

THOUGHT PROVOKING IDEAS OF THE GLOBAL ESSAY COMPETITION 2022

The Role of Social and Community Organisations in Sustaining Charitable Behaviour

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Abstract

This paper explores the role of non-profit organizations (NPOs) in advancing sustainable charitable behavior between youths and seniors. The growing trend of an aging population and youth participation in community building suggests an increasing reliance between the two. The pandemic has also exacerbated the debt burdens passed on from this generation to the next, and public resources have begun to be reallocated in support of elderly care. This paper calls for a rebalancing of our social contracts to ensure a more equitable distribution of support across the generations. The solutions proposed in this paper seek to strengthen the social fabrics between the young and elderly, and call for greater collaboration between civil society, businesses, and the state. NPOs play a crucial role in facilitating this collaboration.

Charitable behaviors and charities are distinct. The former lies at the individual level while the

latter at the organizational. Charitable behavior is understood as the act of giving one's time, resources, or energy to another in the betterment and support of the other. However, when it comes to intergenerational support, this is often overlooked, and community organizations often provide support within their groups rather than across groups. This is not sustainable and more needs to be done to encourage charitable behavior across groups for our social fabric between generations to remain strong and interwoven.

Building on the concept of social contracts to guide the interaction between the two generations, I propose a model anchoring on non-profit social organizations to bridge the interactions between youths and seniors. NPOs act as facilitators allowing both generations to benefit from and support each other and encourage both support-giving and support-receiving between the young and the elderly. Youths can play an active role in advocating for seniors and leverage the use of social media for

advocacy, while seniors can provide mentorship, training programs, and outreach to Youth-At-Risk.

Therefore, the proposed model allows for NPOs to leverage on mutual support, ensuring that charitable behavior between youths and seniors remains robust, mutually beneficial, and most importantly, sustainable. When the different generations acknowledge the challenges faced by the other and commit to supporting each other's development, society ultimately benefits.

Introduction

The act of giving creates a powerful bond in our social fabric. Charitable acts such as the giving of our time, resources, and energy to someone else is a tangible way to express that we value and care about them. The provision of support is crucial for those in lack to feel valued and seen as a member of society. It also impacts the way we think about how public goods and limited resources should be distributed to support them. Charitable acts are often overlooked but remain central to the sustainability conversation. How we progress as a society largely depends on how we support one another. As such, empowering and normalizing the young to contribute towards the elderly and vice versa is key to balancing the social contract between the generations (Shafik, 2021). **Thus, the challenge in keeping charitable behavior between youths and the elderly sustainable for the future must be addressed today.**

Charitable behavior is important as it fosters a cohesive, empathetic, and kinder society, and it seeks to benefit the greater whole (Radley and Kennedy, 1995). Charitable behaviors are also distinct from charities. Charities are found at the sub-national and national level while Charitable behavior refers to the act of giving at the individual level. When it pertains to feeling valued, it is often the personal relationships built at the individual level that is key to making a difference.

Building intergenerational relationships are important for the sustainability of charitable acts. It is easy to lose sight of the problems faced by other generations when we are consumed by our own. The pandemic has exacerbated the debt burdens passed on from this generation to the next, and public resources have begun to be reallocated in support of elderly care. Ensuring that one is not apathetic to the challenges the other faces is thus crucial, and this paper calls for a rebalancing of our social contracts to ensure a more equitable distribution of support across the generations. **Therefore, I suggest that non-profit organizations (NPOs) play an important role in sustaining charitable behaviors between youths and seniors in the long run.**

Social Contracts

The social contract refers to the rules that define what we owe each other in society and how the delivery of those obligations is organized. At its core, the social contract refers to "the partnership between individuals, businesses, civil society, and the state to contribute to a system in which there are collective benefits" (Shafik, 2021). This refers to our behavior in relation to one another and it governs why we do what we do for each other. Understanding our social contracts lays the foundation for charitable behaviors. When we understand the social, economic, and political responsibilities we have to each other, we begin to see the importance of prioritizing the needs of others.

Fostering charitable behavior across groups

Charitable behavior is associated with volunteering and the engagement of individuals "in concrete, direct acts of compassion and connection to other people" (Gross, 2003). Those who volunteer often invest their time in causes they believe in (Shah et al., 2015). A 2019 survey in Australia found that people were most likely to volunteer for "sports and physical

recreation organizations (39.1%), religious organizations (23.3%), and education and training (21.8%)” (Volunteering Australia, 2021). **These are communities that people are already a part of.** Similarly, in Singapore, a 2018 survey found that people were more willing to volunteer when opportunities are “convenient and practical”, with 46% indicating a preference for opportunities to be in their immediate neighborhood and 36% indicating a preference for it to be aligned with their hobbies (National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre, 2018). Both surveys suggest that people are more willing to volunteer within their immediate communities than across groups, and youth participation (15-24 years) has notably increased over time. However, an area that was lacking in both was charitable behavior between the young and elderly. By 2050, one in six people globally will be over the age of 65, up from one in eleven in 2019 (World Population Prospects, 2019). The need for elderly care will rise, and public resources in countries such as Japan have begun to be reallocated in anticipation of this changing trend (Shafik, 2021). **To ensure social support across generations is evenly distributed, a more sustainable framework must be created.**

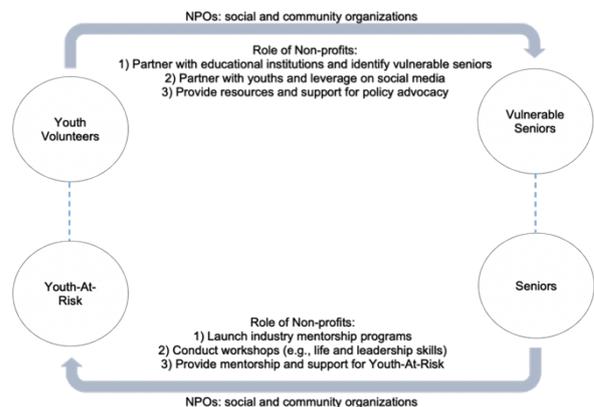
Mutual support and mutual benefits

For charitable behaviors to be sustainable, seniors must contribute to the development of youths as well. Both have much to give and much to benefit from each other. The young are resourceful, energetic, and innovative – traits that are useful when advocating for vulnerable seniors. Seniors, on the other hand, are experienced, well connected, and wiser – putting them in the best position to support youths as they begin their journey into the world. Support-giving and support-receiving must be encouraged and empowered for parties to be willing to give and to take. The act of giving and taking is no longer about who gives and who takes, but rather, how we can continually give and take from each other in a way that is sustainable for the long run. To this end, the role

of not-for-profit organizations, technology, and leveraging on the power of collaboration is key.

The role of NPOs in building social cohesion

NPOs are key to “building healthy communities by providing critical services that contribute to economic stability and mobility” (Camper, 2016). Often, NPOs have strong local knowledge, community relationships, and a wide network of partners. In recent years, they have become a crucial part of community building in diverse communities such as the United States as “government agencies and the private sector have scaled back their charitable giving” (Arkansas State University, 2021). Thus, I suggest that moving forward, NPOs will be a key node in facilitating support-giving and support-receiving between the young and elderly in society. My solution requires NGOs to tap on their vast networks with business leaders, governments, and civil society to launch campaigns, mentorship programs, and policy analysis to promote sustainable charitable behavior between youths and seniors in the community as seen in Model 1 below.



Model 1: The role of NPOs in forming sustainable charitable behaviours between youths and seniors.

NPOs in connecting Youths with Seniors

Facilitating the right kind of support is crucial in ensuring the congruence of one’s intention and impact. Thus, I propose three ways in which

NPOs can facilitate youths' support towards seniors: 1) Partner with educational institutions to connect youths with vulnerable seniors, 2) Partner with influential youths and leverage on social media to launch campaigns and spread awareness, and 3) Provide resources and support to help youths advocate for policy changes.

Partner with educational institutions to connect youths with vulnerable seniors

Identifying specific groups of seniors who require support is crucial. This ensures that the support provided will meet their needs. NPOs, in partnership with schools, can provide students with the necessary training to reach out to these seniors. For example, in Singapore, a non-profit social organization called The Signpost Project (TSP) reaches out to vulnerable seniors in the community who survive by selling tissue packets. TSP specifically focuses on this community of seniors as they are often overlooked. Their volunteers consist of high school students and university students, amongst others. Students are often well-received by seniors as they are perceived as a neutral party. As a result, they are well-positioned to bridge the needs of the seniors with the relevant agencies who can provide specific aid where necessary.

Partner with influential youths and leverage on the power of social media

The power of social media is incredible. How youths channel their influence through their use of social media is even more so. NPOs can partner with influential youths to leverage their social media presence and launch campaigns to spread awareness of the issues seniors are facing. Generating "buy-in" from their peers is crucial to creating a positive environment where support-giving between youth and seniors is seen as a norm. For example, the White House leveraged Olivia [REDACTED]'s fame to advocate for vaccination in July 2021. They noted [REDACTED]'s reach and the good that was achieved by

leveraging on it: "We just want to thank you for using your platform and your voice for elevating the important issue of young people getting vaccinated" (Carras, 2021). The goal is for support-giving to be woven into our social fabrics and leveraging on youths' social media consumption and presence is key.

Provide resources and support for youth advocacy

Policy advocacy is crucial for systemic change. Yet, seniors who are affected by certain policies often have the softest voice in the matter. Simultaneously, youths who are a part of institutes of higher learning often have the desire and platform to advocate for policy change through their institutions. However, they may not have the necessary resources, support, or vocabulary to do so as institutions may refrain from interfering with local government policies. Thus, NPOs play a crucial role in providing the necessary resources to help youths analyze and advocate for policy change. An example is the Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE). AWARE partners with schools and the community and provide training for advocacy and support services to promote gender equality in Singapore. Similarly, NPOs targeting youth-senior partnerships can make a great impact by providing resources to empower youth advocacy for policy changes in support of seniors.

NPOs in connecting Seniors with Youths

For charitable behaviors to be sustainable, youths must also feel that their development is valued and supported by seniors in society. Therefore, I propose three ways in which NPOs can facilitate seniors in their endeavor to support youths: 1) Launch industry mentorship/fellowship programs, 2) Conduct workshops on life and leadership skills, and 3) Provide mentorship and support for Youth-at-Risk.

Launch industry mentorship/fellowship programs

Mentorship is crucial. Between the ages of 16-25, youths are just beginning to find their footing in the world. Depending on one's socioeconomic status, their access to valuable mentorship may be limited or non-existent. Yet, studies have shown the value of mentorship and its impact on youths' sense of self, cognition, social, and economic development (Rhodes, 2005). Through their wide networks, NPOs can launch mentorship programs where youths benefit from the wisdom and experience of senior mentors. Leveraging on platforms such as Zoom and Teams, youths and mentors can be connected from all around the world. A mentorship program like this will empower and enrich the lives of youth from all backgrounds, regardless of socioeconomic status, ethnicity, or faith.

Conduct workshops on life and leadership skills

Youths are at the impressionable age where life and leadership skills are best honed. However, these soft skills may not be a priority for some educational institutions or local communities. Yet, they are undeniably crucial as youths begin to understand how to interact with the world around them, and how to respond to failure, rejection, and success. Hearing from those who may have walked a similar path could help them shape their perspective and instill a sense of confidence, humility, and empathy. Thus, NPOs can partner with schools and community organizations to conduct life and leadership workshops led by seniors for youths.

Provide mentorship and support for Youth-At-Risk

Support for Youth-At-Risk is important and often, challenging. Depending on the kinds of behavior exhibited, different levels of engagement may be required. However, who intervenes is often equally as important, if not more important, than how the intervention takes place. These youths may not respond well to their parents or persons of formal authority such as teachers and social service officers. As such, NPOs can partner with schools to first identify and assess these youths and provide them with an alternate form of support by connecting them with senior mentors. These mentors serve to provide guidance and counsel, and often pose lower barriers of entry when engaging with youths. This ensures that Youth-At-Risk have an alternative form of support and are supported in ways that speak best to them.

Conclusion: Towards a more balanced distribution of social support

The trend of an ageing population accompanied by active youth engagement suggest that these two generations are increasingly interconnected. What directly affects one will indirectly affect the other. As such, how they respond to the growing needs of the other is crucial to ensure fair allocation of public resources and support is evenly distributed. Thus, the proposed model allows for NPOs to leverage mutual support, ensuring that charitable behavior between youths and seniors remains robust, mutually beneficial, and most importantly, sustainable in the future.

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