

## **The Good Work: Volunteerism**

Perhaps the first question that comes to mind should be what is volunteerism? Here is how one international volunteer coined the definition for it: having a passion, a committed passion, to work towards something you believe in.

Volunteerism implies a decision, act or purpose undertaken of one's free will without any consideration or expectation of reward. In short, it is work done for no personal gain or return. But, how could this be so, in light of the massive expenses some volunteer organizations incur on their volunteer work force? No gain in return? Whether there is return or not is one's judgment call. All the indications, however, are that the return is in greater proportions in terms of the benefits provided the beneficiary (those being helped) for a small investment. In other words, an investment of \$10 charity dollar provides 100 Birr value in Ethiopia. Therefore, \$10.00 investment will go a long way in helping the poor of Ethiopia.

For one's investment in time, money, or anything else one pleases to give, there is a considerable benefit to either the giver or the recipient. The impact of volunteerism stretches through global reaches. Volunteers who share their money, skills, and time reach out to heal and rehabilitate, build and rebuild lives. They touch the lives of children, the elderly, the disabled, the poor, and every one who needs relief. The volunteers are there during natural disasters. They are there during devastation in wars. They are always there in peace or war time helping the needy. Without their presence, a number of vital services could not have been met. Volunteers pay dearly when things turn for the worst. They become casualties of war and unintended consequences. Their lives, work and generosity touch us all around. They deliver hope, a commodity that cannot be taken for granted.

There are a multitude of reasons and motivations why one wants to volunteer. Some are consumed by guilt. Some want to help friends and family. Others feel wanted. There are those who seek recognition and gain status, or simply to stand up and be counted. For some it is a debt of gratitude. Still others need to keep busy by engaging themselves in activities. The love of travel, curiosity about new cultures, new ideas, strange customs, make new friends, and gain valuable skills are some of the things that come into play. Some use it as an escape from their boredom. There are also those who want the challenge to become agents of change.

No matter the motivations, volunteerism may provide with a chance or venue to bring about a positive outcome. The following reasons could consolidate the intent:

1. The desire to make a difference: this desire attempts to minimize self-absorption and see beyond oneself. There is an immense need for poverty relief, basic education, basic healthcare, clean potable water, basic hygiene, and etc...that could not wait for tomorrow.

2. The discovery of ones strengths, weaknesses, creativity and talents. This will aid in learning social and technical skills that are transferable to any environment.
3. The development of ones sense of independence, self-confidence, self-esteem, and educational enrichment. This will develop into interpersonal, team-building and problem-solving skills.
4. The interaction with others to develop social awareness and compassion. This therefore makes life-long friendships that create challenging and fulfilling experiences for long-lasting memories both in personal and professional relationships. This is a networking opportunity.
5. The opportunity to give time, energy, and skills. It may be a time to use your skills and abilities to the betterment of others and the fulfillment of your own dreams. This may help bring out the leader in you by revealing the persuasive skills, the flowering of the innovative ideas, the ability to exchange ideas, concerns and trends about people and resources to help you with developing your leadership potential.

In the context of Ethiopia, volunteerism has both internal and external components. Historically, communities of different regions and localities have come together to build roads, to put out fire, to till a farm cooperatively, and to contribute for disaster relief as much as they possibly can, just to mention a few. It is a testament for the Ethiopian people that the overwhelming poverty is matched by a pervading generosity of the people to share. In short, there is a tradition of volunteerism in giving and sharing money, time, and skills whether to help individuals or communities.

Ethiopians are well aware of the roles international charity played in the adverse situations of perennial droughts. Without this international aid, the disasters of starvation could not have been averted. Therefore, when we present here the topic of volunteerism in Ethiopia, we are cognizant of the awareness Ethiopians have about the concept and actual implementation of aid. Probably there are more non-governmental organizations today than there ever were. Therefore, it can be assumed more knowledge and information about these charity outfits is available at this moment. However, it is imperative that more active involvement in the creation and implementation of projects by more Ethiopians, both inside and outside the country, must be done. Their contribution in time, skills, knowledge, and money is the one big solution that will change our current situation. The deepening crisis in all facets of life in Ethiopia could be averted by a unified effort of volunteer activities. Ethiopians today are capable of helping in the areas of health training, teaching, financing, organizing, planning, monitoring, etc.... These activities are not only desirable but also essential to bring a much needed relief to the people overall. Most of all, this will bring back the pride we have lost as Ethiopians directly involve in these activities. Remember: Charity begins at home.

The most important of charities could be an effort, a concerted effort, to create jobs. Ethiopians need jobs more than anything else. To create jobs, they need financing. To get financing, loans should be provided. Who would be better positioned to do this? Maybe we should look at organizations like Zema Setoch Lefitih Maheber (Zemasef) (<http://www.zemasetoch.org/>) that runs a microloan financing arm called Meklit, and

help them grow. There are challenges, however. The challenges may not be only bureaucratic, but also our own sense of shortcomings. We may think we do not have time, money, skills, ideas, etc... or all of the above. If we thoroughly search deep in to our hearts, we will be amazed what we could find from inside. The least we can do is contacting local community organizations, churches and the like and ask what type of programs or projects they have for you to help participate. If there are no community organizations around you, search and find the ones you possibly would like to support. The lists provided in [www.arayaonline.org](http://www.arayaonline.org) would help quite a bit in this regard. Find your passion and provide help.

References:

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