

Measuring the Contribution of Volunteering to the Sustainable Development Goals:

The Measurement of Volunteering in the Global South

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1. Introduction

There are regions in the world where the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have a greater relevance and urgency than others, with possibly the most important region in this regard being Africa. The goals aimed at addressing poverty, hunger, health, inequality, infrastructure, and inclusive, safe human settlements are considerably more pressing in the countries of the Global South than the developed economies of the north. To understand and measure the contribution of volunteering towards achieving the SDGs, the tools and methodologies that we use must be appropriate to, and indeed especially targeted at, understanding volunteering in those regions where the SDGs will have the greatest impact.

In the short lifespan of the systematic study of volunteering, much of the initial research development has taken place in developed country environments. In this paper, I present insights from a large scale study of volunteering and giving in South Africa¹, which suggests that volunteering in developing country contexts more generally is distinct from the types of volunteering that have predominantly been measured in developed contexts. I discuss five main distinctions. Firstly, most volunteering and giving takes place *among* disadvantaged people rather than from advantaged to disadvantaged people. Secondly, the majority of people, especially in poor communities, volunteer their time as individuals to help other needy individuals rather than working through organisations. Thirdly, volunteering in informal economic and organisational settings functions differently than in predominantly formalised settings. Fourth, in more communally-oriented societies and cultures, people who give of their time and energy without remuneration often do

¹ Social Surveys Africa implemented this study in Gauteng Province, South Africa in 2013 for CAFSA. It was the first study aimed at measuring and quantifying the full spectrum of volunteering and giving (financial, material and time) in South Africa. Where possible, data from the published CAFSA Report '*I believe I can make a difference*' (2015) has been used. However, since the report focussed mainly on volunteering through organisations and did not include the available data on other forms of volunteering, much of the data presented here is from Social Surveys' additional analysis on the data collected which has not been published to date.

not label these activities as 'volunteering' or as a form of 'work' but as a way of life. Finally, cultural differences between distinct groups within a society fundamentally shape the forms and patterns of volunteering within each group.

The implication of these five differences is that methods for measuring volunteering in the Global South must be able to:

- a) capture volunteering across the entire socio-economic spectrum;
- b) measure the full extent of individual-to-individual volunteering as well as organisation-based volunteering;
- c) measure volunteering in informal as well as formal organisational settings;
- d) ask about volunteering behaviour in ways which do not assume that respondents identify with the label 'volunteer' or consider it a form of 'work'; and
- e) enable analysis (and potential later weighting) of volunteering patterns by membership in different 'cultural' (which may include religious, ethnic or racial dimensions) groups in addition to demographic variables such as age, gender, education level and income level.

I will show in this paper how the measurement tools that are effective in European and North American cultures and economies do not fulfil the above criteria and are therefore unable to capture the true scale and nature of volunteering in developing contexts such as Africa. Weaknesses in the tools include the ways in which questions are asked, but also the contexts in which questions are asked, e.g. asking about volunteering within a labour force survey which immediately constructs it as a form of 'work'. I illustrate this by looking at several 'international' (but developed in the Global North) tools that have been applied in South Africa without significant adaptations. I also argue that technical staff within government statistics agencies generally do not have sufficient understanding of volunteering and civil society to be able to adapt the first world methodological approaches to local contexts. Finally, I include some thoughts throughout the paper on how measures that monetise volunteering or locate it exclusively in the economic domain of work and service provision are insufficient to measure the (social and cultural) contribution of volunteering to the SDGs.

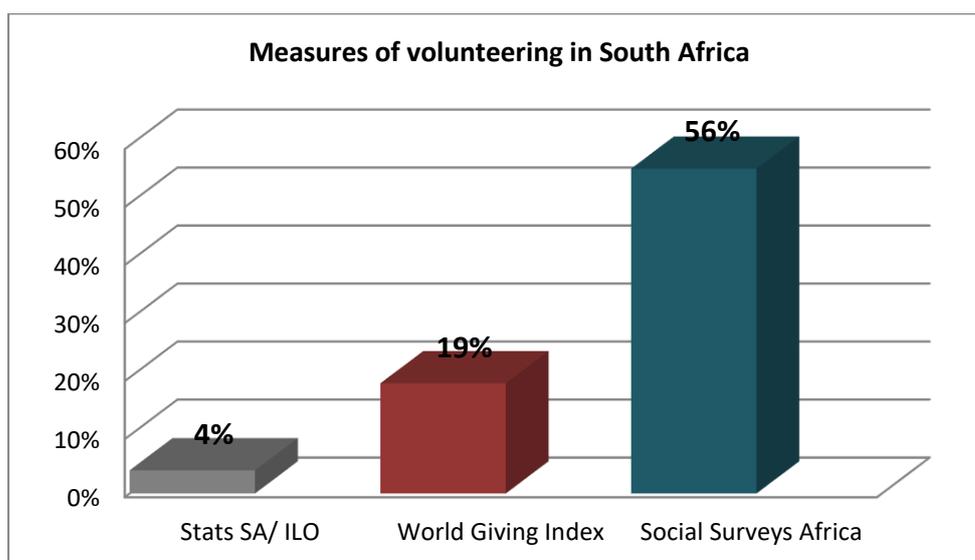
2. Limitations of global tools in the measurement of volunteering in South Africa

Over the last decade, the study of volunteering globally has matured to the point of there being several standardised instruments that are regularly used by countries around the world to generate comparative data on volunteering. Two of the most prominent and widely established are the methodology established by the ILO Manual 2011 and the Charities Aid Foundation's (CAF) World Giving Index methodology. As noted

above, these instruments were originally designed to measure volunteering in Europe, the United States and/or Australia and have subsequently been applied, often without significant adaptation, to other contexts around the world. Both of these methodologies have been applied in South Africa. In 2012, South Africa was included in the CAF World Giving Index (CAF 2012) and 2014, Statistics South Africa most recently applied the ILO Manual methodology in their Volunteering Activity Survey (Statistics South Africa 2014). In both cases, virtually no local adaptations were made to the original methodologies. I discuss the questions asked, the contexts in which they were asked, and the response implications further below.

Figure 1 shows the extremely low levels of volunteering captured by the StatsSA/ILO methodology and the CAF methodology, as compared with the methodology designed and implemented by Social Surveys Africa in 2013. In the rest of this paper, I seek to explain why the Social Surveys Africa study came to such different results as the other two studies, arguing that it is mainly because of the ability of the Social Surveys' approach to capture the full spectrum of volunteering activities in South Africa, rather than limiting our measures to the developed country labels and assumptions associated with 'volunteering.'

Figure 1. Measures of volunteering in South Africa²



The methodological approaches of both these studies were developed to measure volunteering comparatively across the world. The challenge of global studies such as these is always how best to balance comparability across contexts with ensuring the locally appropriate expression of the concepts being measured. If the latter is not adequately addressed, however, the former – comparability – is compromised. Simply using the *same terms and questions* across contexts is insufficient if these questions are understood differently in those different contexts. This may provide highly in-comparable data since different *underlying*

²The Social Surveys Africa and the Statistics South Africa figures reflect prevalence of volunteering in Gauteng Province. The figures for The World Giving Index Survey reflect national giving figures.

concepts are being measured. If, however, the questions are formulated in ways that can account for local differences across contexts, and indeed diversity within each context, then the same methods can be applied globally and remain comparable. The key is recognising the extent to which volunteering, or any other social concept, is impacted on by the extent of differences inherent in the economies and societies of the Global South as compared with the North (and within each of these as well), and ensuring that methodologies take this into account. Endogenous approaches that understand and can interpret local volunteering characteristics are a critical component of any global arsenal of measurement tools. Without accurate tools to measure volunteering per se, it will be impossible to measure how volunteering contributes to the SDGs and the extent of that contribution.

3. Measuring Volunteering for the Global South – Social Surveys Africa’ 2014 Volunteering Study

In 2014, Social Surveys Africa designed and implemented a study aimed at measuring volunteering and giving in its entirety for the first time in South Africa.³ The study had two objectives. The first objective was to develop a methodology that was able to address the shortfall of existing methodologies in determining the prevalence of volunteering and giving in an African context. The second was to explore the multi-cultural and socio-economic factors that influence different types of giving and volunteering. The results of this study and the methodological lessons learned have made it possible to identify why existing standardised instruments for measuring volunteering severely undercount the incidence and misrepresent the nature of volunteering in South Africa, and most likely in other Sub-Saharan countries and developing contexts more generally. Many of the insights gained may indeed be relevant in developed countries as well, where the aspects of volunteering through individual and informal mechanisms may also be present but under-reported through the existing measurement tools.

The study included a desktop review of existing literature and methodologies on measuring volunteering, a qualitative formative phase, four rounds of piloting and refining a draft instrument, and finally a survey of 1252 respondents using a disproportionate random stratified sample that was broadly representative of the population of Gauteng Province, South Africa. The instrument that was carefully developed through the extensive formative research and piloting used a series of sympathetically formulated open-ended questions – both formulated very openly as a question, and allowing respondents to list their activities freely, without pre-determined responses – to elicit respondents’ own understandings of “giving time [or money or goods] ... to either individuals or organisations”. The responses were then post-coded and quantified for the analysis.

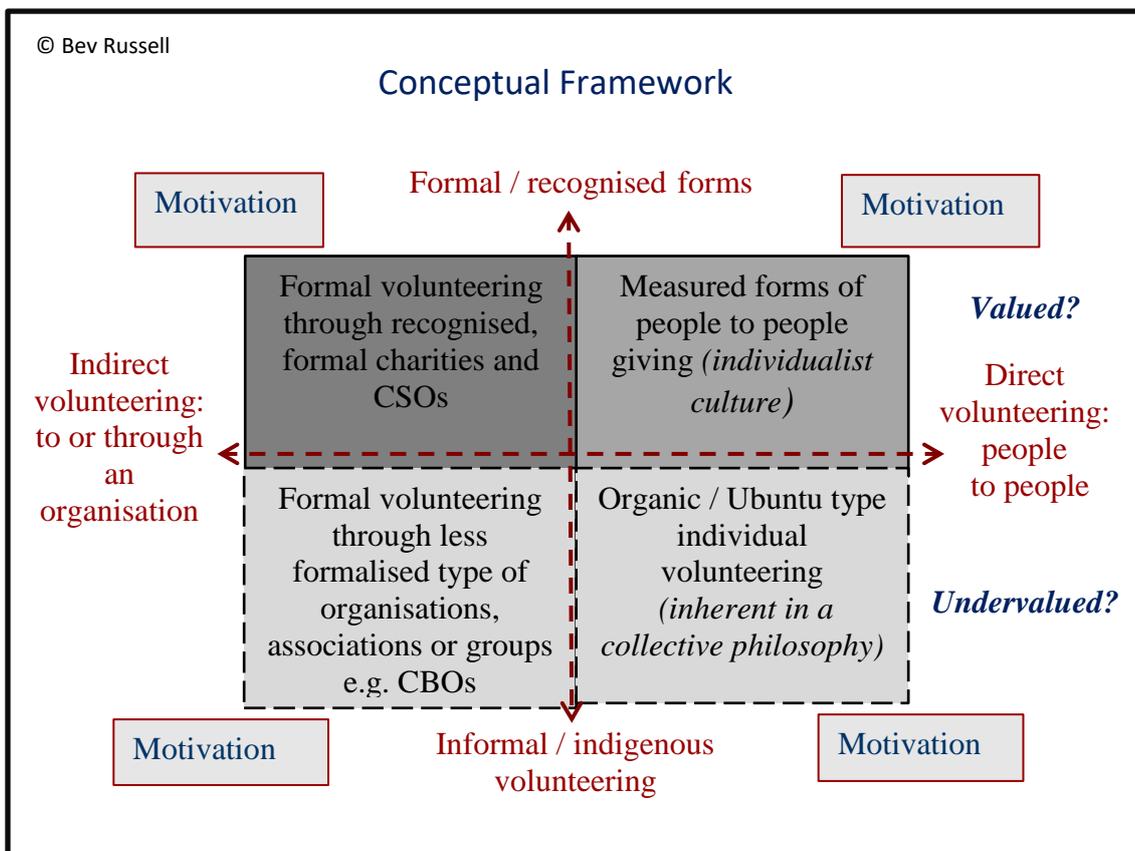
³ The study was commissioned by CAFSA

Conceptual framework

Figure 2 below visualises the conceptual framework developed for the study. The four quadrants represent the four types of volunteering in South Africa. The X axis deals with the type of volunteering: on the one hand, volunteering through formal, recognised CSOs or volunteer involving organisations (VIOs), and on the other hand direct people to people volunteering. The latter tends to account for considerably higher numbers of volunteers globally (UN Volunteers, 2015) although the academic literature, and indeed the standard methodologies as we shall see appears to favour volunteering through VIOs.

The Y axis deals with the extent to which the volunteering is part of the formal or informal economy. In an African scenario, traditional developed country approaches used to measure volunteering tend to pick up volunteering that occurs in the top two quadrants, as this reflects the types of volunteering typical in those types of economies. The volunteering that is more difficult to measure, as it falls outside of the formal economy and therefore cannot be accessed through formal data collection mechanisms, are the types of volunteering in the bottom two quadrants.

Figure 2. Conceptual framework



The bottom left quadrant reflects volunteering through informal organisations such as community-based organisations, home-based care groups and small co-ops. Because these organisations themselves are

located in the informal economy, and therefore not on the grid, it is considerably more difficult to measure those that volunteer through them. According to the results of our survey, 84% of all giving through an organisation – including giving of money, material and time - is through ‘informal’ type organisations that are located in this quadrant (CAFSA, 2015). A large proportion of these is mutual aid structures such as ‘stokvels’⁴ and ‘burial societies’ that play a significant role in the economic life of poorer South African communities. These structures assist members with credit that they would not otherwise have access to and special financial needs such as the costs of traditional funerals (UNDP, 2003) but also provide the context for forms of giving through mutual aid and community engagement beyond the individual financial needs of members.

Other organisational types that the survey identified and which fall into this quadrant include self-help organisations and religious organisations that provide important social coping mechanisms, particularly for the most vulnerable such as single mothers, child-headed households or families afflicted with HIV and Aids. The contribution of volunteering through these types of organisations would have the greatest impact on goal 1.5 of the SDGs.

“Build the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters” (United Nations, A/RES/70/1).

A significant proportion of the organisations in this quadrant does not have any formal staff and are exclusively made up of volunteers (Swilling & Russell, 2002).

The volunteering that occurs in the bottom right quadrant reflects a reciprocal type of person-to-person volunteering to help neighbours and community members in need. This type of volunteering is an integral part of a collectivist culture, where everyone in the community looks out for everyone else, knowing that when they are in need, they too will be looked after. A key characteristic of this type of ‘unremunerated time for social benefit’ is that participants do not think of it as ‘volunteering’. The results of the study undertaken by Social Surveys Africa would suggest that this type of volunteering is particularly important in terms of contributing towards the SDGs. This reciprocal culture of volunteering is most common in poorer communities where this communal approach to looking out for each other acts as an important safety net in helping to deal with poverty and associated issues of infrastructure deficits, public service deficits, crime, neglect and violence.

An example of this type of volunteering can be seen in the manifestation of hundreds of informal home-based care groups that formed to assist other community members suffering from HIV and AIDS. These

⁴ Stokvels are local savings groups.

groups are generally made up of only volunteers. This trend was first manifest in the early 2000s when the South African Government was in denial around the AIDS pandemic, refusing to provide anti-retroviral drugs and assistance to those dying of the illness. Thousands of poor, often unemployed volunteers, operating both individually and through informal community-based organisations, moved into the vacuum created, providing desperately needed support to sufferers and to the children that were left behind.

The contribution that this type of volunteering made to the AIDS sufferers was enormous, not only for the physical comfort it offered but, more importantly perhaps, for the human contact and personal empathy received. In addition to the importance of capturing the scale and scope of this type of volunteering in our studies, we also need to consider how we measure its value. We have to question whether the worth of this type of volunteering and its contribution to the SDGs, can be judged purely through the use of economic tools that monetize its 'labour' value but fail to capture the vital social dimension.

4. What the findings tell us about how to measure volunteering

I now present some of the findings from our study which illustrate four of my key points above, namely that most volunteering in South Africa occurs among the disadvantaged and not from the advantaged to the disadvantaged; the importance of cultural distinctions in how people volunteer; that many forms of volunteering are not labelled as such by the people who practice them and are not considered as forms of 'work'; and that informal contexts generate different forms of volunteering than formal contexts.

Reciprocal Poor-to-Poor Giving

Too often we think of volunteering and giving in terms of advantaged to disadvantaged. So much of the volunteerism and giving in Africa is about the volunteering and giving of ordinary people, many of whom are historically socially and economically marginalised, to other ordinary poor people (UNV 2011, Everett and Solanki 2003, Patel et al. 2007, Wilkinson-Maposa and Fowler 2009; Habib and Maharaj 2008). This stands in contrast to much of the literature which suggests that those volunteering tend to come from more privileged social economic and educational backgrounds (Voicu and Voicu 2003, Flick, Bittman and Doyle; Reisch and Wenocur 1984). In fact, this is only the case if the only forms of volunteering being measured are forms which operate through formal organisations rather than informal organisations or direct person-to-person giving.

The individual volunteering that we see in poorer communities, undertaken by volunteers from those communities is frequently the only assistance that certain marginalised groups, overlooked by the government, receive. These volunteers are generally unemployed and more often than not Black and or female, can gain critical skills, social recognition, networking, a heightened sense of self-worth and often the

potential of a more formal paid position through volunteering. UNDP South Africa, (2003); Swilling and Russell, (2002); Everett, D., & Solanki, S. (2003).

Because of the particular relevance of the SDGs to the Africa continent, volunteering in this context has a critical contribution to make, and therefore it is just as important that we can measure it, and thereby acknowledge and value that contribution, Africa Progress Panel. (2015). This brings me to our findings regarding different culturally mediated interpretations and practices of volunteering among different groups in South African society.

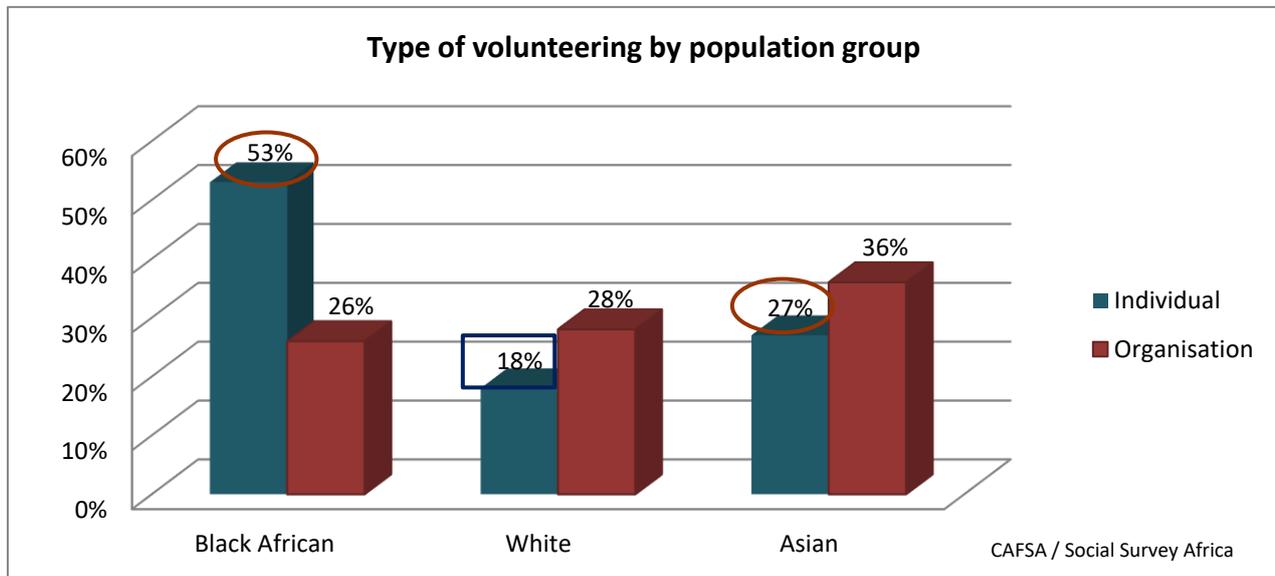
Cultural considerations

Consider for a moment the cultural diversity in a country like South Africa and what this means for the measurement of volunteering. Although we were not looking specifically for cultural differences, and certainly did not prejudge or essentialise respondents based on race, language group or any other characteristics, the differences that emerged spontaneously from the data show the importance of cultural understanding in the design of both our methodology and our instruments.

Clear patterns in the volunteering behaviours of those interviewed correlated with distinct cultural influences present in South African society. These included the diverse cultures associated with Black, White and Asian populations.⁵ When it comes to volunteering behaviour, the survey data suggests these different groups seem to, on average, have significantly different world views in terms of not only their motivation for volunteering and the means through which they volunteer but also whether or not they even perceive their giving behaviours to be 'volunteering'. This is reflected in Figure 3, below.

⁵ South Africa's history of settler colonialism and Asian indentured labour, as well as decades of enforced separation and differential socio-economic opportunities of racially and ethnically defined groups under Apartheid, have resulted in population groups with more distinct ways of living than in many countries. All references to racial categories (e.g. Black, White, etc.) in this paper do not in any way refer to an essentialised understanding of the relationship between 'race', culture and behaviour. However, the general finding that volunteering practices depend on a broader cultural context, and that even within one country there may be several distinct 'cultures' that influence volunteering (however those cultures have been historically and presently developed and defined), is relevant for all countries.

Figure 3. Type of volunteering by population group



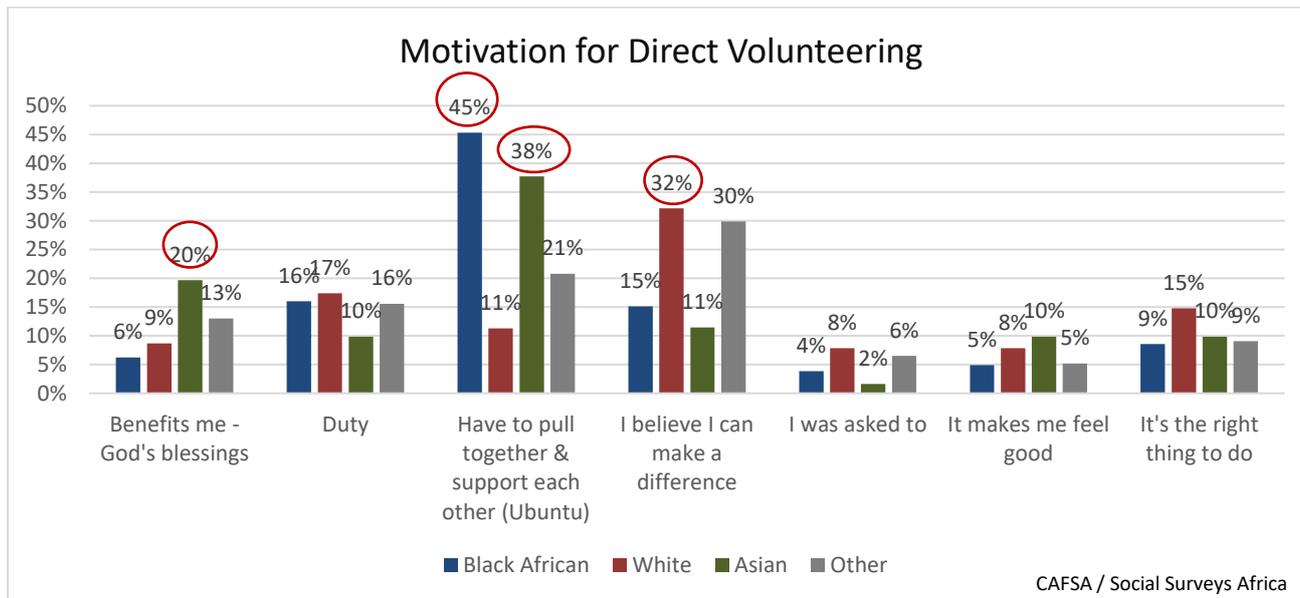
If we look in more detail at the data correlating with the individual versus organisational volunteering patterns reflected in Figure 3, we find patterns that suggest distinct cultural contexts for volunteering. White respondents tend to volunteer through formal organisations and represent the lowest levels of volunteering of any group, reflecting a largely individualistic culture. The most common motivations for volunteering among White respondents were also individualistic, as shown in Figure 4 below, including ‘I believe I can make a difference’. This group’s volunteering patterns are most accurately captured through the ‘international’ measurement tools, since their practices most closely mirror those prevalent in developed countries, although Figure 5 below shows that even White volunteering in South Africa is woefully undercounted by standard tools.

A high proportion of the organisational volunteering by Asian respondents takes place through places of worship or religious civil society organisations, some of which are formal and others informal, which was much less the case for the other groups. Black respondents had by far the highest overall levels of volunteering, predominantly in the form of direct person-to-person, informal volunteering as represented in the bottom right quadrant of our conceptual framework. This volunteering pattern, as well as the explicit motivations given for volunteering, as discussed below, reflect a more collectivist tradition than the cultural assumptions, pressures and practices that underpin White and Asian volunteering. In the collectivist context, volunteering is not considered as a distinct, intentional and labelled activity but is simply a part of everyday life.

As reflected in Figure 4 below, the primary motivation for direct volunteering amongst the Black and Asian population groups is: ‘We have to pull together to support each other’ (Ubuntu). Although a smaller

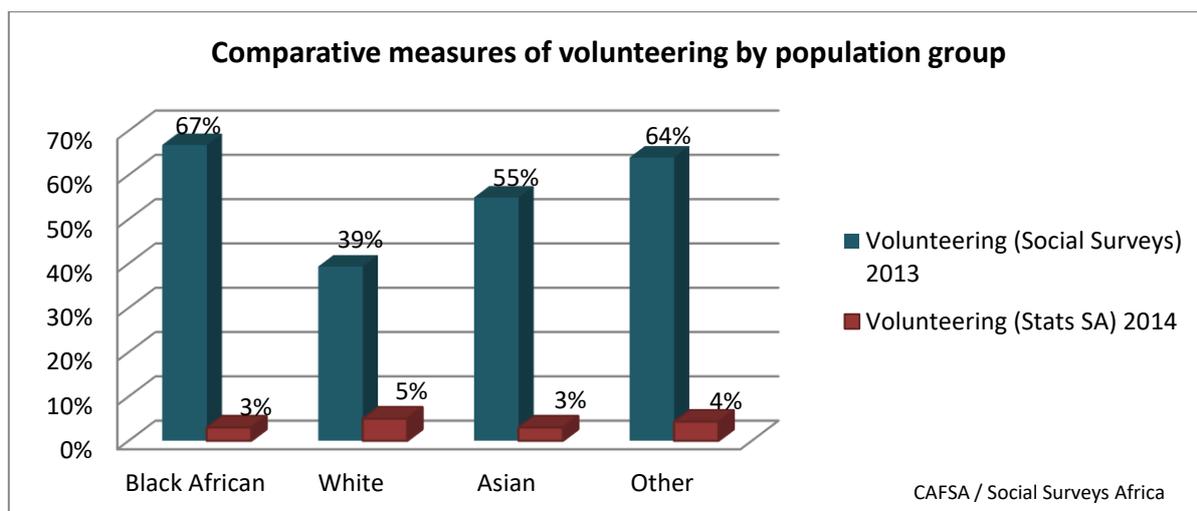
proportion of the Asian population volunteer directly (i.e. not through an organisation), a fifth of those who do, volunteer for spiritual reasons. As mentioned above, the survey used open-ended questions to capture respondents' motivations for volunteering, so the figure below reports on the most common spontaneously mentioned motivations.

Figure 4. Motivation for 'direct' volunteering by population group



As many of these volunteering behaviours fall into the bottom two quadrants of our conceptual framework, current global comparative measurement tools, including those used in the Statistics S.A. Survey and the World Giving Index, are unable to pick up the full extent of South Africa's rich volunteering culture, especially among Black and Asian communities. This explains the low levels of volunteering behaviours among the Black and Asian population groups in the Statistics S.A. results, as represented in Figure 5 below.

Figure 5: Comparative measures of volunteering by population group⁶



Informality and Exposure to Direct Need

Apart from culture, the Social Surveys’ study found that another catalyst for the type of volunteering behaviour by different groups was the level of direct exposure of the potential volunteers, both to those in need and to different organisational structures to address this need.

Exposure or proximity to the potential beneficiary influences whether people volunteer directly or through an organisation. Black respondents who, even in today’s South Africa, tend to live in considerably poorer communities and are surrounded by others who are in need, tend to volunteer directly, often in their own communities where their exposure is greatest.

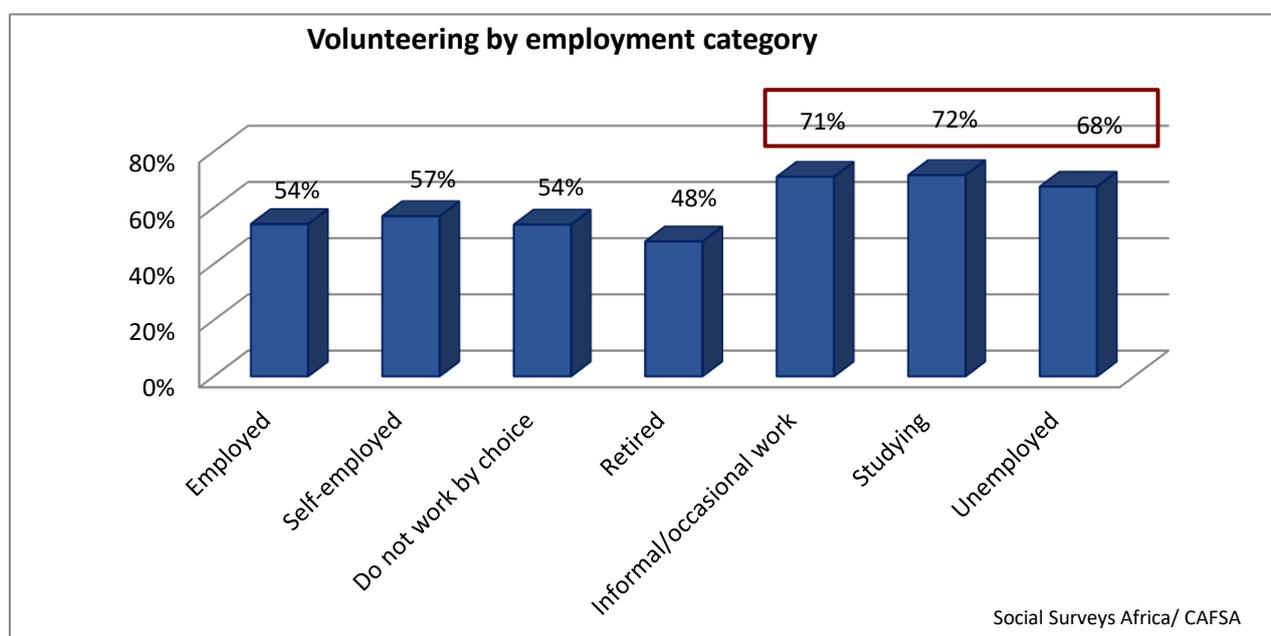
Exposure to formal or informal organisations influences what kinds of structures people volunteer through if they volunteer through organisations at all. The majority of Black volunteers live in communities where most of the organisations are informal community-based organisations.

In these contexts, the spectrum of informality to formality includes many dimensions – not only whether an organisation is officially registered with the state. Such organisations may be registered and may be formally constituted in some way, in the sense of having a name, established decision-making structures and regular activities, but many do not have a name or premises or landline telephones or a web presence or even any paid staff. They are often entirely made up of volunteers. This simultaneously makes such organisations crucial and extremely difficult for standardised measures of volunteering to capture. It is such organisations that we include in the bottom left quadrant of our conceptual framework.

⁶ The Social Surveys Africa figures reflect the Gauteng data and Statistics South Africa reflect national data as a provincial breakdown was not available.

As can be seen in Figure 6, those with the least income tend to volunteer the most. This is not to say that higher income groups in South African society do not give, but they tend to give financially and materially rather than through volunteering their time. The culture of giving that exists across communities in the country suggests that if you do not have money, then you volunteer your time. The motivations given by respondents show that volunteering by students, the unemployed and the informally/ part-time employed is not predominantly about gaining work experience and professional exposure (e.g. as a pathway into ‘real work’). This findings reinforces my point that volunteering is not only or mainly from the advantaged to the disadvantaged, but is often between economically disadvantaged people. It also confirms our finding that many volunteers do not consider time spent on ‘helping’ to be ‘work’.

Figure 6: Volunteering by employment category



5. Question Formulation

To a large extent, the reason why the standard global studies were unable to identify the extent of volunteering behaviour in South Africa, is the way in which the questions were formulated and the context in which they were asked. Both the CAF and ILO questions have gone through rigorous development phases and multiple revisions, yet they retain nuances in their formulation which exclude the majority of South African volunteers.

CAF’s World Giving Index asks about both direct/individual volunteering as well as volunteering through an organisation.

“Have you done any of the following in the past month?”

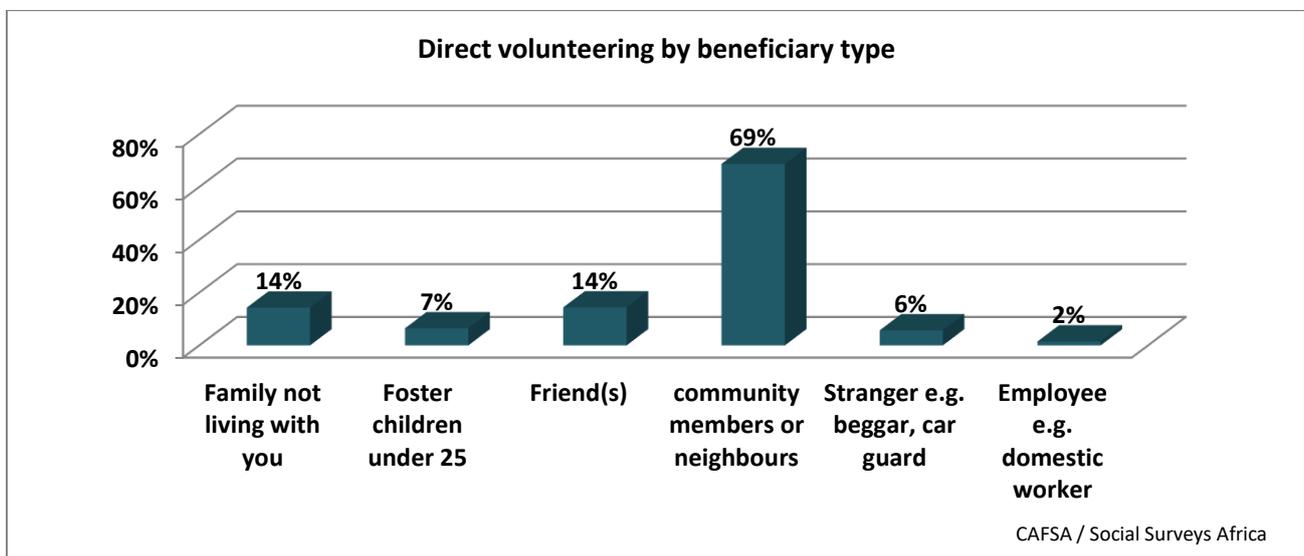
Volunteering your time to an organisation.

Helped a stranger or someone you didn't know" (CAF, 2012)

For volunteering through an organisation, the question depends on respondents' identification with the label of 'volunteering'. As discussed above, many South Africans, particularly in the context of religious organisations and informal community-based self-help organisations, do not consider the time they spend helping others through such organisations as 'volunteering' but rather as a form of reciprocal care or religious/social duty.

For direct volunteering, the formulation of helping 'a stranger or someone you don't know' excludes the majority of contexts in which South Africans volunteer to assist people in need. In the Black community, most assistance goes to neighbours and other community members and in the Asian and White communities, beneficiaries often include domestic workers or other needy people to whom volunteers have regular exposure. Figure 7 clearly shows the importance of exposure as a catalyst to direct giving, with 69% of those that give directly, giving to community members. It is unsurprising then that The World Giving Index ranked South Africa 61 in terms of volunteering (CAF 2012), even though Social Surveys' study found extremely high levels of volunteering.

Figure 7: Direct volunteering by beneficiary type



The ILO Manual on the measurement of volunteer work goes some way to try and address the challenge of self-identification and labelling, as outlined in the following quote: *"The terms 'volunteering' or 'volunteer work' are not used in the recommended module, because experience has shown that they are understood differently in different contexts and are not helpful in eliciting accurate responses"* (ILO, 2011). As a result, Statistics South Africa used the ILO recommended phrasing; *"unpaid non-compulsory work; that is, time*

individuals give....” This, however, was also unsuccessful as indigenous African populations do not consider volunteering to be ‘work’ but rather a way of life, as discussed later.

After four pilot studies that elicited mixed results, Social Surveys Africa eventually found that the best way to approach the question on volunteering, so as to avoid these common pitfalls, was to use a narrative question at the beginning of the interview. Although the results of this question did not necessarily have to be captured, it allowed well-trained interviewers with both strong theoretical understanding and in-depth local contextual knowledge, to explore different activities that could be classified as volunteering, with the respondent. This then enabled them to probe with greater insight in the body of the questionnaire, ensuring that these activities were recorded. The words ‘volunteering’ or ‘work’ were also avoided. There are likely to be similar scenarios in other developing countries where volunteering behaviours do not conform to the commonly held developed world assumptions and therefore require more endogenous approaches to the interpretation and measurement of volunteering.

Our research suggests that it is not about developing a standard set of questions that can be used across countries. It is about the formulation of those questions in a way that is open to recognising a wide variety of ways of volunteering, beyond the ‘labels’ commonly used in developed societies. The focus should be on understanding and consistently measuring behaviours that are both understood and manifest in different ways in different societies. This means that the methodology has to be sufficiently open to allow locally relevant cultural understanding and behaviour to come out.

Is the vehicle carrying the volunteering questions appropriate?

The results of the study undertaken by Social Surveys Africa also suggests that the vehicle that carries the questions has a significant bearing on the respondent’s interpretation of the information being elicited from the question. For example in the Statistics SA Survey, the prevalence questions measuring volunteering were carried in a labour force survey, where all the questions related to the working behaviours of the respondents. As in collectivist cultures, volunteering is not viewed as ‘work’, Black (and some Asian) respondents are unlikely to have thought about giving details of their communal, neighbourly activities. The results of the study are therefore most likely to pick up the volunteering behaviours of those predominately involved in the formal economy, where questions located in a labour force survey would successfully elicit the volunteering activities of respondents. This would help to explain why the Statistics SA results show that the group with the highest level of volunteering are the White population, while the Social Surveys Africa results indicate that volunteering among the Black populations is considerably higher, as can be seen above in Figure 5.

In defence of the ILO Manual, it goes to some lengths to encourage local statistics agencies to adapt the phrasing and questions to be relevant in the local contexts. The question is, however, whether statistics agencies have the dexterity or specialised knowledge to be able to do this effectively. I am sure that in parts of the world, where the local statistics agencies are highly sophisticated, this is entirely possible, although probably not as necessary. In South Africa, where the implementation of a study like this is managed by technocrats that do not have the background understanding of the civil society sector or the power to change how the ILO Manual is applied, suggested formulations are adopted verbatim. This bureaucratic approach to the implementation of the Manual has contributed to the very low figures reported and undermines the efficacy of the tools applied. The results, therefore, when reported in a comparative global context are highly inaccurate, only reflecting a small proportion of the volunteering behaviour in South Africa.

6. Conclusion

The reflections in this paper lead us to some practical recommendations. Firstly, while comparability of data collected across countries and contexts is a valuable aim, the focus should be on a methodology that can capture the same underlying concept across contexts using varying locally appropriate expressions, rather than on applying the same simplified questions and thereby only partially recording local realities. The ILO Manual goes some way towards recognising the need for local adaptation but remains too narrow regarding direct volunteering and too dependent on often missing capacity in national statistical agencies to implement its recommendations appropriately.

While it is tempting to include questions on volunteering in existing surveys, (Labour force or polling surveys) within the African context, this can result in incomplete data, which will fundamentally skew our understanding of where the greatest contributions to and benefits from volunteering lie – namely in disadvantaged informally organised communities helping themselves. By using such methods to measure the contribution of volunteering toward poverty alleviation and other goals, we are contributing to undermining, by hiding and silencing, the very practices we are aiming to understand, while privileging the usual formal, advantaged volunteers who least need recognition and policy support. Any policies developed on the basis are unlikely to provide a supportive environment for the vast majority of South Africa's volunteers and may indeed disadvantage them further.

Whatever methodology is adopted, its effectiveness must be judged primarily by its ability to accurately capture volunteering in developing countries. Only with the creation of a space where the value of volunteering in the Global South can be recognised and its true worth measured, will its contribution

towards the SDGs be possible. As a researcher from the South, the SDG that most resonates with me is number 10.6:

“Ensure the enhanced representation and voice for developing countries in decision-making in global international economic and financial institutions to deliver more effective, credible, accountable and legitimate institutions.”

This also applies to the development of an arsenal of comparative tools that will ensure that the contribution of volunteering in the Global South is equally valued to that of the North. The first step towards this is to examine the assumptions that underpin current global methodologies and the extent to which they present a barrier to the measurement of volunteering in the Global South. These assumptions in effect distort the true value and nature of volunteering in countries like South Africa. Until volunteering in the Global South can be recognised for what it is, on its own terms, we will never fully understand its contribution to the SDGs. The following quote from a report produced by Kofi Annan and Graça Machel’s organisation Africa Progress Panel:

“The SDGs will only succeed ... if they can succeed in Africa” (Africa Progress Panel 2015, p. 8)

So too, if we cannot measure the contribution of volunteering to the SDGs in Africa we will not be able to measure the contribution of volunteering to the SDGs at all.

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