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WHO GETS INVOLVED?

INSIGHTS FROM AFROBAROMETER ON CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN AFRICA AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FOSTERING VOLUNTEERISM IN PURSUIT OF DEVELOPMENT GOALS



**Reimagining
Volunteering**
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WHO GETS INVOLVED? INSIGHTS FROM AFROBAROMETER ON CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN AFRICA AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FOSTERING VOLUNTEERISM IN PURSUIT OF DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set out ambitious targets for countries and societies to meet in order to improve lives and livelihoods around the world. While much of the burden of expectation for meeting these goals falls on governments, it is widely recognized that it will take the joint efforts of citizens and their governments to achieve the best outcomes. Citizen action takes place in many forms and forums, including organizing and working together on shared goals, providing mutual support and assistance, campaigning or advocating for shared needs, and engaging with – and making demands on – governments, and holding them accountable. While some involved citizens may engage in a formal capacity, e.g. through paid employment in non-governmental advocacy or service organizations, or through employment with governments or other service providers, vast numbers will, and must, be engaged in a voluntary capacity. Understanding the nature of this voluntary engagement is a key goal of this analysis.

Yet advocates of volunteerism in Africa have been plagued by a paucity of data on who engages in voluntary service, how much, in what formats, and to what ends. Only a handful of governments have collected any data at all on this topic. But our ability to foster and build support for volunteerism will depend in part on how well we understand the ways in which people are already engaging every day in these critical but uncompensated contributions in pursuit of the public good.

Afrobarometer data can help to fill this void. Although Afrobarometer has not collected data with the explicit aim of studying volunteerism, it has, for more than 20 years, across seven rounds of surveys in 38 countries, captured extensive, nationally representative data on respondents' levels of political and civic participation, much of which also falls under the rubric of volunteerism. This includes people's membership in religious and civic organizations, as well as their participation in individual and collective efforts to engage with leaders and voice community needs. In particular, in addition to associational membership, Afrobarometer tracks respondents' contact with political and community leaders, their attendance at community meetings, and their efforts to join with others to address issues or express their views. These kinds of civic engagement are the cornerstones of volunteerism aimed at solving problems and improving lives.

Understanding who engages, under what circumstances, and why provides a foundation on which to more effectively promote civic engagement and volunteerism in pursuit of the SDGs and core development objectives. This paper explores Afrobarometer data on civic engagement with four core goals:

- To specify how Afrobarometer indicators of civic engagement link to core understandings of volunteerism and its various typologies;
- To map profiles and patterns of who engages in volunteerism, especially at the country level;
- To model voluntary civic engagement to identify the key factors and contexts that facilitate or inhibit it, at both the individual and country level; and

- To use these profiles and models to identify entry points for activists who want to foster or support voluntary civic engagement.

Our analysis identifies several factors that shape voluntary civic engagement, from socio-demographic factors such as education and wealth, to citizens' socio-political engagement, their personal sense of efficacy, and their overall trust in their governments. Country contexts are important, as we see wide cross-country differences in levels of volunteerism. Among other things, wealthier countries, on average, report less volunteerism, while democracies report more. We find evidence that confronting unmet needs – whether one's own or those of others – is a major driving force motivating voluntary engagement. These findings suggest a number of opportunities and entry points for increasing citizen engagement.

The paper is organized into two parts. In Part A, we begin with a discussion of what is known about volunteerism and participation, highlighting the lack of evidence and data sources on volunteering in Africa, and how civic engagement intersects with volunteerism. In Part B, we will then explore Afrobarometer data in depth, first by developing descriptive profiles of who participates in voluntary civic engagement and then through statistical analysis to identify key driving factors. The final section presents recommendations for acting on these findings.

Part A: How civic engagement maps to volunteering

Linking volunteerism to civic and political participation

Volunteer work has been described as “unpaid work carried out for the benefit of those outside the household”.¹ It involves “contributing time, skills, ideas and talents for charitable, educational, political, economic, humanitarian or other worthwhile purposes.”² To be voluntary, these contributions must be uncompensated, undertaken freely rather than coerced, and to serve the common or collective good, rather than private or personal gain.

In 1999, the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) identified four categories of volunteerism³:

- 1) **mutual aid/self-help**, i.e. joining informally with others to meet some perceived need;
- 2) **philanthropy and service to others**, working together to provide services to others in need;
- 3) **civic participation**, such as involvement in political or policy processes; and
- 4) **advocacy and campaigning** to secure change.

Volunteerism can be informal and based on direct action and engagement with recipients, or it can be more formal and indirect when it is mediated through voluntary organizations or associations.

But while we have a robust analytical framework and a solid typology, sound and specific data on levels of volunteerism, especially data that can be disaggregated into these categories, are often still difficult to come by, especially in Africa.⁴ The ILO has found that between 2007 and 2017, just 13 countries on the continent captured any measure of volunteerism in their official statistics. The paucity of data means that it is difficult to develop a comprehensive understanding of the modes and mechanisms of volunteerism, what it contributes to social development, and its potential for supporting the attainment of the SDGs and other core development goals.

There is, however, a rich body of research and evidence on civic and political participation that can be brought to bear on the study of volunteerism, as there is in fact a great deal of overlap between these forms of engagement. Civic and political participation can take many forms, from contacting leaders to

working for a political campaign, voting, and protesting. Clearly not all of these constitute volunteerism. But vast swaths of engagement commonly described as civic or political participation fall under the umbrella of volunteerism as well. These can include collective efforts, whether formal or informal, to secure resources and services to meet community needs, to fight to protect a right, or to advocate on behalf of underserved groups.

There are challenges in using the one (civic and political participation) to describe the other (volunteerism). Certainly, some of the activities that we describe as civic or political participation – voting or protesting, for example – fall outside the scope of volunteerism as described above. And other types of behavior may constitute volunteerism when they serve a collective purpose – e.g. contacting a leader to advocate for a new school or health clinic – but not when they are undertaken in pursuit of more personal or private interests, such as asking for a job or scholarship. Thus, categories and boundaries do not always align easily.

Nonetheless, given the lack of data on volunteerism in Africa, we would do well for now to focus on the extensive overlap between these categories of behavior, rather than the differences. The wealth of available data on civic and political participation offers an essential starting point for exploring many unanswered questions about voluntary civic engagement. There is much that can be learned from existing data resources such as Afrobarometer surveys, which we will explore in the remainder of this paper.

Measuring volunteerism as voluntary civic engagement using Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, nonpartisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Seven rounds of surveys were completed in up to 38 countries between 1999 and 2018. Round 8 surveys are planned in at least 35 countries in 2019/2020.

Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples that yield country-level results with margins of error of +/-2 to +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. The common questionnaires and methods mean that Afrobarometer surveys offer the opportunity for both longitudinal and cross-sectional comparisons of data on voluntary civic engagement.

This paper draws primarily on data from 45,823 interviews completed in 34 countries between September 2016 and September 2018 during Afrobarometer Round 7, while also drawing comparisons to previous rounds of data. The countries covered are home to almost 80 per cent of the continent's population. The data are weighted to ensure nationally representative samples. When reporting multi-country findings such as regional or Africa-wide averages, all countries are weighted equally (rather than in proportion to population size).

Afrobarometer asks respondents about a number of different kinds of civic engagement and political participation. Although these questions were designed with the goal of understanding political and social engagement broadly, rather than volunteerism specifically, the findings offer significant insight into patterns of voluntary civic engagement. Specific modes of participation captured by Afrobarometer include attending a community meeting; joining with others to raise an issue; contacting government, political, or civil society leaders; and active involvement in a community group or voluntary association.

Table 1 presents some key characteristics of the modes of participation measured by Afrobarometer, including whether the participation takes place formally through an organization or is a form of informal engagement. We also record whether the mode of participation can, for our purposes here, always be considered a form of volunteerism or may also take place for personal or private reasons. In addition, we map these measures of participation onto UNV’s typology of volunteerism described above.

Table 1 Mapping Afrobarometer civic participation indicators onto modes of volunteerism
Typology of volunteerism

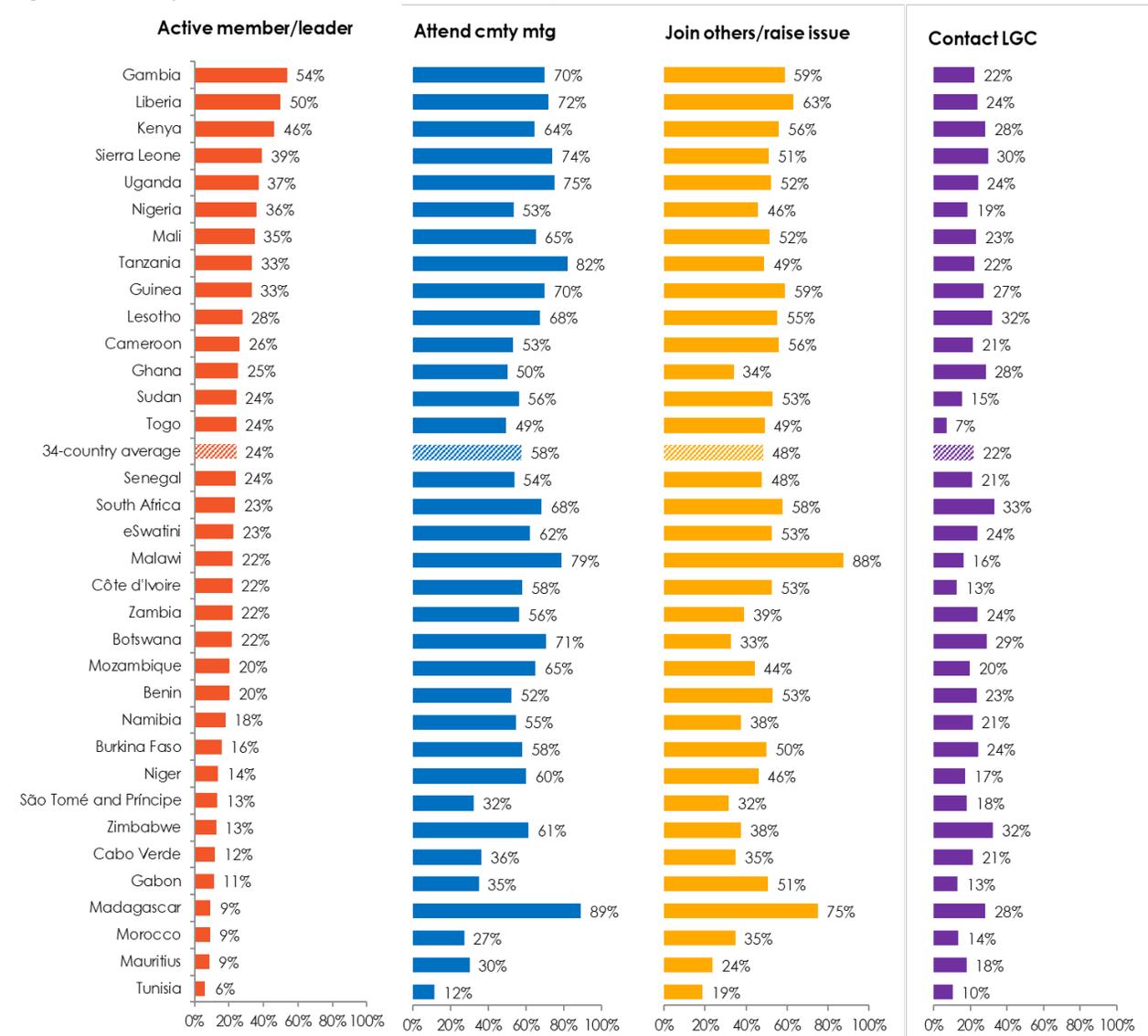
Afrobarometer participation indicators	civic	Formal (F) or informal (I)	Can have non-volunteer purpose	Mutual aid/self-help	Philanthropy and service to others	Civic participation	Advocacy and campaigning	Volunteering as leisure
Active member in or official leader of a voluntary association or community group		F		X	X	X	X	X
Attend a community meeting		I	X	X		X		
Get together with others to raise an issue		I	X	X	X	X	X	X
Contact leaders		I	X	X			X	

Among the Afrobarometer indicators, active engagement with a voluntary organization is the only mode of participation that can be consistently described as being formal or organized. In addition, almost by definition, this mode is consistently for volunteer community-facing purposes, rather than pursuit of private objectives. In contrast, the other three measures capture informal, non-organizational forms of volunteerism or participation. Perhaps more importantly for our purposes here, all three can take place either for purposes that benefit the community or others outside the household, or in pursuit of more personalistic agendas. Thus, while we might anticipate that the bulk of participation captured by these measures reflects the principles of volunteerism, they may also capture other non-volunteering participation.

In terms of linkages to the typology of volunteerism, we observe that, like association membership, more informal forms of joining with others can also occur in pursuit of any type of volunteerism. The other two measures link more selectively. When leaders are contacted by volunteers, for example, it is likely to be in pursuit of a local or community self-help need or to advocate for a policy or action. Community meetings are also likely to be narrower in terms of the scope of their intended impacts.

On average across 34 countries, attending community meetings is the most common form of civic participation (Figure 1): Nearly six in 10 Africans (58 per cent) say they attended a community meeting during the past year. But there are wide country variations, ranging from as high as 89 per cent in Madagascar, 82 per cent in Tanzania, and 79 per cent in Malawi, to only 12 per cent in Tunisia. Half (48 per cent) of respondents joined others to raise an issue at least once during the previous year, a practice that is extremely common in Malawi (88 per cent) and Madagascar (75 per cent). Yet fewer than a quarter of respondents in Mauritius (24 per cent) and Tunisia (19 per cent) report doing so.

Figure 1 Participation in Africa, 34 countries, 2016/2018⁵



About one in four Africans (24 per cent) say they are either leaders or active members of voluntary associations or community groups. About half of citizens in the Gambia (54 per cent), Liberia (50 per cent), and Kenya (46 per cent) report active membership or leadership of voluntary associations, while fewer than one in 10 report this in Morocco (9 per cent), Mauritius (9 per cent), Madagascar (9 per cent), and Tunisia (6 per cent).

For the purposes of this analysis, we want to focus on the form of participation that best represents the concept of volunteerism, or voluntary civic engagement. In making this selection, we consider what each indicator captures, as well as how it is linked to other forms of participation and to the typologies of volunteerism as described above.

Attending a community meeting is significantly correlated with all of the other indicators. However, as already noted, we expect that this indicator may substantially overstate volunteerism, or even capture

the concept poorly. Community meetings are held for diverse reasons, including information gathering or information sharing, as well as for government to organize community activities or action. They may be social as well as civic events. They may be called by political leaders or organized by community members. And participation may be entirely voluntary, or it may be partially or substantially coerced through some degree of social or political sanction. Therefore, despite the correlation with other indicators, we find this indicator too broad to serve as an adequate proxy for volunteerism.

Contacting a local government councillor also has some weaknesses as an indicator for the purposes of this study. Aside from attending a community meeting, it is not significantly correlated with other indicators. In addition, the question asks whether respondents made contact “about some important problem or to give them your views.” Contacting behaviour therefore captures both contact made by individuals seeking to address community problems and contact that occurs to solve personal problems, which would fall outside our definition of volunteerism.

The two other indicators, on the other hand, capture forms of participation that more closely adhere to the definitions of volunteerism or voluntary civic engagement that are of interest here. The two variables are significantly correlated, though as noted, absolute levels reported for “joining with others to raise an issue” (48 per cent) are approximately double the rates at which people report being active in or leading voluntary or civic organizations. This is perhaps not surprising, as engaging with an association or organization represents a higher bar than the more informal, perhaps more episodic engagement that may be captured by “joining with others.” It is also consistent with findings reported elsewhere that people are significantly more likely to engage in informal forms of volunteerism than formal, organizational engagement.⁶ Both indicators clearly capture participation that is communal in nature and goals, and exclude the sort of engagement aimed only at addressing personal issues that might be captured by the “contact” indicator.

Although either variable could potentially serve our purposes in exploring volunteerism, we have opted for the more parsimonious indicator, active membership in or leadership of a voluntary association or community group. This suggests ongoing voluntary civic engagement, as opposed to potentially short-term activity around a single issue or event. It also excludes protest and related activities.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of focusing on this indicator, particularly as it only captures formal associational volunteering, rather than the full scope of both formal and informal engagement. Due to the higher demands it places on individuals, focusing only on formal volunteering may under-represent the engagement of some categories of participants, especially women and those with less ability to commit time or resources on an ongoing basis. This weakness is exacerbated by the fact that none of the Afrobarometer indicators capture time invested in this voluntary work, a critical factor to consider, especially for poorer and female respondents. Thus, while associational membership/leadership is not a perfect indicator, the wealth of data available on this indicator has a great deal to tell us not only about formal volunteerism, but about volunteerism more generally.

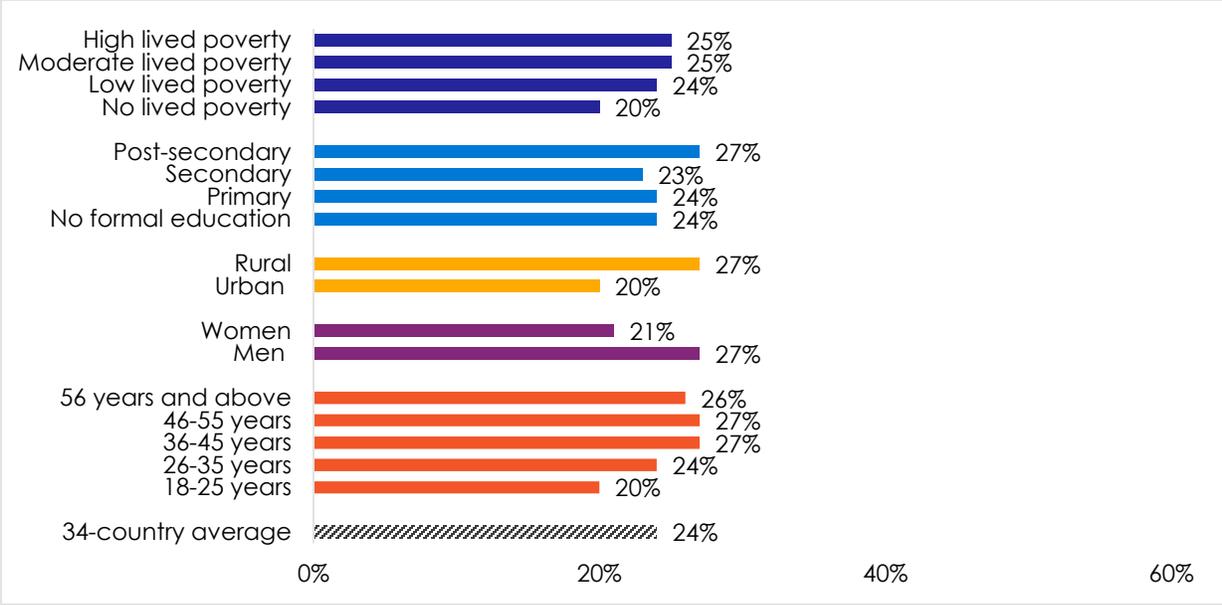
Accordingly, the remainder of this paper will focus on membership in or leadership of a voluntary association or community group as our key indicator of voluntary civic engagement. The sections that follow will first offer descriptive analysis of who volunteers in this way. We then continue with a more comprehensive statistical analysis of various factors at both the individual and country level that may shape individuals’ propensity to engage. We conclude with some thoughts on entry points for encouraging and supporting voluntary civic engagement based on these findings.

Part B: Findings of Afrobarometer data

Who participates?

We begin our assessment of who participates with an overview of the socio-demographic profile of individuals who identify as voluntary civic engagers. Several patterns can be identified when reviewing the aggregate 34-country findings (Figure 2).

Figure 2 Average profile of voluntary civic engagers (group members/leaders)⁷



First, we observe that men (27 per cent) engage at significantly higher levels than women (21 per cent). Rural inhabitants (27 per cent) are also considerably more engaged than urban residents (20 per cent). With regard to other socio-demographic characteristics, the patterns are more subtle. For example, the differences among older age cohorts (36-45, 46-55, and 56 and above) are not significant (26 per cent-27 per cent). But we see that the youngest cohort, 18- to 25-year-olds, are significantly less likely to participate (20 per cent).

A similar pattern holds true for poverty: There are no significant differences among those with low, moderate, or high lived poverty (24 per cent-25 per cent), but those with no lived poverty (20 per cent) are significantly less engaged.⁸ With regard to education, we see that those with post-secondary qualifications (27 per cent) are significantly more likely to engage than those with less education (23 per cent-24 per cent).

It is also worth pointing out what appear to be some contradictory findings in that lack of poverty and education seem to have opposite rather than congruent effects. Those with no lived poverty participate at the lowest rate, but those with the highest levels of education participate at the highest rate. As we will see later in the paper, the negative effects on participation of rising incomes may be countervailed by the positive effects of rising education.

Gaps in voluntary civic engagement

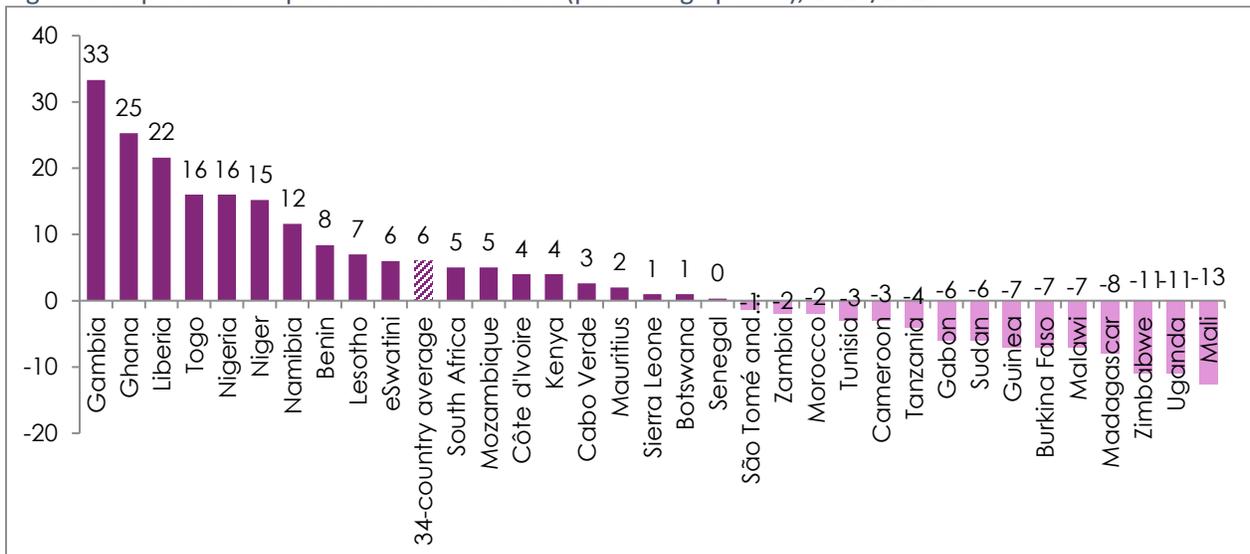
One way to probe these differences descriptively is to compare the gaps between highest and lowest categories across countries. For example, on average across 34 countries, there is an 8-percentage-point rural-urban gap in voluntary civic engagement.⁹ This is the largest difference across the socio-demographic factors tested. But this average obscures very significant variations across countries. The gap is much wider in Liberia, Mali, Ghana, Zambia, and Togo, where urban residents are 17-22 percentage points behind their rural counterparts. In contrast, urban residents in Morocco, Burkina Faso, and the Gambia are actually 4 percentage points more likely than rural residents to participate in voluntary civic engagement. These wide differences highlight the importance of distinctive country features and profiles in developing an understanding of individual decisions about whether to engage in this form of volunteerism. Note that gaps of 2 percentage points or less are within the margin of error and not considered significant.

The story is similar with regard to gender. The gap between men and women averages 7 percentage points, but it is much wider in Liberia (20 percentage points), Sierra Leone (18 points), Guinea (17 points), and Nigeria (15 points). There is no country where women participate more than men in this particular measure of formal volunteerism, although in Tanzania, Lesotho, Namibia, Madagascar, Kenya, Morocco and Tunisia participation by men and women is statistically equal. Age also shows diverse effects. Liberia and Lesotho report the largest gap in participation (26 percentage points) between the oldest age cohort (56 years and above) and the youngest (18-25 years). In contrast, in Morocco, Gabon, Cabo Verde, and Tunisia, young adults are more likely than older citizens to be active members or leaders of voluntary associations.

Although the average gap between the most and least educated is marginal, the country-level results present some of the widest variations. While in general participation is more common among the highly educated than among the least educated, especially in Morocco (by 23 percentage points), Senegal (17 points), and Gabon (16 points), in several countries the opposite is true. Citizens with no formal education in the Gambia, Ghana, Mali, Niger, and eSwatini are more likely than those with post-secondary education to participate (by 5-15 points). There is no significant difference between the most and least educated in Lesotho, Madagascar, and Namibia.

The relationship between wealth and levels of engagement shows the least consistency across countries (Figure 3). On average, the poorest respondents participate more than the wealthiest. But this is true in only 15 of the 34 countries. The gap reaches 33 percentage points in the Gambia and 25 points in Ghana. But in 12 countries, the wealthiest are actually more likely to participate (albeit by generally narrower margins). In another seven, there is no statistically significant gap.

Figure 3 Gaps between poorest and wealthiest (percentage points), 2016/2018



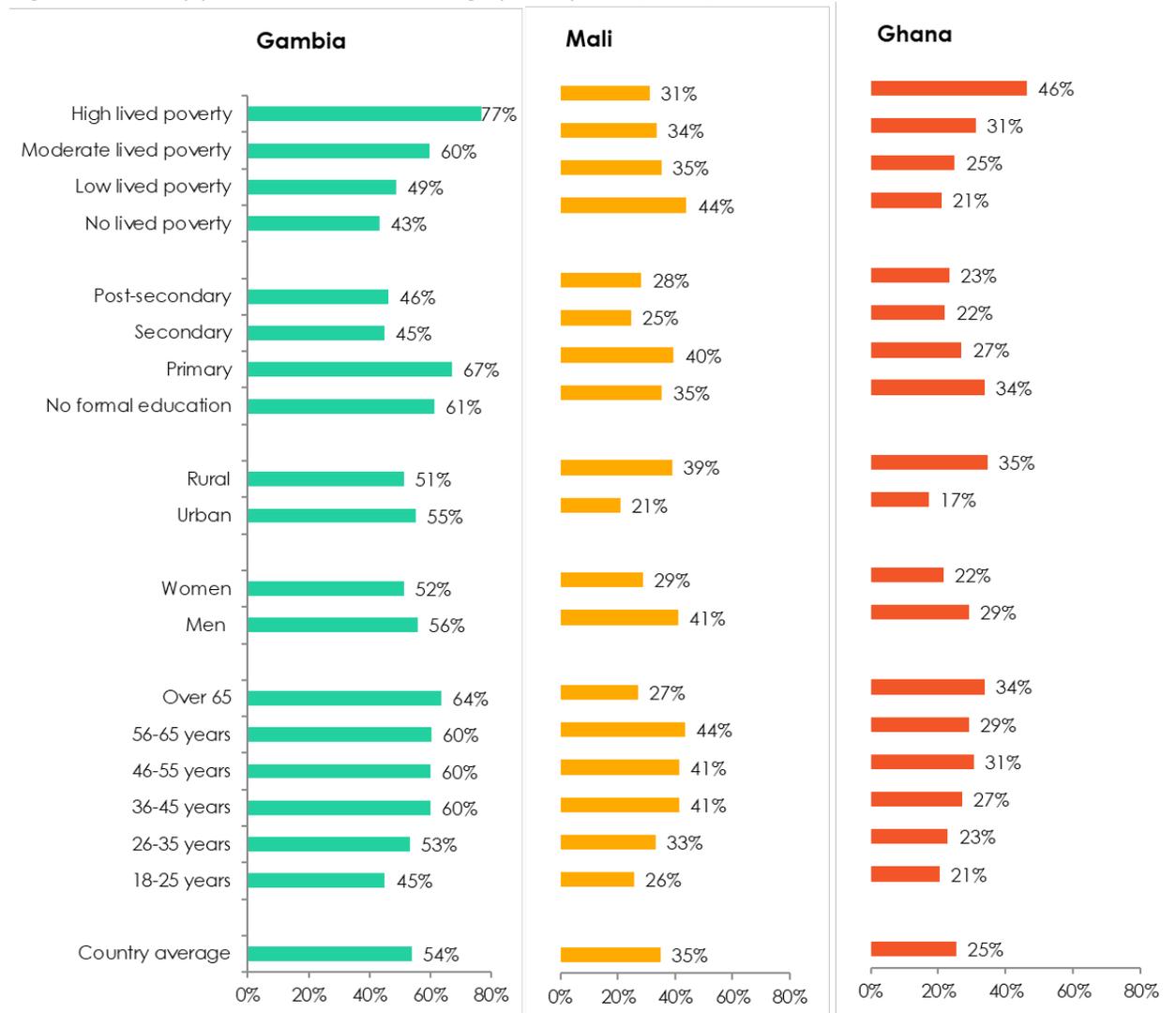
(per cent “official leader” or “active member” of a voluntary association or community group)

Note: Figures shown are high lived poverty-no lived poverty participation rates. A negative number means participation was higher among respondents experiencing no lived poverty, compared to those with high lived poverty

Country profiles

While we can build a general profile of who participates based on our 34-country data, there are profound differences across countries. We can generate profiles for each of the 34 countries in the sample. Comparing a few of these profiles highlights the differences. For example, comparing three countries that are all at moderate to high levels of participation (Figure 4), we see that the Gambia and Ghana follow the most common trend of higher participation by poorer groups, whereas Mali displays the opposite pattern. The Gambia also stands out as one of the few countries where urban participation rates are higher than those in rural areas. All three of these countries show relatively “average” patterns with regard to age (middle and/or oldest cohorts participate more) but show contra-average patterns with regard to education, with higher engagement among less-educated groups.

Figure 4 Country profiles: Moderate to high participation, 2016/2018



(per cent "official leader" or "active member" of a voluntary association or community group)

Trends over time

One key question facing those who study volunteerism is whether the practice is waxing or waning. Have economic, social, or political trends over the past decade resulted in increases or decreases in voluntary civic engagement? If poor people are more likely to participate in voluntary organizations, as the aggregate data show, then have the economic gains that have reduced levels of poverty across many countries in Africa also resulted in decreases in volunteerism? Or does increasing urbanization – where engagement levels are typically lower – mean a more disengaged populace? Then again, are these factors potentially countered by increasing education levels¹⁰ that are associated with higher levels of voluntary civic engagement?

Afrobarometer data suggest that in fact levels of associational membership have been remarkably stable over time, at least in aggregate. Whether we compare across 33 countries included in both Rounds 6 and

7, 31 countries included in Rounds 5 through 7, or 20 countries included in all rounds since Round 4, there is very little variation over time.

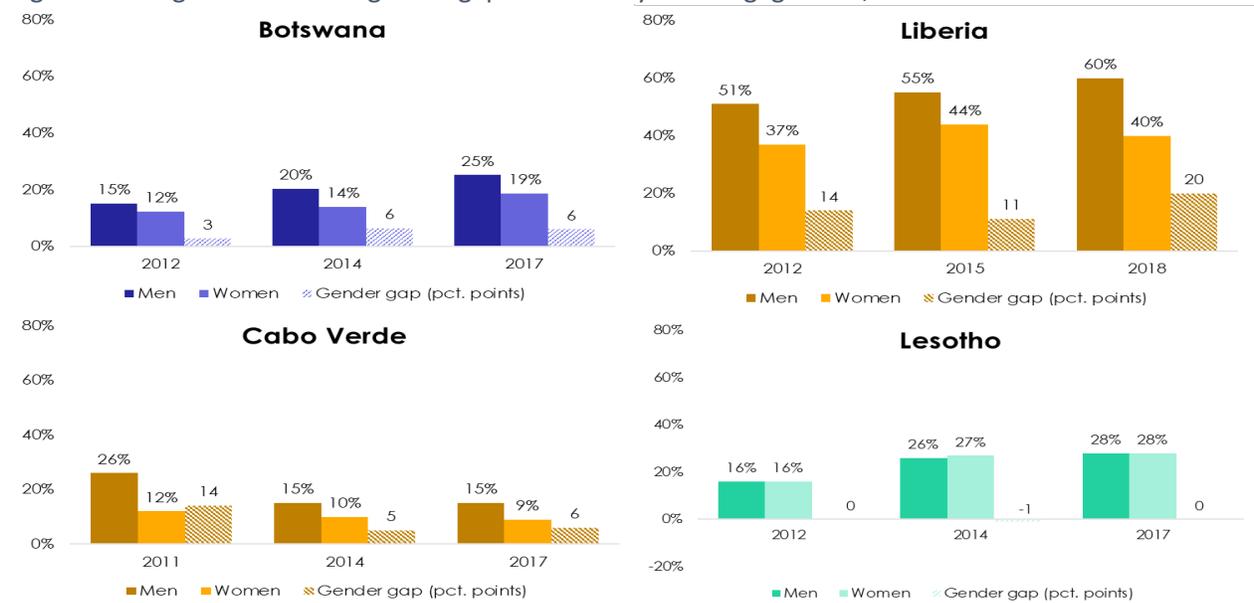
However, when we break it down to the country level, the stable average obscures some modest country-level gains and losses. Starting with the levels of participation recorded in Round 5 (2011/2013), the sharpest increases are recorded in Lesotho (+12 percentage points), Uganda (+11 points), South Africa (+10 points), and Nigeria (+10 points). In contrast, Zimbabwe (-8 points), Tanzania (-8 points), Cabo Verde (-7 points), Mauritius (-7 points), and Senegal (-6 points) record the largest declines in active membership/leadership of voluntary groups. Smaller changes are observed elsewhere, and no significant changes occurred in eSwatini, Kenya, Niger, Morocco, Togo, and Zambia.

Trends in gender gaps

Given the critical role that women play in fighting for better services and bringing about change in their communities, along with the fact that we find they are underrepresented in formal voluntary civic engagement via associational membership, we are particularly interested in tracking trends in participation over time by gender. However, we again see little evidence of aggregate change over time: The gap in levels of engagement between men and women is consistently 5-6 percentage points across the last decade.

But we again see some variation at the country level. For example, even as it has recorded the largest increase overall, Lesotho has consistently shown no gender gap in voluntary membership since 2011; men and women have both become more engaged, at approximately equal rates (Figure 5). In contrast, although participation has also increased in Botswana (albeit to a much lower degree), we also see that the gender gap has more than doubled over the same period, rising from just 3 points in 2012 to 6 points in 2017. Liberia has similarly recorded substantial increases in already very high levels of participation, but there, too, the gender gap has increased substantially.

Figure 5 Changes over time in gender gap in voluntary civic engagement, 2011-2018



(per cent "official leader" or "active member" of a voluntary association or community group)

Cabo Verde, on the other hand, has reported a decreasing gender gap (down 8 points from 14 percentage points to 6), but this is largely a result of decreasing participation over the past decade, a decline that was most pronounced among men. Similar patterns are observed in Burkina Faso (gender gap down 6 points), Cameroon (gap down 3 points), Côte d'Ivoire (-5 points), Malawi (-2 points), Mauritius (-5 points), Senegal (-2 points), and Tanzania (-5 points). All recorded declines in both overall levels of participation and in gender gaps.

Modeling participation at the individual and country levels

It is clear that socio-demographic factors alone are not sufficient to fully describe and understand who participates and who does not. While socio-demographic factors are readily identifiable characteristics of individuals that may be used to help define priorities and guide interventions, we need to develop a deeper understanding of the factors that shape voluntary civic engagement, looking beyond these descriptive features to individual attitudes and preferences as well as to societal characteristics that may shape an individual's propensity to engage in civic action.

There are several aspects of individual attitudes and preferences that may be directly relevant to levels of civic engagement. We incorporate these factors in three broad categories. Socio-political engagement includes news consumption and interest in politics. Personal efficacy captures an individual's rating of their ability to effect change. We also include institutional trust.

It is also clear that there are significant cross-country differences in patterns of engagement, both in terms of the overall propensity to engage, and in terms of how factors like wealth and education affect that propensity. We therefore also consider several country-level indicators that may be significant explanatory factors, including national wealth, level of democracy, and the overall level of infrastructure development.

Given that our dependent variable is binary (1=engaged, 0=not engaged), and that the units of analysis are individual respondents who are nested within countries, we tested the relative importance of each of these explanatory factors using a multi-level logistic regression analysis. Our models include varying intercepts to account for the likelihood that respondents within the same country share similar characteristics. We ran three models (Table 2).

- The first includes only the socio-demographic indicators described above and a measure of employment status (unemployed, part time, or full time).
- The second model adds the other individual-level variables.
- The third model also includes the country-level indicators.

We will focus here on the results of Model 3, which are consistent with the results found in Model 1 and Model 2. Note that São Tomé and Príncipe drops out from Model 3 because no Polity IV rating is available for the country, leaving us with 33 countries.

Table 2 Factors driving membership or leadership in a voluntary or community organization (logistic regression)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Education	0.140*** (0.014)	0.068*** (0.016)	0.074*** (0.016)
Lived poverty	0.085*** (0.014)	0.104*** (0.015)	0.092*** (0.015)
Age	0.131*** (0.009)	0.124*** (0.009)	0.135*** (0.010)
Female	-0.295*** (0.023)	-0.188*** (0.025)	-0.163*** (0.025)
Rural	0.449*** (0.025)	0.480*** (0.027)	0.457*** (0.028)
Employment	0.072*** (0.014)	0.033* (0.015)	0.061*** (0.015)
Discuss politics		0.372*** (0.018)	0.371*** (0.018)
Use traditional news media		0.075*** (0.014)	0.095*** (0.014)
Consume Internet news		0.004 (0.010)	-0.001 (0.010)
Believe ordinary people can fight corruption		0.015+ (0.008)	0.019* (0.008)
Say local government councillors listen		0.145*** (0.013)	0.139*** (0.013)
Trust local government council		0.031*** (0.008)	0.028*** (0.008)
GNI per capita (logged)			-0.080 (0.064)
HDI			-1.354** (0.520)
Polity IV			0.038*** (0.008)
Access to water in EA (country average)			-0.006*** (0.001)
Constant	-1.622*** (0.074)	-2.393*** (0.091)	-1.098*** (0.256)
Country-level variance	1.155** (0.352)	1.012*** (0.297)	0.695*** (0.210)
Countries	34	34	33
Observations	44929	40990	39870

+ p<0.1, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Standard errors in parentheses

Results and discussion

We note first that all of the socio-demographic factors are significant and operate in the expected directions as outlined in the above discussion of the descriptive findings. Specifically, voluntary civic engagement increases with education but also with poverty. While respondents with no formal education have a 32.2 per cent likelihood of membership in a voluntary organization, those with post-secondary education have a 36.4 per cent likelihood. Moving from the lowest level of lived poverty (no lived poverty) to the highest (high lived poverty) generates a 7-point increase in the likelihood of participation.

Age also has a strong effect: Citizens who are 56 or older are 10 percentage points more likely to engage than youth. Gender effects are also significant but produce only a 3-percentage-point difference in the likelihood of participation between men and women. Consistent with the discussion of descriptive patterns of engagement above, significant differences are observed with regard to urban-rural location: Predicted engagement is much higher in rural areas (38.0 per cent) than urban areas (29.4 per cent).

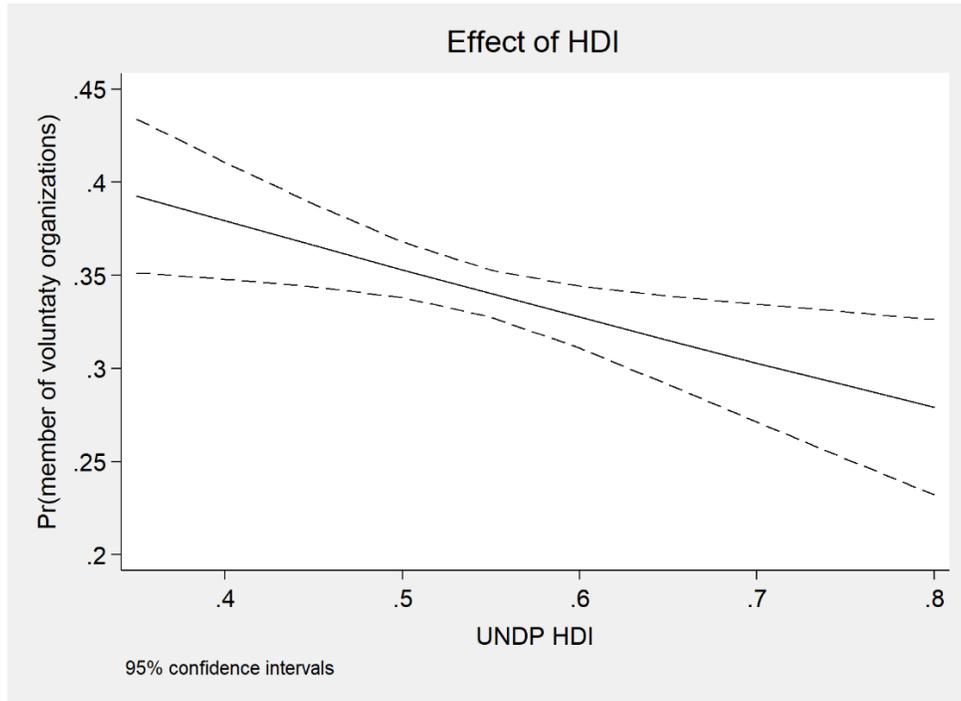
Finally, we find that employment status has significant, albeit modest, effects as well. Individuals who report that they have a full-time job that pays a cash income are 2.3 per cent more likely to participate in voluntary civic engagement compared to those with no employment.

Turning to the other individual-level predictors, we find that individuals' inclination toward socio-political engagement is indeed an important predictor of their voluntary civic engagement. A propensity to discuss politics has a quite substantial effect on predicted probabilities, with those who say they discuss politics frequently predicted to be almost 50 per cent more likely to be active members or leaders of voluntary organizations (28.6 per cent for "never" discuss compared to 42.7 per cent for "frequently" discuss). Exposure to news via traditional media is also significant. Internet news exposure, however, is not.

Efficacy also matters. When local leaders are perceived to be more receptive to hearing from constituents, individuals are 8 percentage points more likely to participate. Individuals' sense of personal efficacy in fighting corruption is significant and positive, but the impact on predicted probability is negligible. The same can be said for trust in government, i.e. the effects are significant and positive but modest. Changing trust in government from the lowest level (trust not at all) to the highest (trust a lot) increases predicted engagement by 2.1 percentage points.

Turning to the country-level factors, we see that, as expected, country context also has important effects on individuals' voluntary civic engagement. Higher national scores on the Human Development Index are associated with substantially lower likelihood of voluntary civic engagement, and the effects are quite profound, with an 11-percentage-point difference in predicted probability between countries with the highest HDI (27.9 per cent) and those with the lowest (39.3 per cent) (Figure 6). This could suggest that individuals' desire to meet their basic human needs, for themselves or for others, is a major driver of voluntary engagement. As basic needs are increasingly met for individuals and societies that have achieved higher levels of human development, this key driver of civic participation declines substantially. Gross national income per capita, which is also captured in the HDI, is not significant by itself. This explanation is also consistent with the finding that increased access to a piped water supply is associated with quite substantial declines in engagement.

Figure 6 Predicted probability of voluntary civic engagement (member/leader) and Human Development Index



Finally, we find that people are also more likely to engage when they live in societies that are more politically open and receptive, as shown by the positive sign and significance for the Polity IV indicator. This tracks with the individual-level finding that responsiveness of leaders – which is generally (though not always) better in democracies – is also a strong predictor of citizens’ propensity to engage.

Entry points: Can we increase voluntary civic engagement?

Voluntary citizen participation is a critical component of efforts to improve lives and livelihoods in Africa and globally, and to meet the basic human needs captured in the Sustainable Development Goals. The purpose of developing these country profiles and models of voluntary civic engagement is two-fold. First, they aim to help activists, practitioners, and promoters of volunteerism better understand volunteerism in the country or countries where they work. Especially given the wide differences across countries in overall levels of volunteerism and in the specific profiles of who participates, this understanding is essential for both analysis and action. Second, once we understand these profiles and the individual- and country-level factors that can foster or inhibit voluntary civic engagement, we can begin to identify entry points for enhancing volunteerism.

As a starting point, it is important to note that while the data reveal differences across groups in society, they also confirm that people from all walks of life engage in volunteerism. This engagement is not just for the educated, or for older people. People from all socio-economic backgrounds participate.

Second, it is worth noting that in those cases where participation is somewhat lower among some groups (e.g. the young), this can be regarded as an opportunity, rather than a shortcoming. Those promoting greater volunteerism could target these groups first, identifying ways to attract them to join their more active counterparts. In short, knowing that the youngest, or wealthiest, or least-educated stratum in a given

society is least likely to engage in volunteerism at present does not mean that efforts to engage that group should be sidelined, but rather that engaging them should be prioritized. They are the greatest untapped resource.

After identifying factors that work in favor of greater voluntary engagement, such as education, efficacy, and interest in politics, as well as some that work against it, especially increased service provision, wealth, and socio-economic security, we can take several lessons from the findings presented here about the way forward. Possible entry points include the following:

- **Promote education.** Generally speaking, education is linked to higher levels of engagement. Special attention should be devoted to educational approaches that build confidence and capacity. Building an individuals' sense of efficacy is likely to increase their engagement even more. This may mean strengthening curricula regarding government decision-making processes, such as how legislation is made and budgets are managed and accounted for, etc. It can also mean incorporating experiential learning to directly expose students to engaging with leaders.
- **Promote equal access to and achievement in education.** Women's engagement is essential to securing the best outcomes for their families and communities, yet we have seen that gender gaps in voluntary engagement tend to mirror those observed elsewhere, such as in education, work-force participation, and access to resources. Closing the gender gap in educational achievement is a key starting point for closing gender gaps throughout society. Equal access to education exposes women to decision-making structures and builds their confidence and skills to engage.
- **Understand women's engagement in order to better promote it.** We need to further explore the impediments to women's voluntary participation, especially via formal organization channels such as those examined here, in order to identify ways to overcome gender gaps in participation and volunteerism. Is it lack of time? A lower sense of efficacy? Social norms about men's and women's roles, and/or concern about social sanctions and risks? Or even fear of retaliation if they try to organize to seek change in their communities? Time studies, focus-group analysis, and more in-depth survey research on these questions could be used to understand the issues more fully at play. Organizational training and engagement should highlight the tendency toward male dominance in organizations and associations and promote women's opportunities and access to leadership positions, especially at senior levels.
- **Engage youth.** Youth are underrepresented in voluntary engagement. New messaging, including via new formats such as social media, that aims to capture their interest and promote voluntary engagement among youth may help to close this generational gap.
- **Efficacy matters.** Having a sense of efficacy – that is, believing that one's actions can make a difference – makes people more likely to engage. Educating citizens, especially women, about how to effectively engage with the state to achieve community goals, and sharing success stories, can foster greater engagement. Information also enhances efficacy, so promoting open-government initiatives and related programs that put more information into the hands of citizens will increase the effectiveness of volunteers, and thus likely increase the incidence of volunteerism.
- **Democracy, governance, and leadership also matter.** Citizens are more likely to engage when they expect their efforts to be effective, so governments that build their own capacity to listen, and to respond, are likely to see a growth in volunteerism and engagement. Governments that recognize they will do better by engaging their citizens in tackling the SDGs and other goals can start by ensuring that elected leaders and government officials, especially at the local level, are open and responsive to citizen input.

- **Identify community needs and priorities for action.** Our evidence suggests that engagement follows needs, so working with communities to identify and build engagement around their priority needs is a key starting point. In needier communities, this may be relatively easy. The absence of clean water or accessible schools and health care services does not need to be “discovered.” In better-off communities, where the needs are less obvious, one starting point for building participation may be to identify common goals and priorities. Once a community’s most basic needs are met, can people agree on what comes next? Is their focus on further improving life in their own communities, or on advocating on behalf of others?
- **Do more to measure volunteerism explicitly.** In addition to using surveys like Afrobarometer, as well as household surveys and other opportunities, analysts, practitioners, and promoters of volunteerism should advocate for more explicit measures of volunteer engagement that ideally would include measures of time commitment and other indicators.¹¹
- **Build an enabling environment for volunteerism.** An understanding of patterns of volunteerism can be used to shape policies on equality, social care and support, labor, and related matters that reduce impediments to volunteering and instead promote an enabling environment.

In sum, the findings of this analysis help us better understand the decision to join in civic engagement and identify entry points for enhancing that engagement. Lower levels of engagement among some groups, or even some countries, can be seen as opportunities rather than impediments, as we identify ways to capture the interest and action of those who have yet to engage.

NOTES

¹ UNV and ILO n.d.

² CIVICUS 2011b.

³ UNV 1999.

⁴ UNV and ILO n.d.

⁵ Respondents were asked: *Now I am going to read out a list of groups that people join or attend. For each one, could you tell me whether you are an official leader, an active member, an inactive member, or not a member: Some other voluntary association or community group? (per cent “official leader” or “active member”)* (Note: The other group asked about was “religious group that meets outside of regular worship services,” so engagement in religious organizations is not captured by this indicator.)

Here is a list of actions that people sometimes take as citizens. For each of these, please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year. (per cent who say “once or twice,” “several times,” or “often”)

- *Attended a community meeting?*
- *Got together with others to raise an issue?*

During the past year, how often have you contacted any of the following persons about some important problem or to give them your views: A local government councillor? (per cent who say “only once,” “a few times,” or “often”)

⁶ CIVICUS 2011b.

⁷ Respondents were asked: *Now I am going to read out a list of groups that people join or attend. For each one, could you tell me whether you are an official leader, an active member, an inactive member, or not a member: Some other voluntary association or community group? (per cent “official leader” or “active member”)*

⁸ Afrobarometer’s Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents’ levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. An average score is calculated for each respondent, ranging from zero for those who never went without any necessary item, to 4 for an individual who reports always

going without all of them. For our purposes here these scores are condensed into categories of “no lived poverty” (LPI score of 0; about 13 per cent of all respondents), “low lived poverty” (LPI of 0.2-1.0; 37 per cent of respondents), “moderate lived poverty” (LPI of 1.2-2.0; 32 per cent of respondents) and “high lived poverty (LPI of 2.2 or greater; 19 per cent of respondents). For more on lived poverty, see Robert Mattes (2020), “Lived poverty on the rise: Decade of living-standard gains ends in Africa,” [Afrobarometer Policy Paper No. 62](#).

⁹ While the numbers shown in Figure 1.2 make it appear that the difference is only 7 percentage points, this is due to rounding. The actual difference is closer to 8 percentage points.

¹⁰ Krönke and Olan’g 2020.

¹¹ UNV and ILO, n.d.

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