity and ownership. However, they may lack credibility with individual stakeholders, such as donors, as they are perceived as more subjective (biased or one sided). These tend to be focused on learning lessons rather than demonstrating accountability.</p> <p>External or independent evaluations Are conducted by the evaluator(s) outside of the implementing team, lending them a degree of objectivity and often technical expertise. These tend to focus on accountability.</p> <p>Participatory evaluations Are conducted with the beneficiaries and other key stakeholders, and can be empowering, building their capacity, ownership, and support.</p> <p>Joint evaluations Are conducted collaboratively by more than one implementing partner, and can help build consensus at different levels, credibility, and joint support.</p>	<p>Real-time evaluations (RTEs) Are undertaken during project/programme implementation to provide immediate feedback for modifications to improve ongoing implementation. Emphasis is on immediate lesson learning over impact evaluation or accountability.</p> <p>Meta-evaluations Are used to assess the evaluation process itself. Some key uses of meta-evaluations include taking inventory of evaluations to inform the selection of future evaluations; combining evaluation results; checking compliance with evaluation policy and good practices; assessing how well evaluations are disseminated and utilised for organisational learning and change, etc.</p> <p>Thematic evaluations Focus on one theme, such as gender or environment, typically across some projects, programmes or the whole organisation</p> <p>Cluster/sector evaluations Focus on a set of related activities, projects or programmes, typically across sites and implemented by multiple organisations (e.g., National Societies, the United Nations and NGOs).</p> <p>Impact evaluations Focus on the effect of a project/programme, rather than on its management and delivery. Therefore, they typically occur after project/programme completion during a final evaluation or an ex-post evaluation. However, the impact may be measured during project/programme implementation during longer projects/programmes, and when feasible.</p>

Source: IFRC guide 2011

Just like monitoring, evaluation has also generated a fair share of debates. Thus, several scholars define evaluation differently. Evaluation is the assessment of the effectiveness of the project or programme in meeting its objectives (see Dinnito & Due, 1987). In most cases the evaluation criteria for NGO led projects focuses on efficiency, effectiveness, relevance, impact and sustainability (Rossi et al., 1999). That is why Fournier (2005) defines evaluation as “an applied inquiry process for collecting and compiling evidence that highlights the effectiveness, efficiency and value of an intervention”. Mthethwa and Jili (2016) submits that the role of evaluation is to measure the effects of development interventions against set program or project objectives with the goal of making quality decisions in future. There are several types of evaluation (see Table 2 below).

As shown in Table 2 evaluation can be categorized according to evaluation timing, who conducts the evaluation and according to methodology. Though, there are different types of evaluation, a common thread is that they save the same function of showing the efficiency, effectiveness, impact, relevance and sustainability of a development intervention. It is then not surprising that M and E is an important aspect of NGO programming to which volunteers are part of.

4. Methodology

4.1. Research approach

The researcher used a qualitative approach to unravel the contribution of volunteers to M and E in NGO led development interventions. Qualitative approach relies on non-numeric data in form of words and text (Mohajan, 2018). Because of the qualitative approach used, the researcher was able to use multiple data collection methods that include interviews and documentary analysis. From the massive amount of data generated using qualitative approach, the research was able to interpret the findings and generate themes used in analysing the data.

4.2. Research design

Research design is defined by Babbie (2007) as the plan that the researcher follows in conducting his or her study. This research was a case study of the contribution of volunteers to M and E, using NGO A as case study. Creswell (2003) notes when using a case study, the researcher explores a program, an event, an activity, a process, or one or more individuals in-depth. The use of a case study allowed the gathering of thick descriptions on the roles of volunteers in M and E. This is supported by Denzin and Lincoln (2008) who argues that a case study is used when detailed information of a specific phenomenon is required. A case study is usually used when a phenomenon lacks clarity. As already shown, there is little knowledge regarding the contribution of volunteers to M and E.

4.3. Data collection methods

Data in the study were collected using in depth interviews and documentary analysis as shown in Table 3. In depth interviews remains the popular qualitative data collection method (Adhabhi & Anozie, 2017). In depth interviews are used to gather information, beliefs, perspective and experience of a particular perspective (Guest et al., 2017). A total of 15 interviews were conducted with volunteers working with NGO A in Chegutu district. The interviews lasted for 50 minutes. Moreover, a total of three interviews were conducted with NGO officials of NGO A. The researcher had an opportunity to ask questions on issues that needed clarity. Put in other words, the interviews allowed probity. The responses were recorded and transcribed later. Besides the use of in-depth interviews to collect data, data were also collected using documentary analysis. The researcher analysed data from reports of NGO A, particularly focusing on the roles of volunteers in M and E. Other documents analysed include; meeting meetings, strategic plans and volunteer policy.

Table 3. Data collection methods

Data collection method	Number of respondents
In depth interviews	
Community volunteers	15
NGO officials	3
Documentary analysis	Reports, minutes, strategic plan, volunteer policy

4.4. Sampling and population

Volunteers that participated in the study were chosen using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is that type of sampling in which the researcher has direct control over the elements selected to participate in the study (Etikan & Kabiru, 2017). The volunteers that participated in the study were chosen based on having knowledge of the roles of volunteers in M and E. Only volunteers working with NGO A were selected to participate in the study. Also, NGO officials belonging to NGO A were selected using expert sampling. Expert sampling is that type of sampling in which respondents are chosen based on experience and knowledge of a phenomena under study (Etikan & Kabiru, 2017). As NGO officials are exposed to the work of volunteers, they have significant knowledge on the contribution of volunteers to M and E. It is important to also note that NGO A was chosen using purposive sampling. The organisation is by far the biggest organisation in Chegutu district in terms of beneficiary reach and funding towards social development. The organisation was chosen because of having a network of volunteers in the community. These volunteers perform a myriad of activities including M and E roles. The study used the current project being implemented by NGO A to understand the roles of volunteers in M and E. The current project seeks to mitigate the impact of HIV and AIDS on Zimbabwe by enhancing sustainability of care of the OVC. The services provided by NGO A to OVC include school fees assistance, child rights education, HIV risk assessment, household economic strengthening and many others. All these activities depend on vibrant network of volunteers in the district. M and E roles are embedded in these broader activities.

4.5. Ethical considerations

Based on the reality that research can expose participants to harm, the researcher adhered to several principles to protect the participants. Anonymity was used to protect the identity of the participants. Participants are identified as either “a volunteer” or “NGO official” without using their actual names. Other studies use false names (pseudonym or alias names) to protect the identity of respondents. Confidentiality is another ethical principle that was followed by the researcher. The collected data in form of recordings were kept safe in a laptop to avoid undue access to the data. The laptop had a password to avoid unwarranted access. Informed consent was obtained before data collection. The participants were informed of the purpose of the research and what was required of them in the research process. All participants in the study gave verbal consent. No respondents were coerced to participate in the study.

5. Presentation and discussion of findings

5.1. Data collection

Volunteers in Chegutu district are playing important roles of data collection. It emerged that NGO A relies heavily on volunteers to do data collection. The data collected by volunteers is used by the organisation to report to its donors and to make decisions based on progress towards project outputs and outcomes. NGO A reports quarterly to its donor and is supposed to report on indicators that include number of children receiving education assistance, number of households participating in economic strengthening activities, number of HIV positive children reached with a service and number of children participating in child led initiatives. It is entirely volunteers that collect this data and then report to NGO A for further analysis. In collecting this data, volunteers uses data collection tools provided by NGO A usually submitting reports on monthly basis. An interviewed M and E Officer said;

... volunteers play an important role in the monitoring and evaluation of projects. Besides being involved in project implementation they are also important in M and E. To complete our quarterly reports we rely on the data that is provided by volunteers. They collect data from key thematic areas of health, child protection, economic strengthening and gender. We use this data to generate our own reports

Volunteers themselves also similarly submitted that they are involved in data collection process across different thematic areas. Interviewed on their roles in M and E, a lead volunteer of NGO A also highlighted the important role of volunteers in data collection processes;

... as volunteers we work in close contact with our supervisors at the headquarters. We are aware that at the end of each month we need to report and submit reports to our supervisors. Mostly our reports captures the number of people reached with services provided by the organisation.

De la Torre and Unfried (2014) also supports the view that community volunteers play an important role in community M and E systems particularly with regards to data collection. In South Africa in a study focusing on Community Home Based Care Program (CHBC), community volunteers were playing an M and E role of collecting statistics to enable analysis of project's progress (see Morton et al., 2018). In Zimbabwe, Kabonga (2018) concurs that NGOs work with volunteers whose duties involves data collection. For Kabonga (2018) volunteers who collect data must "make low-level, real-time strategic decisions, based on the analysis of the data". Because of low literacy levels of volunteers (Kabonga, 2015; Rodlach, 2009), the quality of data collected by community volunteers may be comprised. Morton et al. (2018) discovered volunteers had challenges with of collection of statistical data. In this regard robust capacity building and training plays an important role in improving the quality of data collected by community volunteers. In Nepal, the quality of data collected by volunteers is commendable given the nature of volunteers. Some of the volunteers in Nepal are called technical volunteers because they hold the qualifications similar to their colleagues in the public sector and also some of the volunteers are recent graduates (Burns et al., 2015). Conclusively, the nature of volunteers determines the quality of the data collected by volunteers.

5.2. Targeting of NGOs' projects beneficiaries

Besides data collection, another important duty of volunteers in structured volunteerism is targeting of project beneficiaries. Before NGOs projects starts, the first step is the recruitment and registration of project beneficiaries. This is preceded by the identification of the most suitable beneficiaries. NGO A works with households affected and infected with HIV and AIDS, thus the volunteers in Chegutu were involved in identification and registration of households infected and affected with HIV and AIDS. After the targeting and registration into the project, NGO A conducts continuous profiling of beneficiaries. Every year the beneficiaries are profiled to check changes in the circumstances of the beneficiaries. This allows the organisation to know the impact of its services on the lives of beneficiaries. An interviewed official of NGO A captured the importance of volunteers as;

... normally before the project starts we hold community meetings were we explain the nature and focus of the project. During these inception meetings we outline the kind of beneficiaries that the project focuses on. Volunteers as they are the part of the community, they are the ones that advises us whether such kind of people exist in the community. Once we are done with community meetings, it is the volunteers that profile and register these selected households

Articulating their roles in targeting, a community volunteer explained that;

... we also work with NGOs in the selection of beneficiaries in different projects. Because we live in the community, we know the people that deserve to benefit from a given project. NGOs rely on us to play this important role. In other words, it is us who determines success or failure of NGO projects emanating from our roles in targeting

In Malawi, Mkandawire and Muula (2003) similarly pointed that community volunteers were involved in identifying "chronically ill people, including those with HIV/AIDS, the aged, young people and orphans as vulnerable groups that they would serve". The findings of this study are consistent with the findings of

Kaseke and Dhemba (2006) who discovered that volunteers in OVC programs are involved in the targeting of beneficiaries. Thus, in NGO structured programmes volunteers play an important role in identifying beneficiaries. Volunteers are resident in the community, therefore are knowledgeable about community dynamics. Consequently, their participation in the targeting process enables correct targeting—a vital component of project success. Furthermore “community volunteers are known to, and have the trust of, community members” (Burns et al., 2015), their participation in the targeting process makes the targeting process credible and acceptable to community stakeholders.

5.3. Feedback

Monitoring is defined as an ongoing process to assess progress towards meeting project objectives (Mthethwa & Jili, 2016; World Bank, 2011). NGOs know whether they are making progress through monitoring. Monitoring is anchored on getting feedback from people on the ground and from those benefitting from NGO activities. One way in which NGOs get feedback of their interventions is through use of volunteers. There are two ways in which volunteers gather and provide feedback. Formal feedback is usually encapsulated by monthly and quarterly reports compiled by volunteers. In NGO A processes, volunteers report monthly and quarterly and these reports shows the progress being made in achieving the set goals. Informally, because the volunteers are resident in the community and are part of the community their day to day interactions with other community members allows gathering of community views on projects being implemented. This was said by an interviewed community volunteer;

... we are part of the community, and we know what the community says about NGO led interventions. As we interact with the community, the community alerts us where they are happy with NGO projects and where they want to see improvements made. During our monthly, meetings we provide this feedback to NGO officials. I am happy to say that in most cases NGO officials use this feedback we provide to improve their programmes

The Project officer of NGO A highlighted that they only get to know of their impact in the community through volunteers. This is possible through reporting made by volunteers and the meetings constantly held with volunteers. Volunteers in other words link NGOs to the community. In Zimbabwe, Kaseke and Dhemba (2006) shows that volunteers meet and discuss their work with NGOs officials once a month. In these meetings, volunteers outlined the successes and progress made in achieving project goals. During these meetings challenges met are discussed and solutions to address the challenges are provided. Govo (2015) in South Africa discovered that volunteers contribute to social development through making home visits to assess the living conditions of children living in aftercare program. It is from these home visits that volunteers are able to feedback regarding projects impact in the community. In order to allow decision making, there is need for formal or written feedback. NGO A volunteers were involved in provision of formal feedback. Low literacy levels can militate against written feedback. A study done in Nepal, documents, that because of low literacy levels volunteers preferred giving verbal feedback (Panday et al., 2017). While volunteers may wish to provide internal feedback, they do not always find the process easy argues (Burns et al., 2015).

5.4. Beneficiary verification

One of the key activities performed by volunteers in the context of monitoring and evaluation is beneficiary verification. This activity is conducted during the implementation of the project to determine whether the project is targeting the correct people. NGO A works with over 4,000 households, it difficult for the organisation staff to conduct this verification, hence the organisation relies on community volunteers. NGO A official said;

... every year as an organisation we conduct beneficiary verification. In this activity we will be checking whether the project is providing services to the correct beneficiaries. It is volunteers that transverse communities conducting this beneficiary verification. Volunteers use a simple tool to conduct this beneficiary verification. We use this exercise to weed out undeserving individuals, thus beneficiary verification is a quality assurance activity

That volunteers participate in verification of beneficiaries was also discovered by Kaseke and Dhemba (2006) study of civil service in Zimbabwe. They argue that the roles of volunteers include “monitoring the programme to ensure that assistance goes to the intended beneficiaries”. Beneficiary verification among other things curbs wastage as services are provided to deserving beneficiaries.

5.5. Source of information for external evaluators

M and E officer of NGO A asked on the roles of volunteers in M and E, had this to say;

... volunteers are a credible source of information for any external evaluator. External evaluators prioritised volunteers for two reason. One they are involved in implementation of activities thus they are knowledgeable about the project. Also, volunteers are community members they are aware of what the community says about NGOs interventions

Table 2 shows that there a plethora of evaluation types. Evaluation according to who conducts the evaluation has three sub types of evaluations; internal evaluation, external evaluation, joint evaluation and participatory evaluation (IFRC Guide, 2011). For external evaluation, volunteers are a source of information to external evaluators. As volunteers are an important stakeholder in NGO led development interventions, external evaluators besides focusing on actual beneficiaries tend to rely on volunteers as a source of information when evaluating the relevance, impact, efficiency, effectiveness and impact of the project. Relying on volunteers is informed by the fact volunteers are aware of the level of community satisfaction with NGO projects and volunteers themselves are implementers of NGO interventions (Bhiri et al., 2004). Volunteers are a source of data for external evaluators because they are also involved in implementation of project activities. For instance, in South Africa, Govo (2015) observed that volunteers perform the following roles; conducting home visits to assess the circumstances of OVC, conducting HIV and AIDS awareness campaigns, and participating in livelihoods activities. Kabonga (2015) also observed that in Zimbabwe volunteers were involved in home visits of children infected and affected by HIV and AIDS. Moreover, Caprara et al. (2012) and Graham et al. (2006) submit that volunteers are usually used in education and health activities. It is from performing these functions that volunteers are considered a credible source of information by external evaluators. As volunteers are performing these activities, they interact with community members and from this interaction they can gauge the community satisfaction with NGO projects. Other roles of volunteers in external evaluation include “shaping evaluation questions, identify credible sources of evidence and review findings” (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2009).

5.6. Peer to peer mentoring

In the practise of M and E, M and E officers are imbued with the responsibility to mentor community volunteers. Kabonga (2018) reports that it is difficult to anticipate the success of the project without constant mentoring of volunteers. The mentoring usually focuses on how to use data collection tools effectively. The desire is to ensure consistence, completeness, validity, reliability, precision and timeliness of the data. Because community volunteers are the ones at the lowest level of generating data, the need for mentoring and support cannot be overemphasized. It emerged from the study, that there is peer to peer mentoring in Chegutu district. Volunteers are mentoring each other particularly on the use of data collection tools to ensure consistency and completeness of the data. To facilitate the playing out of peer to peer mentoring, NGO A has paired volunteers to work together. This allows the volunteers to help and assist each other in the use of data collection tools. The nature of volunteers working with NGO A has informed the institutionalisation of peer to peer mentoring. This was said by NGO A official;

... some of our volunteers are old women with writing difficulties. To counter that we have paired our volunteers in accordance with literacy abilities. We have done this to ensure that there is peer to peer mentoring

Moreover, NGO A has what are called lead volunteers. These are usually selected by volunteers themselves based on the technical ability and literacy ability. One of the lead volunteer summarized her duties as “ ... some of my duties is to identify those that have difficulties in completing assigned tasks. I then work with those and assisting them. If there is a volunteer having difficulties with completing a form. I then do a practical with him or her”. Studies by (Kabonga, 2015; Morton et al., 2018) established the need for continuous mentoring and support for community volunteers. Though appreciating the importance of mentoring, Morton et al. (2018) cautions that “people chosen to be mentors need to be hard-working, to have the ability to do in-service training of caregivers, to manage groups of caregivers and to lead by example”. Kabonga (2018) argues that both peer to peer mentoring and program staff mentoring are important in ensuring data quality. The goal of any M and E system is to produce data of good quality characterized by consistency, timeliness and completeness to enable strategic decision making (World Bank, 2011). A variant form of peer to peer mentoring is when volunteers conduct their own meetings without the participation of NGO officials (see Kaseke & Dhemba, 2006). These meetings ensure peer to peer mentoring and encouragement in face of daunting challenges. Rodlach (2009) study in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, agrees that members of a voluntary care group can teach each other and encourage each other in face of challenges.

5.7. Challenges of using volunteers in monitoring and evaluation

As shown above, volunteers play important roles in M and E of NGO led development projects. Despite this, there are several challenges that NGO A highlighted in using volunteers to carry out M and E roles. By its nature, M and E is a technical undertaking. The majority of the volunteers despite the trainings they undergo, they lack the technical aptitude required in carrying out M and E roles. The majority of volunteers working with NGO A are middle to old women with literacy problems and this is creating challenges in undertaking of M and E roles (De la Torre & Unfried, 2014). This was highlighted by M and E official of NGO A “ ... indeed these volunteers are important to us as they carry out several M and E roles but the challenge that we are facing is that some of the volunteers lack the capacity to meet the demands of M and E assigned to them. M and E involves a lot of data collection using different data collection forms. Though we train these volunteers in the use of the data collection, clearly some of them are failing to meet the required standard. It is as a result of the nature of volunteers that we are using, and I think it’s high time we consider the calibre of people who volunteer to work with the organisation”. This finding is also confirmed by Mthethwa and Jili (2016) who argues that those that perform M and E roles may not have the knowledge, skills and competence to perform M and E roles consequently affecting the utility of M and E. As a solution Mthethwa and Jili (2016) suggests that there is need to attract and retain skilled and motivated individuals to perform M and E roles. Thus in the context of volunteerism, organisations should allow skilled and competent volunteers to perform M and E roles.

Another challenge relates to data management and protection. From the study it emerged that the volunteers maintain confidential data of people living with HIV and AIDS. These data are stored in volunteers’ households. An interviewed M and E officer expressed concern regarding undue access to the data by family members of the volunteer. This is despite the signing of confidentiality clause by the volunteers. Elsewhere in Madagascar, Smith et al. (2013) unlike this study discovered best practise among volunteers in terms of documentation and data management. This was attributed to continuous capacity building.

Volunteers in Chegutu district, just like elsewhere in Zimbabwe are performing M and E roles in the context of economic challenges. This is further exacerbated by the fact that they receive no incentives from NGO A. As established by Govo (2015) funding for volunteerism is dire in Southern Africa. Incentives are vital in the motivation of volunteers (see Bhiri et al, 2004; Kabonga, 2015; Madziva & Chinouya, 2017; Smith et al., 2013). As a result of lack of incentives, dedication of volunteers to M and E roles has significantly declined. This is reflected by low attendance during meetings and simply failing to carry out the assigned work. NGO official submitted that “ ... it is a herculean task to work with volunteers. I believe this has to do with lack of incentives. You assign

work to them and expect it to be done but alas ... you visit them to collect the work they will tell you stories. We cannot put pressure on them because we are not paying them anything”. That is why Patel et al. (2007) concludes that people facing challenges are highly unlikely to volunteer. It is difficult to expect volunteers facing economic challenges to be wholly dedicated to M and E voluntary duties. A study by Smith et al. (2013) discovered that poor performance by volunteers is a function of lack of supervisory visits by coordinating agencies. Thus, there is need for continuous mentoring to optimize the performance of volunteers. For Graham et al. (2006) “training of community volunteers could also enhance the quality of service delivery”.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

This research was a qualitative study of the contribution of volunteerism to monitoring and evaluation of NGO projects using the case study of a NGO in Chegutu district. The purpose of the research was to extend the frontiers of knowledge given lack of studies on the nexus between formal volunteerism and M and E. It emerged from the study that NGOs rely on volunteers for performance of several M and E functions. These functions include data collection. Data collected by volunteers is used by M and E officials for reporting purposes. In Zimbabwe, the targeting process of NGO beneficiaries is superintended by M and E officials. Thus, volunteers assist in correct targeting. Moreover, other duties of volunteers in M and E include peer to peer mentoring and beneficiary verification. However, despite the important roles of volunteers in M and E, it also emerged there were data storage and management problems. Performance of M and E roles may be affected as volunteers struggle to sustain their livelihoods. As volunteers are not paid incentives, their commitment to M and E roles decline with increase in economy difficulties. Given these problems encountered in performance of M and E duties the study recommends the following;

- It is important to provide stipends to volunteers to ease their burdens. As volunteers face economic difficulties, their commitment to volunteerism declines. Thus stipends may assist to keep volunteers motivated as they perform various M and E duties.
- As some volunteers have low literacy levels, continuous technical building helps to improve the quality of data collected by volunteers.

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