

METHODOLOGICAL ANALYSES AND APPLICATIONS TO DETERMINE AND MAXIMIZE THE ADDED VALUE OF VOLUNTEER WORK IN OMAN

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ABSTRACT

Volunteers are the backbone of many organizations including Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), private institutions and public organizations. The concept of added value is a common term used by economists to measure the significance of the services provided to the community as whole. Understanding the added value of volunteerism is important to benchmark the involvement of volunteers and establish strategies to improve their roles in society. In Oman, there is a need to develop the current laws and regulations for voluntary work. The aim of the present paper is to review common strategies to determine the value of volunteers in Oman. This paper also includes detailed steps to determine and maximize the economic values of volunteers in Oman. The local community culture, the regulatory institutions and the legislative framework are three main channels that could maximize the added value of volunteer work in Oman. This paper suggests several strategies to utilize these channels to improve the added value and outcomes of volunteer work in Oman

KEYWORDS: Added- Value, Volunteerism, Measurement, Indicators

INTRODUCTION

Volunteers are the backbone of many organizations including Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), private institutions and public organizations (Wilson & Pimm, 1996). In these organizations, volunteers provide both direct and indirect services to the clients. (Hartenian, 2007; Wilson & Pimm, 1996). In Oman, voluntary work is considered as a social practice and service provider, and it represents as one of the key features and main pillars in building and sustaining Omani civil society. Besides, volunteer work is a human practice that reflects the conscience of the society due to its association with every sense of the goodness and virtue of humanitarian work. Currently, however, volunteer work in Oman is limited to the activities of NGOs and charities which confine their work to raising money and do not include other vital areas of economic, social, educational, cultural and health concerns.

The absence of clear vision for volunteerism in accordance with the educational system and its organizational structure and cultural fabric of society is one of the most prominent obstacles to maintaining unity, effectiveness, integration and development in society. Volunteer work is also considered an added value for development within the community, as volunteer work has diverse patterns, forms and types. Upon this the National Vision of Oman Government 2020, declares the importance role of NGOs in supporting the economy of the nation in Oman. Based on these facts, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos yearly Award for Volunteer Work was launched in February 2011. This reflects the importance of volunteer work as the backbone for the development of Omani society socially, economically and culturally. Since 2011, the national statistics report of the Ministry of Social Affairs for the third quarter of 2015 showed that there is increasing number of volunteer organizations which offer a range of voluntary opportunities in Oman. Also, the number of official

volunteer societies reached 135 in 2015 compared to 16 in 1990 (Ministry of Social affairs, 2015). These volunteer organizations offer short-term and long-term services such as caring for people with disabilities, conservation, archaeological, and community development projects especially in the Holy Month of Ramadan and on other religious occasions. The conceptual framework of volunteer work and practices in Oman is shown in diagram 1.

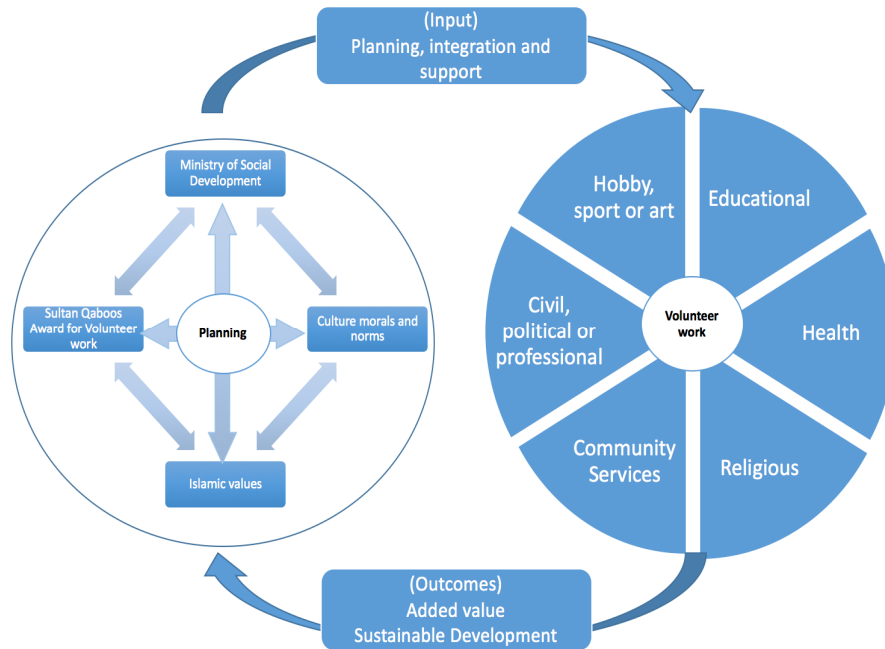


Diagram 1: The Conceptual Framework of Volunteer Work in Oman

The volunteer practices in Oman are very similar to the current volunteer practices in the other Gulf Council Countries (GCC). It worth mentioning that Oman shares geographical boundaries, history, culture and traditions with the GCC states. In Saudi Arabia, the definition of volunteer work is very similar to the Omani terminology which is defined as “the individuals’ contributions in operating organizations that serve the community at no cost” (Yally, 2011, p.13). Also, a study by Barqawee (2008) revealed that volunteer work in Saudi Arabia is targeted toward the spirit of cooperation and helping others. Youths in Saudi Arabia are motivated to volunteer as a part of their religious beliefs that encourage concept of helping other. The youth in Saudi Arabia believe it is important to facilitate the work of charities by the government or other beneficial parties to develop strong economic and social systems that provide positive returns for the entire country. This study concluded that volunteer work has become one of the important components to build and achieve sustainable development in all its forms, as it feeds the social and economic needs Barqawee (2008). Similarly, in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), volunteer work exists in multiple forms through social NGOs that target social, health and educational supports in society. It is worth mentioning that many youths in the UAE report that the major reason to volunteer is to improve their personal characteristics and achieve their career goals, and this is considered as one of the added values of volunteer work (Al Munazel, & Al Utoom, 2015). In Kuwait, there are more than 178 NGOs which are involved in developing and raising the standard of local authorities, municipal services and utilities; assisting members financially through soft loans for development projects. Also, these organizations focus on delivering educational programs that nurture the entrepreneurial and leadership skills of young people and inspire future generations of business leaders (Al Kandari, 2016).

The concept of added value is a common term used by economists to measure the significance of the services provided to the community as whole (Mook, Richmond, & Quarter, 2003). It is also referred as the “net benefits” that the volunteers provide to society (Handy & Mook, 2011). The net benefits are conceptually determined by subtracting the total benefit from the total cost of the volunteers. The added value of volunteers depends on the extent of the volunteers’ involvement in the organization and the benefits associated with their involvement (Handy & Mook, 2011). The benefits of the volunteers’ involvement must exceed the cost to produce an added value to the organization (Handy & Mook, 2011). Understanding the added value of volunteerism is important to benchmark the involvement of volunteers in society and establish strategies to improve their role in society.

A study by Brudney and Kellough (2000) aimed to determine the role of volunteers and explain the benefits associated with volunteers’ involvement. A questionnaire was used to survey 189 personnel managers of state agencies across the United States. The results of this empirical study revealed several organizational benefits from volunteers. These benefits include: delivery and public services, specialized skills, source of employment and labor, public welfare, health services, and general administration services. However, the survey also indicated several challenges associated with volunteers’ involvement in these organizations, as perceived by the organization managers. These challenges, which may inhibit the optimal involvement of volunteers in the organizational framework, include the following: lack of volunteers, lack of staff to train and supervise the volunteers, lack of volunteer findings, costs associated with volunteer recruitment, lack of work commitment among volunteers, and high volunteer turnover rate. The study also indicated that volunteers may impose financial and non-financial costs on the organization. These costs depend on the role of volunteers in the organization. The cost of volunteers is higher in the organizations that rely heavily on direct service volunteers, when compared to the organizations that rely on both direct and indirect service volunteers (Brudney & Kellough, 2000). These findings were consistent with a recent study conducted by Terry, Harder, and Pracht (2011). Thus, the action of training, educating, sustaining and managing the volunteers by an organization may impose costs and utilize some of the organizational resources (Leonard, 2012). The organization must balance the cost of input required to train and educate the volunteers and the output generated from the direct and indirect services provided by the volunteers to generate an added value. In this framework, there is a need to determine the costs and values of volunteers in society.

An easy standard method to measure the value of volunteerism is by expressing it in economic terms or dollar value. Based on the number of hours spent by the volunteers and the type of input they offer, the value of volunteers can be determined (Brown, 1999). However, it is difficult to define or measure the added value of volunteerism in modern concepts. This is related to the fact that the pattern of volunteer practice is unstructured in nature and volunteers provide free benefits (Brown, 1999).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Recognizing the reasons for volunteerism enables an econometric analysis of the cost-benefit ratios, sustainability and value-adding generated by harnessing community service. Accounting for a population’s voluntary contribution informs policy-makers and enables strategic planning because, as unpaid work, it not only “produces tangible outputs” but it provides a means of contributing to social wellbeing and aligning the sense of “decent work” with “human agency, dignity and self-respect”(ILO, 2011)

According to a study by The Omani State Council (2008), there is a need for laws and regulations to regulate voluntary work in Oman. Current data on the type of volunteer work and activities in the Omani community are lacking. The lack of data on volunteering leads to numerous consequences such as decreased visible economic value of volunteers, difficulties in management of volunteers, lower perceived benefits of volunteers by society and unenthusiastic and discouraged volunteers (Salamon, Sokolowski, & Haddock, 2011). Thus, it is necessary to define an organizational structure or outline for volunteer work. This will help in assessing the added value of volunteer work, and recognizing the efforts of volunteers in our societies.

The aim of the present paper is to review common strategies to determine the value of volunteers in Oman. This paper also includes detailed steps to calculate the economic values of volunteers in Oman and suggest strategies to maximize the value of volunteer work in the Omani community. The thematic framework of this paper is based on a large body of literature on the current valuation approach of the volunteers' added value in social and economic concepts.

It is the intent of this paper to help managers, directors and stakeholders in Oman to determine the added value of volunteers to improve the volunteers' outcomes and increase the cost-effectiveness of volunteers in their organizations.

STRATEGIES TO EVALUATE VOLUNTEER WORK IN ECONOMIC TERMS

Previous researchers have suggested different strategies to evaluate volunteer work (Handy & Mook, 2011; Handy & Srinivasan, 2004; Sajardo & Serra, 2011; Salamon et al., 2011). These strategies are: (a) the replacement cost, (b) the opportunity of cost return and (c) the social benefits (Handy & Mook, 2011; Handy & Srinivasan, 2004; Sajardo & Serra, 2011; Salamon et al., 2011). The first and second valuation strategies focus on the cost/inputs of volunteer work. The third strategy of assessment, however, focuses on the benefits/outputs in the form of the goods and services of volunteer work. (Handy & Mook, 2011; Salamon et al., 2011).

All the three approaches can be used simultaneously. However, one strategy may be more efficient and valuable than the other two depending on the type of volunteer practices and the organizational goals and objectives. Table 1 shows the three valuation strategies for the added value of volunteer work.

Economists and policy makers most commonly measure the contribution of volunteers using the replacement cost method, which relies upon assigning a monetary value for volunteer outputs, based on equivalent market services (Scharlach, 2015). Whilst this is the method advocated by the International Labor Office (ILO), the preference is qualified by the recognition of difficulties associated with differences in skill and efficiency between paid and voluntary workers and variations in the rates of pay across sectors (ILO, 2011). The ILO recommends that official labor force data or equivalent household census data act as the basis identifying and accumulating quality information about voluntary activity based on individual volunteer activity (rather than beneficiaries) in relation to demographic details, the number of hours donated, the organizational context (non-profit, government, for-profit, cooperative or direct) and the relevant industry or sector (e.g. health, education, disaster management) (Salamon et al., 2011).

Furthermore, the exclusive reliance on the economic quantification of volunteer work overlooks the sizeable direct and indirect benefits to organizations, to both volunteers and beneficiaries and to the overall fabric of society. Assigning a value, based on cost of the service, overlooks benefits which include, but are not limited to, enhancing service recipient satisfaction and community relations and improving the physical and mental wellbeing of both providers and recipients, particularly by reducing social isolation, enhancing intergenerational relationships, integration and the

performance of social institutions (Scharlach, 2015).

Expanding the measurement of volunteerism to encompass the social and environmental outputs incorporates the progressive mainstream accounting practice of accounting for the wealth created or destroyed by voluntary labor and philanthropy to transform goods and services (Mook, 2007). Critical accounting recognizes that accounting for volunteerism is not neutral and, as such, can shape social reality, and that aspects of social and sustainable accounting accommodate the specific variables attributed to civil service (Scharlach, 2015).

Table 1: Valuation Approach for the Added Value of Volunteer Work

Valuation Strategy	Focus of Valuation	Basis of Valuation		Accuracy	Complexity
		Monetary Equivalent	Estimation Judgment		
Replacement cost	Cost/ Inputs	Replacement wage	Supervisor judgment	Over-estimate	Fairly Complex
Opportunity cost	Cost/ Inputs	Alternative-employment wage	Volunteer judgment	Under-estimate	Complex
Social benefits	Benefits/ Outputs	Cost of similar goods or services	Beneficiary judgment	Under-estimate	Highly complex

a. The Replacement Cost Strategy

This represents the most common strategy used to value the economic value of volunteer work (Sajardo & Serra, 2011). This strategy focuses on the value of volunteer work as a source of labor input. As shown in Table 1, according to this strategy, the added value of the volunteer work can be valued using two different approaches. The first approach includes estimating the cost of replacing the volunteer with paid labor. The second approach includes asking the supervisors or beneficiaries of the volunteer work to estimate or value the value of volunteer work (Salamon et al., 2011). In the next part of this paper, detailed steps to calculate the economic value of volunteers using the replacement cost method in Oman are provided. This method is utilized by many research studies which addressed the measurement of the added value benefits of volunteer work by the volunteers' contributions to the primary outputs, and consisted of the total hours spent in volunteer work, to place a value on these hours using replacement wages (Mook et al., 2003; Tokke, 2006).

b. Opportunity Cost Strategy

This strategy focuses on the cost/input value of the volunteer related to performing unpaid tasks. The volunteer usually replaces the value of a paid job with the value of volunteering. In many instances, the alternative to volunteering is the leisure or free time of the individual (Handy & Mook, 2011) In another words, the volunteers tend to replace their leisure or free time by volunteering, not their actual job time However, estimating the value of leisure time is very challenging (Salamon et al., 2011).

c. Social Benefits Strategy

Determining the social benefits of volunteer work is also very challenging (Handy & Srinivasan, 2004). Volunteers provide economic and social benefits to the local community, organizations and the society as a whole (Handy & Srinivasan, 2004). Each volunteer activity produces different amounts of value to the society (Colonna, 1995). Although some of these social benefits can be directly estimated, many other social benefits are hard to estimate. The benefits of volunteer work have a multiplier effect on society (Handy & Srinivasan, 2004; Salamon et al., 2011).

It is very challenging to choose the appropriate valuation strategy at an organizational level. The study by Salamon et al. (2011) suggests five criteria open to an organization to choose the appropriate valuation strategy. These criteria include: suitability, breadth, conceptual clarity, objectivity and feasibility

It is worth mentioning that, to a large extent, these strategies rely on labor market conditions as well as on monetary values to value the added values of volunteerism. In other words, the added value of volunteerism mainly represents productive economic values.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL VALUE OF VOLUNTEERISM IN OMAN

Volunteers generate added social and economic values to society. Social values are generated to the community, to organizations and to the volunteers themselves. At the community level, the volunteer services build the community, increase social capital and enhance the quality of life in society. At the organizational level, the volunteers constitute an unpaid workforce for their organization. Finally, at the volunteers' level, the value of acknowledgment and a sense of belonging is gained. These social added values contribute to a high extent to the status of social stability that leads to economic stability in society as whole (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 2011).

The second form of added value generated by volunteer work is economic in nature. Volunteers' input to society generates mainly economic values (Colonna, 1995). The added economic value of volunteering is mainly calculated in terms of the number of hours spent by the volunteers to perform various types of work (Colonna, 1995). Thus, volunteerism has direct effects on the stock of social capital; volunteerism builds economic and social capital resources.

In Omani society, volunteers contribute to economic and social benefits in many aspects. These include health, environmental, social, religious and educational benefits. However, current data on the value of volunteer work in Oman is lacking. This may be related to the absence of rigid valuation strategies for the stakeholders and the governmental bodies that allow them to value the input of volunteers to Omani society. Only recently has the value of volunteer work been recognized by governmental bodies in Oman. In 2011, the Ministry of Social Development affirmed that the Sultan Qaboos Award for Voluntary Work was one of the first awards that supported voluntary work in Oman. The award covers 15 fields, namely economic areas, sport, social affairs, childhood, youth, charitable work, environmental projects, heritage, health, the media, educational fields, informational technology, civil defense, the disabled, culture, arts, literature and women (Muscat Daily Staff Writer, 2011).

According to a study by The Omani State Council (2008) there is a need for laws and regulations to regulate voluntary work in Oman. The majority of the voluntary activities in Oman are organized by civil societies and NGOs (Al-Ani, Lashin, & Al-Fahdi, 2016). Some of these organizations that foster the youth voluntary activities are supported financially by governmental bodies. However, these organizations face many challenges related to funding, laws and regulations, and the valuation systems of the voluntary work in Oman (Al-Ani et al., 2016). The perceived social responsibilities, youth activities, youth attitude and motivation toward voluntary work remains very low in Oman, as voluntary work is perceived as non-skilled work (Al-Ani, Saadi, & Hadhrami, 2016).

RECOMMENDED STEPS TO CALCULATE THE ECONOMIC VALUE OF VOLUNTEER WORK IN OMAN

It is necessary to determine the economic value of volunteer work hours on a monthly or yearly basis to determine

the economic and added value of volunteerism. The following shows an approach to calculate the economic added value of volunteer work using the replacement cost method:

Step 1: Determine the Focus

The first step in calculating the economic value of volunteer work involves focusing. The term “economic value of volunteer” is a complex term. Thus, it is important to focus the economic value on a specific period/time frame and specific volunteer tasks.

Step 2: Choose the Most Appropriate Wage Rate

A study by Hartenian (2007) concluded that NGOs primarily depend on the direct service volunteers. However, this study’s findings suggested that the dependence on the direct service volunteer is low in the NGOs that heavily rely on the indirect services of volunteers, and vice versa. Thus, based on these study findings, the values and benefits of direct service volunteers and indirect service volunteers may be perceived differently, according to the organizational structure (Hartenian, 2007). Each volunteer’s role in the organization has a different estimated average wage rate depending on the tasks that are performed by the volunteers. The average wage rate is determined depending on the type of tasks and level of abilities required by the volunteer. As mentioned previously, voluntary work in Oman is perceived as non-skilled work (Al-Ani et al., 2016). The Ministry of Manpower uses a standard wage equivalent for all types of voluntary work of \$5 /hour (Oman Labour Law, 2003). This is considered a very low wage rate for many types of voluntary work and leads to a considerable underestimate of the value of voluntary work in Oman. Thus, three categories of wage types are suggested for the different tasks accomplished by volunteers, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Suggested Wage Range for Different Levels of Tasks Performed By Volunteers

Level	Task	Wage Type	Estimated Average Wage Rate
Level 1	Volunteers who provide public services such as transportation services, assistance and support services and other services	Minimum wage	\$5-15
Level 2	Volunteers who provide specific roles that are very similar to the role of an employer in the company	Average wage	\$20-30
Level 3	Volunteers who provide specialist roles that require certain level of talent/experience, such as providing personal care and leadership roles.	Specialist wage	\$35-50

Step 3: Calculating the Economic Value

- In this step, the specific economic value of the volunteer is determined based on the average wage rate chosen in step two and the specific time period (monthly or yearly). The weekly full-time equivalent (FTE) is based on an average of seven working hours a day and five days a week for a full-time employee in Oman (Oman Labour Law, 2003). Figure 1 shows the procedure to calculate the economic value of volunteer.

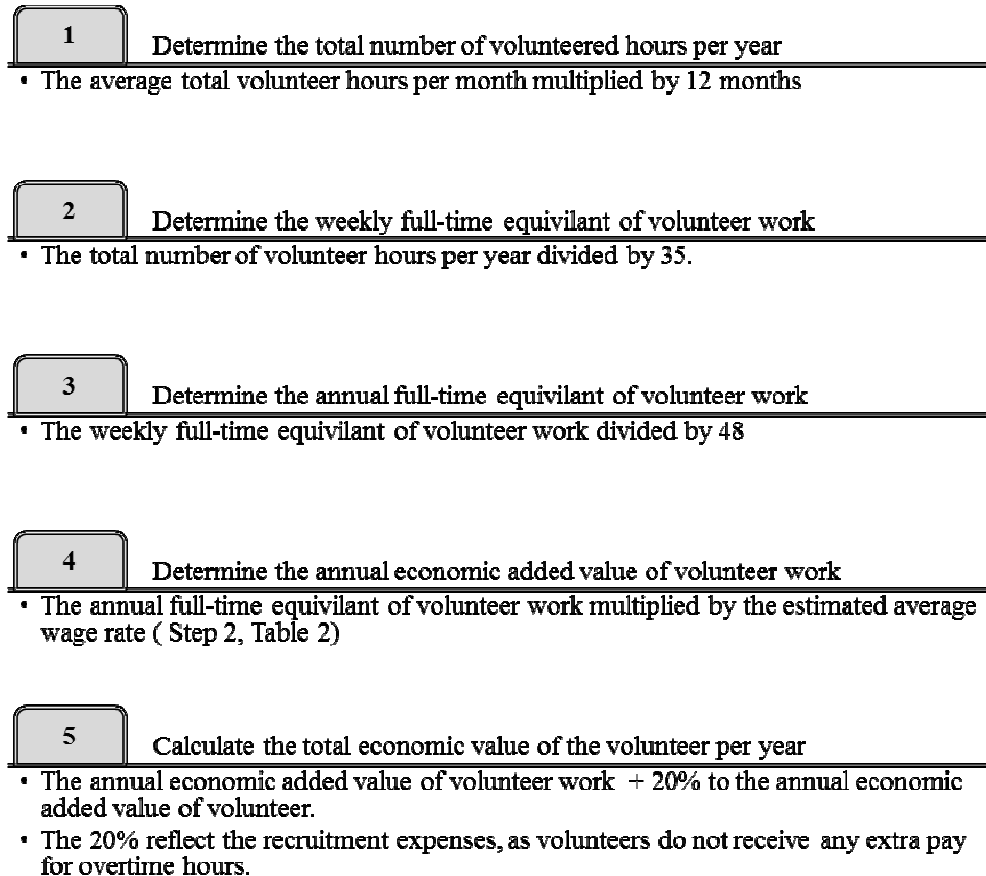


Figure 1: The Procedure to Calculate the Economic Value of Volunteering

Step 4: Reporting Outcomes

Recoding and reporting the outcomes of volunteer work is vital tool to: (1) Motivate volunteers and financiers and local communities by presenting the form of their contributions; (2) Look at volunteer work as an economic value by decreasing cost outcome with the benefits of saving cost; (3) Describe and value the volunteer's roles in the community; and (4) Estimate the expense and resources provided to support the volunteers. In general, organizations tend to report volunteer involvement and value in direct service, rather than indirect services (Terry et al., 2011).

SUGGESTED MECHANISMS TO MAXIMIZE THE ADDED VALUE OF VOLUNTEER WORK

There are several mechanisms to maximize the added value of volunteer work. One of the most important tools to enhance volunteer practices is through implementing rules and regulation to manage designing a specific volunteer's tasks or job design. The process of providing the volunteers with specific job tasks has been shown to enhance their autonomous motivation, satisfaction and engagement (Millette, 2008). Here we suggest three main channels to maximize the added value of volunteer work in Oman:

First: The Local Community Culture Channel

Promoting the culture of volunteerism at the family level is an effective approach to enhance the value of volunteers at the individual level (Laila, 2009). The value of volunteering is implemented during the early stages of human development. A family could train their children to follow a volunteer's behavior at younger ages (Laila, 2009). Besides

the family, schools are considered as the second approach to build the values of volunteer work among children and adolescents. School programs or educational classes and lessons on the value of volunteer practices could be embedded in the school curriculum. The schools in Oman have implemented several programs to enhance the value of volunteer work among school children. For instance, the “Save our environment” program is a school level program implemented by many schools to improve the local environment. In general, emphasizing the positive value of volunteer work and “helping others” during the early stage of child development will help to direct their behavior. These pre-established values of volunteers tend to persist during their later development and adulthood (Laila, 2009). However, it is important to harmonize the information presented about volunteers through the local cultural channels.

Second: The Regulatory Institution Channel

As discussed earlier, there is a need to implement regulatory institutions to manage voluntary work practices in Oman. These assist the local community channels in achieving their goals of spreading volunteer culture among the local communities (Nabti, 2006). These institutions are powerful in terms of implementing policies and regulations that enhance the role of the volunteer at the community level. They represent a reliable source of input and information about volunteer work, and provide data on the current needs, the nature of the work and the required experience for the volunteers to participate effectively in the local volunteer programs in their communities (Nabti, 2006). Furthermore, these institutions may provide the volunteers with some privileges within the scope of their areas and mobilize their enthusiasm toward the actual voluntary work. Finally, these institutions can provide a safe and secure environment for volunteers to participate in the local community (Nabti, 2006).

Third: The Legislative Framework Channel

Legislation and policies are a regulatory need for voluntary work. The legislative framework protects and secures volunteers during their work commitment. The source of security afforded by a legislative authority may increase voluntary practices in a community. Furthermore, a legislative framework can provide privileges for volunteers in their local communities. These privileges include jobs, internships or service privileges (Jaunmuktane, 2012).

CONCLUSIONS

Voluntary work is valuable work that contributes to many economic and social benefits. This article explained some applications that determine and maximize the value of voluntary work in Oman. In Oman, the perceived value of volunteer work is low as volunteer work is considered non-skilled work. This false perception limits the Omani community’s understanding of the economic and social value of volunteer work. This paper suggests a new approach to conceptualize the value of volunteer work with reference to the task and the wage type for an employee performing similar work. This method will allow a more accurate estimation of the value of volunteer work in Oman. Estimating the value of volunteerism based on the wage rate of labor indicates that the labor market in society is a static system. However, this may not be fully true in reality. Labor itself may produce broader social benefits. In addition, the value of volunteers makes a major contribution beside their basic function as labor. Volunteering produces an added value that is related to the efficient use of land and human capital. The productive value of volunteering includes activities that produce value. However, not all activities produce the same amount of value to society.

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