

Monograph #1

MOTIVATIONS CONTRIBUTING TO VOLUNTEERING: THE CASE OF SKILL SAKHIS OF MAHARASHTRA

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For more information visit www.in.undp.org/disha

IKEA Foundation believes that women can be the most important catalysts for change in their children's lives. By empowering women, we can improve children's health, education and futures.

The Disha project is a partnership between the United Nations Development Programme and India Development Foundation, supported by the IKEA Foundation. It aims to improve the lives of one million underprivileged women in India by enabling them to acquire marketable skills and avail employment opportunities.

ABSTRACT

This paper reports on an exploratory study conducted by the researchers of India Development Foundation (IDF) to understand the motivations contributing to community volunteers' (Skill Sakhis) participation in a skilling project (Disha), in the state of Maharashtra, India. The paper uses qualitative data collected through semi structured interviews conducted with 41 volunteers called 'Skill Sakhis'. The findings point to a mix of 'personal' motivations, namely personal development, personal understanding, reciprocity expectation and joy of seeing others benefit, and also to 'other' oriented motivations such as helping others, progress of the community and change in the mind-set of the community coming into play as the main motivations. Understanding what motivates volunteers to take part in resource poor settings is paramount in recognizing, facilitating, and in sustaining the work that they do.



1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

India has a proud history of volunteerism. The tradition of ‘Shramdaan’, offering to work in the service of humanity, is practiced by millions of people who have been inspired by the great leader, Mahatma Gandhi, when he urged that the “best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of other.” India—the largest democracy and one of the fastest growing economies in the world continues to address the challenges of inequality and uneven human development, with volunteers playing a critical role in ensuring that neighbourhoods, villages and communities become a little better every day. While the governments of India at the centre and state levels have numerous and on-going developmental and welfare oriented schemes for the people of India, the problems of inequity in terms of incomes and opportunities persist. The benefits of these programmes continue to elude large sections of rural and semi-urban populations.

Youth are a major human resource for development and thus key agents of social change, economic development and technological innovation (Aiyar and Mody 2011). However, according to the National Sample Survey (NSS) data for India, labour force participation rates of women aged 25-54 (including primary and subsidiary status) have stagnated at about 26-28 per cent in urban areas, and fallen substantially from 57 per cent to 44 per cent in rural areas, between 1987 and 2011.

In this context, project Disha¹ aims to help one million underprivileged women in five states of India, namely, Telangana, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Delhi and Haryana, to get access to income generating opportunities through skilling and acquiring relevant information that will help them take advantage of the emerging employment and entrepreneurial opportunities. Project Disha is funded by the IKEA Foundation. The implementing partner is the UNDP and the concurrent monitoring and evaluation partner is IDF. UNDP is also expected to form partnerships with NGOs and training agencies, governments and private sector employers to crystallize the market access to the women. The implementation strategy of the project is to run many pilots for smaller number of women, with the participation and support of the government and the private sector, training agencies and others and scale up the successful ones.

THE PILOT THAT USED VOLUNTEERS -

In one of the pilots, implemented by UNDP in partnership with an NGO, ‘Pratham’ in the state of Maharashtra, female volunteers were used, and were called Skill Sakhis (Sakhi is a Hindi word, meaning female friend). The objective of the pilot was to provide job relevant information to underprivileged girls and women and bring them up to date on different economic opportunities available in the market so that they can make informed decisions about their future careers. The method of delivery of the information was through e-content. On a few select career options in sectors like health care, beauty treatment, two wheeler repair, mobile phone repair, and tailoring information was provided through a device connected to television using a software program. The Skill Sakhis were required to host a smart TV which showed videos on these different opportunities and to mobilize the women to first see the videos so that they get some basic idea of what is involved and to further participate in camps where a more in-depth exposure was given to them on their chosen vocations.

The Skill Sakhis were identified by the employees of the implementing partner, Pratham, and signed on in 24 blocks² in the districts of Nagpur and Aurangabad in the state.

Mobilizing people for social interventions has been found to be difficult in many developing countries due to social and cultural barriers (Debaje 2014). The experience of Disha is also similar. In this pilot, the implementers sought to overcome this challenge through the services of volunteers, namely ‘Skill Sakhis.’ Skill Sakhis mobilized girls and women from their local communities and informed them about the select career and livelihood opportunities available in the market.

This study aims to understand what motivates these Skill Sakhis, living in difficult economic conditions, to give their time and effort on a continuous basis for the benefit of others while receiving no monetary compensation.



2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to Penner (2002), volunteerism can be seen as long term and pro-social behaviour which is planned; it benefits strangers and occurs in an organizational setting. A selective review of literature shows that motivation is one of the most important factors contributing to voluntary work and in carrying out volunteer work on a sustained basis (Houle et al. 2005).

Looking more closely into the issue of what factors motivate volunteerism, community and national youth volunteers in Tanzania cited education, desire to volunteer, status, independence and wanting to make a difference as reasons for volunteering (Wijeyesekera 2011). A central premise of the functional approach is that the same behavior may serve different functions for different individuals. According to functional analysis of volunteerism, people engaging in similar acts may have different underlying motivations for doing so. Clary et al (1998) in their study conducted on volunteers in Minneapolis, USA, catalogue values, social, career, enhancement, understanding and protective as six functional motives of volunteering. Here 'Enhancement' means a way to help the ego grow and develop; 'Values' refers to a way to express one's altruistic and humanitarian values; 'Social' refers to a way to develop and strengthen social ties; 'Career' refers to a way to improve the career prospects; 'Understanding' refers to a way to gain knowledge, skill and ability; and 'Protective' refers to a way of protecting the ego from difficulties of life. Akintola (2010) studied the motivations of volunteer caregivers of people living with HIV/AIDS in South Africa. Qualitative interviews were conducted with 57 volunteer caregivers of people living with HIV/AIDS in six semi-rural South African communities to explore volunteer motivations. Consistent with functional theorizing, most of the volunteers reported having more than one motivation for enrolling as volunteers. The study gives 11 categories of motivations, and the most frequently mentioned categories relate to altruistic concern for others and community, career benefits or employment and desire to avoid idleness by the unemployed. Kironde and Klaasen (2002) in their qualitative study explored the factors that motivated lay volunteers to join Tuberculosis (TB) control programmes in high burden but resource limited settings. Altruism, having spare time, need to gain work experience and novelty of the community based programme are the themes which emerged from as motivation for community members to volunteer for the TB programme. In a study conducted to explore the motivations contributing to community volunteer's participation in a nursery feeding project in Malawi, a mix of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations were found (Uny,

2008). The intrinsic motivations found were a deep concern for orphans and a moral obligation to help. The external factors they found were, spirituality, links of reciprocity, and building of social capital.

On sustainability of volunteerism, Penner (2002) finds that it is the way in which people start volunteering, the decisions they make to continue, along with the way they feel about their volunteering that will sustain their commitment. It is therefore of utmost importance for the volunteers not only to enjoy their work but also to feel valued.

While volunteers are used by NGOs in India, there is no research done on why people do voluntary work and what sustains their motivations to continue to engage in the same. In this research we study the motivations of the girls and women to begin and continue to do voluntary work.





3. METHODOLOGY

This research uses only qualitative data. Semi structured interviews with 41 volunteers (Skill Sakhis) were conducted in 2 of the programme's 24 blocks. Purposive sampling was adapted to select women and girls, who had participated from the beginning of the programme in March, 2016, since the goal was also to study what sustained their motivation. The number of months served by the volunteers interviewed spanned from five to thirteen months and 66 per cent of the volunteers had served for more than 9 months.

Interviews were conducted in Hindi, a language spoken by both the interviewers as well as the interviewees; interviews were recorded and transcribed into English by the same team. A daily diary was kept by the researcher, and broad preliminary analysis was conducted in the field. Participants' consent (including consent to record the interview) was also sought. Confidentiality and anonymity were respected at all times.

Upon return, a phenomenological analysis was carried out on the 41 interview transcripts. This methodology was chosen because it is particularly concerned with 'the participant's view' of the topic under investigation. The analysis consisted of close and repeated reading of each transcript, 'suspending (bracketing) as much as possible the researcher's meaning and interpretations and entering into the world of the unique individual who was interviewed' (Hycner 1985:281). This process was conducted with each interviewee's transcript individually. Later, all themes from all transcripts relating to the volunteer's motivation for becoming a volunteer and reasons for sustained volunteerism were brought together and clustered, continually checking interpretations against actual data, and remaining open to contradictory and diverging themes. In order to reach a deeper understanding and to add breadth to the analysis, notes from a series of formal and informal discussions with key informants, as well as from observations made by the researcher, were also used in the analysis.



4. FINDINGS

The volunteers interviewed were between the ages of 15 to 30 with about 70 per cent of them falling between 18 to 21 years of age. Their education ranged from middle school to graduation. Around 60 per cent of them had completed senior secondary school education and were continuing their study. In terms of Social category³, 54 per cent of the respondents belonged to Other Backward Classes (OBCs), 10 per cent belonged to the general category, 22 per cent belonged to Scheduled caste (SCs) and the remaining 14 per cent belonged to scheduled tribe (STs) category. The family income ranged from INR 1,000 (15 USD) to INR 40,000 (625 USD) per month, with the average monthly family income of the sample being INR 16,000 (250 USD). The household size ranged from 3 to 14 members, the average household size being 5.

After collecting data and analysing the responses from our sample of female volunteers, we categorised the motivations into two groups: 'Personal' and 'other' oriented. 'Personal' here refers to motivations arising from those which are person centric, meaning which relate to one's own self. The 'other' oriented motivations are those which arise from concern for the others. This categorisation while largely in line with the 'intrinsic' and 'extrinsic' categorisation found in other studies, is also slightly different and more in line with our findings. The one main distinction between 'intrinsic' as we found in the literature and 'personal' as we have categorized it is that we are including 'expectation of rewards in future' under personal whereas 'intrinsic' leaves that out. This categorisation is also found in studies that have used 'personal' motivational category. In the case of 'other' category, our methodology is in tune with other studies that have used this categorisation. The themes in no way are exclusive in nature, and cluster, link and mutually reinforce each other. Almost all the volunteers reported motivations relating to multiple themes.

The following are the motivations categorized under 'Personal'. These have surfaced based on the responses received from the Skill Sakhis in the sample. One of the motivations which other studies did not highlight and which emerged from our analysis is that of 'Respect in family and society'. All the others are found by other studies as well and therefore maybe considered standard under the Personal categorisation.

4.1 PERSONAL MOTIVATIONS

4.1.1. PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GROWTH

Personal Development refers to the factors where the volunteers were drawn to becoming Skill Sakhis and for continuously working in the programme⁴ for reasons which they thought would help in their own development. 12 of the 41 volunteers reported reasons for volunteering relating to their own development. One of the ways in which they thought this work would help them was in increasing their self-confidence. After being a part of the programme, they had all experienced an increase in confidence.

"I get confidence, so like doing this work".

A second reason given by them was that the information and knowledge they received free of cost could play a crucial role in building their career. The Skill Sakhis did not have information about the various courses and the vocational training institutes in the nearby areas. This information was received by them by participating in the programme.

"I want to learn something, want to learn a lot, I will get knowledge, then it might benefit in the future in terms of career"

A third reason was that for them and also women in their communities in general, mobility was a big challenge. It was difficult for them to get consent from their families to go outside their block¹ for any type of vocational training or even for employment.

"People in the family don't want girls to step outside the house, even today, some girls were told to come early, and not get delayed"

Becoming self-employed or opening a small enterprise of their own within the village is a more feasible option for the women rather than getting into jobs. Participating in the pilot would help them achieve that. The knowledge gained would come in handy in future also.

“to understand how to improve my future, if I get married, and go to other person’s house, then if I get into trouble, then I can use this information to do some work and help”.

The girls also reported increase in self-esteem as the motive for wanting to engage in this programme.

“By helping others, I get happiness, increase in self-esteem”

4.1.2 PERSONAL LEARNING AND UNDERSTANDING,

Personal learning and understanding motivation arises from the factors which enable a person in gaining deeper understanding of self and getting more experiences in life. 17 out of 41 volunteers expressed factors relating to deeper understanding as a reason for prolonged engagement in the programme. One of the factors reported by the girls was eagerness to learn new things. The content in the smart PC was not just about the different vocational trainings, but also contained videos on yoga, on personality development, on basic computer skills like MS Office. Peer to peer learning was also taking place simultaneously. The content also contained videos on personality development, basic computer skills and how to face interviews, normally absent from regular college curricula. They enjoyed learning.

“There’s no matter of payment, this is social work, I am getting to learn so much, so no need of money, this is an age to learn, when I go for a job later, then how to face interviews, how to talk to people, that learning is also taking place”

Getting opportunities to interact with more people and understanding their thoughts and views was also reported as an important factor in wanting to continuously engage with the programme. They also got the opportunity to step out of their homes for attending various events and meet more people. One of the girls felt that only by stepping out of their homes they could learn the more important things in life, things which they are not taught at schools and colleges. They also reported that this was one way of meeting more people, increasing their network and making more contacts.

“Learn new things, gather more information, the important things in life are never taught in school, only when you step out, you learn these things”

“I will keep working as a volunteer, because I get a lot of happiness, going from village to village, talking to people, making new contacts, seeing how people talk, see what their thinking is, so lots of learning taking place, there’s satisfaction that they told us what they really think, and then making them aware about what they should be doing, motivating them to move ahead in life”

4.1.3 RECIPROCITY EXPECTATION

Expectation of reciprocity was a factor that came up. The respondents expressed that since they were helping the other girls and women right then, when they needed other’s help in the future, they expected to receive it. The others would help them. It was a means of creating credit today in terms of favor, which could be called in in the future when the time came. This is in line with Blau’s ‘Theory of Social Exchange’ (1967), which underlies volunteering in two ways. Firstly, people who already received help either for themselves, or their close ones feel obligated. So volunteering is a way to relieve that obligation. Secondly, people volunteer as they fear that one day they will be in need of society’s help, so by volunteering today they create ‘credit’ to rightfully ask for society’s help in the future (Wilson, 2000).

“They will think that since I helped them, so they will help me, when I get a job, I can also help them”

4.1.4 FEELING OF JOY ON SEEING OTHERS BENEFIT

The feeling of joy on seeing the other benefit is a factor which cannot be clearly categorised as either personal or other oriented, as the feeling of joy occurs internally but is caused by the effect on the other. 13 of the respondents expressed happiness on seeing other people in their village benefitting from the information provided by them. One of the respondents expressed that there are some things which should be done without expecting anything in return, as she would then be acting selfishly if she got something in return.

“Because I like telling others, I see them all as friends, I don’t want anything, because then I will be selfish, I don’t want to be selfish, I like helping others without taking anything“

4.1.5 RESPECT IN FAMILY AND SOCIETY

A surprising finding, not documented by the papers reviewed was that volunteering can increase the respect that these girls and women got from within the family and the larger community. The Skill Sakhis themselves did not expect this before starting their work and therefore was not a motivational factor to begin voluntary work, but ended up contributing to their sustained involvement in the programme. The other papers reviewed did not bring this factor out. When people in the village wanted information relating to jobs and training started coming to these girls and enquiring. Popularity in their community also gave them more confidence to carry out their work with increased dedication.

“We get inspiration, feel good that people take our name, if somebody wants job so they come to me and ask, so it feels good. My mother was telling me that nobody used to ask about you before, but now my friends ask about you, that if somebody needs a job will your daughter help them, so respect has increased”

4.2 OTHER ORIENTED MOTIVATION

The following are the ‘other’ oriented motivations which have surfaced:

4.2.1 TO HELP OTHERS

Helping other people was a very important factor for the volunteers when it came to joining the programme. 22 volunteers reported wanting to improve the condition of other people as a reason for volunteering. They stated that the literacy level and the economic condition of the villagers was not very good and this made them want to contribute towards improving their conditions in whichever way they could. They further stated that even if one person in these families got employment, then the entire family’s living condition could improve. This gave them encouragement. Some of Skill Sakhis also reported that many of the girls in their communities lacked access to information that could improve their livelihoods, and so they wanted to help them. Since the information was free of cost, the volunteers wanted it to reach as many as possible. The girls they wanted to reach out to had parents who could not afford to pay the training cost.

“I see the people around me, I see their condition and then it feels that something needs to be done for them, and their condition is that they can’t even eat 2 meals in a day, if they stay at home for 1 day, they can’t even eat properly.”

4.2.2 TO HELP THE UNEMPLOYED

Another reason which surfaced as a reason making these girls volunteer was that they wanted to help the unemployed people in the village in getting employment. They felt that if the unemployed people could get jobs then, theirs and their family’s condition could improve.

“So that unemployed people can get employment”

4.2.3 PROGRESS OF THE COMMUNITY

The volunteers were concerned about the overall progress and advancement of the people in their villages. Eight volunteers explicitly expressed willingness to contribute towards the progress of the girls and women of their villages. It is difficult for girls and women to get consent of their families for moving to distant places to pursue higher studies or start a new job, as also seen in ‘Gender and Mobility in Developing World’ (Tanu Priya, 2011).The girls expressed that even if they could not get the opportunity to move away and progress, the other girls who did get consent from their parents could go out for higher education and jobs could benefit.

“Some things which I did not get, others should get, there are some people whose parents would allow them to go out, so they should be told”

Some volunteers expressed that the opportunities to learn and develop careers that women had in big cities were missing in the villages. They wanted to contribute towards correcting this situation. They also wanted that the people in the villages should not feel that nobody cared about them. Some of the girls also expressed a wish to serve the society. They wanted all the people in the village to progress and wished to contribute in whichever way that they could.

“I feel the information I have, all the girls should have, and nobody should think that they don’t know anything, that nobody tells them anything”

4.2.4 CHANGE IN THINKING AND MINDSETS

All the volunteers reported equal status not being given to girls and boys in the village. They wanted to disseminate information to more and more people in order to change

their attitudes and thinking towards the female members in their communities. They wanted more and more girls to go out for attending vocational training and get into jobs so that they could start earning and become financially independent. They stated that becoming financially independent would improve their status in the society and increase their say within their households.

“We will feel important in the household when we will get a job and contribute financially”.

They expressed the view that the problem of gender imbalance can be addressed in this way. Trying to bring a change in people’s attitudes and mindsets was a big push factor for these girls to become volunteers and continue as such on a sustained basis.

“I want people to develop, change their attitudes, they should encourage their children to go for education, allow them to go for training”



5. CONCLUSION

The focus of this study was on understanding the different motivations and their underlying factors of the Skill Sakhis. The phenomenological analysis found many ‘Personal’ and ‘Other’ oriented motivations consistent with findings in other studies (Fuentes and Jimenez, 2000), especially the theme of Personal Development. Personal development and growth, personal learning and understanding, reciprocity expectation, feeling of joy on seeing others benefit and respect in family and society are the ‘Personal’ motivations which were discovered. To help others, to help the unemployed, to contribute to the progress of the community and to change thinking and mindsets about women’s role in the society are the ‘other’ oriented motivations which were found. One of the main findings, the wish to help others, arising from concern for others, has also been seen in the findings of Kironde and Klassen (2002) relating to volunteers working in the TB control programs in the South Africa. The themes covered under the ‘Personal’ category also support the findings of Wilson and Musick (1999) talking about how there are individual benefits to be derived from doing volunteer work for the volunteer reaching far beyond the act of volunteering itself which may linger on even after the role of volunteer is relinquished.

Our finding of the motivation relating to respect in family and society was interesting. This has not been reported elsewhere. It could not have been a factor which motivated them to start volunteering in the first place. With time the respect they commanded within the family and the larger community increased, leading to their sustained involvement. It is worth mentioning here that a majority of the girls (38 out of 41) are studying, either in schools or colleges. But in spite of that, they are devoting time to this work. Many of them had said that even after they start on a job or get married, they would continue to do this work. One of the interviewees is working as Skill Sakhi even after marriage. In fact the condition she put before getting married was that she should be allowed to continue working as a Skill Sakhi and her in-laws accepted. If they were not engaged in this work, they would spend time either studying or engaging in household chores.

END NOTES

- ¹ The project is being funded by IKEA foundation, implemented by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), while India Development Foundation (IDF) is the concurrent monitoring and evaluation partner.
- ² For administration purposes, a state is divided into districts and a district is further divided into blocks. Blocks represent a compact area for which effective plans are prepared and implemented through village panchayats.
- ³ OBC is a collective term used by the Government of India to classify castes which are socially and educationally disadvantaged. It is one of several official classifications of the population of India, along with Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SCs and STs). The SCs and STs are various officially designated groups of historically disadvantaged indigenous people in India. The terms are recognized in the Constitution of India and the various groups are designated in one or other of the categories.
- ⁴ For the project purpose, Pratham is a pilot, but for the girls and women, along with their families, it is a programme.

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