

## **Volunteering in Disaster Management for Development in Africa: Reflections from Bukoba District, Tanzania**

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### **Abstract**

Volunteering is an old phenomenon; but it never gets obsolete. It plays a pivotal role in disaster management and development, particularly in resource-constrained settings. This article explores the critical contributions of community volunteers during the 2016 earthquake in Bukoba, Tanzania; highlighting their agency in handling the crisis. Drawing on the social construction of reality theory, this article examines how volunteers externalize their intentions, objectify their roles, and internalize their experiences to create a resilient community response that fills institutional gaps. The paper draws from a qualitative study that applied key informant interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation, and documentary review to unearth the lived experiences of earthquake survivors' interaction with community volunteers. Findings reveal that volunteers provided immediate rescue and medical assistance; including quick excavation and transfer of casualties to health facilities, navigated bureaucratic challenges, and fostered community resilience and economic recovery. The article underscores the need for integrating volunteer efforts into formal disaster management frameworks to enhance effectiveness and sustainability, especially in disaster-prone settings and poor neighbourhoods. The article concludes that by recognizing the diverse contributions of volunteers, both formal institutions and community initiatives can better address disaster risks and promote development outcomes.

**Keywords:** *volunteer, disaster, management, development, community resilience*

### **1. Introduction and Context**

Disasters top the list of the world's most disturbing encounters (Kateule et al., 2024; Johnson et al., 2022; Hambati & Yengoh, 2018). Efforts to address these disasters are multiple and are evolving, including volunteering which seems to be neglected in conventional institutionalized disaster response mechanisms (Smith et al., 2022; Armah, 2020). However, volunteering has long been recognized as a critical component in disaster management and development efforts. For instance, in recent times, the COVID-19 pandemic further underscored the importance of volunteerism in responding to crises, enhancing community resilience, and achieving development goals (Kateule et al., 2024; Kamanyi, 2023; Shagembe et al., 2022). Thus, this article provides a concise review of available literature to synthesize comprehensive studies on the role of volunteering in disaster management and development, with a focus on the transformative potential of

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volunteerism, and the need for a more inclusive approach that recognizes the diverse contributions of volunteers from both the global North and South. It further focuses on how various studies on crisis and disaster management in Tanzania have failed to voice up this role of volunteers.

The existing literature on crisis, risk, and disaster management predominantly adheres to traditional institutional frameworks, often neglecting the critical role that volunteering plays in disaster response and resilience building. This oversight results in a reductionist and simplistic view of disaster management that fails to leverage on the diverse benefits of volunteerism. Many studies focus extensively on formal institutional arrangements and government policies. For instance, Andrea and Kangalawe (2016) examined community vulnerabilities to floods in the Lower Rufiji floodplain, emphasizing geographical, social, economic, political and environmental factors. While there is much to learn from their study, the role of volunteers is undermined; that is, the study does not indicate how volunteer networks could mitigate these vulnerabilities. Similarly, Msemo et al. (2021) analysed the economic impacts of weather disasters in Tanzania, and highlight the need for improved climate information systems; but do not address how volunteer efforts can support these systems and enhance community resilience.

Nevertheless, in their study of community resilience in informal settlements in Mwanza City, Hambati and Yengoh (2018) recognize the importance of local coping mechanisms, but focused primarily on physical infrastructure and traditional technologies. They suggest integrating traditional and contemporary technologies to promote resilience, but do not mention how volunteer initiatives could facilitate this integration and support vulnerable populations more effectively. In their study, they show how poor urban settings and limited resources and scarcity of support are eminent, yet people still survive and remain resilient. It would be useful to establish what really comprises traditional mechanisms beyond infrastructure and technologies. Volunteering from the grassroots level, based on cohesive and mutual self-help approaches, can help understand this phenomenon better as argued in this article.

Furthermore, Armah (2020) explores the dissemination of early warning information among different socioeconomic groups in Tanzania, where he describes significant disparities in accessing such information. The study suggests targeting the most vulnerable households to improve resilience; but does not consider the potential of volunteer networks to bridge these gaps in information dissemination and community preparedness. Similarly, Johnson et al. (2022) discuss co-producing knowledge to address disaster risks in Dar es Salaam, highlighting the role of local NGOs and government representatives. While this study acknowledges the involvement of the civil society, it does not fully explore how volunteer groups and individuals could enhance these collaborative efforts and contribute to disaster risk reduction; including fostering resilient futures.

Additionally, Wabanhu (2017) investigated the effectiveness of early warning systems for flood management in Kinondoni Municipality, identifying substantial gaps in public awareness and response mechanisms. The study calls for enhanced community engagement, but overlooks how organized volunteer groups and/or community informal networks of volunteers could play a crucial role in raising awareness and improving the efficiency of early warning systems. The literature also emphasizes the role of governance and institutional structures in managing disasters, while remaining silent on the gaps that are eminent to these structures. Ringo (2018), on the other hand, argues that existing structures are insufficient in flood management, largely due to top-down decision-making processes and inadequate community involvement. However, this perspective fails to consider how volunteerism can strengthen these structures by providing grassroots support, and fostering a more inclusive approach to disaster management.

Overall, whilst these studies provide valuable insights into various aspects of disaster management, they collectively miss the opportunity to highlight the transformative potential of volunteerism. Volunteers can offer flexible, community-driven responses that complement formal institutional efforts, bridging gaps in service delivery, and fostering resilience at the grassroots level, which normally reflects at the top level as well (Fadel & Chadwick, 2020; Chen, 2018; Smith & Jenkins, 2011; Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2003). By integrating volunteers into disaster management strategies, it is possible to develop more holistic and effective approaches that leverage the strengths of both formal institutions and community initiatives.

## **2. Organization of the Article**

The article comprises an introduction that situates volunteerism within disaster management, highlighting its critical role in a Tanzanian setting. It includes a theoretical framework based on the social construction of the reality theory, which examines volunteerism as an agentic activity shaped by social processes. This is followed with the methodology, which details a qualitative approach involving interviews, focus groups, and observations in Bukoba after the 2016 earthquake. Key findings include the agency and identities of volunteers, their self-help interventions, roles in bridging institutional gaps, contribution to resilience-building, and support for economic recovery. The conclusion emphasizes integrating volunteer efforts into formal disaster frameworks to enhance resilience and effectiveness.

## **3. Volunteering in Disaster Management and Development**

Disaster management should be understood as a process that requires multiple approaches to effectively address it (Kateule et al., 2024). Conversely, literature on disaster management often prioritizes formal institutional frameworks and government policies, neglecting the significant contributions of volunteer

networks: both formal and informal. Studies have shown that volunteerism can mitigate community vulnerabilities and enhance resilience, yet this potential remains underexplored (Andrea et al., 2016; Fathi & Fiedrich, 2020; Msemo et al., 2021). As pointed out before, in their analysis of the vulnerabilities of communities to floods in Tanzania, Andrea et al. (2016) strongly accentuate geographical, socioeconomic, political, and environmental factors; however, less is highlighted on the mitigating role of volunteer networks. Similarly, Msemo et al. (2021) highlighted the economic impacts of weather disasters and the need for improved climate information systems without showing how volunteer efforts could facilitate improving the disaster management situation. A similar disposition is learned in other literature sources (see, e.g., Johnson et al., 2022; Armah, 2020; Hambati & Yengoh, 2018).

Furthermore, volunteering in the context of development frequently privileges the perspective of international volunteers, emphasizing global citizenship, cultural encounter, and personal and professional development (Fathi, & Fiedrich, 2020; Smith & Laurie, 2011; Brown, 2005; Laurie & Smith, 2018; Meneghini, 2016). However, this approach often risks reproducing power imbalances, and overlooks the contribution of volunteers from the global South. A number of contemporary researches have questioned these dominant models, calling for a more inclusive approach that recognizes the diverse experiences and contributions of volunteers from different contexts (Kamanyi, 2020; Sohrabizadeh & Sayfour, 2020; Hustinx et al., 2010; Wilson & Musick, 1997; Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2003).

Critical studies on volunteer relationships emphasize the importance of acknowledging power dynamics and hierarchies embedded in volunteering spaces (Smith & Jenkins, 2011; Griffiths, 2018). These studies highlight the need to unpack the potential of collaboration across different types of volunteer engagement; and to ensure that certain forms of volunteering are not prioritized over others. This requires challenging the tendency to assume that definitions and norms developed in the global North are universally applicable and relevant (Brooks & Dunn, 2020; Hazeldine & Smith, 2015). Nonetheless, theories of transformative agency counter such delusions by insisting the consideration of power within individuals to create and recreate their own realities on the basis of which they function beyond the limits of institutional frameworks (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

For instance, in the case of Tanzania and other parts of Africa, the blended volunteering approach by Volunteer Services Overseas (VSOs) exemplifies this inclusive perspective by emphasizing the relationship between different types of volunteers, and their contribution to development outcomes (Smith et al., 2022). Though this is mostly focused on development agenda, the approach recognizes the importance of self-organization for community resilience, and how community volunteering can be strengthened through models of supportive solidarity (Fadel & Chadwick, 2020). Despite the growing attention

to informal and community-based volunteer efforts, there remain gaps in understanding the relationships between local volunteering and disaster management and development. Hence, this article addresses this gap by exploring the role of volunteers in response to the earthquake that hit Kagera region, and Bukoba district in particular, in 2016.

Moreover, literature further emphasizes the need to explore the interactions between different types of volunteers working together, and how these interactions could improve development outcomes. This gap reflects long-standing preoccupations with particular understandings and practices of development derived from ideas and power rooted in the global North (Laurie & Smith, 2018). Turner (2015) argues that different types of volunteers—including even those who do not call or recognize themselves as volunteers—bring diverse skills, knowledge, and perspectives into their roles and activities, hence improving the situation of disaster management and development. The author also believes that this inclusive approach can strengthen bottom-up programming by building on the role of volunteers as participatory practitioners.

Hence, the critical role of volunteering in disaster management and development cannot be overstated. Volunteers provide flexible, community-driven responses that complement formal institutional efforts, bridging gaps in service delivery, and fostering resilience at the grassroots level. By integrating volunteers into disaster management strategies and development programmes, it is possible to develop more holistic and effective approaches that leverage on the strengths of both formal institutions and community initiatives. This role is exemplified in this article by showing how various volunteer efforts contributed to mitigating the challenges that earthquake survivors of Bukoba district, Tanzania, faced as they struggled to respond and recover from the disaster.

#### **4. Social Construction of Reality and Volunteering during Disasters**

Volunteering is an act of agency that requires deeper scrutiny of the purpose and motives of actors (Hustinx et al., 2010). Further, understanding volunteering during disasters as an agentic activity requires a robust theoretical framework that encapsulates the dynamic and socially constructed nature of human actions and interactions. The social construction of reality, as articulated by Berger and Luckmann (1966), provides an insightful lens through which the role of volunteering can be examined. This theory posits that reality is not objectively given, but is constructed through social processes and interactions. In the context of disaster management, volunteering emerges as a socially constructed reality shaped by collective understandings, interactions, and the shared meanings of community members. This theoretical perspective, based on the interpretive paradigm, highlights the importance of agency, emphasizing how volunteers actively participate in creating and sustaining social reality during crises. Berger and Luckmann argue that reality is produced and maintained through social

interactions and the continuous process of socialization. This reality is constituted by the shared knowledge, meanings, and practices that individuals collectively create, recreate and un-create.<sup>1</sup> The construction of reality involves three fundamental processes: externalization, objectivation, and internalization. These processes can be applied to understand how volunteering during disasters is both an agentic activity and a socially constructed phenomenon. These three processes are defined in the sub-sections that follow.

#### **4.1 Externalization**

Externalization refers to the process by which individuals express their subjective experiences and ideas into the social world (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). In the context of a disaster, volunteers externalize their desires to help by engaging in various activities such as rescue operations, providing first aid, and offering emotional support. These actions are not just individual responses, but are shaped by the collective cultural and social context in which they occur. The motivations, behaviours, and roles of volunteers are influenced by pre-existing social norms, values, and expectations regarding communal support and solidarity during crises.

#### **4.2 Objectivation**

Through objectivation, the actions and roles of volunteers become institutionalized and recognized as part of the objective reality. Volunteering during disasters is formalized through the establishment of volunteer organizations, the creation of guidelines and protocols, and the recognition of volunteers by official disaster management bodies. This process transforms individual actions into a social fact that is acknowledged and expected by the community. The recognition and institutionalization of volunteering contribute to its persistence and stability as a social reality during disasters. This article underscores the fact that some volunteers just got recognized not by the government *per se*, but rather by community members; and their roles remain informal but highly appreciated.

#### **4.3 Internalization**

Internalization is the process by which individuals adopt and incorporate the socially constructed reality into their own consciousness. Volunteers internalize the roles, responsibilities, and meanings associated with their activities through socialization and continuous participation in volunteer efforts. This internalization shapes their identities, motivations, and commitment to volunteering. The shared experiences and narratives of volunteers during disaster response reinforce their understanding of volunteering as a crucial and valued component of the community's collective response to crises.

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<sup>1</sup> I would also call it '*deconstruct*'

Therefore, the social construction of reality framework by Berger and Luckmann provides a comprehensive understanding of volunteering during disasters as both an agentic activity and a socially constructed phenomenon. By examining the processes of externalization, objectivation and internalization, this theory elucidates how volunteering becomes an integral part of the social fabric during crises. It highlights the active role of volunteers in shaping and reshaping their environment; and underscores the importance of cultural, institutional, and narrative elements in constructing the reality of volunteering. This perspective enhances our understanding of the complex dynamics of disaster response, and the critical contributions of community volunteers to smoothen the response complexities as circumnavigated by disaster survivors.

### **5. Methodology**

The study<sup>2</sup> employed an exploratory research design, which is particularly suited for understanding complex social phenomena such as disaster response and management. This design allowed for an in-depth examination of the forms of agency exhibited by earthquake survivors in Bukoba district, while expounding on the role played by volunteers in managing the hiccups caused by the earthquake. The qualitative approach was chosen to capture the rich, contextualized experiences and narratives of the community members involved in volunteer efforts during the earthquake crisis. As mentioned earlier, the research was conducted in Kagera region, Bukoba district, Tanzania. This area was selected due to its recent experience with an earthquake in 2016, which had a profound impact on the local population and infrastructure. The district provided a relevant context to explore the roles and contributions of community volunteers in disaster management and recovery efforts. The study used purposive sampling to select participants who had direct experiences with the earthquake and subsequent volunteer efforts. This method ensured that the sample included individuals who could provide detailed and relevant insights into the research questions. The sample size consisted of 50 participants, including community volunteers, earthquake survivors, local leaders, and representatives from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and government agencies involved in disaster response.

Various data collection methods were employed to generate comprehensive and diverse perspectives on the role of volunteers in disaster management. First, key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with key informants who had significant roles in the earthquake response. These included local leaders, volunteer coordinators, and representatives from NGOs and government agencies. The interviews aimed to gather detailed information on the coordination and impact of volunteer activities. Secondly, focus group discussions (FGDs) were held with different groups of volunteers and survivors to facilitate discussions, and capture a

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<sup>2</sup> This study was conducted as part of my PhD

range of experiences and viewpoints. Each focus group consisted of 6-8 participants, and focused on specific themes such as initial response efforts, challenges faced, and long-term recovery strategies. Thirdly, participant observation was carried out. The researcher engaged in participant observation by joining ongoing volunteer activities, and attending community meetings deliberating on disaster management. This method provided a first-hand understanding of the dynamics and interactions within the volunteer efforts. Fourthly, documentary review was another source of data. Relevant documents—including government reports, NGO records, and media articles—were reviewed to complement the primary data. These documents provided contextual information, and helped to triangulate the findings from the interviews and FGDs.

The data collected from interviews and FGDs was transcribed, and then translated and analysed thematically. This method involved identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. This was done using NVivo, version 1.0. The process included familiarization, coding, theme development, theme definition and naming, and reporting. During familiarization, the researcher read and re-read the transcripts to become thoroughly familiar with the data. Secondly, initial codes were generated by systematically labelling relevant features of the data across the entire dataset. Thirdly, codes were grouped into potential themes, which were then reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately reflected the data. Fourthly, each theme was defined and named, providing a clear narrative for the findings; and lastly, the themes were organized into a coherent narrative that addressed the research questions and objectives as presented in the next section.

## **6. Findings and Discussion**

### ***6.1 Volunteering Identities and Agency in Disaster Emergency***

It is a critical prerequisite to first contextualize volunteering in an emergency that is produced by disasters. This article, which is based on the findings from a culturally rich context, is based on the understanding that volunteering is an agentic activity that involves active—as opposed to passive—actors who take control of their situation knowingly and voluntarily. The same actors do not necessarily identify themselves as volunteers, but rather just do what they have to do as a part of social responsibility. Hence, it is important to further examine the conceptual underpinning of volunteering as an agentic phenomenon.

Volunteering during disasters exemplifies human agency, where individuals and groups actively shape their environment and social reality. Agency, in this context, refers to the capacity of individuals to act independently and make choices that influence their circumstances and the broader social structure. Volunteers exercise their agency by taking initiative and making decisions that directly impact the effectiveness of disaster response efforts. They identify needs, mobilize resources, and coordinate actions to address immediate challenges. This



proactive involvement demonstrates how volunteers are not merely passive recipients of external directives, but active agents who contribute to shaping the disaster response landscape. This act is seen from the findings as a collective action, and part of solidarity. Volunteering is inherently a collective endeavour, where the combined efforts of individuals create a significant impact. The sense of solidarity and mutual support among community members fosters collective agency, enabling volunteers to achieve outcomes that would be impossible through individual efforts alone, and which even governmental institutions fail to actualize at some point. This collective action is a manifestation of the socially constructed reality of volunteering, where shared beliefs and values drive communal participation in disaster management.

In addition, the dynamic and unpredictable nature of disasters necessitates adaptive and innovative responses. Volunteers often devise creative solutions to emergent problems, demonstrating flexibility and resourcefulness. This adaptability reflects the capacity of volunteers to construct new realities and practices in response to changing circumstances, reinforcing their role as active agents in disaster management. This was evident during the earthquake event in Bukoba as the survivors expressed their thankful thoughts towards the community motorcyclists<sup>3</sup> who acted as ambulances, quickly picking up casualties at the verge of losing life and rushing them to a hospital. It was also noted that at the hospital that some played a significant role as medical assistances when the providers were overwhelmed by casualties.

It was clear from the findings that volunteering during disasters is embedded in the social fabric and cultural context of the community. It is a socially constructed reality that is continuously negotiated and reaffirmed through social interactions and collective practices. One would wonder why, in most cases, these volunteers – including even those on daily business routine – did not prioritize payment; but instead just offered support, and did the same repeatedly. This is not to generalize that there were not some who demanded money first-hand; there are reports of such cases. However, further discussion with study participants indicated that some of those who demanded to be paid first would be categorized as people from other areas using the streets just as business centres. They might have been from other regions of the country, and did not feel they were socially obligated to volunteer. Otherwise, for some poor people, the disaster was an opportunity to make money and solve their long-standing financial challenges.

Based on such a reality, it was evident in this study that cultural norms and values play a critical role in shaping the social reality of volunteering. Communities with strong traditions of mutual aid and communal support are likely to have a more robust volunteer response during disasters. These cultural

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<sup>3</sup> Commonly known in Kiswahili as '*bodaboda*'

elements provide a framework within which volunteering is understood, valued, and enacted. Also, the institutionalization of volunteering, through the establishment of volunteer organizations and recognition by official bodies, reinforces its legitimacy and importance. Institutional support provides the necessary resources, coordination, and training that enhance the effectiveness of volunteer efforts. This formal recognition also contributes to the social construction of volunteering as a vital component of disaster response. This was exemplified by the role played by volunteers from the Red Cross and World Vision organizations in Bukoba and beyond. It was noted that these volunteers were a crucial part of the response mechanisms whose function made the survival rate of the impacted people a huge success. These did also recruit other local youths as volunteers who later became formalized. At this point one would remember the 'Majaliwa' saga in which a fisher-boy who tried to rescue plane-crash victims was later recognized nationally as a hero, and offered an opportunity to train and be employed as a fire-fighter.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, the narratives and stories of volunteer experiences during disasters contribute to the collective memory and identity of the community. These narratives highlight the heroism, sacrifice, and solidarity of volunteers; reinforcing the social reality of volunteering as a noble and essential activity. Symbolic acts, such as public acknowledgments and awards for volunteers, further solidify this constructed reality.

## ***6.2 Volunteering as a Self-help Interventions during Disasters***

Volunteering as a self-help intervention is a crucial mechanism in managing disaster events. The earthquake that struck Bukoba in 2016 highlighted the importance of such grassroots efforts. When the earthquake hit, the immediate response from the community was pivotal. Private car owners quickly turned their vehicles into makeshift ambulances, transporting the injured to hospitals in the absence of adequate government assistance. This rapid, self-organized response by the local community underscores the critical role of volunteerism in emergency situations.

In the broader context, volunteerism as a self-help intervention during disasters, is supported by a significant body of literature. Volunteers often step in to fill gaps left by formal disaster response mechanisms. They provide not only physical assistance, but also psychological and emotional support to survivors (Shagembe et al., 2022; Hustinx et al., 2010; Jenkins, 2009a, 2009b; McGloin & Georgeou, 2016; Meneghini, 2016; Shachar et al., 2019), which is crucial in the immediate aftermath of a disaster. Volunteers are often the first responders; bringing essential supplies, medical aid, and comfort to those

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<sup>4</sup> [https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://www.youtube.com/watch%3Fv%3DCnL1nw3BcR0&ved=2ahUKEwjrnJq6oLiGAX9g\\_0HHcYPDJYQtwJ6BAGREAI&usg=AOvVaw09RVT5XJtv0jt3UveuR1lt](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://www.youtube.com/watch%3Fv%3DCnL1nw3BcR0&ved=2ahUKEwjrnJq6oLiGAX9g_0HHcYPDJYQtwJ6BAGREAI&usg=AOvVaw09RVT5XJtv0jt3UveuR1lt)

affected (UNV, 2018). Their ability to mobilize quickly and operate flexibly makes them indispensable in disaster scenarios. The situation in Bukoba, as explained by study participants, would have been fatal for most casualties had it not been for the quick intervention by volunteers.

Furthermore, volunteering also fosters a sense of solidarity and community resilience. The immediate and effective response by volunteers do mitigate the impact of disasters and accelerate the recovery process. In Bukoba, for instance, volunteers not only provided immediate aid; but also helped organize community resources, collaborated with local authorities, and established temporary shelters. This collective effort significantly reduced the chaos and confusion typically associated with disaster situations.

In congruence with the findings of this article, research highlights that volunteerism is particularly effective in contexts where formal institutional support is lacking or delayed. In many developing countries – and in Sub-Saharan Africa in particular – government resources and infrastructure are often insufficient to handle large-scale disasters effectively. In such cases, the role of volunteers becomes even more critical. Their local knowledge and networks enable them to identify and address the most urgent needs quickly (Smith et al., 2022). This grassroots response complements formal disaster management strategies, creating a more comprehensive and effective approach to disaster response.

### **6.3 Volunteers Backing Institutions during the Earthquake in Bukoba**

The earthquake in Bukoba revealed significant gaps in institutional disaster preparedness and response. The disaster exposed the limitations of government resources, and the crucial role that volunteers played in filling these gaps. Retired army officers and medical practitioners were among the key volunteers who provided critical services during the crisis. These individuals leveraged their expertise to conduct rescue operations, administer first aid, and manage risks: which were all essential given the overwhelmed state of government resources.

The volunteers not only asked less questions during the rescue and recovery support to the survivors of the earthquake, they were more respected and accepted in comparison to their formal government counterparts who were heavily accused of betrayal, nepotism, discrimination, hypocrisy and taking advantage of the disaster for their political gain, as denoted in the excerpt below:

*To be honest with you, we just realized that there was a problem of politicians trying to use people's problems as a political ladder... For example, some chairpersons at the street/village levels who had initially been involved in offering support through distributing some food and goods – including blankets, buckets, soap and the like – did so depending on who voted for them, or their party for that matter... People began complaining against unfair distribution... We made a follow-up very quickly only to discover that some leaders were disregarding those from opposition parties (KII/District Disaster Coordinator/Bukoba).*

This citation is congruent to the findings by Sherraden et al. (2006), which supported the notion that volunteers are essential in bridging the gaps left by institutional inadequacies. In disaster-prone regions, formal response mechanisms often lack the agility and resources required for immediate and effective action. Volunteers, on the other hand, offer a flexible and rapid response that can be tailored to the specific needs of the affected community. Their involvement ensures that critical services are delivered promptly, reducing the overall impact of a disaster.

Volunteers also play a crucial role in raising awareness and educating the community about disaster preparedness. In Bukoba, for example, volunteers conducted training sessions on basic first aid, evacuation procedures, and emergency response tactics. These educational efforts not only equipped community members with essential skills, but also fostered a culture of preparedness and resilience. By enhancing the community's capacity to respond to disasters, volunteers contribute to long-term disaster risk reduction.

The involvement of volunteers also enhances the coordination and effectiveness of formal disaster response efforts. Volunteers often act as liaison persons between the affected community and formal institutions, facilitating communication and ensuring that resources are allocated efficiently. In Bukoba, volunteers helped coordinate the distribution of aid, identified the most vulnerable individuals, and ensured that support reached those who needed it most. This was particularly implemented by formalized volunteers while leveraging on the networks of grassroots volunteers earmarked during the rescue mission at the eve of the crisis. This collaborative approach maximizes the impact of both volunteer and institutional efforts, leading to a more effective disaster response.

#### ***6.4 Recovering from Crisis: Resilience Building through Volunteer Mechanisms***

Building community resilience is a critical aspect of disaster recovery, and volunteer mechanisms play a significant role in this process. In Bukoba, the earthquake led to the establishment and strengthening of social networks that were crucial for recovery. Families and individuals relied heavily on these networks for emotional support, financial assistance, and physical help, such as rebuilding homes and infrastructure. The ability to draw on a wide range of social connections allowed survivors to recover more quickly and effectively.

Volunteers also play a crucial role in providing psychological support to disaster survivors. The trauma and stress associated with disasters can have long-lasting effects on individuals and communities. Volunteers often provide counselling services, organize support groups, and offer a listening ear to those in need. In Bukoba, for example, volunteers worked closely with mental health professionals to provide psychological support to earthquake survivors, helping them to cope with the emotional aftermath of the disaster.

Furthermore, volunteers contribute to the physical rebuilding of communities after a disaster. In Bukoba, volunteers were actively involved in rebuilding homes, schools, and other critical infrastructure. Their efforts not only provided immediate relief, but also helped to create a sense of normalcy and stability for the affected community. The physical reconstruction efforts led by volunteers also set the stage for long-term development and resilience. For instance, it was also noted that in more remote areas of Bukoba where houses, schools, worship buildings and market centres (cooperative society buildings) suffered major cracks, communities volunteered to contribute to their rebuilding.

Resilience building through volunteer mechanisms is well-documented in the literature as earlier discussed. Authors such as Lewis (2015) and Schech et al. (2018) do corroborate the findings of this article: they argue that volunteers help foster social cohesion and collective efficacy, which are essential components of community resilience. Volunteering brings people together and facilitate mutual support, and helps create a strong sense of community that can withstand and recover from future disasters. This social capital is a critical resource that enhances the overall resilience of a community, contributing to its social and economic development.

#### ***6.5 Survivors' Economic Strengthening for Development through Volunteerism***

Economic recovery and development are critical components of post-disaster recovery, and volunteer efforts play a significant role in this area. In Bukoba, volunteers supported economic activities by providing skills training and resources necessary for rebuilding livelihoods. For instance, retired professionals and local artisans contributed their expertise to educate and guide community members on better construction practices to withstand future earthquakes. Volunteers also facilitated access to financial resources and support for small business development. They organized microfinance initiatives, and provided training on financial literacy and entrepreneurship. These efforts helped survivors to rebuild their businesses and create new economic opportunities, contributing to the overall economic recovery of the community. Likewise, volunteer efforts also promote inclusive development by ensuring that marginalized and vulnerable groups have access to resources and opportunities.

The study findings show that, in Bukoba, volunteers worked closely with women, the youth, and people with disabilities to ensure that they were included in the recovery and development efforts. This inclusive approach not only enhances the overall resilience of a community, but also promotes social equity and justice. The role of volunteering in disaster management and development is multifaceted and indispensable. The case of the Bukoba earthquake illustrates how volunteer efforts can provide immediate relief, fill institutional gaps, foster community resilience, and support economic recovery. The integration of

volunteerism into disaster response and development strategies not only enhances the effectiveness of these efforts, but also ensures that they are sustainable and inclusive. As the global community continues to face various disasters, the importance of volunteerism cannot be overstated. Volunteers offer a unique combination of local knowledge, flexibility, and dedication that is crucial for effective disaster management and long-term development.

The integration of volunteerism into economic recovery strategies is also well-documented in literature. It is noted that volunteers provide essential services that help bridge the gap between immediate relief and long-term development. These services include vocational training, financial literacy programmes, and support for the development of small business. By empowering individuals economically, volunteerism helps to create more resilient and sustainable communities as we have also learned from the programmes by VSO in a recent study conducted in Tanzania (Smith et al., 2022: 7). The study confirms that incorporating locally-based volunteers into a project delivery team offers clear benefits such as fostering a culture of innovation and adaptability, and their longer-term presence increases the likelihood of sustained impact.

## **6. Conclusion and Recommendations**

This article underscores the indispensable role of volunteers in disaster management, especially in resource-constrained settings like Tanzania. Leveraging on the social construction of the reality theory by Berger and Luckmann (1966), the study offers a profound understanding of how volunteers externalize their intentions, objectify their roles, and internalize their experiences to create a resilient community response. The 2016 earthquake in Bukoba served as a central case study, revealing volunteers' critical contributions, such as immediate rescue operations, navigating bureaucratic challenges, fostering community resilience, providing psychosocial support, and promoting economic recovery.

Therefore, this article concludes that disaster management for development requires multifaceted approaches in response. In this view, volunteers stepped in, in outstanding ways, offering rapid excavation, first aid, and transport for the injured; effectively bridging the gap left by overwhelmed government resources. Their adaptability in overcoming bureaucratic obstacles ensured swift aid delivery to the most vulnerable populations. Beyond immediate relief, their collective efforts facilitated long-term recovery by rebuilding homes and infrastructure, and supporting economic activities. Volunteers also played a crucial role in providing emotional and psychological support, aiding mental health recovery, and reinforcing community solidarity. Additionally, they extended their efforts to vocational training, financial literacy programmes, and small business support, promoting sustainable economic recovery.

As the world continues to face various forms of disasters, the importance of volunteerism cannot be overstated. Volunteers bring a unique combination of local knowledge, flexibility, and dedication that is crucial for building resilient communities capable of withstanding and recovering from disasters. Therefore, the argument here is that volunteers are actors with agency and have the potential to support disaster management efforts by the government and other responsible institutions, and can foster development in deprived contexts. Hence, policy makers should not shy away from incorporating them in their plans.

The article further recommends that to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of volunteer efforts, it is imperative to integrate them into formal disaster management strategies, invest in capacity building, and encourage active community participation. Further research should document and analyse the diverse contributions of volunteers in different disaster contexts, focusing on the mechanisms through which they operate, the challenges they face, and the impact of their efforts on community resilience and development. Policies should support informal volunteer networks, and promote inclusive volunteerism that recognizes the contributions of individuals from diverse backgrounds, including marginalized and vulnerable groups. Cross-sector collaborations between government agencies, NGOs, and volunteer organizations can create synergies that enhance disaster management efforts. The role of volunteers in disaster management and development is both vital and transformative, as demonstrated by the case of the 2016 Bukoba earthquake. More effective and sustainable approaches to disaster response and development can be developed by integrating volunteerism into formal frameworks, building volunteer capacity, engaging communities, and fostering cross-sector collaboration.

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