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Civic Service Worldwide: Social Development Goals and Partnerships

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Abstract: *Civic service is a long-term, intensive form of volunteering. This article reports on a global assessment of civic service, which identified 210 programs in 57 countries. Program goals and administrative partnerships suggest that civic service is a social development intervention. For civic service to achieve its potential, research is recommended regarding server inclusivity, goal accomplishment, and the nature and effect of partnerships.*

Keywords: civic service, global assessment, individual development, community development

Development interventions take many forms as does volunteering. Volunteering can range from mutual aid between villagers to episodic volunteering for grassroots groups to long-term, intensive service through structured programs. Little is known systematically about the latter (Clotfelter, 1999; Grantmaker Forum on Community and National Service, 2000; Sherraden, 2001a). Anecdotal evidence suggests that long-term, intensive volunteering or civic service is prominent worldwide and being used by governments and nonprofit organizations to develop individuals and communities (Clohesy, 1999; Ford Foundation, 2001). This article uses data from an assessment of the forms and nature of civic service worldwide (McBride, Benitez, & Sherraden, 2003). The research is exploratory and speculative, raising more questions than it answers, but it demonstrates that service may be an emerging societal institution that furthers social development.

Civic service can be defined as “an organized period of substantial engagement and contribution to the local, national, or world community, recognized and valued by society, with minimal monetary compensation to the participant” (Sherraden, 2001b, p. 2). The term civic connotes that the servers’ actions occur in the public realm and have public benefit. Civic service is different from episodic volunteering because it takes programmatic form and requires a time commitment from the server. Examples of civic service programs include the National Service Schemes of Nigeria and Ghana, the transnational European Voluntary Service program, and the United States Peace Corps.

This article uses data from a global assessment of 210 civic service programs to describe basic program characteristics, targeted server groups, program goals, and administrative partnerships. We first describe an outcome-based, process perspective on social development. Then, we describe the research methods and sample, and we present the descriptive results including program examples. Research directions are suggested if civic service is to achieve its potential as a social development strategy.

Social Development: Program Outcomes and Collaborative Process

Social development programs and policy innovations aim to integrate citizens into society through investments in individual capabilities, improvement of individual well-being, and promotion of participation in economic, social, and political systems (Midgley, 1993, 1995). As an approach, social development is predicated upon the value that each human has inherent worth and deserves the opportunity to develop to her or his fullest potential (Gil, 1981). Notable examples include Individual Development Account programs that increase asset-ownership, public health programs, educational and job-training programs, and microenterprise development (Midgley, 1999).

Social development refers to both a process and a product (Ingham, 1993; Meinert & Kohn, 1987a, 1987b). Omer (1978) and others (Meinert & Kohn, 1987a; 1987b; Midgley, 1995) have argued that social development is centered on interaction and change between sectors. Social development is not just about positively affecting individuals, but also societal change and the creation of responsive institutions that reduce societal fragmentation. Interorganizational and multi-sector collaboration is an administrative process that may help achieve these objectives (Alter & Hage, 1993; Brown & Ashman, 1999). As such, social development outcomes may be influenced by collaborative partnerships developed between nonprofit organizations,

government, and private, for-profit organizations for program implementation (Sherraden et al., 2002).

The Possible Effects of Civic Service

Civic service programs address a wide range of substantive activities, such as the environment, arts and culture, public safety, and disaster relief efforts (Eberly & Sherraden, 1990). Civic service can be thought of as a “strong policy” due to the wide range of positive effects that may result from this single intervention (Sherraden, 2001a). Service programs can be structured with the dual purpose of benefiting the servers as well as the served (Sherraden & Eberly, 1982; Wheeler, Gorey, & Greenblatt, 1998). Service programs may increase the capacity of the server in some way, while simultaneously addressing a social issue through the server’s activities, such as unemployment, health problems, natural disasters, crime, and inadequate schools.

Civic service is associated with personal, economic, and social goals for affecting the server. Outcomes may include improved self-esteem, increased social skills, and increased tolerance and cross-group understanding (Perry & Imperial, 2001; Wilson & Musick, 1999). Service may also increase work skills, expand career options, and advance educational achievements (Education Commission of the States, 1999; Sherraden & Eberly, 1982). Service is also believed to affect servers’ civic engagement (Eberly & Sherraden, 1990; Flanagan et al., 1998; Perry and Katula, 2001). Service programs’ collaborative administrative structures have been studied for their potential effect on community development and cooperation (Thomson & Perry, 1998). However, much less is known about the effects of service on the served, including the efficacy and outcomes of the activities that are implemented (Brav, Moore, & Sherraden, 2002; Grantmaker Forum on Community and National Service, 2000).

Over the last decade, publication and research on service has increased substantially, especially in the United States (Perry and Imperial, 2001). Scholarship on service is only emerging in other countries, and is largely descriptive and attitudinal (Kalu, 1987; Sikah, 2000; Tuffuor, 1996). Existing research is tenuous, but indicative of positive effects as discussed above. These potential effects for the server and the served suggest that civic service may be a social development intervention. Moreover, attention to the collaborative administrative structures raises questions regarding the potential for service to change institutions and reduce fragmentation.

Research Objectives

The purpose of this research is to analyze civic service as a possible social development intervention with both social development products and processes. We use qualitative and quantitative data from the first systematic study of civic service worldwide (McBride, Benitez, & Sherraden, 2003). To determine who is included and may benefit from the service experience, server groups and service eligibility requirements are examined. Also explained are the programs’ goals for the servers and the served. In regards to social development processes, we examine qualitative data that describe program administration, including the sectors and organizations involved and the nature of administrative partnerships.

Methods

Global Civic Service Assessment

This article uses specific data from the Global Service Institute's (GSI) Global Civic Service Assessment (McBride, Benitez, & Sherraden, 2003). The purpose of the Global Assessment was to identify a sample of service programs worldwide so as to develop an operational understanding of service forms. This systematic profile of the service phenomenon was developed for international discussion and feedback. The assessment documented programs' goals and activities, who serves, who is served, supports provided to servers, and details about program operations and implementation. For a comprehensive report of research methods and findings, see McBride, Benitez, & Sherraden (2003).

Sample selection.

The Global Assessment research team identified and collected information about service programs using specific criteria. The focus was on formal, structured programs that required intensive commitments of time on the part of the server, e.g., a minimum of one week full-time. This intensity was selected as a minimum because it is believed to potentially impart a substantial effect on the server as well as the served (although the vast majority of programs required a much more substantial commitment). Military service was not included, unless civilian service was an option, and neither were service-learning programs because of the varying durations and intensities of the programs.

Data sources.

The total number or population of civic service programs worldwide is not known. Programs were identified through civic service membership associations (e.g., International Association for National Youth Service and the Association for Voluntary Service Organizations), formal and informal publications, and program websites. In regards to Internet searches, research staff had reading knowledge of eight different languages, which supported the global search. Program information was collected over a six-month period, from July through December 2001. The Global Assessment does not claim to have identified every service program, only to have developed a "sample" of existing programs, which met conceptual and operational criteria, and were found through published sources over the six month period.

Instrument and data collection.

An instrument was developed to capture civic service program data. The unit of analysis was the program. An institutional perspective informed instrument development, capturing programs' access (e.g., eligibility criteria), incentives (e.g., compensation and awards), information and support (e.g., training), and operations (e.g., administrative organizations). Basic information regarding program operations, server characteristics, and time commitment was also collected. A mix of closed and open-ended items was used. Open-ended items were imperative given the exploratory nature of the study, and allowed for the entry of information not corresponding to predetermined categories. The validity and reliability of the instrument were not confirmed.

If a source of information was in another language, then the qualified research staff person translated that program information into English. This was done for uniformity of analysis and

understanding, but was rarely required. This method of data collection can be construed as an informational scan, analyzing published materials and abstracting information to complete the instrument. To further improve data quality, data were sent to the civic service programs via fax and email for clarification and to fill in missing values. Sixty-six programs (31 percent response rate) provided confirmations, specifications, and/or corrections to the survey. When data points were not evidenced in program documents or confirmed by program staff, these data were considered missing.

Analysis

In this article, we advance a specific conception and analysis of civic service using a social development perspective. As such, only selected data from the Global Assessment were used. For a basic description of service, we used global distribution, age, voluntary nature, service forms (scope), and intensity and duration. To explore whether civic service represents a social development intervention, the following data were used: servers, eligibility criteria, goals, administrative agency, public policy support, and descriptions of service administration. Closed-ended items were analyzed descriptively.

Regarding program goals, using Sherraden, Sherraden, and Eberly's (1990) study of civic service in nine nations, 10 goals were identified as possibilities prior to data collection. All of these goals are considered social development goals because they are oriented toward increasing individual capabilities, improving individual well-being, and promoting participation in economic, social, and political systems (See Table 3). Upon reading program descriptions in the data sources, the programs were categorized as either addressing a particular goal or not. Programs may work on any or all of the goals. There was an open-ended item that captured additional goals, which did not fit this categorization.

Data regarding program administration and collaborative partnerships resulted solely from an open-ended "program description" item allowing for textual description. Two research staff independently coded these data for conceptual themes, including represented sectors (e.g., public, for profit, and nonprofit), existence of partnerships, and the nature of partnerships (e.g., funding, co-delivery, and reciprocal exchange.) A code matrix was developed prior to analysis and applied to the data. Frequencies are reported for the themes, and applicable examples are noted for illustration. Information about multi-sector partnerships remains unknown for a majority of programs that did not mention them in the written materials. These data are not definitive regarding the nature of service administration and delivery; they are considered to be suggestive, and detailed here for consideration.

Sample

The sample had a total of 210 civic service programs, based in 57 countries. Programs were connected to a specific country based on location of the home office. The majority was found in North America and Western Europe followed by Sub-Saharan Africa (Table 1). The programs ranged in age from one year to 103 years. The average program age of the sample was 21 years, and the median age was 14 years. The most frequent ages among the 210 programs were six

years and 10 years (11 programs each), followed by seven, nine, and 13 years (10 programs each). Age was unknown for 21 programs.

Table 1. Civic Service: Geographic Distribution of the Sample (N=210)

Region	Frequency	Percent
North America	69	33
Europe/Central Asia	56	27
Sub-Saharan Africa	25	12
East Asia/Pacific	21	10
Latin America/Caribbean	20	9
Middle East/North Africa	11	5
South Asia	8	4

Programs can be distinguished by the voluntary versus the compulsory nature of the service. In this sample, 92 percent of the programs were voluntary, and four percent were compulsory. For five programs, the voluntary or compulsory nature of the service was unknown. We identified four primary forms of service in this sample, indicating the scope of the service activity: transnational—organized exchange across countries (21 programs), international—leaving a country to serve in a host country (103 programs), national—performed within and across a nation (73 programs), and local—organized and performed within a defined community (13 programs).

We defined intensity as the number of hours a server was required to commit to the program in a given week. Eighty-one percent of all programs in the sample required a full-time commitment, equivalent to about 35 hours per week. Nine percent of the programs offered part-time opportunities, and six percent allowed full and part-time commitments. Intensity was unknown for approximately three percent of the programs. Service duration ranged from one week to 3.5 years. The average possible length of service participation was known for 124 programs at 7.3 months. More than half of the programs (107) had no expressed limitations on the maximum length of service participation.

Findings

Servers and Eligibility Criteria

Information regarding who is targeted for civic service and who is allowed to serve based on specific eligibility criteria reflects the inclusive or exclusive nature of the program and suggests those targeted for benefits. Across all programs, youth served more than any other group. Seventy-seven percent of the programs in the sample engaged youth as servers. Sixty-nine percent had adults who served, and 34 percent had seniors who served. Ten percent of the programs allowed children to serve. Other servers indicated by the programs included people with physical disabilities, those of low income, and college students.

In regards to eligibility, age was the primary criterion to serve across a majority of programs (Table 2), followed by specific required skills. Other programs required residency in a particular geographic area, enrollment in school, and proficiency in specific languages. Organizational

affiliation, religion, race, and gender were criteria for a small percentage of programs. Other criteria listed by the programs included citizenship status, disability, or health. Eleven programs specified no eligibility criteria.

Table 2. Server Eligibility Criteria (N=210)

Criteria	Yes		No		Unspecified	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Age	156	74	23	11	31	15
Skills	66	31	101	48	43	21
Geographical location	60	28	94	45	56	27
Student status	41	19	113	54	56	27
Language	38	18	105	50	67	32
Income	21	10	142	68	47	22
Organizational affiliation	18	9	130	62	62	29
Religion	8	4	155	74	47	22
Race	5	2	165	79	40	19
Gender	4	2	172	82	34	16

Note. No.=frequency

Civic Service Program Goals

The most frequent goals in the sample focused on the server. “Increasing the server’s motivation to volunteer again” or long-term civic engagement was the most prevalent goal in the sample (Table 3). The goal of “increasing the server’s skill acquisition” was the next most frequent goal, followed by “increasing the server’s social skills,” “increasing server’s confidence and self-esteem,” “influencing server’s career choices,” and “increasing employment.”

Table 3. Civic Service Program Goals (N=210)

Goal	Yes		No		Unspecified	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
<u>Goals for the Server</u>						
Increase server's motivation to volunteer again	170	81	8	4	32	15
Increase server's skill acquisition	160	76	23	11	27	13
Increase server's social skills	143	68	36	17	31	15
Increase server's confidence and self esteem	130	62	26	12	54	25
Influence and expand server's career choices	98	47	43	20	69	33
Increase employment rate	68	32	77	37	65	29
<u>Goals for the Served</u>						
Promote cultural understanding	139	66	13	6	58	28
Create/improve public facilities	115	55	41	20	54	26
Promote sustainable land use	104	50	52	25	54	26
Improve well-being and health	98	47	45	21	67	32

Among the goals oriented toward impact on the group served or the outcomes of service, “promoting cultural understanding” was the most prevalent goal, followed by “creating or improving public facilities” (Table 3). Other measured goals included improving the environment or “promoting sustainable land use” and “improving well-being and health.”

Information was collected about other program goals that did not correspond with the original 10 goals. The additional goals included increasing civic engagement beyond future volunteering such as voting and community activism, phrased as “civic and democratic participation,” “citizenship rights,” and “developing a sense of social responsibility.” Other programs noted that they focused on “developing spirituality” or some type of religious “identity.” Eleven programs promoted “human rights and international development.”

The Kenyan National Youth Service program is an example of a dual focus on the servers and the served. This program aims to relieve youth unemployment, create a pool of trained and disciplined human resources to support the army and police forces, undertake work on national development projects, and create national cohesion. The Action Reconciliation Service for Peace Program in Germany organizes service opportunities to promote reconciliation and understanding of the suffering and other effects experienced under the Nazi regime. German youth and youth from the program's partner countries are sent to communities around the world to work on education, cultural heritage projects, and care for holocaust survivors.

Civic Service Partnerships: Program Administration and Delivery

Administrative agency.

Two types of administrative bodies are responsible for the implementation of service programs, nonprofit organizations and government agencies. Of the 210 programs, 75 percent of them were administered by nonprofits and 22 percent by government agencies. Primary administrative agency was unknown for three percent of the programs. The nonprofit organizations were classified as international (17 percent), national (34 percent), and local (10 percent). Scope was unspecified for 29 percent of the nonprofit organizations.

Public policy.

Information about public policy support was either not in the published information or not provided for 112 programs (53 percent). Public policy support was construed generally and can include sanction or funding support. Of the remaining 98 programs, 55 were based on or funded through a government policy or legislation and 43 were not.

The nature of civic service partnerships.

Two primary partnerships were identified from general program descriptions: partnerships between nonprofit organizations and government (44 of the 210 programs) and nonprofit organizations and for-profit or private, corporate entities (21). Very few programs involved all three sectors. The nonprofit organizations involved in the partnerships included social service agencies, faith-based groups, educational institutions, and international organizations such as the United Nations or the Red Cross. Some programs had partnerships with professional groups such as physicians, teachers, and social workers. For example, in South Africa, a national service program for physicians requires that they provide medical service in local, impoverished communities in order to be licensed.

The service partnerships reflected three types of relationships: funding, co-delivery, and reciprocity or the sending and hosting of servers. The most prominent relationship was strictly a funding arrangement between governments and nonprofit organizations that administered the programs. Thirty-five of the 44 programs with public partnerships disclosed a funding relationship with a government entity.

This funding can be juxtaposed to co-delivery, which represents more active, intensive collaboration. Twenty-seven programs were arranged for the co-delivery of program resources or program components across multiple partners. For example, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) operates in support of the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV) program. JOCV is a partnership between nonprofit organizations and private corporations. JOCV recruits corporate professionals to engage in one year of voluntary service. Participating corporations guarantee the employment of the servers post-service, and JICA works with the employers, in some cases helping to defer personnel expenses and other costs incurred during employees' absences.

Thirty programs were identified as having multiple organizational partners for recruiting servers and hosting service experiences, possibly a partnership unique to civic service. There were

organizations that recruited eligible servers and sent them to host organizations, which managed the service projects and the server, in the communities where service was performed. For example, international programs tend to link volunteers in developed nations with organizations in developing countries who have service opportunities. National service programs may identify servers across the country, but they are referred to local nonprofit organizations or community groups that are responsible for the service experience, e.g., servers teaching at local schools through the Ghana National Service Scheme.

By their very nature, transnational service programs involve multiple partners. They are an example of public-nonprofit partnerships and sending-hosting relationships. For this form of service, a sending organization may also be a host organization because servers are “exchanged” across countries. Governments are involved because visas need to be negotiated, and they may also fund the service program or even host the service experience. The transnational European Voluntary Service (EVS) program is the most notable example. It is carried out through the Alliance of European Voluntary Service Organisations, an international nonprofit organization, representing organizations running service projects in over 20 countries. Each organization promotes community development, intercultural education, and peace through voluntary service. The common aim of all EVS work-camps is to provide a resource and support to local communities, while giving youth from diverse backgrounds the opportunity to meet others and live an intercultural experience.

Discussion

It is not known how representative GSI’s sample of civic service programs is of the total number of programs worldwide, because the population is unknown. The purpose of GSI’s Global Assessment was to create a profile of civic service not a catalogue of programs. As such, caution should be exercised in generalization. It is recognized that because of the emphasis on formal, structured programs, the topic and research may be biased toward more “developed” countries and urban centers. In regards to data collection, relying on published information and program information conveyed via websites has inherent biases due to financial and technological resources required for publication and Internet access. This is compounded by the fact that there are missing data, and that only 31 percent of the sample confirmed program information. Given these limitations, the Global Assessment represents a first step. It is exploratory, ground-breaking, and developed for international comment and feedback.

The data on global distribution and program age demonstrate that civic service may be an emerging global phenomenon. As the goals, administrative findings, and program examples demonstrate, civic service is an instrument for the development of individuals and communities. Considering its global distribution and potential, three important implications can be drawn for social development from the findings. Upon review of this sample of programs and who serves, service may or may not be inclusive. Civic service programs have social development goals, but whether those goals are achieved is not known—especially for the served. Collaborative partnerships are evidenced in the development and implementation of civic service programs, but the strengths and limitations of these partnerships have not been considered so as to inform innovation and efficacy.

Inclusivity

Targeted server groups vary. Some programs take an inclusive approach, targeting particular disadvantaged server groups such as individuals with physical disabilities and those of low income. But eligibility criteria for service suggest that servers are potentially more-educated and privileged, e.g., requiring specific skills and knowledge of multiple languages. Youth are the primary servers across all programs. Inclusion of youth in such opportunities may serve as a social development strategy with long-term consequences for the server, e.g., improving social skills and training in marketable, job skills. Nevertheless, data on server groups and eligibility—when paired with data on the intensity and duration of the service role—do call into question the inclusive nature of the programs. Who are the individuals that are able to voluntarily give substantial portions of their time to service? More research is needed to determine if service program incentives and supports make service possible for a wide spectrum of individuals, or if the individuals who serve are more economically secure than those who do not serve. A lack of inclusivity could undermine the social development effects that are possible through service programs.

Goals and Effects

A similar concern emerges through examination of service goals. Proportionately, the programs express more of a goal-directed focus on the servers than the served. Given that the majority of programs are international, concerns are salient regarding the effects of service on communities and villages who host the servers and service programs. Imperialism has a long and dark past, which could be repeated through service (Brav, Moore, & Sherraden, 2002). One must beg the question, does service “do to” or “do with?” A critical examination is needed of programs’ approaches and influence on host communities. Furthermore, research has focused primarily on the short-term effects for the server (Grantmaker Forum on Community and National Service, 2000; Perry & Imperial, 2001). Little is known about the long-term effects of service on servers and the served. Are the goals of service realized as effects? Does civic service represent an effective social development approach? These are guiding questions for future research.

Partnerships: Pitfalls and Potential

Multi-sector and interorganizational partnerships in social development programs are not extensively studied nor are the effects that partnerships may have beyond the intended program goals. Only one study was found that examined the effects of partnerships in civic service programs on program outcomes as well as additional structural and community-level effects (Thomson & Perry, 1998). It is not known whether service partnerships are creating more responsive institutions that better integrate individuals into society. Also, more remains to be known about the nature and effects of government involvement in civic service. Service could be a statist tool for control, e.g., Hitler’s Youth, or a state’s investment in its people. Moreover, there are studies on the inefficiencies of multi-sector partnerships (Rosenau, 1999), but there is no sense of the costs or benefits of collaboration in civic service. Given the evidence of partnerships in this sample, which play a role in the operations and administration of service programs, more research is warranted regarding the nature of the partnerships and their positive and negative effects.

Conclusion

GSI's Global Assessment demonstrates that civic service is a young, emerging phenomenon around the world. This article suggests that civic service is a tool used by governments and nonprofit organizations to develop the potential of individuals and communities by increasing individual capabilities, improving individual well-being, and promoting participation in economic, social, and political systems. If the administrative process and the program goals realize multiple, positive effects, then civic service may represent another productive social development intervention worthy of investment and expansion. If it is to achieve its potential for social development, however, more research is called for regarding the prevalence, forms, nature, and effects of civic service worldwide.

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