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# **YOUTH VOLUNTEERISM AND DISASTER RISK REDUCTION**

A research report on the motivations for young people  
volunteering in urban slums of Freetown, Sierra Leone  
by **Ayden Cumming**  
edited by Lizz Harrison

## **Contents**

<b>Foreword</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>About</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>List of acronyms</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>8</b>
Expected outcomes	9
<b>2 An overview: young people and volunteering in DRR in slums</b>	<b>10</b>
Slums	10
Youth	10
Community-based Disaster Risk Reduction	10
Volunteerism	11
Community Disaster Management Committees	11
<b>3 Methodology</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>4 Sierra Leone</b>	<b>13</b>
4.1 Freetown	14
<b>5 Results</b>	<b>16</b>
5.1 What are the demographic characteristics of the volunteers, absentees and non-volunteers?	16
5.2 What are the values, attitudes and perceptions of the volunteers, absentees and non-volunteers?	17
5.3 What are the costs and benefits of volunteering as perceived by volunteers, absentees and non-volunteers?	19
<b>6 Recommendations and further research</b>	<b>22</b>
Recommendations	22
Areas of further research	23
<b>7 References</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Annex 1– Theories of Volunteerism</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Annex 2– Quotations from young stakeholders</b>	<b>27</b>

## **Foreword**



More than 1 million people have been killed and one billion affected by disasters since 2000. Floods, cyclones, tsunamis, earthquakes and other natural hazards have cost the world more than US\$1 trillion in destruction since then. Last year alone, natural disasters including the drought in the Horn of Africa, and earthquakes and floods in Asia and Latin America killed almost 26,000 people.

Natural hazards present many risks to young people, particularly those living in poverty in less developed countries. Disasters can affect young people's education, livelihoods and health, and also setback gains made through development activities. Disaster risk reduction (DRR) is one of Y Care International's key focuses and all our projects and programmes consider disaster risks throughout the project management cycle to support young people to become more resilient to disasters, and to ensure sustainable development.

We believe that for DRR activities to be effective and sustainable, they must include the leadership, participation and engagement of the young people in the communities in which we work. Young people are assets in development and therefore supporting them to identify and address the disaster risks that face them is essential.

In an increasingly urbanised world, understanding what motivates young people living in urban slum communities to volunteer in DRR activities will help us to ensure that we are able to engage with young people on this issue. This report is the first of many and is the result of a valuable partnership with King's College London. We are very grateful to Ayden Cumming for her research report based on her discussions with young people living in Kroo Bay and Dworzack. We are also very proud to be working with the Sierra Leone YMCA who have been carrying out a DRR pilot project in these two slum communities and we thank them for their commitment to this.

Finally, YCI aims to integrate the recommendations outlined in this report into all of our DRR projects and activities to ensure that young people are leading the effort to help their communities to become less vulnerable to disasters, and thus better places to live.

Dylan Mathews  
Director, International Programmes  
Y Care International

# Acknowledgements

## Acknowledgements from Y Care International

Y Care International would like to thank the young people involved in this research and acknowledge the young people around the world who are engaged in disaster risk reduction (DRR) work.

Thanks to King's College London and particularly Professor Mark Pelling for the valuable partnership and support which made this research possible. We hope that this link continues to enable Y Care International to learn, improve and deliver on our mission. Through this partnership, we hope to work alongside Masters students at King's College London to carry out more research on young people and DRR.

Thank you to Sierra Leone YMCA, and particularly Tom Menjor, Christian Kamara and Francis Reffell for their time, dedication and hard work in helping young people to realise the importance of their participation in DRR in their own communities, and for supporting Ayden.

Finally, Y Care International would like to say a big thank you to Ayden Cumming for her support, enthusiasm and research work. This valuable piece of research will feed into our project development and help us to ensure young people are leading on and participating in DRR in Sierra Leone and across the world. Thank you Ayden.

## Acknowledgements from Ayden Cumming

This report is the output of an MA degree in Disasters, Adaptation and Development at King's College London, supervised by Professor Mark Pelling. Thanks to Mark for his patience and guidance throughout the research process and to the staff of Y Care International, in particular Lizz Harrison and Sarah Hunt, for collaboration and support.

Particular recognition is owed to the staff of Sierra Leone YMCA, especially Tom Menjor, for the huge amount of time he dedicated. Finally, thank you to the young people in Kroo Bay and Dworzack who generously gave their time and shared their knowledge. This research would not have been possible without them.

Further comments are welcome, and can be sent to Ayden Cumming at [ayden.cumming@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:ayden.cumming@kcl.ac.uk).

My full academic research report, which includes a critique of the three main theories of volunteerism, is available on request and will also be available from Y Care International's website.

## Photography

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## About

### About Y Care International

 Y Care International is the YMCA's international relief and development agency. We work in partnership with YMCAs and other local partners across the developing world to respond to the needs of the most disadvantaged young people.

The needs of disadvantaged young people in developing countries are often neglected, making the transition into adulthood difficult. We help young people develop alternatives to a future of poverty and empower them to contribute to the development of their communities.

[www.ycareinternational.org](http://www.ycareinternational.org)

### About Sierra Leone YMCA



Sierra Leone YMCA (SLYMCA) is one of the country's oldest youth serving organisations, established in 1912. SLYMCA's vision is a society where young people are empowered to be responsible and productive within their communities and Sierra Leone at large, providing opportunities for young people to fulfil their potential through developing innovative and participative programmes addressing young people's needs.

SLYMCA presently has 24 branches in all regions across the country and through its work, SLYMCA is considered a leading NGO in the country; delivering socially relevant programming for young people and their communities.

### About King's College London



King's College London is one of the world's leading research and teaching universities based in the heart of London. It is also one of England's oldest, founded in 1829. King's is dedicated to the advancement of knowledge, learning and understanding in the service of society.

[www.kcl.ac.uk](http://www.kcl.ac.uk)

## List of acronyms

CDMC	Community Disaster Management Committee
CSG	Community Steering Group
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
FEDURP	Federation of Urban and Rural Poor
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
SLYMCA	Sierra Leone Young Men's Christian Association
YCI	Y Care International
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association



Residents of Kroo Bay live next to the heavily polluted river

## Executive summary

Disasters such as floods, earthquakes and cyclones have a variety of impacts on the people that they affect, including hindering poverty reduction activities. People living in less developed countries are particularly vulnerable to disaster risk and such vulnerability is compounded by the effects of rapid urbanisation; including poverty, income inequality and high population densities. Cities are therefore particularly vulnerable to disaster risk, and residents of slums even more so. Unplanned urban development often results in the expansion of slums such as Kroo Bay and Dworzack in Freetown, Sierra Leone where population densities are high, housing is poor quality, and living conditions are dire.

Efforts to reduce disaster risk have increasingly concentrated on community-based actions focusing on reducing vulnerability and increasing resilience to disasters. However, many community-based projects have difficulty achieving the desired level of voluntary resident participation, threatening the success and sustainability of such initiatives. Y Care International believe in the value of engaging young people in disaster risk reduction (DRR) activities and recognise that the willingness of community members to volunteer is critical for the success of community-based DRR projects.

While much literature documents the challenges of participation in community-based projects, very little has been written on the motivations of those who volunteer, and even less on the incentives and barriers to youth volunteers in less developed countries.



Young people outside the Community Centre in Dworzack

The purpose of this research was to understand the motivations and barriers for young people volunteering in community disaster management committees in the slum communities of Kroo Bay and Dworzack. Y Care International hope that the findings and recommendations from the research will help to inform future project design to ensure community-based DRR projects and activities attract and retain young volunteers.

### Key recommendations

- Benefits of participation should be clearly explained or advertised when recruiting youth volunteers, and expectations should be managed throughout the process;
- Recruitment of volunteers for DRR initiatives should not only target existing volunteer or youth organisations;
- Financial incentives should not be used as the main recruiting strategy when establishing a DRR committee;
- Every effort must be made to overcome the gendered nature of absenteeism through activities such as providing childcare during meetings and events, and supporting communities to ensure female participants are supported and encouraged by their family and friends.

The report starts with an introduction to the research project (Chapter 1) and then goes on to give an overview of disaster risk reduction and volunteering (Chapter 2) used to analyse the data collected. Chapter 3 then explains the methodology of the research, followed by a justification for, and description of, the research locations; Kroo Bay and Dworzack (Chapter 4). Analysis and discussion of the results and findings of the research are outlined in Chapter 5. Finally, Chapter 6 concludes and provides ideas for further research and recommendations for projects and programmes.



Kroo Bay during the floods in 2007

## 1 Introduction

Disasters are the result of both natural hazards and human action; people are often repeatedly affected by disasters, halting economic and human development and hindering efforts to reduce poverty. People living in less developed countries are particularly vulnerable to disaster risk, as livelihoods and homes are repeatedly destroyed. Such vulnerability is compounded by the effects of rapid urbanisation including poverty, income inequality and high population densities. Cities are therefore particularly vulnerable to disaster risk and residents of slums even more so. Unplanned urban development often result in the expansion of slums where population densities are high, housing is of poor quality, and living conditions are dire.

Disaster risk reduction (DRR) has increasingly focused on community-based actions focusing on reducing vulnerability and thus increasing resilience to disasters. Emphasis is placed on community self-reliance and local capacity building. However, many community-based projects have difficulty achieving the desired level of voluntary resident participation, threatening the success and sustainability of such initiatives. Interestingly, none of the major theoretical models of volunteerism recognise or address the unique context of urban slum residents who volunteer within their own communities; to date, volunteer research has been based in developed countries.

In response to this gap, this research investigates the motives of volunteers in Community Disaster Management Committees (CDMCs) in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Emphasis is placed upon the motives of youth residents, a sub category of volunteers which is often neglected. While some research has focused on the roles of children under the age of 18, the incentives and obstacles affecting older youth has thus far been ignored by volunteer theorists.

## **Expected outcomes**

The willingness of community members to volunteer is critical for the success of community-based DRR projects. While much literature documents the challenges of participation in community-based projects, very little has been written on the motivations of those who volunteer, and even less on the incentives and barriers to youth volunteers in less developed countries. The purpose of this research was to understand the motivations and barriers for young people volunteering in community disaster management committees in the slum communities of Kroo Bay and Dworzack. Y Care International hopes that the findings and recommendations from the research will help to inform project design to ensure community-based DRR projects and activities attract and retain young volunteers.



Two young Dworzack residents

## 2 An overview: young people and volunteering in DRR in slums

### Slums

Slums are informal settlements with poor housing conditions, and often poor living conditions, within cities. Characteristics of slums are that they are often built in hazardous locations, lack basic services, have poor access, poor quality housing, inadequate infrastructure, high population density and overcrowding, and limited security of tenure.

### Youth

This study focuses on the motives of youth in the CDMCs, because this is an age group which is often neglected. Y Care International defines youth as those aged between 15 and 24 years old; Sierra Leone Government defines youth as those aged between 15 and 35 years old. Under 18 year olds were excluded from the study due to time constraints and the long process of ethical approval for carrying out research with children. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, youth refers to people between the ages of 18 and 35 years old.

### Community-based Disaster Risk Reduction

Disaster risk reduction (DRR) means to reduce disaster risks through disaster management, reducing the vulnerability of people and property, and disaster preparedness. As NGOs and governments move from top-down, interventionist

approaches to community-based approaches to DRR, the engagement of community volunteers becomes crucial to the success of DRR initiatives.

People and local knowledge are the principle resources in mitigating disasters, and community-based approaches reduce vulnerability through involving those most exposed to risk<sup>1</sup>.

## **Volunteerism**

The willingness of community members to volunteer is critical for the success of community-based DRR projects. While much literature documents the challenges of participation in community-based projects, very little has been written on the motivations of those who volunteer.

Volunteering can mean different things to different people. Therefore, for the purposes of this research, volunteerism is defined as planned voluntary behaviour intended to benefit others, taking place within an organisational setting, for a prolonged period. Volunteer literature has neglected to study the motives of slum dwellers who volunteer within their own communities, and particularly volunteers in less developed countries. This research report addresses this gap. Throughout the analysis of the findings, the three main theories of volunteerism were considered: Functional Approach, Planned Behaviour Theory, and Political Economy Theory.

## **Community Disaster Management Committees**

To establish/revitalise CDMCs in Kroo Bay and Dworzack, SLYMCA built on previously existing, but no longer active, disaster volunteer groups. In 2006 and 2007, Concern Worldwide established a disaster committee of 15 members in both slums. These initial members were randomly selected from the existing Dworzack Youth Advocacy Group and the Kroo Bay Community Youth Committee. The Sierra Leonean Office of National Security trained an additional 15 members for each committee in 2010. SLYMCA re-recruited those 30 members and trained another 15 people, bringing the total to 45 members.

These additional members were recruited by the YMCA from existing YMCA youth advocacy group members, Federation of Urban and Rural Poor (FEDURP) members, and Community Steering Group (CSG) members in Kroo Bay and Dworzack. They were recruited during the four year Youth Livelihood and Slum Upgrading Project (2007-2011). Youth therefore represent over half the membership in each CDMC.

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<sup>1</sup> The terms disaster risk reduction and disaster management will be used interchangeably in this report as disaster management is so closely related to DRR and the research surveyed members of the Community Disaster Management Committees (CDMCs) in Freetown.



YMCA staff visit a family in Kroo Bay

### 3 Methodology

Research methods consisted of focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews and participant observations. Two focus group discussions were conducted after CDMC meetings: one in Kroo Bay, one in Dworzack. To facilitate comparison, information from young people who were surveyed was divided into three groups: volunteers, absentees and non-volunteers. Volunteers are defined as those who attend the regular meetings and activities of the CDMC. Absentees are people who are officially members of the committees but attend less than 50% of the scheduled events. Non-volunteers are not, and have never been, members of the CDMCs.

In total, 22 interviews were conducted with young people: 12 with volunteers, 5 with absentees and 5 with non-volunteers. In addition, interviews were conducted with the chairmen of the CDMCs to gain information about the background and functioning of the committees.

This research investigates the motives of urban slum resident youth volunteers in CDMCs. Three research questions were formulated:

- 1    What are the demographic characteristics of volunteers in the CDMCs?
- 2    What are the values, attitudes and perceptions of the volunteers, absentees and non-volunteers?
- 3    What are the costs and benefits of volunteering with the CDMCs as perceived by volunteers?



Poor housing in Kroo Bay and Dworzack increases people's vulnerability to disaster risks

## 4 Sierra Leone



Sierra Leone is an ideal place to investigate volunteerism in DRR. The country suffers from both chronic and catastrophic disasters including flooding, coastal and upland erosion, landslides and rockfalls.

As the population is extremely vulnerable to natural hazards there is growing interest in DRR activities from the government and local and international NGOs. The Department of Disaster Management was established by the national government in 2004 and has mobilised several communities within the country to participate in DRR activities<sup>2</sup>.

**Figure 1: Map of Africa showing Sierra Leone**

Source: © OpenStreetMap and contributors, CC-BY-SA

<sup>2</sup> Sierra Leone YMCA (2012)

## 4.1 Freetown

The capital city, Freetown, is growing rapidly and as a result, urban planning and environmental management is challenged by the continued growth of unplanned slum settlements, such as Kroo Bay and Dworzack, which are home to a large proportion of Freetown's nearly 900,000 inhabitants.

Urban population growth is largely driven by internal migration of youth from rural areas in search of jobs<sup>3</sup>, a phenomenon which was exacerbated by refugees and internally displaced people seeking safety and jobs during the civil war in Sierra Leone<sup>4</sup>. The growing population has placed pressure on infrastructure, and there has been little improvement in basic services since the end of the civil war in 2002.

### Kroo Bay and Dworzack

SLYMCA has been active within Kroo Bay and Dworzack for many years, since their Youth Livelihood and Slum Upgrading Project. During the Comic Relief funded four year project from 2007-2011, environmental hazards and risks were identified, and lessons learned on how to address them, based on the geography of the two communities.

In addition, SLYMCA initiated the establishment/revitalisation and operation of the CDMCs in Kroo Bay and Dworzack, through a DRR pilot project with the goal of aiding residents in identifying, analysing and mitigating disaster risk in their communities. With such high concentrations of young people and varied hazards and risks, Kroo Bay and Dworzack are excellent locations to study youth volunteerism in DRR.

The following map indicates the location of these two slum communities within Freetown.

**Figure 2: Map of Freetown showing location of Kroo Bay and Dworzack**



Source: © OpenStreetMap and contributors, CC-BY-SA

<sup>3</sup> Williams (2001)

<sup>4</sup> Hoffman (2007)



Kroo Bay lacks basic sanitation facilities leaving residents vulnerable to the spread of disease

### **Kroo Bay**

Kroo Bay is one of the largest and poorest slums in Freetown. It is a coastal slum located at the mouth of George Brook and Kroo Bay Rivers that both flow through Freetown. As a result, all waste dumped in the streets and drainage system flow through Kroo Bay, causing major annual flooding. Inadequate drainage contributes to flood risk and erosion. Additionally, as the slum is at sea level, it is vulnerable to storm surges and sea level rise.

The current population is over 10,000 and with a growth rate of close to 300% since 1991, the population is expected to increase further<sup>5</sup>. SLYMCA undertook an enumeration study in Kroo Bay in 2010 which identified that 22% of the population are between the ages of 20 and 29 years old and 24% are between the ages of 10 and 19 years old; showing a large youth population.

### **Dworzack**

Dworzack is a hillside slum on Peninsula Mountain in the western part of Freetown, approximately two miles from the city centre. Dworzack is the source of the George Brook River which floods frequently within the slum. Erosion from rainwater runoff is another problem which is compounded by deforestation. Consequently, natural hazards in Dworzack include flooding, land, mud and rock slides, and erosion. Dworzack has a total population of over 16,500 of which half are youth<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Parvez (2011)

<sup>6</sup> Sierra Leone YMCA (2012)



A young lady sells fish in the market in Dworzack

## 5 Results

### 5.1 What are the demographic characteristics of the volunteers, absentees and non-volunteers?

The demographic characteristics of the volunteers, absentees and non-volunteers are presented below. Youth volunteers represent the full range of the youth age bracket of 18-35. In short, the demographic characteristics of volunteers are not decisive in differentiating them from absentees or non-volunteers.

There is a relatively even gender balance, although this is due to the deliberate recruitment of women, who were initially under-represented, by SLYMCA into the CDMCs. Educational attainments range from a few years of primary education to completion of tertiary level education. While many youth volunteers have children, some are single with no dependents. Approximately 60% are Muslim, reflecting the dominant religion in Sierra Leone, while the remaining 40% identify as Christian.

Nevertheless, all volunteer respondents display two common attributes: long-term residence and volunteering with other organisations. Of all the respondents, only 8% had lived in the slum for fewer than five years. In addition, 67% of volunteer respondents volunteer with at least one other organisation. However, this high percentage is likely due to SLYMCA recruiting youth CDMC members from existing community-based youth organisations.

While the demographic characteristics of the absentee volunteers are largely similar to those of the active volunteers, 80% of absentee respondents are female. The chairmen

of the CDMCs perceive gender to be a significant variable in absenteeism; they estimate that of all the absentee volunteers, approximately 75% are female. Furthermore, both active and absentee female respondents express that family and household responsibilities often take priority over attendance at CDMC meetings and activities. For example:

*"I cannot come [to the meetings] when I have to watch my little brother."*

One of the surveyed female absentee volunteers

*"I'm very busy at home. It takes a lot of time to cook, clean..."*

Another one of the surveyed female absentee volunteers on why she misses CDMC meetings

This suggests that the opportunity cost of volunteering with the CDMCs may be influenced by gender. Alternatively, gendered social norms may be influential. Both possible causes of gendered absenteeism are discussed further in the cost-benefit section following.

## **5.2 What are the values, attitudes and perceptions of the volunteers, absentees and non-volunteers?**

It is also important to explore the values and attitudes that can help to explain why young people choose to volunteer with the CDMCs. Three variables are found to differentiate volunteers from non-volunteers:

- 1 rating of neighbourhood;
- 2 sense of citizen duty; and
- 3 perception of problems.

Overall, volunteers and absentees have a **positive attitude towards their neighbourhoods**. When asked to describe the area they live in, volunteers and absentees began with positive attributes of the area, including: a strong sense of community, social activities, helpful neighbours, and personal safety. However, CDMC volunteers are also aware of the many challenges. For example:

*"Dworzack, well, it's not just one place, there are many little neighbourhoods in Dworzack. They are named after countries, like Germany, Spain, Italy... Altogether, Dworzack is a good place to live. It is close to [the city centre], we all play football together, and there is not much crime. People from other slums want to come to Dworzack; it is the best place to live...But it's still a slum, we have many problems; electricity, roads, water, poverty..."*

A 25 year old volunteer describing Dworzack

In contrast, non-volunteers started neighbourhood descriptions with negative characteristics and only provided positive attributes when probed. For example:

*"[Dworzack is] a slum! There is nothing good about slums. There is so much garbage, and no electricity, and when it rains it is terrible".*

An 18 year old male non-volunteer describing Dworzack

**Sense of citizen duty** is a significant variable distinguishing volunteers and absentees from non-volunteers. Volunteers and absentees express a sense of moral or civic responsibility to volunteer in order to address hazard and disaster related problems and risks in the neighbourhood. By contrast, non-volunteers express a sentiment that it is the government's responsibility to improve or alleviate problems. Examples are provided below in Table 1.

**Table 1: Examples of sense of moral/civic responsibility**

Volunteers	Absentees	Non-volunteers
"We have to do it. No one else will. We must make [change] happen."	"It is [the residents of the slum] who must make it a better place to live, for ourselves, for our children."	"How can it be our job? We did not make the problems! The government must do its job, it's not for us to fix everything, we can barely survive."
"It is us! We live here, we even make some of the problems, so we must make changes, together."	"the government should help, but we must help too, for this is our neighbourhood"	"Why me? It's not my fault!"

Volunteers and absentees surveyed indicate feeling a sense of responsibility to act on values important to them; showing that values are a significant motivating factor to volunteer with the CDMCs (see Table 1). Values do not significantly differentiate volunteers from absentees, therefore it appears that values are an important factor in attracting volunteers initially but less important for the retention of volunteers. Perceptions of problems within the neighbourhood also appear to draw out contrasts between volunteers and non-volunteers.

**Perception of problems** is the third and final variable which significantly separates volunteers from non-volunteers. When asked to describe the most significant problems or challenges in the slum, volunteers report environmental challenges: insufficient drainage, lack of waste removal, large boulders, annual flooding and poorly constructed homes. Similar challenges are expressed by absentee volunteers. However, non-volunteers describe broader societal challenges including unemployment, child labour and poverty.

In addition, volunteers express strong beliefs that their volunteering would help address the challenges, while non-volunteers do not believe their involvement would contribute to solving the problems in their neighbourhoods. These responses suggest that perception of problems and perceived ability to address these problems affect the decision to volunteer more strongly than a sense of moral or civic responsibility.

It is clear that values, attitudes and perceptions differentiate volunteers from non-volunteers. Absentee volunteers are extremely similar to volunteers in these terms and such similarity suggests that these factors are important in the *decision* to volunteer; however, they are less significant for volunteer *retention*.

## 5.3 What are the costs and benefits of volunteering as perceived by volunteers, absentees and non-volunteers?

### Benefits

Volunteers report experiencing numerous benefits as a result of their participation in the CDMCs (see Table 1 in Appendix 2). Absentees report fewer benefits than active volunteers, and also indicate that the benefits do not have a significant impact on their lives. The benefits described by volunteers and absentees can be categorised into material, solidarity and purposive benefits<sup>7</sup> (as described in Table 1 Appendix 1). Non-volunteers, conversely, express the belief that they would receive few benefits from volunteering with a CDMC and that they expect the opportunity cost of volunteering would be very high.

*"I liked making my area safer"*

One of the surveyed absentee volunteers

### Material benefits

Material benefits are tangible rewards, often in the form of money<sup>8</sup>. The volunteers of the CDMCs are not paid for their participation, consistent with the characterisation of volunteering as an unpaid activity. However, at the beginning of the DRR project, SLYMCA offered a 'travel stipend' of 5,000 leones<sup>9</sup> at the end of the twice monthly meetings. The travel stipend was offered as part of an effort by SLYMCA to recognise that volunteers were offering their time and therefore likely forgoing wages. SLYMCA staff estimate that most volunteers with the CDMCs earn between 15,000 and 20,000 leones per day, so the travel stipend was approximately equal to a quarter day's work or the length of a CDMC meeting.

During the first half of the CDMC pilot project, SLYMCA became concerned that the travel stipend was the main incentive for community members to volunteer. Staff were concerned that the CDMCs would not be sustainable once the pilot project ended and SLYMCA ceased to provide the stipend.

As a result, the stipend is now only offered once a month to those who attend the joint CDMC meeting in the slum in which they do not reside. SLYMCA staff and the chairmen of the CDMCs noted a drop in attendance when the travel stipend was removed; they estimate approximately 25% of volunteers became absentees at this point. While direct causation is difficult to determine, evidence suggests that the material incentive in the form of the travel stipend was a significant benefit of volunteering in the CDMCs. Once that benefit was removed, it seems that the costs outweighed the benefits for a quarter of the volunteers.

### Solidarity benefits

Solidarity benefits are intangible rewards deriving from group membership, including recognition and respect from others<sup>10</sup>. Solidarity benefits are frequently expressed by volunteers (see Table 1 in Appendix 2) and volunteers explain that these rewards are important factors in their decision to volunteer with the CDMCs. However, it is difficult

<sup>7</sup> Clark and Wilson (1961)

<sup>8</sup> Chiman and Wandersman (1999)

<sup>9</sup> Approximately 70 pence

<sup>10</sup> ibid.

to assess how influential the solidarity benefits are in the decision to volunteer or not, as unlike the removal of the travel stipend and its reflection on material benefits, there does not appear to be a specific event or occurrence which signifies the importance of solidarity benefits. It is, however, possible to conclude based on interviews that solidarity benefits are important motivating variables for the volunteers.

Assessing the impact of solidarity benefits for absentees showed that absentee respondents had expected to experience some degree of solidarity benefits, but this expectation was not realised. These findings suggest that while all three benefits are important motivating factors in the decision to volunteer, solidarity benefits need to be experienced in order for new volunteers to remain active. Therefore volunteers who receive the benefits that correspond to their initial motives for volunteering are less likely to drop out or become absentee volunteers.

Non-volunteers did not perceive that volunteering with a CDMC would lead to solidarity benefits. Non-volunteer respondents expressed the belief that they already derived solidarity benefits from other aspects of their lives, including tribal, political and/or religious affiliations and relationships with friends and family. They either stated that they did not need more solidarity benefits or that they did not believe such benefits would be experienced as a result of their volunteering with the CDMC. While these findings do not directly support or contradict any of the theories of volunteerism, they suggest that solidarity benefits may not be strongly perceived prior to volunteering; rather, it seems that solidarity benefits emerge and are experienced over time. Thus, solidarity benefits may be more important in encouraging volunteers to remain active, rather than in motivating individuals to volunteer.

### **Purposive benefits**

Purposive benefits are experienced when volunteers feel they have achieved a personal goal through their voluntary actions; they are therefore derived from the goals of the voluntary organisation, i.e. making the community a safer place<sup>11</sup>. Volunteers and absentees described many occasions when purposive benefits were experienced as a result of volunteering with the CDMCs. The frequency with which purposive benefits were cited by respondents suggests purposive benefits may be more important than material or solidarity benefits; however, purposive benefits may simply be the easiest to identify and of which to provide an example.

When asked about the potential benefits of volunteering with the CDMCs, non-volunteers say that they do not think volunteering would provide them with many benefits. They accepted that volunteering might provide some benefits to some people. However, they think that they themselves would not experience any benefits. This may be because non-volunteers also feel the costs of volunteering are significant, and therefore perceive the opportunity cost of volunteering to be high.

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<sup>11</sup> Chinman and Wandersman (1999)



Young people in the Kroo Bay River in Freetown looking for materials to sell or recycle

### Costs

As already mentioned, much less research has been done on the costs associated with volunteering than the benefits. The two most widely cited costs of volunteering are time and money; both were found to be costs young people associated with volunteering with the CDMCs (see Table 1 in Appendix 2). However, in this study, it is not the costs themselves that prove to be of interest; rather, findings suggest that there is a distinctly gendered experience of the costs of volunteering.

Analysis of the sex of volunteers indicates that there may be a gendered aspect of costs and benefits associated with volunteering. Importantly, of the absentee volunteers, approximately 75% are female. Despite confirmation from female absentee volunteers that they have experienced many benefits while they were active with the CDMCs, they described many family obligations they are required to fulfil before they can attend CDMC meetings or events. In contrast, male volunteers and absentees do not feel they have as many family obligations. This suggests that females experience a higher opportunity cost of volunteering, and may also indicate that social norms in Sierra Leone put more pressure on females than males regarding family obligations.

While male absentees surveyed explain that they have other commitments and are often too busy to attend CDMC events, only vague explanations of what those commitments entailed were offered. Further research is needed in this area to determine the costs and benefits of volunteering for young men.

## 6 Recommendations and further research

This research analyses the demographic, social psychological and cost-benefit factors influencing the decision of youth to volunteer with CDMCs in urban slums of Freetown, Sierra Leone. Below are some recommendations based on the findings of this piece of research.

As governments and NGOs continue to increasingly support community-based disaster management initiatives, the active participation of volunteers will be critical for their success. A more comprehensive understanding of the motives for, and barriers to, young people volunteering in urban slums will allow community-based disaster management initiatives to attract and retain volunteers more successfully. Further studies on this topic will be crucial for reducing disaster risk in urban slums as outlined below.

### Recommendations

The conclusions of this research indicate several areas of focus to improve volunteer-based DRR programmes in urban slums.

First, **the benefits of participation should be clearly explained or advertised when recruiting youth volunteers, and expectations should be managed throughout the process.** In this study, active youth volunteers identified a wide range of benefits they experienced as a result of their participation in the CDMCs. However, absentees and non-volunteers did not describe as many benefits and also indicated that the benefits did not significantly impact their lives. Such a discrepancy indicates that there is a lack of understanding of what the potential benefits of volunteering are with the CDMCs in Freetown. During the recruitment of volunteers, it is therefore important that the full range of potential benefits, as well as the programme itself, be clearly explained to potential volunteers.

Additionally, many youth volunteers expressed frustration at the lack of resources available to the committee, the amount of time it took to organize events and the general slow pace of change within their communities. On-going explanations of the goals of the committee and the resources available will help to prevent disappointment for participants. Allowing time for members to express frustration or concern may also lead to a greater sense of inclusion and ownership of the committee and therefore a reduction in absenteeism.

In addition, **recruitment of volunteers for DRR initiatives should not only target existing volunteer or youth organisations.** The CDMCs in Freetown recruited youth volunteers from existing organisations; disproportionate numbers of these youth were also involved in other initiatives and youth organisations. Recruiting from an existing pool of volunteers can lead to the creation of a ‘volunteer elite’: youth volunteers who have experience volunteering and are aware of the full range of benefits. When organizing DRR programmes it is important to target youth who are not part of this elite; such a strategy provides new opportunities to youth who are not currently volunteering, raising the profile of the project and awareness of the benefits of volunteering.

Third, it is important that **financial incentives are not used as the main recruiting strategy when establishing a DRR committee.** In this study, almost 25% of the

absentees stopped attending CDMC meetings and events regularly when the travel stipend was removed. Such a dramatic drop in the number of active volunteers can significantly impact the ability of the committee to achieve its goals. In addition, a dependency on financial incentives for volunteers jeopardises the ability committees to become fully sustainable, as it relies the provision of travel stipends. While travel stipends are important for assisting members to travel to other parts of the city for joint meetings, they must not become the main incentive for youth to become active participants.

Finally, there are also several recommendations regarding the retention of youth in CDMCs. Importantly, **every effort must be made to overcome the gendered nature of absenteeism**. A disproportionately high percentage of absentees are female. These young women explained that family and household obligations prevented them from fully participating with the CDMCs.

Two recommendations follow this finding: First, **the provision of childcare during meetings and events will likely increase the ability of women to attend**. Second, **it is important that female volunteers feel supported and encouraged by family and friends**. It is therefore recommended that the committees conduct a meeting to explain its goals and functioning to family and friends of volunteers, as well as the wider community. Such transparency reduces misconceptions of committees and clearly outlines the benefits of involvement for youth female participants.

## **Areas of further research**

The findings of this study suggest three directions for future research:

1. More comprehensive studies need to focus on the motives of volunteers within the economically active age brackets. While age-specific volunteer studies have examined the motives of seniors and teenagers, the variables affecting young working adults have been neglected. Further understanding the benefits and barriers to volunteering of young people is critical for the success of community-based initiatives.
2. Further research on the motives of volunteers must be conducted in less developed countries. While this research indicates theories of volunteerism (see Box 1 in Appendix 1) developed in developed countries can be broadly applied to developing areas, it also suggests that contextual factors present in urban slums affect the ability of the theories to consistently and accurately predict and explain volunteer behaviour.
3. A more in-depth analysis of factors influencing stakeholders' perception of free time (i.e. time available for taking part in volunteering activities) would have provided richer conclusions in this study; due to limited time, this was not possible. However, as it appears that perception of time is both a significant motivating factor as well as perceived barrier to volunteering; further research could investigate factors influencing perceptions of time in urban slums.

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## Annex 1 – Theories of Volunteerism

Table 1: The three main theories of volunteerism

### Functional Approach

A functional analysis of volunteering suggests that volunteering serves one or more of the following functions of volunteering:

1. A person volunteers to express or act on values that are important to them (values function);
2. An individual learns, develops new skills or grows psychologically (understanding function);
3. Voluntary acts can provide career-related experience (career function);
4. Voluntary acts can strengthen social ties (social function);
5. Volunteering can reduce feelings such as guilt or addressing personal problems (protective function);
6. Self-confidence grows through volunteering (esteem function).

The decision to volunteer is a rational process based on an evaluation of the benefits derived from volunteering.

Sources: Clary and Snyder (1999); Greenslade and White (2005)

### Planned Behaviour Theory

Planned behaviour theory suggests that people's behaviour is driven by a series of rational decisions based on available information. The most precursory decision is the intention to perform, which is assumed to capture the motivational factors that influence a behaviour.

Intention is determined from:

- Attitude: the overall evaluation of performing the considered behaviour;
- Subjective norm: the perceived social pressure to perform the behaviour;
- Perceived behavioural control: the extent to which the person believes they can perform the behaviour. This includes factors such as income and available time.

Planned behaviour theory has been applied to volunteerism and findings showed that attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioural control were all positive predictors of intent to volunteer. The inclusion of perceived behavioural control markedly differentiates planned behaviour theory and functional analysis.

Sources: Ajzen (1991); Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) in Greenslade and White (2005); Okun and Sloane (2002)

### Political Economy Theory

Political economy theory suggests that people will spend their energy in an organisation if they expect to receive some benefits. Benefits include material, solidarity and purposive incentives. Material incentives are monetary values, such as wages or reduced taxes, while solidarity incentives are intangible benefits derived from social interactions and include status and group identification. Purposive incentives include bettering the community and feeling a sense of responsibility.

Less research has focused on the costs of volunteering; however, it is documented that perceived or actual costs related to volunteering include time and money, such as foregone wages. In addition, much literature mentions negative opinions of volunteering including fear of discrimination and negative interpersonal experiences of volunteering.

Sources: Clark and Wilson (1961); Chinman and Wandersman (1999)

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## Annex 2 – Quotations from young stakeholders

**Table 1: Costs and benefits of volunteering with CDMCs  
(compiled from interviews)**

	<b>Volunteers</b>	<b>Absentees</b>	<b>Non-Volunteers</b>
<b>Benefits</b>	<p>“I learn a lot.”</p> <p>“I like to meet new people.”</p> <p>“We help our neighbours.” “People recognise me [as a committee volunteer].”</p>	<p>“I liked making my area safer...”</p> <p>“The training was interesting.”</p>	<p>“Yes, I think there may be [benefits] for volunteering [with the CDMCs], but everything has benefits, [the CDMCs] are not special.”</p>
<b>Costs</b>	<p>“It is difficult to balance [CBDMC obligations] with other things I must do.”</p> <p>“Sometimes [CDMC events and meetings] are at the same time as work.”</p>	<p>“... it's very difficult, there is so much else to do.”</p> <p>“[the work the CBDMC does] is good. I think it's important, but there are many other important things I have to do, too.”</p>	<p>“Maybe you can pretend to do good [work], but this is a slum, we have to work to live, I just [would not be able] to do it.”</p>

**Y Care International (YCI) supports youth-focused programmes of action and advocacy that meet the needs of disadvantaged and vulnerable young people across the world. One of YCI's areas of focus is disaster risk reduction (DRR). The importance of young people leading on, and participating in, disaster risk reduction activities is often unacknowledged. However, Y Care International believes that young people are powerful actors for change and their participation should not be overlooked.**

**This report summarises the findings from Ayden Cumming's research in the slum communities of Kroo Bay and Dworzack in Freetown, Sierra Leone in 2012. The report attempts to understand and analyse the motives for young people living in slum communities volunteering in community-based DRR activities. The recommendations will be used in project design to increase the effectiveness of YCI's DRR projects by attracting and retaining young volunteers.**

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Y Care International

Kemp House

152-160 City Road

London EC1V 2NP

United Kingdom

Tel +44 (0)20 7549 3150

Fax +44 (0)20 7549 3151

[enquiries@ycareinternational.org](mailto:enquiries@ycareinternational.org)

[www.ycareinternational.org](http://www.ycareinternational.org)

Y Care International is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales.  
Charity no: 1109789. Company no: 3997006.  
Registered office: Kemp House, 152-160 City Road,  
London EC1V 2NP

