

Impact of Volunteerism on Volunteers, Communities, Service Recipients and Organizations: The Case of St. Martin Catholic Social Apostolate and L'arche, Nyahururu, Kenya

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Abstract

Volunteerism plays a critical role in strengthening community development initiatives, particularly within faith-based and civil society organizations. Despite its growing importance, there remains limited empirical documentation of how volunteerism simultaneously affects volunteers, service recipients, communities, and host organizations, especially in African contexts. This study examined the impact of volunteerism on volunteers, host organizations, service recipients, and the wider community through a case study of St Martin Catholic Social Apostolate and L'Arche in Kenya. Grounded in Maslow's Theory of Human Needs and Moral Foundations Theory, this study employed a mixed methods approach involving surveys, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews with volunteers, organizational staff, and community members.

The findings demonstrate that volunteerism contributes to personal growth, skills development, and enhanced well-being among volunteers. At the organizational level, volunteer engagement expanded program reach, strengthened institutional credibility, and enhanced operational capacity. Service recipients and the community benefited through improved access to services, social inclusion and community resilience. Despite these benefits, the study identifies structural, social and logistical challenges. The paper concludes that structured volunteer management, capacity building, and community participation are essential for sustaining volunteer-driven development outcomes. The study contributes context-specific evidence to the literature on volunteerism and community-based development in the Global South.

Keywords: Volunteerism, community-based development, organizational impact, faith-based organizations, non-profit organizations, impact assessment, civil society, Kenya

1. Introduction

Volunteerism is widely recognized as a cornerstone of social development, civic engagement, and community resilience across diverse contexts. Globally, volunteers contribute time, skills, and social capital to address social, economic, and humanitarian challenges, often filling gaps where state and market mechanisms are limited (Tsai et al., 2024). Across the Global South, volunteers play a critical role in delivering social services, strengthening community cohesion, and extending organizational reach to marginalized populations (Smith et al., 2022). In Kenya, volunteer-driven initiatives, according to Wakiaga, Odary and Masha (2024), are central to addressing persistent challenges such as poverty, child vulnerability, disability exclusion, and psychosocial distress. Despite the prominence of volunteerism in practice, empirical evidence on its multidimensional impact, particularly within faith-based organizations, remains limited and underdocumented in academic literature.

This paper addresses this gap by examining volunteerism through the institutional experience of St. Martin Catholic Social Apostolate and L'Arche Kenya. The “twin” organizations have a common heritage and shared resources; human, physical and financial to capitalize on each other's strengths. The two organizations share office spaces and operate in the same geographical area, which is Laikipia, Nyandarua, Baringo and Nakuru County. Both organizations are located in Nyahururu town in Laikipia County, 200 km North of Nairobi, Kenya. St. Martin CSA exists to strengthen community capacity and systems that care for and empower vulnerable and marginalized people in mutually transformative relationships. L'Arche Kenya was founded in 2008, initially as a project of St. Martin CSA, and later registered as a separate Trust with the sole mission of making known the gifts of adults with intellectual disabilities through mutually transforming relationships. The two organizations envision a more just and inclusive society in which communities uphold the dignity and respect the voices of vulnerable and marginalized people for the integral human development of all. L'Arche Kenya runs 2 model homes in Nyahururu, called Effatha and Betania, where adults with and without intellectual disabilities share life as a family, 4 occupational therapy workshops, 4 production workshops, a gift shop under the Marleen Crafts project and a disability outreach programme. St. Martin CSA runs community-based programmes in children's rights, mental health, peace and reconciliation, youth development, gender equality and livelihood thematic areas.

Existing scholarship on volunteerism has tended to focus either on volunteer motivations or on organizational outcomes in isolation. Studies often examine why individuals volunteer, emphasizing altruism, skill acquisition, or moral obligation, while others assess organizational efficiency or service expansion (Nichol et al. 2024; Tierney et al. 2022). Less attention has been paid to volunteerism as a relational and reciprocal process that simultaneously transforms individuals, institutions, and communities. This gap is particularly evident in African contexts, where volunteerism is deeply embedded in cultural norms of mutual aid, solidarity, and collective responsibility.

This study seeks to address this gap by examining the impact of volunteerism through a holistic lens, using St Martin Catholic Social Apostolate and L'Arche Kenya as case studies.

Drawing on Maslow's Theory of Human Needs and Haidt's Moral Foundations Theory, the study explores how volunteerism satisfies personal and social needs, reinforces moral identity, and contributes to organizational and community transformation. By adopting a mixed methods approach, the study captures both measurable outcomes and lived experiences of volunteers, staff, and service recipients.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to both theory and practice. Empirically, it provides context-grounded evidence on volunteerism within a faith-based organization operating in a low-resource setting. Conceptually, it demonstrates how volunteerism functions as a mechanism for human development, social cohesion, and institutional sustainability. Practically, the findings offer insights for organizations seeking to strengthen volunteer management, enhance impact, and sustain engagement over time.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptualizing Volunteerism

Volunteerism is commonly understood as the voluntary provision of time, skills, and services for the benefit of others without expectation of financial compensation. It is both a social practice and a moral expression, shaped by cultural norms, institutional contexts, and individual motivations (Kropf, 2021). In many African societies, volunteerism is closely linked to traditions of communal support and collective responsibility, where helping others is viewed not as optional charity but as a shared social obligation.

Scholarly literature emphasizes that volunteerism extends beyond service provision to encompass identity formation, social integration, and moral development (Mersianova et al., 2024). Volunteers often derive meaning, belonging, and purpose through their engagement, while communities benefit from enhanced social capital and strengthened networks of trust. Within faith-based organizations, volunteerism is further infused with spiritual values, ethical commitments, and a sense of calling, which can deepen engagement and resilience.

2.2 Theoretical Perspectives on Volunteerism

This study is anchored in Maslow's Theory of Human Needs and Haidt's Moral Foundations Theory, both of which provide valuable lenses for understanding volunteer behavior and impact.

Maslow's theory posits that human motivation is structured around a hierarchy of needs, ranging from basic physiological needs to higher-order needs such as belonging, esteem, and self-actualization (Mustofa, 2022). Volunteerism can serve as a pathway through which individuals satisfy these higher-level needs. Participation in volunteer activities fosters social belonging, enhances self-esteem through recognition and contribution, and enables self-actualization by aligning personal values with meaningful action (Smith et al., 2022).

Haidt's Moral Foundations Theory complements this perspective by emphasizing the moral and emotional dimensions of human behavior. The theory suggests that moral intuitions related to care, fairness, loyalty, authority, and sanctity shape individual actions (De Giorgis, Gangemi & Damiano, 2022). Faletahan (2023) posits that volunteerism, particularly within

faith-based contexts, often draws upon these moral foundations, reinforcing values of compassion, solidarity, and service. Volunteers are not only motivated by rational considerations but by deeply held moral commitments that guide their engagement.

Together, these theories underscore volunteerism as both a psychological and moral process, linking individual fulfillment with collective well-being.

2.3 Volunteerism and Individual Outcomes

A substantial body of literature highlights the benefits of volunteerism for individual volunteers. Participation has been associated with enhanced skills, increased self-confidence, expanded social networks, and improved psychosocial well-being. Volunteers often acquire practical competencies, such as communication, leadership, and problem-solving, which can enhance employability and personal development (Mersianova et al., 2024).

Beyond skills, volunteerism contributes to identity formation and a sense of purpose. Individuals who engage in sustained volunteer work frequently report heightened self-worth and emotional satisfaction derived from contributing to the well-being of others. In faith-based settings, volunteer experiences are often interpreted through spiritual narratives, reinforcing personal faith and moral identity (Faletchan, 2023).

However, literature also acknowledges challenges faced by volunteers, including emotional exhaustion, role ambiguity, and limited institutional support (Kabonga & Zvokuomba, 2022). Without adequate training, supervision, and recognition, volunteer engagement can become burdensome, leading to burnout and attrition. These dynamics highlight the importance of intentional volunteer management within organizations.

2.4 Organizational Impacts of Volunteerism

From an organizational perspective, volunteers are critical assets that enhance service delivery, expand reach, and strengthen community legitimacy. Kang (2024) asserts that volunteer contributions allow organizations to operate more efficiently, particularly in contexts where financial resources are constrained. Volunteers often act as bridges between organizations and communities, facilitating trust, communication, and participation.

Faith-based organizations benefit uniquely from volunteer engagement due to shared values and moral alignment (Jahani & Parayandeh, 2024). Volunteers who identify with an organization's mission are more likely to demonstrate commitment, adaptability, and resilience. At the same time, reliance on volunteers introduces managerial challenges, including coordination, capacity building, and quality assurance (Brzustewicz, 2022). Effective volunteer management systems are therefore essential to maximize impact and sustainability.

2.5 Community and Beneficiary Outcomes

Volunteerism also generates significant benefits for service recipients and communities. Through direct service provision, volunteers contribute to improved access to education, health, psychosocial support, and social inclusion. Community-based volunteer initiatives

foster collective action, strengthen local capacities, and enhance social cohesion (Nursey-Bray et al., 2022).

In contexts such as Nyahururu, where social vulnerabilities are pronounced, volunteer-driven interventions play a critical role in addressing gaps left by formal institutions. Volunteers embedded within communities possess contextual knowledge and relational proximity that enhance the relevance and effectiveness of interventions. However, literature cautions that volunteerism must be participatory and community-led to avoid dependency or misalignment with local needs.

2.6 Gaps in Existing Literature

While existing studies provide valuable insights (Smith et al., 2022; Mersianova et al., 2024; Kang, 2024; Nursey-Bray et al., 2022), several gaps remain. First, there is limited empirical research that simultaneously examines the impacts of volunteerism on volunteers, organizations, service recipients, and communities within a single analytical framework. Second, African faith-based organizations are underrepresented in volunteerism scholarship, despite their central role in social development (Faletehan, 2023). Third, few studies integrate psychological and moral theories to explain volunteer engagement and outcomes in non-Western contexts.

This study addresses these gaps by offering a holistic, theory-informed analysis of volunteerism within St Martin Catholic Social Apostolate and L'Arche Kenya. By grounding the analysis in empirical data and established theoretical frameworks, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of volunteerism as a transformative social process.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Approach

This study employed a mixed-methods case study design to comprehensively examine the impact of volunteerism on multiple stakeholder groups, namely volunteers, host organizations, service recipients, and the surrounding community. The case study approach was selected due to its suitability for examining complex social phenomena within their real-life institutional and community contexts (Taherdoost, 2022). Given that volunteerism is inherently relational and context-specific, the case study design allowed for an in-depth and nuanced exploration of lived experiences, organizational dynamics, and community-level outcomes.

The mixed methods approach combined quantitative and qualitative techniques to ensure methodological triangulation of findings, enabling the study to capture both measurable outcomes and contextual experiences associated with volunteer engagement. The quantitative component facilitated the systematic assessment of patterns, trends and perceived outcomes of volunteerism, while the qualitative component provided depth through narrative explanations and lived experiences. This design was particularly appropriate given the complex, relational, and socially embedded nature of volunteerism within faith-based and community-driven development contexts.

3.2 Study Context and Organizational Setting

The study was conducted within the operational context of St Martin Catholic Social Apostolate and its partner organization, L'Arche Kenya, both based in Nyahururu, Kenya. St Martin Catholic Social Apostolate implements community-based programs focusing on child protection, disability inclusion, psychosocial support, and social welfare. L'Arche Kenya complements this work through inclusive community living initiatives for persons with intellectual disabilities.

Both organizations work closely with local communities, volunteers, and service recipients across multiple programmatic areas, making them appropriate cases for examining volunteerism as both a social practice and an organizational strategy. The institutional setting enabled access to diverse stakeholder groups, including volunteers, community members, service beneficiaries, and organizational staff, thereby supporting a holistic assessment of volunteerism's multi-level impact.

3.3 Study Population and Sampling Procedures

The study population comprised organizational staff involved in volunteer coordination and program implementation, service recipients benefiting from volunteer-supported activities, and volunteers who included young professionals or students, community volunteers, organizations' Board members, programme management committee members, community counsellors, and foster parents involved with St Martin Catholic Social Apostolate and L'Arche Kenya.

Purposive sampling was employed to select participants who had direct experience with volunteer activities. This approach was deemed suitable because it ensured that respondents possessed the relevant knowledge and engagement necessary to provide informed perspectives on the study objectives.

Volunteers were selected based on the duration and level of involvement in organizational activities, while service recipients and community members were identified through program participation records and community engagement forums. Organizational staff were selected based on their roles in volunteer management and program oversight. A total of 309 respondents were selected to participate in the study.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents by category

Category of respondents#	Population (N)#	Sample (n)#
Young professionals or students#	5#	2#
Board members#	22#	8#
Programme Management Committee members#	37#	13#
Community volunteers#	583#	208#
Community counsellors#	12#	4#
Foster parents#	24#	8#
Top organization managers#	4#	4#
Project coordinators#	10#	4#
Frontline staff in organizations#	20#	8#
Total#	717#	259#

Similarly, purposive sampling was used to identify service recipient respondents from whom data were collected, and their distribution is indicated in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of service recipients by category

Service Recipients Group#	Total#
Caregivers of people with mental illness#	10#
Recoverees #	10#
Parents of children with disabilities #	10#
Parents of children in need of care and protection#	10#
Survivors of human rights violations #	10#
Total#	50#

3.4 Data Collection Methods

Before conducting the research, authorizations such as the Institutional Ethics and Review Certificate (IERC) and a research permit from the National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI) were obtained. This was followed by carrying out the pilot study, testing for validity and reliability, and revising the instruments where necessary. The main study entailed collecting data from the respondents by administering the instruments, which was done by the seven research assistants.

3.4.1 Questionnaires

Structured questionnaires were administered primarily to volunteers and service recipients. The questionnaires captured demographic information, motivations for volunteering, perceived personal, social and professional benefits, challenges encountered during volunteer engagement, and observed community and organizational outcomes. Likert scale items were included to quantify perceptions and experiences, enabling descriptive statistical analysis.

There were also open-ended items that allowed qualitative elaboration where necessary.

3.4.2 Key Informant Interviews

Key informant interviews were conducted with selected organizational leadership, program coordinators, and experienced volunteers. These interviews explored volunteer management practices, institutional benefits and challenges, sustainability concerns, capacity building, perceived community impact, and the broader developmental role of volunteerism. The interviews followed a semi-structured guide, allowing flexibility to explore emerging themes while maintaining alignment with the study objectives.

3.4.3 Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions were conducted with service recipients and community members. These discussions enabled participants to collectively reflect on their experiences with volunteer-driven interventions, perceived changes in service access, social relationships, and community dynamics. The group setting facilitated rich interaction and validation of shared experiences.

3.4.4 Document Review

Secondary data were collected through review of organizational documents, including program reports, volunteer records, and monitoring and evaluation tools. This data provided contextual background and supported the triangulation of primary data.

3.5 Data Analysis Procedures

Quantitative data were coded and analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques. Frequencies, percentages, and cross-tabulations were used to identify trends and patterns related to volunteer demographics, motivations, benefits, and challenges. Results were presented using tables and figures consistent with those in the original paper.

Qualitative data from open-ended questionnaire responses, interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed and analyzed thematically. Responses were reviewed, coded and grouped into thematic categories reflecting recurring patterns and significant narratives. This process enabled the integration of participant voices into the interpretation of findings and strengthened analytical depth.

The mixed-methods approach allowed for data triangulation, whereby quantitative trends were interpreted alongside qualitative explanations, enhancing the credibility and robustness of the findings.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the research process. Participation in the study was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents prior to data collection. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw at any stage, and the intended use of the findings.

Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by excluding personal identifiers from data

analysis and reporting. Data were used strictly for academic and organizational learning purposes.

3.7 Methodological Limitations

While the study provides valuable insights, certain limitations are acknowledged. The use of purposive sampling limits the generalizability of findings beyond the organizational contexts of St Martin CSA and L'Arche Kenya. Additionally, reliance on self-reported data introduces the potential for response bias, particularly in relation to socially desirable responses from volunteers and beneficiaries.

However, these limitations were mitigated through triangulation of data sources and inclusion of multiple stakeholder perspectives, strengthening the overall validity of the findings.

3.8 Rigor and Trustworthiness

To enhance rigor, the study employed consistent data collection tools, triangulated data sources, and systematic analysis procedures. The inclusion of both quantitative and qualitative data strengthened the reliability of findings and supported a nuanced interpretation of volunteerism as both an individual and institutional phenomenon.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Overview of the Findings

This section presents and discusses the findings of the study in relation to the overall objective of assessing the impact of volunteerism on volunteers, the organization, service beneficiaries, and the wider community within St Martin Catholic Social Apostolate and L'Arche Kenya in Nyahururu. The analysis is organized around four key thematic areas: volunteer approaches and techniques, challenges faced by volunteers, motivations for volunteer engagement, and the impacts of volunteerism at individual, organizational, and community levels. Quantitative findings are complemented by qualitative insights from focus group discussions and interviews, and interpreted through Maslow's Theory of Human Needs and Haidt's Moral Foundations Theory.

4.2 Volunteer Techniques and Approaches in Community Engagement

4.2.1 Needs-Based Interventions

Findings indicate that needs-based intervention is a dominant approach utilized by volunteers within St Martin CSA and L'Arche. Volunteers conduct assessments through community dialogues, observation, and surveys to identify unmet needs and service gaps. These assessments inform targeted programming in areas such as mental health, child protection, disability support, peace and reconciliation, guidance and counseling, and substance abuse.

The adaptive nature of needs-based interventions allows volunteers to respond promptly to emerging challenges, including supporting survivors of gender-based violence, conducting home visits, and facilitating foster care arrangements. This approach enhances relevance, efficiency, and sustainability, particularly in resource-constrained environments. By

addressing root causes rather than symptoms, needs-based interventions strengthen community trust and participation, aligning with Maslow's emphasis on meeting fundamental and psychosocial needs as a foundation for human wellbeing.

4.2.2 Participatory Methods

Participatory methods emerged as a central strategy in volunteer engagement. Volunteers actively involve community members in problem identification, planning, and implementation, treating beneficiaries as partners rather than passive recipients. Inclusive forums, focus group discussions, and stakeholder mapping exercises ensure that marginalized groups such as women, youth, and persons with disabilities have a voice in decision-making.

The findings highlight key strengths of participatory approaches, including inclusiveness, contextual relevance, sustainability, and empowerment. Initiatives such as the *Jaza Kikapu* project targeting vulnerable women illustrate how community ownership enhances long-term commitment. These outcomes reflect Haidt's moral foundations of fairness, care, and loyalty, reinforcing collective responsibility and social cohesion.

4.2.3 Capacity Building Approaches

Capacity building was identified as a core volunteer strategy aimed at fostering self-reliance and long-term resilience. Volunteers support individuals and groups through training, mentorship, and linkage to vocational opportunities in areas such as youth entrepreneurship, mental health, peace building, and leadership development.

The study found that youth programs were particularly impactful in linking unemployed youth to vocational training centers and equipping them with both technical and soft skills. This empowerment-oriented approach positions volunteers as facilitators rather than service providers, enabling communities to become active agents in their own development. From a theoretical perspective, capacity building supports self-esteem and self-actualization needs as articulated by Maslow.

4.2.4 Collaborative Partnerships and Advocacy

Collaborative partnerships were found to significantly enhance volunteer effectiveness. Volunteers work alongside local leaders, government agencies, civil society organizations, and religious institutions to pool resources and coordinate interventions. These partnerships enhance credibility, reduce duplication, and support sustainability beyond volunteer involvement.

Advocacy and awareness campaigns further complement these efforts by mobilizing communities around issues such as human rights, mental health, child protection, and gender equality. Peer support models, outreach strategies, and digital platforms expand reach and inclusivity, particularly for marginalized populations. Volunteers often act as bridges between communities and service providers, reinforcing Haidt's moral foundations of care and authority through trusted relationships.

Table 3. Volunteer approaches and their application

Approach#	Description#	Application at St Martin CSA and L'Arche Kenya#	Outcome#
Needs-based intervention#	Tailored response to community needs#	Mental Health, Child Protection#	Relevance, Trust#
Participatory Methods#	Community involvement#	FGDs, community forums#	Ownership#
Capacity-building#	Skill development#	Youth training, mentorship#	Sustainability#
Collaborative partnerships#	Multi-sector engagement#	Government, NGOs#	Resource leverage#
Advocacy and awareness#	Rights sensitization#	Gender, mental health#	Civic awareness#

4.3 Challenges Faced by Volunteers and Mitigation Strategies

4.3.1 Nature of Volunteer Challenges

Despite the positive impacts of volunteerism, the study identified several challenges affecting volunteer effectiveness. These challenges were categorized into structural, social, and logistical constraints.

Structural challenges included limited resources such as food, clothing, and transport, inadequate training for handling complex cases, delays in case processing, and poor communication infrastructure. Social challenges involved stigmatization, lack of community participation, favoritism by local leaders, resistance from beneficiaries, and cultural barriers that undermined volunteer authority. Logistical challenges included insecurity in certain areas, long distances, time constraints due to balancing paid work and volunteer roles, and inconsistent network connectivity.

These challenges contributed to emotional strain and fatigue among volunteers, particularly those working with highly vulnerable populations. However, findings also indicate that overcoming these challenges strengthened volunteer resilience and commitment.

Table 4. Challenges faced by volunteers

Challenge Category#	Key Issues Identified#	Source#
Structural#	Limited resources, delayed cases#	Questionnaires, FGDs#
Social#	Stigma, favoritism, resistance#	FGDs#
Logistical#	Distance, insecurity, time#	Questionnaires#

4.3.2 Mitigation Strategies

Volunteers proposed several strategies to address these challenges. Key among them were regular training and capacity building, provision of transport and logistical support, recognition and certification of volunteer contributions, improved communication and networking, and gender balanced volunteer recruitment.

Collaboration with government agencies and systematic follow-up on beneficiaries, particularly vulnerable children, was emphasized as critical for sustainability. These mitigation strategies reinforce both Maslow's emphasis on support and security needs and Haidt's focus on collective moral responsibility.

4.4 Motivations for Volunteer Engagement

Findings from questionnaires and qualitative responses reveal that volunteer motivation at St Martin CSA and L'Arche Kenya is predominantly community-oriented rather than self-serving. High levels of agreement were recorded for motivations such as giving back to the community, contributing to the organization's mission, making a difference in people's lives, and developing skills and teamwork capacities. In contrast, motivations linked to boredom or social comparison recorded high levels of disagreement. These findings demonstrate that volunteerism functions as a service mechanism as well as a pathway for personal empowerment and identity formation.

Qualitative findings further revealed that organizational teachings, encouragement from community leaders, parental influence, and personal passion for advocacy and human rights were significant motivators. Many volunteers viewed engagement as an opportunity for learning, career development, and moral fulfillment. The coexistence of altruistic and self-development motivations aligns with a broader understanding of volunteerism as a mutually beneficial social practice. These motivations align strongly with Haidt's moral foundations of care and sanctity, as well as Maslow's higher-order needs of belonging and self-actualization.

Table 5. Volunteer motivation and reported benefits

Motivation Type#	Evidence from Data#	Related Benefit#
Altruistic#	Giving back to the community#	Social cohesion#
Skill development#	Career experience#	Employability#
Moral values#	Faith and teachings#	Commitment #

4.5 Impacts of Volunteerism

4.5.1 Impact on Individual Volunteers

The study revealed significant positive outcomes for volunteers across social, personal, and professional dimensions. Volunteers reported increased self-confidence, enhanced interpersonal skills, and improved understanding of social issues affecting their communities. Many respondents indicated that volunteering strengthened their sense of purpose and belonging.

From a professional perspective, volunteers highlighted the acquisition of practical skills such as communication, teamwork, leadership, and problem-solving. These skills were perceived as transferable to employment and civic engagement contexts. The findings suggest that

volunteerism serves as an informal learning platform, particularly valuable in contexts where access to formal training opportunities may be limited.

These findings underscore the role of volunteerism as a capacity-building mechanism, contributing to individual empowerment while simultaneously strengthening community-oriented human capital.

4.5.2 Impact of Service Recipients

Service recipients consistently reported positive experiences associated with volunteer-supported services. Respondents emphasized improved access to support, increased emotional encouragement and enhanced quality of service delivery. Volunteers were perceived as approachable, compassionate, and responsive to community needs.

Importantly, service recipients viewed volunteer involvement as charity as well as relational support that fostered dignity and inclusion. This highlights the relational dimension of volunteerism, where social interaction and trust-building are significant as material assistance.

The findings suggest that volunteerism enhances the effectiveness of service delivery by complementing organizational resources with human connection, thereby improving both perceived and actual outcomes for beneficiaries.

4.5.3 Community-Level Impacts

At the community level, volunteerism was associated with strengthened social cohesion, increased awareness of social issues, and improved collective responsibility. Community members reported that volunteer activities fostered collaboration, reduced isolation, and encouraged participation in communal initiatives.

Volunteer presence within communities contributed to positive role modeling, particularly for young people. The visibility of volunteers engaged in service reinforced norms of mutual support and civic responsibility. These findings position volunteerism as a catalyst for community resilience and social capital formation. This highlights that beyond individual outcomes, volunteerism plays a structural role in reinforcing communal values and sustaining collective action.

4.5.4 Organizational Impact of Volunteerism

From an organizational perspective, St Martic CSA and L'Arche Kenya benefited significantly from volunteer engagement. Staff reported that volunteers enhanced program reach, reduced operational strain, and introduced diverse skills and perspectives into organizational processes.

Volunteers were also identified as ambassadors of the organization within communities, strengthening trust, legitimacy, and community ownership of programs. However, organizational staff also noted challenges related to volunteer coordination, supervision, and sustainability, particularly in contexts of limited resources.

These findings emphasize that while volunteerism adds value, it requires deliberate management structures to ensure effectiveness and sustainability. Volunteer engagement must therefore be viewed as a strategic organizational investment rather than a supplementary activity.

4.6 Conceptual Framework of the Study

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework guiding this study on volunteerism within St Martin Catholic Social Apostolate and L'Arche Kenya. The framework illustrates the relationships between volunteer motivations, volunteer approaches, contextual challenges, and the resulting impacts of volunteers, the organization, beneficiaries, and the wider community.

At the input level, volunteer motivations form the foundation of engagement. These motivations include altruistic values, faith-based commitment, desire to give back to the community, skill development, career advancement, and moral responsibility. These intrinsic and extrinsic motivations influence the level of commitment, consistency, and quality of volunteer participation.

These motivations inform the core volunteer approaches applied by the organizations. As identified in the study, these approaches include need-based interventions, participatory methods, capacity building, collaborative partnerships and advocacy and awareness campaigns. These approaches represent the operational mechanisms through which volunteerism is translated into action. They shape how volunteers interact with beneficiaries, how programs are designed and implemented, and how community ownership and sustainability are fostered.

The framework also recognizes the presence of moderating factors in the form of challenges faced by volunteers. These challenges are categorized as structural challenges, such as limited resources and delayed case processing, social challenges, including stigma, favoritism, community resistance, and logistical challenges, such as insecurity, distance, and time constraints. These factors influence the effectiveness of volunteer approaches by either constraining or shaping implementation processes.

The interaction between volunteer motivations, applied approaches, and contextual challenges produces measurable outcomes across three interrelated domains. First, at the individual volunteer level, outcomes include enhanced skills, personal growth, emotional well-being, social connectedness, and increased civic responsibility. Second, at the organizational level, volunteerism contributes to improved operational capacity, expanded program reach, cost efficiency, strengthened stakeholder relationships and increased institutional credibility. Third, at the beneficiary and community level, outcomes include improved access to services, increased rights awareness, social inclusion, reduced harmful practices, strengthened social cohesion, and enhanced community resilience.

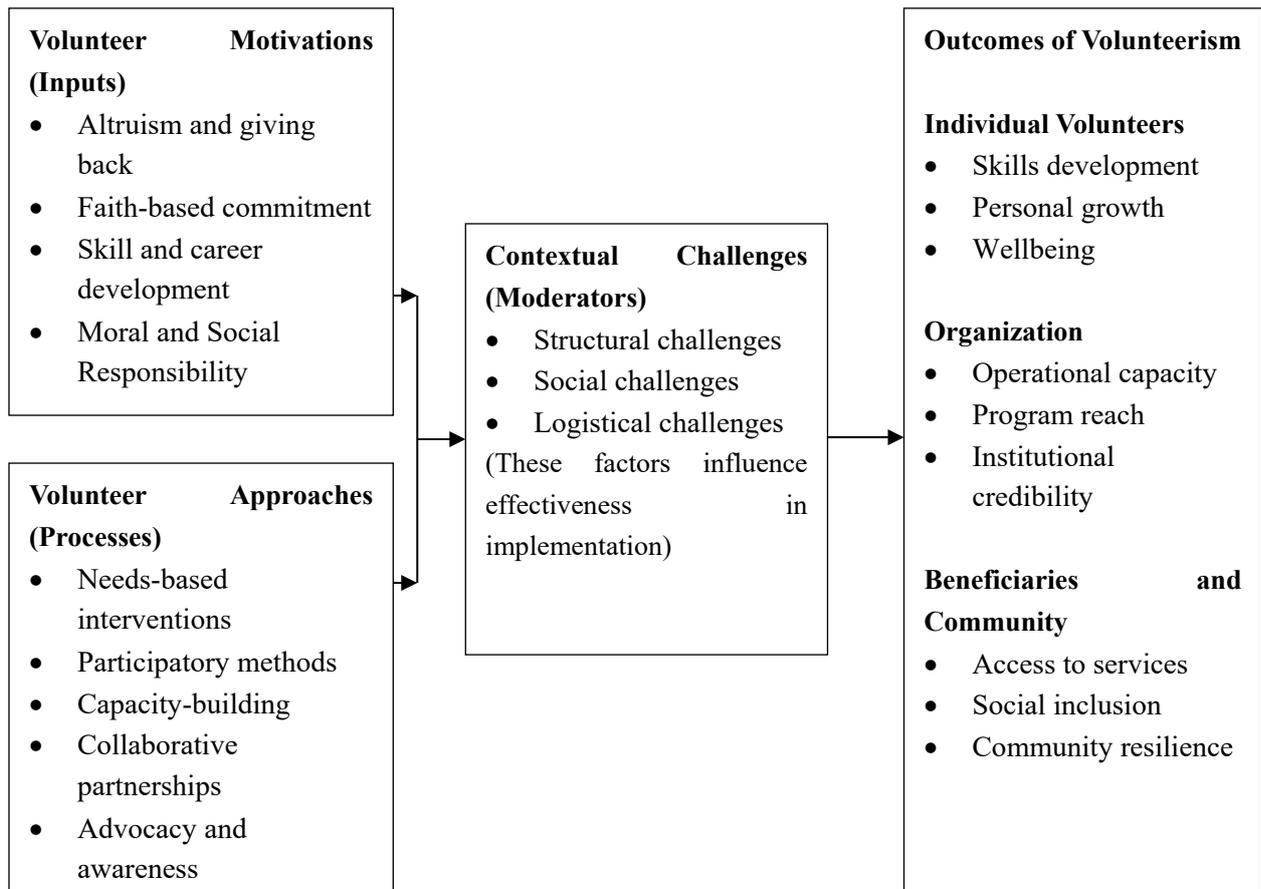


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of volunteerism and its multidimensional impacts

5. Conclusion and Implications

5.1 Conclusion

This study set out to assess the impact of volunteerism on volunteers, host organizations, service beneficiaries, and the wider community, using the twin cases of St Martin Catholic Social Apostolate and L’Arche Kenya in Nyahururu. Drawing on mixed methods data and guided by Maslow’s Theory of Human Needs and Haidt’s Moral Foundations Theory, the study provides comprehensive empirical evidence that volunteerism is a transformative force operating simultaneously at individual, organizational, and community levels.

The findings demonstrate that volunteerism within faith-based organizations is not a peripheral or supplementary activity, but a central mechanism through which social development outcomes are achieved. Volunteers at St Martin CSA and L’Arche employ a combination of needs-based interventions, participatory methods, capacity-building approaches, collaborative partnerships, and advocacy strategies to respond to complex social challenges. These approaches enable services to be contextually relevant, inclusive, and sustainable, particularly in settings characterized by limited resources and high vulnerability.

At the individual level, volunteerism was found to significantly enhance personal

development, psychosocial well-being, and skill acquisition. Volunteers reported increased self-confidence, a stronger sense of purpose, expanded social networks, and the development of transferable skills such as leadership, communication, and problem-solving. These outcomes align closely with Maslow's higher-order needs of belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. The moral motivations underlying volunteer engagement, including compassion, care for others, and commitment to social justice, further reflect Haidt's moral foundations theory, particularly the principles of care, loyalty, and sanctity.

At the organizational level, volunteerism emerged as a critical driver of institutional effectiveness and sustainability. The involvement of volunteers expanded service delivery capacity, enhanced community trust, strengthened stakeholder relationships, and improved organizational visibility and credibility. Volunteers functioned as connectors between the organizations and the community, reinforcing legitimacy and facilitating community ownership of development initiatives. Despite challenges related to coordination, training, and resource constraints, the net effect of volunteerism was a strengthening of organizational mission delivery and strategic positioning.

For service recipients, volunteerism directly improved access to essential services, justice mechanisms, psychosocial support, and educational opportunities. Beneficiaries experienced increased social inclusion and reduced stigma, particularly among children, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized groups. At the community level, volunteer-driven initiatives contributed to enhanced civic awareness, social cohesion, peace building, and the reduction of harmful practices such as domestic violence and early marriage. Community-based economic initiatives further strengthened resilience and collective agency.

While the study identified structural, social, and logistical challenges faced by volunteers, these challenges did not diminish the overall positive impact of volunteerism. Instead, they highlight the importance of intentional volunteer management, adequate support systems, and strong institutional collaboration. Overall, the study confirms that volunteerism within faith-based organizations functions as a powerful catalyst for human development, organizational strengthening, and community transformation.

5.2 Implications for Practice

The findings of this study have several important implications for faith-based and community-based organizations that rely on volunteer engagement. First, there is a clear need for structured volunteer management systems that go beyond informal coordination. Regular training and orientation should be institutionalized to equip volunteers with the skills required to handle sensitive and complex social issues such as mental health, disability inclusion, and child protection. Mentorship and feedback mechanisms should be put in place to enhance volunteer effectiveness, reinforce motivation and retention. Structured support also mitigates challenges related to burnout, inconsistency, and role ambiguity.

Second, organizations should invest in psychosocial support mechanisms for volunteers. Given the emotional strain associated with working with vulnerable populations, providing counseling, peer support spaces, and regular debriefing sessions is essential for volunteer

well-being and retention. Recognition mechanisms, including certificates and public acknowledgment, can further enhance motivation and commitment. Additionally, organizations should prioritize relational approaches to service delivery. The positive experiences reported by service recipients highlight the importance of respectful, human-centered interactions facilitated by volunteers. Strengthening these relational dimensions improves service quality and community trust.

Third, capacity-building approaches should remain central to volunteer programming. Empowering volunteers and community members with skills and knowledge fosters self-reliance and reduces dependency on external support. Programs targeting youth, women, and marginalized groups should continue to emphasize leadership development, vocational skills, and civic engagement.

Finally, collaborative partnerships should be strengthened and formalized. Working closely with government agencies, community leaders, and other civil society actors enhances resource mobilization, reduces duplication of efforts, and supports sustainability. Volunteers should continue to be positioned as bridges between institutions and communities, facilitating trust and inclusive participation. Volunteerism should be recognized as a strategic resource rather than supplementary labor. Effective volunteer programs require intentional planning, clear role definitions, orientation, and continuous support to maximize impact and sustain engagement.

5.3 Implications for Policy

At the policy level, the study underscores the need for greater recognition of volunteerism as an integral component of social development and service delivery. Policymakers should develop supportive frameworks that acknowledge the contributions of volunteers and faith-based organizations in addressing social challenges, particularly in underserved areas.

Policies that support volunteer training, protection, and coordination can enhance the effectiveness and safety of volunteer engagement. Additionally, integrating volunteer-driven initiatives into broader national and county development strategies can strengthen service coverage and community resilience. Government collaboration with faith-based organizations should be encouraged as a means of leveraging existing community trust and moral authority for development outcomes.

5.4 Implications for Faith-Based and Community Organizations

For faith-based organizations such as St Martin CSA and L'Arche Kenya, the study highlights the unique positioning of these institutions to mobilize and sustain volunteer engagement. Shared values, moral commitments, and community trust provide a strong foundation for volunteerism. However, reliance on values alone is insufficient. Faith-based organizations must complement normative motivations with professional volunteer management practices to ensure consistency, effectiveness, and long-term impact.

5.5 Implications for Theory and Research

The findings of this study contribute to the theoretical understanding of volunteerism by

demonstrating the applicability of Maslow's Theory of Human Needs and Haidt's Moral Foundations Theory in explaining volunteer engagement and impact within African faith-based contexts. The study illustrates how volunteerism simultaneously satisfies psychological needs and reinforces moral identity, thereby sustaining long-term engagement.

For future research, there is a need for longitudinal studies to examine the long-term impacts of volunteerism on individuals and communities over time. Comparative studies across different organizational and cultural contexts would also enrich the understanding of how volunteerism operates in diverse settings. Further research could explore the gendered dimensions of volunteerism and the specific experiences of different volunteer groups.

5.6 Final Remarks

This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on volunteerism by demonstrating its multifaceted impact within community development and faith-based organizational contexts. By foregrounding the voices and experiences of multiple stakeholders, the research affirms volunteerism as a powerful mechanism for social transformation when embedded within supportive structures and shared values. Volunteerism emerges as both an act of service and as a collaborative process that strengthens individuals, communities and institutions.

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