



Y-LEAD

Creating Civic Spaces for Active Citizenship

Enhancing Volunteerism in Egypt

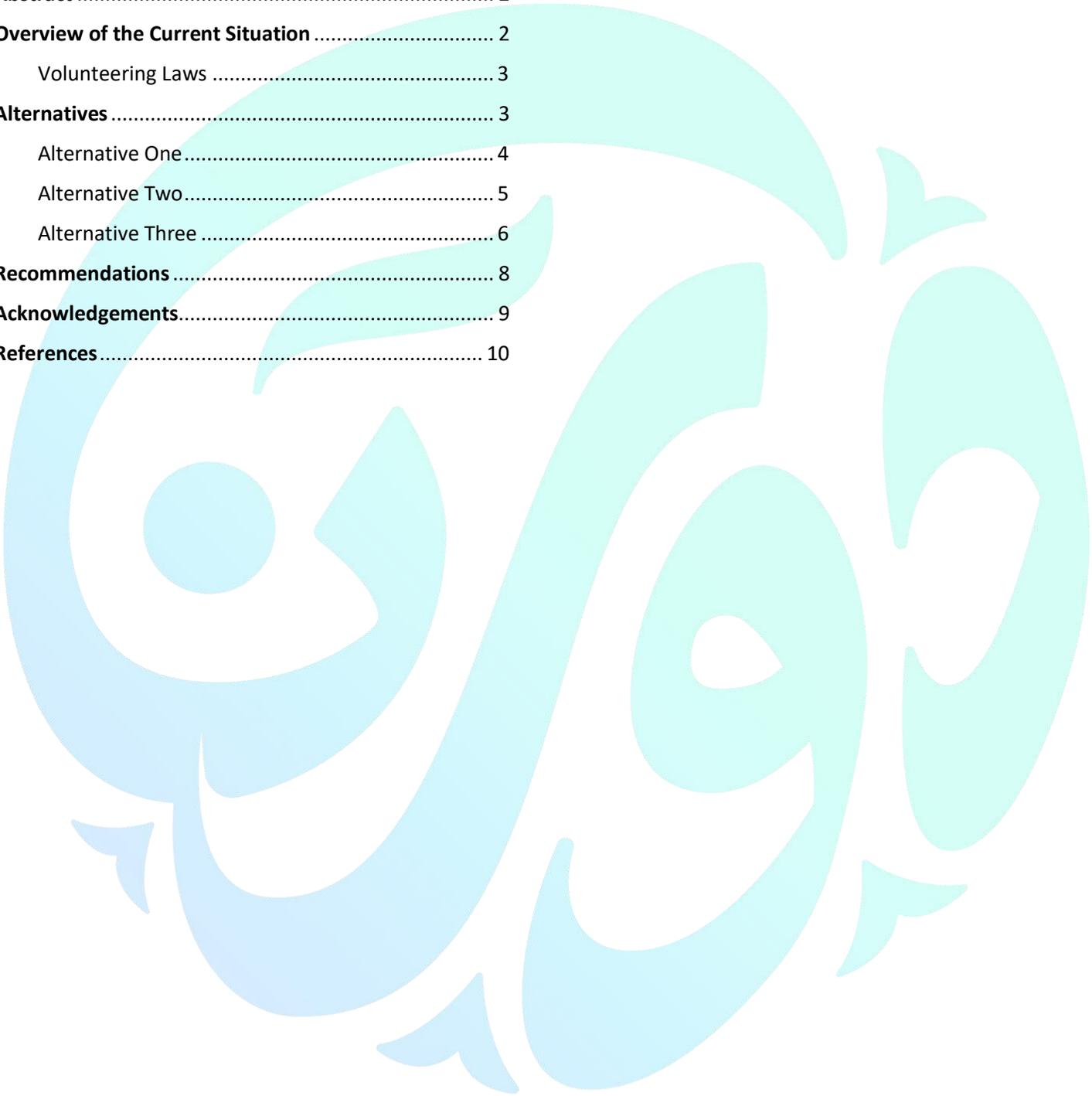
Policy Paper

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Y-LEAD

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Abstract

In today's world, societies face rapidly increasing challenges which governments cannot deal with alone. Effective partnerships and collaboration from all members of the society is required to enable states overcome such challenges. As such, volunteerism is a vital untapped resource that could be used to address many of today's development challenges. In order to capitalize on volunteerism as a resource, a regulatory framework is necessary. This needs to be developed in a reliable and sustainable way in order to achieve the state's development goals. In the past decade, the Egyptian state has implemented several important transformations and overcome difficult challenges which have impacted various economic, social and political aspects, and led the state to adopt new public policy in order to deal with these conditions and challenges.

Taking into account Egypt's difficult economic situation, the state needs to capitalize on volunteerism in order to ensure the success of its public policies, and to achieve its sustainable development strategy "Egypt Vision 2030".

This policy paper explores the situation of volunteerism in Egypt, and how to maximize its benefits through analyzing the presence of volunteerism in Egypt, developing and evaluating alternatives and finally, providing a list of recommendations to increase volunteerism in Egypt. As such, three alternatives were proposed: the first focuses on the legislative aspect by proposing to draft an independent law to regulate volunteer work in Egypt. The second alternative proposes institutional solutions, and calls for the creation of an official institutional body to manage volunteer work. And the third alternative presents linking voluntary work with the educational system.

Following an analysis of the current situation of the country versus the proposed alternatives, the first alternative was chosen as the most appropriate and suitable measure towards enhancing volunteerism in Egypt.

Overview of the Current Situation

In the case of Egypt, there is insufficient research and reliable data on volunteerism. This poses a serious challenge to the sustainability and expansion of volunteerism projects and initiatives in the state. Traditionally, the concept of

formal volunteerism has been viewed by some people as a western concept and as such, has not been fully embraced by all members of the society. On the contrary, helping others – "informal volunteerism" is seen as a part of a religious duty in both Islam and Christianity. Hence, most volunteering is informal, as people would rather not affiliate with governmental organizations, NGOs and volunteering organizations.

According to the 2018 report published by the United Nations Volunteers: *"The State of the World's Volunteerism Report – the thread that binds"*, the total number of volunteers in Egypt is 1,729,734; of which 55.3% are women, and 44.7% are men. This appears to be a modest figure when compared to several other countries, among which are Arab countries. The numbers reveal that volunteers represent only 2.85% of the total population above 15 years old, and that men's participation has declined in favour to that of women. However, according to some official estimates the number of volunteers in Egypt is over three million – based on the criteria given from a representative at the Ministry of Youth and Sports. Nonetheless, the greater concern is the considerable decline in the ratio between formal to informal volunteerism, where the proportion of formal volunteerism is one percent of informal volunteerism (United Nations Volunteers, 2018, p.102). The difference here between formal and informal volunteerism is that formal volunteerism supports the state's development plans and contributes to achieving its goals; it is characterized by regularity and sustainability; however, these benefits cannot be achieved through informal volunteerism.

A Y-LEAD survey on "Perceptions of Youth Towards Community Participation" conducted by the Egyptian Center for Public Opinion Research - Baseera explored the reasons behind the decline in volunteerism ratios in Egypt, and the significant decline in the percentage of formal volunteerism compared to informal volunteerism, data from a report written by the Egyptian Center for Public Opinion Research - Baseera which was based on a survey it conducted on "Youth perceptions of community participation". The findings revealed that according to the opinions of a surveyed youth sample, the most prominent reasons that prevent youth from participating are: unemployment, life pressures, lack of opportunities that

implemented by an organization, and carried out by volunteers with an ongoing, or sustainable commitment towards an organization, and contribute their time regularly."

1 Informal volunteering is defined as "voluntary activities that are carried out directly, without the mediation of an official organization coordinating broader voluntary efforts", in contrast to formal volunteering that is defined as "a voluntary activity

match their interests, and their lack of interest in community participation. However, the largest percentage of the surveyed youth did not have a specific reason for not participating.

The correlation between the decline in the percentage of formal volunteerism and the findings that there is no specific reason which prevents youth from volunteerism, provides a clear need for the creation of an integrated system to organize volunteerism. Through this, the direct benefits of volunteerism in developing and supporting the state's policy and programs will be recognized and hence, may contribute to increasing the ratio of formal volunteerism and to promote the culture of volunteerism.

Volunteering Legislation

Before elaborating on the alternatives to promote volunteerism, it is important to understand the nature of the current policies that deal with volunteerism. A number of old laws were found which refer to concepts similar to volunteerism, for example, the concept of public service had been stipulated in the "Public Service Law 76 of 1973". Public service can be considered as a middle ground between volunteerism and paid work, as it is similar to volunteerism and contributes to providing the community with services and assistance, and in supporting the development process while possessing the free will of whether or not choose to provide the service. It is also similar to paid work in the sense that it pays a monthly reward of four Egyptian Pounds (EGP) in accordance with the law to those who are designated to provide the service. Official statements indicate that in reality this reward amounts to 800 EGP per month. Also, those who provide the service are subject to labour policies such as regulations governing leaves and penalties for regular workers. Additionally, participation in public service is not open to all people, as it excludes those who have completed their military service and those employed in fixed positions, or persons with disabilities. Following the directives of the President Abdelfatah El-Sisi, the Ministry of Social Solidarity (MoSS) is working on amending and updating that law.

Another law concerned with the welfare of youth and sports is Law 77 of 1975. In its 8th Chapter, it requires for the establishment of the General Union of Voluntary Public Service Organizations for Youth. Among the unions competencies are; the development of the overall policy of the voluntary public service movement for youth, advocating for the increase of voluntary public service

among them, and permission to hold elections in order to form the union's membership as well.

Law 218 was issued in 2017 to replace Law 77 of 1975. The new law regulates youth organizations, specifically, in Article 32 there is a briefer form regarding the "Voluntary Public Service Union" which includes the cancelation of the elections as one of the union's membership forming mechanisms. Despite the creation of the new law, the Union has not entered into force since the creation of the first law 1975.

Another reference can be found in the provisions of Article 82 of Egypt's 2014 Constitution, which dictates that the state shall encourage "youth engagement in group and volunteering activities and enable them to participate in public life."

Nevertheless, the clearest manifestation of the concept of volunteerism was in Law 149 of 2019 which regulates civil work. The 9th chapter of the law is dedicated to referring to volunteerism, however, the Executive Regulations of this law have yet to be issued.

While there is a set of legislations and policies covering some aspects of volunteerism, there is no unified act or body that organizes volunteerism, nor is there a specialized institution in charge of organizing and managing volunteerism in Egypt. MoSS carries out the current tasks to facilitate the Public Service Law and to supervise the NGOs entrusted with carrying out volunteering activities in accordance with Law 149.

Alternatives

This policy paper seeks to provide more effective paths and alternatives to maximize the benefits of volunteerism in development. Additionally, the developed alternatives aim to align with the global interest to increase volunteerism and to capitalize on it so as to support the state's policies and goals.

This paper proposes three alternatives that the state can adopt:

The first alternative focuses on the legislative aspect by proposing to draft an independent law to regulate volunteer work in Egypt.

The second alternative proposes institutional solutions, and calls for the creation of an official institutional body to manage volunteer work.

The third alternative presents linking voluntary work with the educational system.

Alternative One

A comprehensive legislation regarding the dimensions and segments of volunteerism in Egypt.

Over the last two years, both the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia issued laws to regulate volunteering. The UAE issued Law No. 5 of 2018 in order to regulate volunteerism, and in January 2020, Saudi Arabia issued the Decree of “volunteerism system”. Tunisia, however, has been ahead in volunteering legislations as it issued its volunteerism Law No. 26 in 2010.

Efforts towards giving greater importance to volunteerism can be achieved through either reforming some of the existing laws that address, in parts of them, volunteerism, as a short-term solution or by drafting an independent law in order to regulate volunteerism in Egypt which can be explained in detail in the following points:

Short-term measures

Apparently, “Law No. 149 of 2019” on NGOs work is currently the most important and relevant law which addresses the issue of volunteerism in Egypt. Given that its Executive Regulation have not been issued yet, this may present an opportunity to incorporate some recommendations in the regulation considering that the unofficial version that is currently being circulated deals with volunteerism in some details and includes a number of positive points, however, the draft law needs to take the following points into consideration:

- The Executive Regulations should consider volunteerism in a more holistic and comprehensive view, and not just in the non-governmental sector so as to include volunteering activities carried out other sectors such as the government and the private sector.
- Volunteerism should be dealt with as an important development resource, and as a tool that can be utilized effectively to achieve the overall state policy goals and the success of its development plans.
- Tools should be in place to help increase the number of formal volunteers. Additionally, ways should be found to measure the economic and social impact of volunteerism.
- There should be measures taken to ensure that there are no obstacles or impediments that prevent or hinder volunteering activities, in addition to the

existing regulatory frameworks in order to protect the rights of volunteers.

- Adopting measures and tools to promote volunteerism, especially among youth and marginalized groups.
- Volunteerism should be treated as being distinct to paid employment, and should not result in the reduction or replacement of paid employment.

Long-term measures

A long-term measure would be drafting an independent law to regulate volunteerism.

This may be accomplished in two ways; the first is to incorporate volunteerism into the new public service law which the President called for, to become the "Public Service and Volunteerism Law", since this law is closely related to the nature of volunteerism. The second course of action is to issue an independent law to regulate volunteerism following an assessment of the new NGO law and determining its potential weaknesses in order to avoid them in the new law. The creation of this new law also requires determining the ability of MoSS to carry out the responsibility of executing this law; otherwise, an independent body will be required to take on this position, the second alternative will further elaborate on this option.

There are a number of advantages that can be achieved overall through legal reform or the issuance of a new law to regulate volunteerism in Egypt. Firstly, by formalizing volunteerism, it will increase citizens' trust towards it, and as such, contribute to increasing the ratio of volunteerism. Secondly, through binding legal regulations, maximum protection will be ensured for volunteers during volunteering activities, and this will guarantee their rights and preserve their dignity. Thirdly, new regulations will link volunteerism to the state's goals and development programs, and thus, this will establish an effective role for the government sector in regulating volunteerism. Fourthly, through issuing a legislation aimed to regulate volunteerism which states that it does not entail financial obligations or burdens, volunteerism will achieve support for economic activity. And finally, legal reform will provide a role for the private sector to contribute to volunteerism as part of their corporate social responsibility (CSR).

However, there are some disadvantages that could be associated with the issuance of a law to regulate volunteerism. First, there is the possibility of volunteerism losing its independence of being a free civil activity. The

second disadvantage could be that by relying only on the legal solution to deal with the issue of volunteerism may not help in promoting the culture of volunteerism nor in increasing the ratio of volunteers, because there is a need to exert greater efforts on the institutional and regulatory levels in order to achieve better results.

Alternative Two

Creating institutional solutions through the creation of an official institutional body to manage volunteer work.

Another possible alternative that can be adopted to maximize the benefits of volunteerism in Egypt through improving the institutional framework related to managing and increasing volunteerism.

After conducting research of existing governmental entities that have units dedicated to volunteerism in Egypt, it was revealed that MoSS and the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoYS) were the most important entities. Within MoSS is the Central Department of Social Welfare, in its mandate, it calls for the increase of volunteerism. Additionally, the Fund for Drug Control and Treatment of Addiction which is affiliated with the Central Department of Social Welfare, depends on volunteerism through a body called "the Volunteer House". MoYS, has a Central Department for Cultural and Voluntary Programs, which is also concerned with organizing cultural and youth programs through volunteers.

Among their other mandates, the above-mentioned departments partially organize a few initiatives and programs associated with volunteerism, however, they are not specialized or fully dedicated to managing and organizing volunteer work. Also, their initiatives and programs usually do not expand outside of their ministries and often have limited target groups. Therefore, we suggest this alternative should have short-term and long-term solutions to enhance the institutional capacity of volunteerism in Egypt through the following goals:

Short term measures:

Stimulating the current departments responsible for volunteerism

As a temporary solution, the effectiveness of the current departments responsible for organizing voluntary work should be enhanced. This could be accomplished by increasing their financial allocations to enable them to

launch initiatives and programs that can target wider youth groups from different regions, and diverse educational and social levels. Another option could involve providing these departments with the necessary specialized to manage and follow up on the volunteering programs. Additionally, another option is to use technological tools and solutions which can contribute to spreading the culture of volunteerism, or through advertising the volunteering opportunities, Online platforms could be one the most efficient tools that can be used in this respect, provided that they are designed interactively and are not just a portal for news and information.

Despite the importance of starting with these temporary solutions, they are not very reliable since the previously mentioned departments in the ministries are under increasing burdens which make them incapable of adopting other more complicated initiatives and programs, which could make those initiatives and programs less effective and as a result, reduce their impact.

Long-term measures:

The establishment of an independent body to manage volunteerism

On the long term, there should be consideration to create a government body; agency or unit to manage volunteerism in Egypt like the many countries that have preceded Egypt in this domain. For example, in 2013, the Peruvian government founded a department for volunteerism within the Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations. That department is responsible for all major stakeholders in Peru that are in charge of the implementation of the volunteerism infrastructure. Additionally, in 2014, the Republic of Togo founded the "The National Volunteerism Promotion Program" which is a public authority that administers volunteers on the national level under the supervision of the Minister of Grassroots Development, Crafts, Youth, and Youth Employment. Furthermore, in 2020, Saudi Arabia within its approved volunteerism system, founded the "National Committee for Volunteerism" which is headed by the Minister of Labour and Social Development.

In Egypt's case, this body can be established in different ways; the first of which could be through the founding of an independent national body affiliated to the Prime Minister or the President. A second option would be to create an administrative unit within a relevant ministry, such as MoSS or MoYS. This unit will coordinate with other various state institutions and stakeholders associated with



volunteerism. Another way would be to form a cross-sectorial administration composed of representatives from the government, private sector and civil society sectors, in order to coordinate and supervise voluntary work within the state. Regardless of the organizational form to be adopted, the cross-sectoral approach is preferred as it achieves a higher degree of participation from different members of the society. This is highly important as it ensures that the established body or unit is to be able to carry out the functions and tasks necessary to support and stimulate voluntary work.

Among the competences and tasks that this body should assume is to develop a national volunteering strategy for Egypt. This should be developed through linking the states development needs with available human resources, and through that, design voluntary programs based on that strategy, in addition to setting organizational mechanisms for voluntary work and its development plans.

Moreover, the established body should create a volunteer database in addition to creating and managing the necessary online platforms to advertise opportunities and disseminate information on programs and achievements made. Furthermore, the elected body should possess the capabilities to train volunteers and build their capacities in order to support in the development and the increase in voluntary work. The body should also support in organizing conferences and seminars in addition to promoting for the increase research and studies related to volunteerism and increasing it.

Given the many advantages of adopting this decision, one of the most important advantages is the strong potential to increase the ratio of organized formal volunteering in Egypt. In addition to this, other advantages of the creation of an independent body to regulate volunteer work are:

- It provides better organization of volunteering activities, programs, and a guarantee of volunteers' rights, in accordance with the rights and regulations that would be issued.
- It fully utilizes volunteer work in order to support in achieving the state's overall policy goals, by directing volunteering activities towards areas and programs that are in line with the state's plans and programs.
- It provides technical and logistical knowledge and support for the various volunteering activities that are implemented in a manner so as to ensure its good performance.

- It has greater ability to measure the economic and social impact of the volunteering programs that are being implemented.
- It is capable of using the state's capabilities and its tools to promote development programs and to mobilize a greater number of participants.
- It is capable of guaranteeing sustainable volunteering activities, and to achieve the funding required to accomplish the set goals.
- It has the ability to link youths voluntary work records with future benefits offered to them, such as giving them preference in job opportunities.

Despite the advantages of this alternative, the founding of a new body to manage voluntary work in Egypt may pose some challenges. This alternative is the costliest, as establishing a new body requires financial resources for its establishment and operations, which could make this alternative inapplicable due to the difficult economic conditions that Egypt faces at the moment. The second challenge is the apprehension that the establishment of a government body to manage volunteering may cause volunteerism to lose its most distinguished characteristics; the choice and freedom of performing voluntary work, which can result in its transformation into a near-compulsory activity out of fear of the possible consequences in not participating.

Alternative Three

Integrating volunteer work into the education system.

Given the importance of the legislative and institutional aspects in developing organizational frameworks that stimulate volunteerism, the educational and cultural aspects are equally important in creating an environment that is encouraging to volunteering. As societies often rely on youth to engage in voluntary work and community participation, the development of mechanisms and systems to stimulate and integrate voluntary work in the lives of undergraduate students is an important input that can be built upon when developing voluntary work in Egypt.

"Motivations and Benefits of Student Volunteering: Comparing Regular, Occasional, and Non-Volunteers in Five Countries" is a significant study conducted on volunteerism, by a number of researchers in different universities, in five countries (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States of America). The study sought to explore the benefits of

voluntary work among university students, and among its most prominent findings were:

- Students who volunteer while attending school are more likely to volunteer later in their lives.
- A higher degree of participation is likely to be present among students of the same age group.
- Governments consider student volunteering to be essential to sustain an engaging civil society.
- Educational institutions should attempt to link voluntary work with job opportunities.
- The governments of the countries participating in the study can approach voluntary work among university students as an investment in the future of civil society and for the provision of voluntary services.
- The motivation and benefits behind youth volunteers differ to those of older volunteers; youth are mainly motivated by the opportunity to gain work-related experience, skills and qualifications that can help them in their education and careers.

Currently, in almost every Egyptian university there is a Vice President for Environmental Affairs and Community Services, and there are Vice Deans in the affiliated faculties. Moreover, within all universities and faculties there are youth welfare departments that are responsible for organizing student activities and programs. In addition to this, faculty members seeking promotions are required to supervise student activities. However, despite all of this, there are no departments or units specialized in organizing and following up the voluntary work that the universities are supposed to carry out in order to serve their communities through their students or faculty members. This is to the extent that youth welfare departments at the universities are not even affiliated with the Vice Presidents' offices or the Vice Deans for Environmental Affairs and Community Services, they are only affiliated with Vice Deans for student affairs.

While some university students in the education and social service faculties are required at some point of their degrees to complete their "public service" as part of their course assignments, this is not found in other faculties, which makes the public service only an obligation to students to pass their courses, rather than a voluntary act of free will.

As for student associations that are affiliated with university youth welfare, their main volunteering activities are limited to renovating their universities or its surrounding areas, and preparing visits and recreational activities for orphans and

sick children. Furthermore, the student associations are primarily focused on students' care and services, and organizing festivities or recreational trips for them. While some students' volunteering activities have been monitored in the form of campaigns that extend assistance to disadvantaged villages; providing homes with roofs and water extensions, in addition to providing in-kind assistance through fundraising, those campaigns, despite being more organized and more relevant to volunteering, do not follow the university's administrations in any organized manner, nor do they attain real support from university departments; they are organized informally within each class.

Given the possibility of developing a better vision for managing volunteerism within universities, it can be seen that this can achieve many advantages, of which the most prominent of which are:

- Creating a general culture that supports volunteerism, in order to ingrain the values and principles of volunteerism among students at an early stage, so as to guarantee greater participation in voluntary work and community participation in their future lives.
- Implementing this alternative may not require significant costs, as it can be implemented within the available capabilities within the universities, and by linking it to youth welfare departments and the offices of Vice Presidents and Vice Deans for community services.
- The importance of the element of generational convergence in attracting greater number of people who wish to volunteer and to participate in community development, which is clearly shown in each university class' adoption of a private student campaigns.

On the other hand, there are some weaknesses in the application of this alternative can be noted. Firstly, that the impact of this alternative may not appear in the short term, and it may require a long period of time to achieve clear results. The second weakness is the possibility that volunteerism will be routinely dealt with within the educational institutions and that it will lose its importance. The third weakness is that carrying out volunteerism through university students without a law explaining the rights of the volunteers and how to protect them could limit the numbers of volunteers, especially among young women, and it may also result in some volunteers being exposed to problems or violations of their rights.



Recommendations

Stimulating volunteerism in Egypt and maximizing its benefit to support the advancement of the country's policy goals is a matter which imposes mutual benefit amongst all stakeholders; government, private sector and non-government, as it is seldom to find anyone who objects to volunteer work or views it harmful, or a threat to their own interests, so long as that voluntary work remains peaceful, and does not come at the expense of paid work.

Therefore, all of the previously proposed alternatives are all viable and attainable propositions to stimulate volunteering in Egypt. As such, one may choose to start applying one alternative in the first stage and then continue to apply the others over a period of time. Alternatively, the state can adopt any of the alternatives that have been proposed, or it can set a phased plan to adopt a number measures in the short term and others over a longer period of time given the state's financial and regulatory position.

All things considered, this paper's final recommendation is that the state should begin, through its legislative and executive bodies, to adopt the proposals put forward to achieve a better organization of volunteerism in Egypt. It is therefore recommended that the state begin with alternative 1; legislative measures as it will provide the basis from which to start working towards more organization and the stimulation of volunteerism in Egypt.

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