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PHILANTHROPY & VOLUNTEERISM:

Youth, Participation and Development

Dear Fellows,

We are now in the midst of preparing for our 2009 Americas Project Colloquium, which will take place October 8–11, 2009. This year's theme is "Beyond the Absence of War: Peace and Stability in the Americas of the 21st Century." We hope to publish the fellows' conference report on the event before the end of the year, and encourage you to visit our Web page to download and read a copy.

I want to thank the fellows who participated in the current issue of *The Americas Project* newsletter, which focuses on philanthropy and volunteerism in the region. For the spring 2010 edition, we invite you to reflect on the bicentennial celebrations that are currently underway in many Latin American countries. Argentina, Chile, Colombia and Mexico will celebrate 200 years of independence in 2010, followed by Venezuela, Uruguay and Paraguay in 2011. Ecuador and Bolivia are commemorating their bicentennials this year. Our newsletter will serve as a space for you to share your thoughts and knowledge on these critical moments in history.

The fall 2010 edition of the newsletter will cover global energy trends, and we are especially interested in receiving contributions from our American, Canadian, Brazilian, Colombian and Venezuelan fellows.

Please e-mail Lisa Guáqueta at lguaqueta@rice.edu if you would like to contribute to either of these issues. I encourage you to propose future topics and give us feedback to improve the new format of *The Americas Project* newsletter.

Happy reading, and we look forward to your contributions!

Best wishes,

Erika

Erika de la Garza
Program Director
Latin American Initiative



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Volunteering and other philanthropic activities are at the center of this edition of *The Americas Project* newsletter. We invited our fellows to tell us about the current state of philanthropy in their countries: participation trends, areas or themes that receive the most attention, historical changes and more. The articles we received not only explore these issues but also delve deeper into the meaning of volunteering and the importance of humanitarian activities in the region, for volunteers as well as the communities and institutions that promote their efforts.

The articles present a region where volunteers — primarily youth and young adults — are actively helping those less fortunate. However, the actual number of volunteers is low, and the fellows offer their thoughts and solutions on how to encourage more people to volunteer, ways to include public and private institutions, and approaches that make volunteering opportunities more accessible. Some of the articles address specific organizations that promote volunteerism and major areas of interest and need. Volunteering, as one fellow reminds us, is "the maximum expression of social capital in action." This can clearly be seen throughout the newsletter.

This edition includes contributions from fellows from Jamaica, Canada, Argentina, the Dominican Republic, Uruguay and the United States. The opening article, written by one of our Argentine fellows, addresses the state of volunteering in the region as a whole.

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Volunteer Work, Participation and Social Capital: Analysis of Citizen Participation Rates

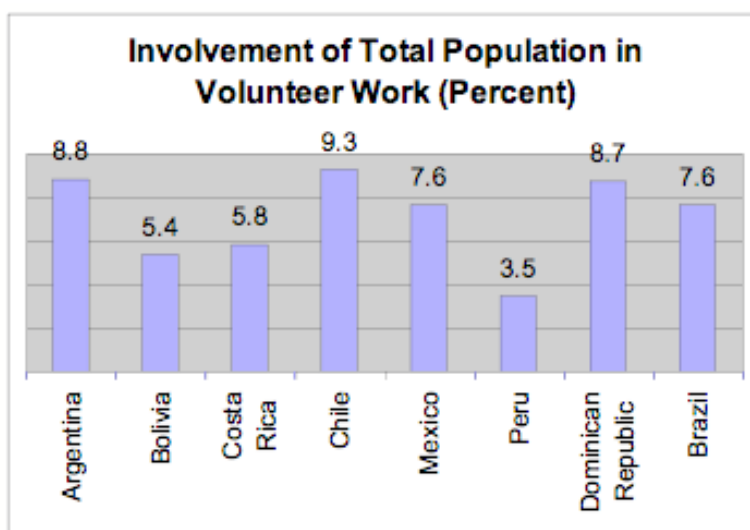
By Argentine fellow Pablo Ava ('08)

Volunteer work, like any form of participation in civil society, has, as academic Robert Putnam¹ has shown, external effects — in this case, social capital. Social capital refers to social contact between individuals and groups that leads to trust and unity, and makes community living possible. It links individuals within a network and builds bridges with other networks.

Various empirical studies have focused on how this disposition toward social participation manifests itself. One of these studies is the Latin American Citizen Participation Index (CPI), developed by the Inter-American Democracy Network with the backing of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).² The model used in this study assumes that a citizen has, in addition to his routine work assignments and leisure activities, time that can be spent directly or indirectly in social activities. In cases where the activities require direct personal involvement, participants determine the outcome of the community or of a collective project. Concepts such as identity, belonging, commitment, activism, volunteerism, solidarity and social responsibility are the added value of this process. The environment in which direct participation takes place varies — political parties and movements, religious or civil organizations such as the nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) devoted to community issues, neighborhood organizations, and even street demonstrations or mobilizations. Citizen participation, in turn, reflects an individual's level of dedication. This participation can warrant both small and large commitments of time and effort, ranging from taking on an executive responsibility to attending meetings, paying fees, making donations or donating work time.

On average, 50 percent of the total population of the eight countries analyzed in the CPI participate in activities linked directly to civil society, though some forms of participation are more common in some countries than in others, depending on the idiosyncrasies and the cultural wealth of each country. For example, of the total participation in volunteer activities, service linked to religious institutions is most prevalent in the Dominican Republic (20.6 percent of the population), Costa Rica (21.8 percent), Brazil (18.5 percent) and Peru (17.3 percent). Volunteer work with a direct link to charity or social aid is the dominant form of participation in Argentina (17.8 percent) and in Chile (18.4 percent). Brazil also has the greatest number of individuals involved in sports-related activities (18.8 percent).

In absolute population terms, 9.3 percent of Chile's population, 8.8 percent of Argentina's population and 8.7 percent of the Dominican Republic's population is involved in volunteer activities. These top three countries are followed by Mexico and Brazil, each with an average of 7.6 percent of the population being involved in volunteer service.



Source: Author's work based on data from the Citizen Participation Index (CPI 2005).

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Furthermore, there are also significant differences by countries according to the age group. In some cases, youth are more involved, such as in the Dominican Republic, which has a participation rate of 21.2 percent among individuals between the ages of 18 and 25. In other countries, the activity is greatest among individuals from 46 to 55 years of age, as in the case of Brazil, which has a participation rate of 21.6 percent for that age group. Socioeconomic status also plays an important role in volunteer work. In Chile, for example, the groups with the highest income levels are the most involved in volunteer work, and in Peru the involvement of the middle class is most common.

Finally, it can be pointed out that in Mexico the intensity and time spent on volunteer work is greater than average. And in terms of work done in the volunteer's own neighborhood or community, the Dominican Republic, with 19.6 percent, ranks highest.

Conclusion

Data from the CPI also show that the different forms of commitment and participation seen in volunteer work are directly related to the meaning of the concept of "participation" in each society. In Brazil, 70.2 percent of the population defines participation as "helping, collaborating, and cooperating"; 61 percent think of it as "getting involved, becoming interested, and being committed." These two groups of thought, in this same order, are dominant in the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Costa Rica and, to a lesser degree, Peru. However, in Argentina, Bolivia and Chile, it is the second response that prevails ("getting involved, becoming interested, and being committed"). The idea of "integrating into a group or joining" is also seen as important in the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, Bolivia, Chile and Peru.

There are varying ideas regarding the reasons people are believed to participate in community-oriented activities. In countries such as Brazil and Mexico, civic involvement is associated with "fun and leisure," whereas in the Dominican Republic, the belief that certain people have "a calling" is most common. By contrast, in Argentina and Bolivia there is a prevalence of less altruistic ideas, such as "personal interest" and "financial motives."

The main reasons, from most prevalent to least prevalent, why it is believed people do not participate are "lack of time," "mistrust" and "lack of information."

In analyzing the consequences of the diversity of situations, Putnam, in his work "Bowling Alone" (2000), finds a strong correlation between a wane in social capital and social consequences — such as lack of security and a decline in education levels — and the weakening of public health and economic growth.

To value volunteer work as a form of participation means to value the very foundations of society. Thus, it is important that we educate our respective communities about the importance of social participation and volunteerism to promote social capital locally and globally. To stimulate volunteerism is to stimulate not only individual positive actions, but also to improve the dynamics of society and its values.

¹ R.D. Putnam, "Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community" (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

² Citizen Participation Index, Inter-American Democracy Network, First Edition, Buenos Aires 2005, http://www.redinter.org/contenidos.php?id_secciones=118&pathAcum=c2VjY2lvbmVz/UHJvZ3JhbWVz/SW5kaWNlIGRIIFBhcncRyY2lwYWNp824gQ2lIZGFkYW5hIDIwMDU=&ACTION=TW9zdHJhcnVuQ29udGVuaWRv&id_contenidos=ODE.

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Strategic Issues for Volunteerism in Canada

By Canadian fellow Joan D'Angola ('08)

Introduction and Background

The volunteer sector plays a pivotal role in current Canadian society, existing in conjunction with the public and private sectors. Indeed, there is increasing interconnectedness and a resultant blurring of boundaries and sharing of power among the public, private and nonprofit sectors.

According to the Canada National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating¹ from both 2000 and 2004, the percentage of Canadians ages 15 and over who volunteered in the year preceding the survey increased from 27 percent in 2000 to 45 percent in 2004. The number of average annual volunteer hours also increased from 162 to 168 over the same time period. However, in 2004, only 11 percent of Canadians accounted for 77 percent of all volunteer hours. A decline in participation levels by this particular group of volunteers would therefore have significant negative repercussions on the Canadian volunteer sector as a whole.²

While volunteer levels in Canada are on the rise, there are numerous strategic issues facing volunteerism in Canada. These include time constraints acting as a barrier, the importance of corporate sector support and the impact of Information Technology (IT) on spreading information about volunteering.

Time Constraints

Lack of sufficient time is cited as the biggest barrier to volunteering among nonvolunteers and existing volunteers alike.³ Canadians are facing multiple, intense demands on their time, with Canadian society seeing an increase in dual-income families. This is likely in response to the rising cost of living, particularly in large urban centers. Soaring housing prices alone are enough to prompt or even require families to spend increased hours at work. Indeed, "for the employed, volunteering could be costly in terms of lost earnings."⁴ This trend then extends into the next time-pressure trend — the need to spend nonwork hours with one's family and to tend to the everyday running of the household. As Jacqueline Luffiman notes, "a greater percentage of employees are assuming more responsibilities in both the work and family spheres (such as child care, elder care, single parenting or working longer hours)."⁵

These time pressures are an external factor that significantly impacts volunteer levels in Canada. Volunteerism must compete for an individual's time in an environment with little time to spare and with abundant choices on how to spend the scarce existing time. While, in general, a lack of time is an obvious barrier to volunteering, Michael Hall et al. discuss the question of whether the barrier has more to do with an actual shortage of time or whether it has more to do with the desire to choose one of the many alternative options for filling spare time.⁶ This leads to the identification of a second and related key strategic issue facing volunteerism in Canada today — the importance of corporate sector support.

Corporate Sector Support

The percentage of volunteers who received some form of support for volunteering from their employer was 57 percent in 2004.⁷ Corporations have a variety of means to support an employee's volunteerism efforts. The most common forms of support are the use of workplace facilities and equipment for volunteer purposes, time off, and accommodation of work schedules.⁸ Other forms of support include promotion of volunteer organizations and encouragement of volunteer endeavors.

Not only is the corporate sector in the position to lessen the time burden felt by volunteers through the use of corporate incentives and support for volunteering, corporations can also provide financial support — as well as high-level endorsement and promotion — for nonprofit organizations, thereby helping to increase public awareness and participation.

Having said this, the relationship between the corporate and volunteer sectors is not one-sided, as corporations stand to gain significant benefits from support of volunteers as well. "Although benefits may not be strictly quantitative, the overall improved morale and working environment are cited as important spin-offs. In addition, companies may see volunteer support as a useful recruitment tool or a chance to equip their staff with new skills."⁹ Furthermore, support of volunteer activities may improve community relations as well as the corporation's reputation, as it is seen as making an important social contribution.¹⁰

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Information Technology

The information technology revolution is changing operations in the public, private and nonprofit sectors alike. For several reasons, including lack of funding abilities and current knowledge, the nonprofit sector is slower to adopt new technologies and is falling behind as a result. One study indicates that a mere 28.6 percent of rural volunteer organizations use a Web site as a communication tool.¹¹

While lack of time is cited as the foremost barrier to volunteering, lack of knowledge about volunteering opportunities also proves a significant barrier, with 22 percent of Canadians in 2004 admitting they did not know how to become involved, and an additional 40 percent identifying failing to be personally asked as a barrier. Only 8 percent of volunteers in 2004 indicated that they used the Internet to find volunteer opportunities.¹² It would appear that there is a “need for recruitment practices to become more sophisticated to respond to a more diverse population of potential volunteers.”¹³

Information technology can fill this void and have a tremendous impact on increasing public awareness of volunteer opportunities and on recruitment practices. Using information technology to promote volunteerism and recruit volunteers would be a new and innovative way to extend personal invitations to would-be volunteers.

¹ “Volunteering in Canada,” National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating (fact sheet, Canadian Centre for Philanthropy, Toronto, 2000), <http://www.givingandvolunteering.ca/pdf/factsheets>.

² Michael Hall, A.J. McKechnie, Katie Davidman, and Fleur Leslie, “An Environmental Scan on Volunteering and Improving Volunteering,” Toronto: Canadian Centre for Philanthropy (2001), http://www.vsi-isc.org/eng/hr/pdf/environmental_scan.pdf (accessed May 8, 2009).

³ Michael Hall, David Lasby, Glenn Gumulka, and Catherine Tryon, “Caring Canadians, Involved Canadians: Highlights from the 2004 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating,” Ottawa: Ministry of Industry (2006), http://www.givingandvolunteering.ca/pdf/CSGVP_Highlights_2004_cn.pdf (accessed May 8, 2009).

⁴ Jacqueline Luffman, “Volunteering on company time,” Statistics Canada Perspectives Cat. No. 75-001-XIE. (2003): 5-11, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75-001-x/00403/6507-eng.html> (accessed May 8, 2009).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Hall, et al., “Caring Canadians,” 2001.

⁷ Hall, et al., “Caring Canadians,” 2006.

⁸ Luffman, “Volunteering on company time,” 2003.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Hall, et al., “Caring Canadians,” 2001.

¹¹ David Bruce and Lindsay Lyghtle, “Use of the Internet by Volunteer Groups in Rural Canada: The Case of Springhill, NS,” Sackville: Rural and Small Town Programme, Mount Allison University (2003), http://www.mta.ca/rstp/internet_use_comm_volgroups_springhill.pdf (accessed May 8, 2009).

¹² Hall et al., “Caring Canadians,” 2006.

¹³ Hall et al., “Caring Canadians,” 2001.

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United States: Volunteerism Built on Inspiration and Perspiration

By American fellow Daniel Joelson ('06)

Presidential calls to service and the Internet are helping spur U.S. citizens to action

"We need your service, right now, at this moment in history," proclaimed the newly elected U.S. President Barack Obama. "I'm not going to tell you what your role should be; that's for you to discover. But I am asking you to stand up and play your part. I am asking you to help change history's course."

On April 21, 2009, President Obama signed the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act to spur Americans to serve their communities and country. Using the Internet in part to drum up support for volunteerism, the administration established www.serve.gov, a Web site on which people can type in their zip code and the keyword of a subject that interests them to discover volunteer opportunities in their area.

The Obama effect — the repercussions of the new president's call to service — has already rippled deep into cyberspace and elsewhere. In the week before and in the week following the inauguration, the Web site volunteermatch.org, an Internet recruiting tool for more than 65,000 nonprofit organizations, saw a 40 percent to 70 percent increase in its year-over-year numbers and continues operating at a higher level of network participation than it did last year, according to Robert Rosenthal, director of communications for the company. The site is now seeing a growth of 200 to 300 applications per week from participating organizations.

While his clarion call may boost the ranks of U.S. volunteers, Obama is hardly the first U.S. head of state to urge one to donate one's service. President George W. Bush created the Volunteer Service Award in part to stimulate activism at an early age; an award is given to those under 14 years of age who complete 50 or more hours of volunteer service in one year. In 1960, among President John F. Kennedy's first initiatives was to encourage Americans to live and work in developing countries by launching the Peace Corps, which since has sent more than 195,000 volunteers to 139 countries. "That seems to have started the country on the road to a more formal road to answering societal needs through these types of positions," says Siobhan Dugan, a public affairs specialist for AmeriCorps, a network of programs that annually supports the engagement of nearly 75,000 Americans in service to meet critical needs in education, the environment, public safety, homeland security and other areas.

Presidential inspiration can be found in the creation of AmeriCorps itself. The organization was formally launched in 1993, when President Bill Clinton signed the National and Community Service Trust Act, which brought all community service programs under the umbrella of a central organization. But that legislation had roots in the first National Service Act signed by President George H.W. Bush in 1990. AmeriCorps incorporated the National Civilian Community Corps, loosely based on the Depression-era Civilian Conservation Corps, and the Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), a program created by President Lyndon Johnson in 1964.

AmeriCorps' volunteer pool is rapidly expanding. Between November 2008 and April 2009, the organization received 76,404 applications, more than three times the 23,145 received in the same period the previous year. While its budget recently expanded to accommodate another 13,000 applications so that it can now accept 88,000 total per year, demand from volunteers is soaring to such an extent that the organization will have to increasingly deny applications. The growth is attributed to the "Obama effect," a strong altruistic streak among today's young adults, and a recession that leads youth to consider public service positions.

Volunteer work continues to thrive in areas one might most expect, such as disaster relief. For example, student volunteers from all over the country continue flocking to New Orleans to help rebuild a city ravaged by Hurricane Katrina in August 2005. The Internet has changed the way Americans volunteer by offering a wide range of opportunities that enable people to frequently take up their favored causes — or exploit their special skills — at a time and place of their choosing. Many people are going online both to uncover volunteer opportunities and to fulfill their civic duties without getting up from their chair or leaving their computer, according to Rosenthal. To get involved "virtually," many people are working for free to do research, write grant proposals and perform other fundraising work. Others are copywriting, designing brochures, building Web sites and programming databases.

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More spontaneous forms of volunteering are also surging in the United States. People are creatively translating the common, ordinary things they do in their lives into a boon for others. For instance, an individual who creates a compost heap in her backyard over a period of months might, when she has enough, bundle it up and bring it to her local nonprofit community garden.

No longer are Americans looking for corporate America, the government or the military to solve all of their problems. “That paradigm is kind of being overturned by one in which Americans increasingly embrace their own ability to organize, get involved with grassroots organizations that allow them to leverage their work and ultimately band together in order to solve the problems that are closest to home — problems with school, problems in their community and problems that they see on the street,” says Rosenthal.

Philanthropy in the United States is also healthier than ever. American giving reached a record high in 2006, with donations totaling \$295 billion. “Charitable giving in this country has risen every year over the last 40 years except 1987, through all different economic conditions and circumstances, recessions and expansions of the economy,” says Drew Hastings, vice president of external affairs for the National Philanthropic Trust, an independent public charity.

Certainly U.S. citizens can be further enlightened as to how they can best direct more money toward charitable contributions. For instance, while they take pains to learn how to invest, save and spend their money, they do not always put the same time and effort into discovering how they can give away their money. “Most kids will tell you exactly where their local McDonald’s is, but they couldn’t necessary tell you where your local Boys and Girls Club or YMCA is,” says Hastings. Still, with more than 1 million charitable organizations in the United States, family foundations ballooning and corporate giving rapidly increasing, money continues to flow freely into charities — particularly to those concerning religion, education and health.

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Volunteer Work in the Dominican Republic: Youth in Service

By Dominican fellow María Scharbay ('08)

In the Dominican Republic, there is no shortage of young people trained to offer organizational strength, technical support and financial support in response to the needs of a community. Evidence of this is found in the voluntary assistance offered by Dominican youth to the most neglected rural communities in times of disaster or when emotional support is needed.

Dozens of community, social and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), as well as government institutions, have put forth great efforts to make volunteer work among young people a common occurrence, helping to transform society and improve the living conditions of those less fortunate. In the process, Dominican youth learn the importance of working together to solve problems, and are rewarded by making a difference in someone's life.

According to the 2006 National Census of the National Statistics Bureau, the Dominican population stands at 9.7 million. There are, as yet, no official statistics that provide numerical data regarding volunteer activity in the country. However, some state institutions and NGOs show information on youth volunteer work, organized by season. The Civil Defense and the Center for Emergency Operations bring together about 14,000 volunteers (most of them between 18 and 35 years of age) during Easter week and the cyclone season. During the Christmas season, these prevention and rescue operations organizations see a reduction in volunteer activity.

Another estimate of the frequency and amount of volunteerism can be extrapolated from the 60 hours of volunteer service required of students in their third and fourth years of middle school. According to data from the Department of Education, student enrollment for the 2005-2006 school year was 197,000. These students volunteered with tree planting, surveillance of environmentally protected areas, educational programs, health-oriented programs and the manufacturing of educational toys, among other things. Catholic youth, as well as youth from other growing religious groups, also play an important, though not highly visible, role.

This beautiful work has brought about the growth and empowerment of rural and urban youth, who are now presenting development proposals to the public and private sectors to promote employment for the jobless, protection of the environment, abatement of crime and violence, and greater access to education and public services. All of these proposals are intended to help put an end to the cycle of poverty.

Within the Dominican Republic there is a volunteer network known as Red Sirve Quisqueya, created in 2001 by volunteer organizations such as the NGO Alliance, the Dominican Scout Association, the Dominican Rehabilitation Association, the International Student Organization (AIESEC), the Presidential Commission for Millennium Objectives and Sustainable Development (COPDES), the Peace Corps, Youth for Peace, the Youth Bureau of the National District Council, Pastoral Youth, Rotary Club, the Department of Education, and the United Nations Volunteer Program. Coordinated by the NGO Alliance, the Red Sirve Quisqueya promotes volunteering as a common experience for Dominican youth. Its mission is to strengthen the quality of education and to encourage youth participation and leadership through community service. The Red Sirve Quisqueya also advocates for the creation of volunteerism legislation in the country.

Notwithstanding the work of Red Sirve Quisqueya, one of the weaknesses of volunteer service in the Dominican Republic is that many organizations do not coordinate their efforts. Volunteer organizations also often lack a strategic scheduling plan for operations and for evaluation of work accomplished. A lack of resources to implement initiatives is another obstacle to the promotion of youth volunteer service.

There is an important need to enhance organizational skills and to train volunteers in proper responses to conflict. Training in conflict resolution in this country is found only in the curriculum of the Latin American College of Social Sciences (FLACSO), and this program is not being utilized by the volunteer sector. However, it is a very important topic for a country sharing a border with Haiti, as there are many conflicts arising from the Dominican resistance to the presence of Haitians in the country, which can degenerate into racism and physical violence.

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The state should provide financial resources and academic training to organizations that promote volunteer service and social empowerment. In addition, there is a need for public policies that address and protect volunteering at the national level. These policies could, for instance, provide oversight for NGOs created by the political class or state employees. Because of their close ties to government resources, these NGOs tend to receive greater economic privileges than those created by other groups. Other state actions could help identify NGOs known as “ghosts,” which are created to channel public funds illegally. Every year, the ghosts become a center of attention during discussions of the public budget. Public policies that protect the interests of volunteering at the national level should be prepared with participation from the main actors involved from the public and private sectors, as well as from civil society.

Volunteer work in the Dominican Republic has been strongly influenced by history, religion and culture. Some private businesses, politicians, and economists are not yet aware of its social value and feel that volunteer work is merely unpaid labor, often involving undesirable tasks. They overlook the fact that it is a personal decision made in a responsible and thoughtful manner. In the Dominican Republic, it is time to recognize that volunteering is an important tool in addressing many of our most pressing social issues.

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Volunteerism in Jamaica

By Jamaican fellow Toni-Shae James Freckleton ('08)

“Far away from the spotlight, there are millions of generous individuals who, around the clock and around the world, roll up their sleeves and volunteer These dedicated and courageous individuals are important partners in the quest for a better, fairer and safer world.”

— Kofi Annan (2003)¹

Jamaica has a rich tradition of volunteerism that stems from as far back as the pre-emancipation period. Volunteers, from that period to the present, play a critical role in setting the foundation for the development of social infrastructure such as hospitals and schools. In recent times, areas of involvement in volunteerism include vocational training, provision of health care services and shelter, caring for the dispossessed and persons with disabilities, welfare, sports and disaster management. According to Winsome Wilkins, chief executive officer of the Council of Voluntary Social Services, “Volunteers in Jamaica, through their actions, have been advocates for the most vulnerable members in society.”

It is widely understood that people in Jamaica volunteer for various reasons, chief among them being:

- The desire to help other people;
- Repayment of the community for assistance which may have been rendered while less fortunate; and
- Recognition as a concerned and civic-minded citizen.

Therefore, volunteerism is essentially an investment where the entire society benefits.

The National Registry of Volunteers (NRV) was established in Jamaica with the specific objective of encouraging all existing and potential volunteers to register as a form of acknowledgement and for placement when the need arises. This database records a profile of the registered volunteer including names, location, areas of interest and the contribution made to the respective areas.

The benefits of the registry are:

- Identifying persons offering volunteer service;
- Ensuring greater networking among volunteer groups;
- Facilitating access to volunteer programs;
- Matching volunteers to programs based on their skills;
- Facilitating cooperation with international organizations who wish to volunteer in Jamaica; and
- Increasing support of volunteerism.

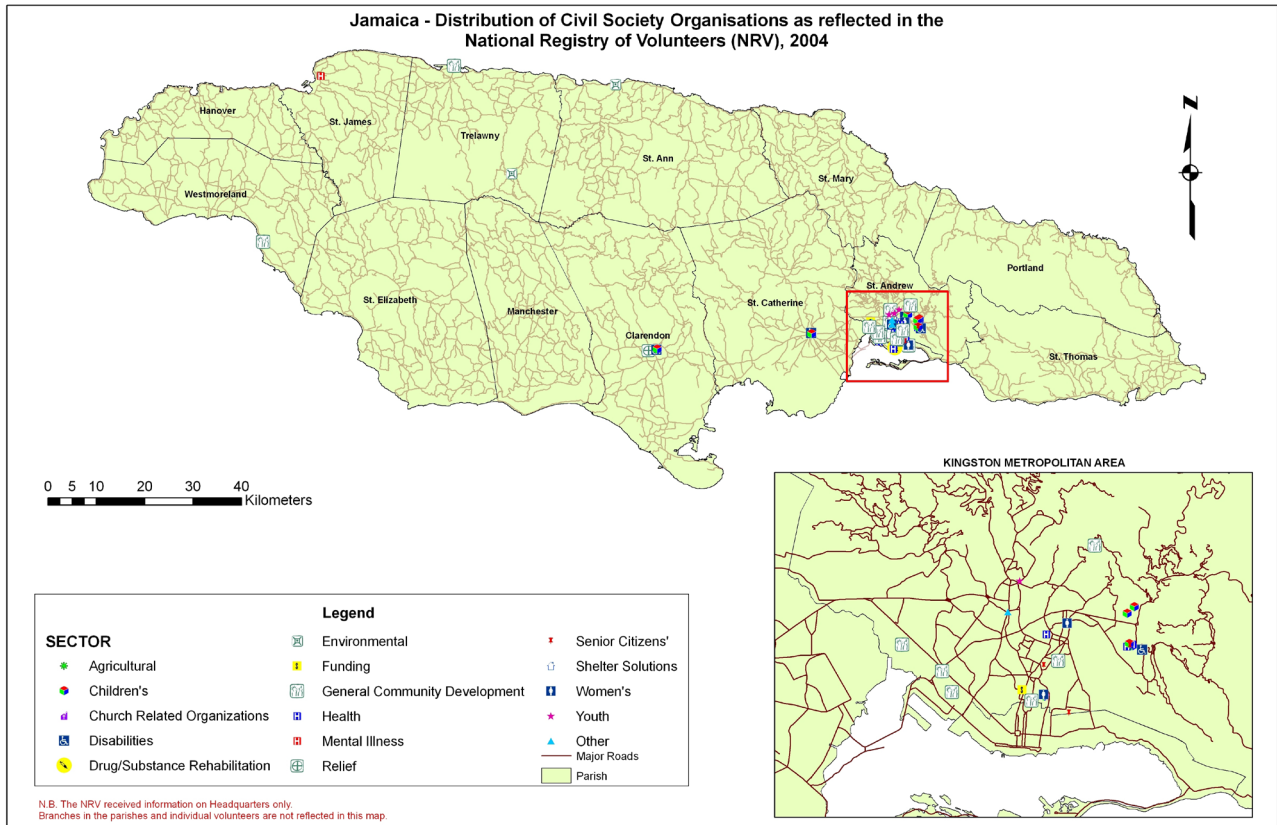
The NRV registers volunteers in the following sectors:

- Agriculture
- Children
- Church-related organizations
- Disabilities
- Drug/substance rehabilitation
- Environment
- Funding
- General community development
- Health
- Mental illness
- Relief
- Senior citizens
- Shelter solutions
- Women
- Youth
- Other

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Volunteers in Action

Volunteers in Jamaica make a significant contribution to national development. While this impact has not been fully quantified in monetary terms, the range of areas in which volunteers serve is an indication that millions of dollars worth of services are contributed on an annual basis. In recognition of this contribution to national development, there have been several awards and demonstrations of appreciation for the work being done by volunteers — for example, National Honours, the Governor General's Award and the Prime Minister's Award.

There are several service organizations, including the Rotary, Kiwanis and Lions Clubs, that, through their work, make an indelible mark in national development. They provide support to vulnerable groups, disaster relief programs, community-based interventions and education. Service in these areas continues to be their primary mandate, and they contribute significantly to the development of many communities across the island.

In August 2007, the National Volunteer Centre was opened to mobilize and train volunteers and to support initiatives by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that provide social services in the areas of health, youth and community development. The center also provides short-term courses to NGOs in proposal writing, project management, advocacy and networking, strategic planning, fundraising, financial management and volunteerism. The courses are offered in collaboration with the University of the West Indies at Mona and the National Youth Service. It is envisaged that this initiative will strengthen the capacity of the NGO sector and facilitate even more volunteerism.

Service to Culture: The Case of the Jamaica Cultural Development Commission

The Jamaica Cultural Development Commission is the national agency responsible for the enhancement of "national development through cultural practices by creating opportunities that unearth, develop, preserve and promote creative talents and expressions of the Jamaican people."²² This is achieved through various activities and programs, such as the Miss Jamaica Festival Queen Competition.

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This competition seeks to encourage the development of cultural awareness, talent and creativity among young women, 18 to 25 years old. A critical aspect of the program is training and development of these young women in the areas of etiquette, walking and poise, grooming and deportment, and awareness of the importance and relevance of Jamaican culture. The year-round program culminates in the crowning of a national queen in time for the national independence celebrations each year — ultimately identifying a young cultural ambassador for the country. It is exceptionally rewarding to witness the growth and development of the young women involved, who complete the program not only having a renewed self-confidence, but also having contributed to national development.

These young ladies have become volunteers as well. They have embarked on projects and community activities, including support to persons living with HIV/AIDS; work in children's homes, infirmaries and homes for the elderly, and with inner-city youth and homework centers; efforts to protect the environment; donating books to schools; and establishing cultural clubs across the island to transmit and share information about the Jamaican culture.

Conclusion

Volunteerism produces many outcomes that essentially lead people to make a contribution to community and national development. The experience of volunteering can develop many social competencies: identity development, compassion, the ability to make a difference, leadership, confidence and self-esteem. In Jamaica, this service has empowered large groups of people and developed relationships that last a very long time. It is evident from the approach being taken by the country that volunteerism is a critical tool for development and an expression of solidarity in action.

¹ Kofi Annan, Message by United Nations' secretary general on International Volunteers Day, 2003.

² Jamaica Cultural Development Commission Mission Statement.

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New Forms of Social and Political Participation: Youth, Democracy and Volunteer Work

By Uruguayan fellow Sebastian Sabini ('08)

Latin American youth and young adults are becoming politically involved through social volunteer efforts as opposed to political party affiliation and party-driven activities, a trend that strengthens direct democracy and, therefore, representative democracy.

In our respective Latin American countries, we are building the democracy we live in. This process is not easy for countries that had once been under dictatorship. They deal with residual issues regarding human rights and how to resolve these issues in democratic societies. These countries also struggle with the incalculable demographic, social, economic, cultural and political setbacks that resulted when dictatorships eroded the most elementary institutions of the social fabric.

Without getting into a political science analysis, it could be said that there are at least two models of democratic systems: representative and direct. These two forms are not philosophical opposites; they appear as complementary and necessary options. Representative democracy operates through delegation of sovereignty through votes, and direct democracy through direct action and influence of the individual citizens. A dialogue between the two is necessary, since one without the other lacks purpose and richness. Most Latin American countries have opted, since achieving political independence in the nineteenth century, to be republics with a representative democratic system. To varying degrees, they add instances of direct democracy (such as plebiscites and referendums), which gradually broaden political involvement from restricted, census-based voting¹ to true democracies that include women's suffrage and that do not discriminate with regard to ethnic, social or cultural origin.

On a theoretical plane, political parties represent the embodiment of society and its ideas and interests. Many politicians have felt that political participation should be implemented through the parties themselves, as they are the means for channeling society's demands. However, sweeping technological innovations, the emergence of new urban cultures and the development of new perspectives about the world have meant that political parties no longer necessarily represent the only opportunities for political and social participation, and therefore do not meet the expectations of all sectors of the population. Youth appear especially segregated from the political system, with little opportunity to voice their opinions and even less for action.² Many are uninterested in the "1960s-style"³ party structures — those that usually involve greater reward for incumbency and retention of office than for intelligence, favor the vertical (top-down decision making) over the horizontal (a more inclusive system), and value individuals over the collective. Older adults, and for the most part males, appear as the "leaders" of political parties and leave little room for the views of a different generation, gender, race, ethnic group or culture to take root. This is plainly seen in the social and generational makeup of the parliamentary seats in both the Senate and in the House of Representatives, where older males are an overwhelming majority.

It is under such circumstances that the younger generation — independently and socially, in the community, and locally — develop their own strategies for participating in the social and political life of our countries. In Uruguay, the explosion of certain cultural expressions among young people is a good example of this: youth street music,⁴ dance and theater groups. Philanthropic groups are also important. These include neighborhood food programs for children (usually associated with some type of religious group) and private-enterprise "housing"⁵ programs such as "A Roof for My Country"⁶ — the latter of which is an example of a certain deafness in the dialogue between state and civil society (in both directions). This project, which brings together hundreds of young people for volunteer work days, aims to build simple wood houses in Uruguay's most underprivileged neighborhoods, which are selected through prior screening by a nongovernmental organization (NGO) of the same name. While it does involve an improvement for the beneficiary families, some relevant institutions — such as the Ministry of Housing, Territorial Order, and Environment (MVOTMA) — have not disguised their disappointment over the lack of inter-institutional coordination of these projects (particularly when some projects were built in areas vulnerable to flooding), the lack of follow-up in the program, and the very limited actual construction.

Classic volunteer groups such as the Scout Movement of Uruguay, the Rotary Club, Salesian Oratories, and Evangelical or Christian youth networks are active in the community as well, though these have a greater degree of dependency on the adult world. The organizational forms of these groups are naturally the extreme opposites of those found in political parties (bottom-up as opposed to top-down), and they represent forms of direct political action and, more precisely, action that is concrete and

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visible. For political organizations, however, any change occurs in the mid to long term, since their ideas generally are developed through the state's apparatus. The government thus considers all implications of the proposed reform, ranging from access to and exercise of power to obtaining the funds for the development of effective policies.

This having been said, it must be added that it is not the author's opinion that young people have a special gift for running these parties or any other institution in society. Quite the contrary is true — young people suffer the same human weaknesses that adults do. But maybe, in some cases, they have the ability to see what others do not, to hear what others do not, and to understand what others have not yet become aware of, to say nothing of their ability to accept necessary change and evolution in society, as well as their openness to transform and question these.

If we believe that young people ought to contribute to discussions on human rights, on the legalization of marijuana and abortion, on problems relating to the environment, on social and educational policies, and on the development of new policies for the eradication of racism, xenophobia and homophobia, we ought to ask ourselves why their voices are not being heard on a daily basis. This is most clearly seen in seldom-studied phenomena, such as the recent student movements in Chile, in the anti-capitalism mobilizations, in peace-seeking movements and in world social forums. The adult world generally stigmatizes young people, invalidating their actions.

Ultimately, anything new creates certain fears, and the "youth-drugs-delinquency" insecurity would appear to be one of the greatest barriers for our democratic systems to overcome; it is one of the dominant views on youth held by society. It is necessary to acknowledge cultural diversity, to accept new means of socialization, and to promote decision-making areas that will be superior to current structures which, with few exceptions, have not been widely used. The Youth Participation Budget of Rosario, Argentina, is an example of effective youth integration. Young people, individually or collectively, not only make proposals to the city on how the budget assigned to them should be spent, but they actually determine, by democratic means, how funds will be spent.⁷ Spaces such as these are (without going into an analysis of the new information and communication technologies) true spheres of social and political participation, where a significant number of young people develop into citizens committed to the reality of their life and times, resulting in a strengthening of democracy in our countries.

If political organizations want to renew their agendas and promote new pragmatic and ideological foundations; if civil society organizations wish to integrate into the social fabric to promote a citizen culture based on the paradigm of human rights; if educational institutions wish to remedy the extreme dropout and failure rates among young people; and if communications media wish to extend democracy by promoting an effective right to freedom of information, they should all become aware of this diversity in forms of participation, of the multicultural nature of youth populations, of their renewed interests and ways of viewing the world that, almost naturally, are in constant transformation. In this way, the social and political participation of young people will enrich, supplement and strengthen democracy in our countries.

¹ In the emerging Latin American republics, census-based voting refers to a vote limited to individuals included in a restricted census: male property owners who have an income, are literate and are white.

² OIJ-CEPAL, 2004, "Youth in Spanish-America: Trends and Urgencies," Buenos Aires, August 2007. 2nd Edition.

³ This expression is used in Uruguay to refer to the organizational and ideological forms of political parties of the late 1960s.

⁴ In Uruguay these are known as "murgas jóvenes," which refers to a Carnival group that uses singing, dance, humor, and social and political critique to put on a performance that is semi-theatrical. These groups emerged in the early 2000s in response to a contest sponsored by the city of Montevideo, in which more than 70 groups participated, each composed of approximately 20 members.

⁵ These are not homes in the traditional sense, as they lack windows, bathrooms, kitchens, plumbing, insulation and electrical installations.

⁶ For further information: <http://www.untechoparamipais.org.uy/>.

⁷ For further information, visit the Web site of the city of Rosario: http://www.rosario.gov.ar/sitio/desarrollo_social/juventud/presupuesto_joven.jsp.

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