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# SOCIAL INNOVATIONS IN AN EMERGENCY SETTING: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR YOUTH VOLUNTEERS IN CURBING THE SPREAD OF COVID-19 IN HUYE DISTRICT, RWANDA

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** Following COVID-19 at the close of 2019, countries have been in an emergency to contain the improvised danger to their citizens; Rwanda was no exception. The Government of Rwanda (GoR) turned to investing in different mechanisms to deal with the pandemic, including community-based interventions by youth volunteers, which is considered a social innovation to deal with the improvised societal challenge. This study investigated the motives, opportunities, challenges, and lessons that youth volunteers encountered while curbing the spread of the pandemic at the community level.

**Theoretical Concept:** Social innovation concepts contribute to social change and provide actors with the means to meet societal challenges. The social innovation concepts were adopted as the theoretical concepts underpinning the study.

**Method:** The study followed a descriptive qualitative design. Using key informants and in-depth interview techniques (KIIs), data were collected from 13 interviews with youth volunteers and opinion leaders among citizens of the Huye District of Rwanda who were selected using network and purposive sampling techniques. Interviews were uploaded in MAXQDA 2022 to visualize and map the data.

**Results:** The results indicate that youth volunteers have encountered various challenges where a poor mindset had a big occurrence, followed by aggressive attitudes from beneficiaries of their interventions. However, despite the challenges, there were opportunities whereby youth volunteers showed a high level of patriotism for their country and learned new skills like public speaking.

**Implications:** The study suggests that in similar future interventions, the government should mitigate the identified challenges and enhance the highlighted opportunities for the intervention to be more impactful.

**Keywords:** Social Innovation, Emergency Setting, Youth Volunteers, Opportunities, Challenges, Rwanda.

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## INOVAÇÕES SOCIAIS EM UM AMBIENTE DE EMERGÊNCIA: OPORTUNIDADES E DESAFIOS PARA JOVENS VOLUNTÁRIOS A FIM DE CONTER A DISSEMINAÇÃO DA COVID-19 NO DISTRITO DE HUYE, RUANDA


### RESUMO

**Propósito:** após a Covid-19 no final de 2019, países estiveram em uma emergência para conter o perigo improvisado para seus cidadãos; Ruanda não foi exceção. O Governo de Ruanda (GoR) passou a investir em diferentes mecanismos para lidar com a pandemia, incluindo intervenções comunitárias por jovens voluntários, o que é considerado uma inovação social para lidar com o desafio societal improvisado. Esse estudo investigou os motivos, as oportunidades, os desafios e as lições que jovens voluntários encontraram ao conter a propagação da pandemia no nível comunitário.

**Conceito teórico:** Os conceitos de inovação social contribuem para a mudança social e fornecem aos atores os meios para enfrentar os desafios societais. Os conceitos de inovação social foram adotados como os conceitos teóricos subjacentes ao estudo.

**Método:** O estudo seguiu um desenho qualitativo descritivo. Usando informantes-chave e técnicas de entrevista aprofundada (KIIs), foram coletados dados de 13 entrevistas com jovens voluntários e líderes de opinião entre cidadãos do distrito de Huye em Ruanda que foram selecionados usando técnicas de amostragem intencional e em rede. As entrevistas foram enviadas no MAXQDA 2022 para visualizar e mapear os dados.

**Resultados:** Os resultados indicam que jovens voluntários têm encontrado vários desafios onde uma mentalidade pobre teve uma grande ocorrência, seguida por atitudes agressivas dos beneficiários de suas intervenções. No entanto, apesar dos desafios, havia oportunidades através das quais jovens voluntários mostraram um alto nível de patriotismo para seu país e aprenderam novas habilidades como falar em público.

**Implicações:** O estudo sugere que em intervenções futuras semelhantes, o governo deve mitigar os desafios identificados e aumentar as oportunidades destacadas para que a intervenção seja mais impactante.


**Palavras-chave:** Inovação Social, Ambiente de Emergência, Voluntários para Jovens, Oportunidades, Desafios, Ruanda.

## INNOVACIONES SOCIALES EN SITUACIONES DE EMERGENCIA: OPORTUNIDADES Y DESAFÍOS PARA LOS JÓVENES VOLUNTARIOS A LA HORA DE FRENAR LA PROPAGACIÓN DE LA COVID-19 EN EL DISTRITO DE HUYE, RUANDA


### RESUMEN

**Finalidad:** Tras la COVID-19 a finales de 2019, los países han estado en una emergencia para contener el peligro improvisado para sus ciudadanos; Ruanda no fue la excepción. El Gobierno de Ruanda (GoR) se dedicó a invertir en diferentes mecanismos para hacer frente a la pandemia, incluidas las intervenciones comunitarias de jóvenes voluntarios, que se considera una innovación social para hacer frente al desafío social improvisado. Este estudio investigó los motivos, las oportunidades, los desafíos y las lecciones que los jóvenes voluntarios encontraron al frenar la propagación de la pandemia a nivel comunitario.

**Concepto teórico**: Los conceptos de innovación social contribuyen al cambio social y proporcionan a los actores los medios para enfrentar los desafíos sociales. Los conceptos de innovación social fueron adoptados como los conceptos teóricos que sustentan el estudio.

**Método:** El estudio siguió un diseño cualitativo descriptivo. Utilizando informantes clave y técnicas de entrevista en profundidad (KII), se recopilaron datos de 13 entrevistas con jóvenes voluntarios y líderes de opinión entre los ciudadanos del distrito de Huye de Ruanda que fueron seleccionados utilizando técnicas de muestreo en red y deliberadas. Las entrevistas se subieron en MAXQDA 2022 para visualizar y mapear los datos.

**Resultados**: Los resultados indican que los jóvenes voluntarios se han encontrado con diversos retos en los que una mentalidad deficiente tuvo un gran impacto, seguido de actitudes agresivas por parte de los beneficiarios de sus intervenciones. Sin embargo, a pesar de los desafíos, hubo oportunidades en las que los jóvenes voluntarios mostraron un alto nivel de patriotismo por su país y aprendieron nuevas habilidades como hablar en público.

**Implicaciones:** El estudio sugiere que en intervenciones futuras similares, el gobierno debería mitigar los desafíos identificados y mejorar las oportunidades destacadas para que la intervención tenga más impacto.

**Palabras clave:** Innovación social, Emergencia, Jóvenes Voluntarios, Oportunidades, Retos, Ruanda.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Volunteerism was one of the civic engagements used to contribute to societal well-being and a resilient society amid the COVID-19 widespread (Pinchuk et al., 2022). However, different measures imposed by governments, like lockdowns, and limited opportunities for physical volunteering, the government of Rwanda opted for an innovative solution of community interventions by youth volunteers among other strategies. However, up to now, no study has been conducted to reveal the challenges and opportunities encountered by that group of youth volunteers to serve as a way of improving their future interventions. In this context, it's crucial to understand how youth groups, which are a major source of volunteers, can adjust to the new reality and provide effective aid to individuals who need it. Specifically, it is of great importance to look at the challenges and opportunities that have affected the young volunteers executing socially noteworthy aims at curbing the spread of COVID-19. It is necessary to investigate the opportunities and difficulties facing young volunteers in Rwanda as they are fighting COVID-19. There is also a gap in the literature on social innovation notions that point to driving social challenges (Bund et al, 2013) that can be used to identify the opportunities and obstacles that young volunteer competencies face in their interactions with community members who benefit from their community-based initiatives.

As part of the country's reconstruction and support of a common national identity following the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, the Rwandan government has depended on Rwandan culture and traditional customs. As a result, the community became a strong foundation from which home-grown initiatives (social innovations) to meet the needs of the citizens would develop (Rutikanga, 2019). Reading Gatwa & Mbonyinkebe (2023), examples of homegrown solutions adopted in Rwanda include but are not limited to: Umushikirano, translated as the National dialogue, a platform for governance and political participation; Umuganura, translated as a Rwanda approach to promoting the national unity and self-reliance; Abajyanama b'ubuzima translated as community health workers; Umugoroba w;ababyeyi

translated as parents forum; ingando, translated as social-political reconstruction through memory and identity in Rwanda's post-genocide, Umuganda translated as community work where citizens come together at each last Saturday of the month to do voluntary activities contribution to the wellbeing and development of people. Along the same line, the intervention of youth volunteers during the COVID-19 pandemic period in Rwanda is considered a homegrown solution and a case of social innovation and co-creation in the current study.

After the genocide against the Tutsi in 1994, these locally made solutions became popular as people wanted to use them to create sustainable development programs. In addition to helping Rwanda rebuild and improve, grass-roots solutions have also helped people be more interested in their social development. (Ndahiro & Rwagatara, 2015). It is in the same context that it was revealed that social work in Africa needs to be more suited to African realities (Twikirize & Spitzer, 2019). This is possible because there is a need to involve beneficiaries in choosing what fits them. The African Union emphasizes the role of youth volunteers; this accentuation is based on the objective of including the youth in intentional exercises that contribute to the development of Africa's society (Kamugisha, 2020).

Youth volunteerism could be an effective tool for engaging citizens in handling social developmental challenges, and it can change the pace and nature of improvement. Volunteerism is beneficial to both societies at large and individual volunteers by enhancing trust, solidarity, and correspondence among citizens and by intentionally making alternatives for engagement. Youth volunteers contribute to solving various social issues, maintaining peace, dealing with emergencies like pandemics, and advancing by supporting the acknowledgment of volunteers (Adam, 2018). They work with governments to coordinate volunteerism into developmental programming and prepare an expanding number and differences of volunteers, counting experienced youth volunteers, all through the world (Kail & Carr, 2017). Palmary & Moat (2002) stated that youthful individuals are exceptionally critical accomplices on the off chance that community social issues are viably effectively addressed. The same youth volunteers played an important role in controlling the spread of COVID-19 in Rwanda (Louis et al, 2022) even though they could have met some challenges and enjoyed some opportunities during their interventions, which is the subject of the current study.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which was first detected in Rwanda in March 2020, displayed danger for irresistible infection control (Karim et al., 2021), which needed unconventional community solutions like interventions by youth volunteers. Health Institutions of Rwanda and the Epidemic and Surveillance Response Division have worked together to get ready for the pandemic since it started in January 2020 (Karim et al., 2021). Different ways of

communicating information to the community were used, such as using drones and robots; social media was also used to share official information and to stop people from spreading lies. This helped to get a united response from the people, including young volunteers (Karim et al., 2021). The Rwandan government responded to COVID-19 via its healthcare system by taking action at the local level to prevent and control the infection. Various social distancing and hygiene protocols were implemented to ensure the continued operation of critical sectors of the economy, including the provision of hand-washing equipment at agricultural collection centers. Young volunteers have used creative and social innovations to communicate with and engage with communities. This has helped provide a good response to the COVID-19 outbreak (Karim et al., 2021).

However, there is no research conducted on motivations, challenges, opportunities, and lessons for youth volunteers during their curbing of the pandemic. In brief, the study aimed at responding to the following questions: (1) How youth volunteers were motivated to take part in curbing COVID-19 in Rwanda? (2) What strategies were adopted by youth volunteers in Rwanda while responding to the pandemic? (3) What were the challenges and opportunities for youth volunteers while taking action against the pandemic? (4) How youth volunteers' involvement in curbing COVID-19 in Rwanda could have generated lessons for them?

## 2 THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

The current section discusses the literature on volunteerism culture and its connection to social innovation as a way of dealing with issues affecting the community. The Rwandan culture exhibits a profound integration of volunteering and volunteerism. In Rwanda's tradition, volunteerism encompassed self-help and mutual assistance endeavors, as well as the provision of care for the vulnerable and the provision of community service. Volunteerism in Rwanda primarily aims to mitigate socio-economic limitations faced by people or communities and enhance their overall well-being (Republic of Rwanda, 2012). In the Rwandan setting, volunteerism is commonly known as "ubwitange," which stands for "free will action" and is carried out of self-motivation and passion. Ubwitange encompasses several volunteer activities, including umuganda, gutanga umusanzu, and guheka abarwayi ‘which involve the provision of ambulance services to patients within the community’ (Republic of Rwanda, 2012).

Youth volunteering represents a social innovation that is highly effective in times of crisis (Raffini et al., 2021). Volunteering to help others can have a significant impact on society, particularly during a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic (Chawłowska et al., 2021). We at that

point looked at a few of the approaches /strategies to managing social issues utilized by youth volunteers. We moreover investigate a few of the plausibility that can be utilized to back volunteer exercises. At long last, we distinguish a few of the challenges and opportunities confronted by youth volunteers in Rwanda. COVID-19 widespread has posed phenomenal challenges for society and made a requirement for viable volunteer activities. However, even though the need for volunteer work is widespread, it does not only depend on government support but also on the willingness of young community members to participate. These incorporate keeping up a positive state of mind; maintaining a strategic distance from over-the-top introductions to false information; looking for solid sources of information taking after cleanliness proposals; keeping a standard schedule; restricting physical movement; maintaining social relationships, obtaining professional help if necessary, and so on.

A social innovation could be understood as a kind of social intercession that points to illuminate or move forward a certain social issue or circumstance in an unusual way by applying inventive consideration (Seidametova et al., 2022) which is the case of youth volunteer interventions in dealing with the pandemic in Rwanda. Managing social issues can be viewed as a means of carrying out social innovations that bring positive societal changes (Syvyi et al., 2022). Social innovations can moreover be utilized as a strategy for learning that community members have true assignments that are pertinent to their social needs, values, etc (Shapovalov et al., 2023). Social innovation helps make changes in society and gives people the power to solve problems that impact society (Avelino et al., 2019). Social innovations that help society can be hard to define and understand because they involve many different areas of study and have been talked about for a long time by experts (cited in Bozic, 2022).

Innovation has been understood as doing things differently from the rules in politics, society, or other areas. This was very clear until the 19th century when innovations were not always wanted. Since the mid-1800s, there has been significant progress in the field of organized research (Kotsemir et al., 2013). The period between the 1960s and 1990s can properly be called the brilliant age in thinking about innovation. According to OECD, innovation is defined as "the execution of a new or completely progressed item" (great or benefit), or handle, a new showcasing strategy, or a modern organizational strategy in trade, work environment organization or outside relations" (OECD, 2005). However, innovation has different meanings which differ from one author to another.

In common, two fundamental perspectives of innovation can be recognized (Cooper, 1998; Gopalakrishnan & Damanpour 1997); as a preparation that energizes change (as a result of the emphasis on invention); or as an occasion, protest, or a discrete object, distinguished by

peculiarity. However, the most significant increase in the use of this concept in the literature occurred after 2008, when global financial crises heightened the need for government, business, civic, and charitable organizations to advance social administrations and find innovative approaches to address emerging societal issues (Ayob et al., 2016). Social innovation has emerged in response to the difficult social issues that arise as a result of the current welfare state's failure, with standard arrangements established within various organizational settings (Nicholls & Murdock, 2012).

However, over time, two common ways of understanding social innovation have emerged in the writing (Montgomery & Mazzei, 2021). The important part is about how entrepreneurs can solve social problems and make money at the same time, this comes from their ability to create new ideas and products (McNeil et al., 2012; Mulgan, 2019; Nicholls & Murdock, 2012). The other side of it is on making changes in society, especially at a local level, to improve communities and address social problems (Moulaert & MacCallum, 2019; Moulaert et al., 2013; Howaldt et al., 2016; Montgomery & Mazzei, 2021), this is more relevant to the current study.

In that case, many experts agree that these elements of understanding social innovation have been quite ambiguous for a long time. (Edwards-Schachter & Wallace, 2017; Holtgrewe & Millard, 2018).

Young volunteers can take part in important activities that help them learn new things and make a positive impact on society (Khyzhniak et al., 2021). In this context, the opportunities and challenges confronted by youth volunteers ought to point to creating these competencies through suitable substance and strategies for future interventions. Despite the existing literature, there is a gap in documenting the motives, lessons, challenges, and opportunities that youth volunteers encountered during their volunteerism work amid COVID-19 in Rwanda, and the current study intended to fill this gap.

## 3 METHODOLOGY

The study embraced a descriptive-qualitative approach to examine the motivations, lessons, opportunities, and challenges for youth volunteers in curbing the spread of COVID-19 in the Huye District of Rwanda. Qualitative descriptive studies seek to offer a thorough and all-encompassing overview of events. Qualitative descriptive research produces data that provide a subjective description of the individuals, objects, and locations involved in events or experiences (Kim et al., 2017).

## 3.1 POPULATION AND SAMPLING

The study was carried out in the Huye District of Rwanda; the district has the second-biggest city in Rwanda following Kigali, the capital city. The techniques for selecting the interviewees were network and purposive sampling-based techniques. Selected research participants were the representatives of youth volunteers (the target group), and citizens representing others locally known as opinion leaders among citizens of Huye District who were the key informants. Some of the interviewees were from the urban areas of the Huye district while others were from the rural areas of the district. This was to make sure that opinions from both settings were accommodated.

## 3.2 SOURCES OF DATA

Data were collected from 13 key informants and in-depth interviews with representatives of youth volunteers and opinion leaders among citizens of the Huye District of Rwanda. The interviews started with representatives of youth volunteers and when we reached the 10th interviewee, we noticed that he was giving opinions which were almost captured in the previous 9 interviews. From there, we decided to add the 11th interviewee to crosscheck if we were approaching the saturation point, and from there, we realized the same observation as the one on the previous one. Reaching the category of representatives of opinion leaders among the citizens, upon conducting the first two interviews, we observed that their opinions were covered by youth volunteers and that's how we decided to stop to 13 interviews.

## 3.3 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

The 13 interviews were conducted with representatives/leaders of youth volunteers and opinion leaders, which gave them more information than regular members. The interviews were recorded through field notes and records in the mother tongue i.e. Kinyarwanda and later on translated into English which is the writing language of the current paper. There was also the transcription verbatim to make sure that no opinion from the interviewees was left behind while analysing the gathered information.

### 3.4 DATA ANALYSIS

The descriptive method was followed for data analysis. The qualitative descriptive method experiences from a subjective perspective which is the case of documenting the contribution of youth volunteers in controlling COVID-19 by focusing on motivations, lessons, challenges, and opportunities encountered by the group of intervenes. This was done after the data were coded and later grouped into two sub-categories of challenges and opportunities to be able to investigate the occurrence of each challenge or opportunity after another. The data were then uploaded to MAXQDA 22, a qualitative data analysis software, for better visualization and mapping.

### 3.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The current study acquired institutional ethical clearance from the University of Rwanda, which was granted by the College of Arts and Social Sciences' Ethical Committee. Interviewees were assigned codes for the current report to ensure confidentiality and anonymity (see Table 1). While conducting interviews, some of the youth volunteers were found to have changed their location and were no longer living in Huye District but voluntarily agreed to participate in the study via a phone call where their opinions were recorded. A few of the interviewees were reluctant to accept to be recorded saying that they didn’t want their voices to be kept by the research team. Also, some of the interviewees argued that they wanted to know whether the study is known by the District and the University of Rwanda and then they explained how the study was cleared by the University of Rwanda and how the University has formally introduced the study to the district.

## 4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1 below presents the interviewees in their different categories and the code assigned to each of them to ensure the anonymity of the participants. The table also shows the gender of participants to accommodate the concept of gender in the study by having opinions from both women and men.

**Table 1**

*Coding of interviews*

| SN | Category of Interviewee | Gender | Code Assigned to the Interviewee |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Youth Volunteer | M | YV-1 |
| 2. | Youth Volunteer | M | YV-2 |
| 3. | Youth Volunteer | M | YV-3 |
| 4. | Youth Volunteer | F | YV-4 |
| 5. | Youth Volunteer | M | YV-5 |
| 6. | Youth Volunteer | M | YV-6 |
| 7. | Youth Volunteer | M | YV-7 |
| 8. | Youth Volunteer | F | YV-8 |
| 9. | Youth Volunteer | M | YV-9 |
| 10. | Youth Volunteer | M | YV-10 |
| 11. | Youth Volunteer | F | YV-11 |
| 12. | Local Citizen | M | LC-1 |
| 13. | Local Citizen | F | LC-2 |

From the above table 1, it is readable that the majority of interviewees were of the male gender. In presenting and analyzing the findings let's start by touching on what motivated youth volunteers to take part in curbing the pandemic as well as the strategies that they adopted during their community interventions and later on will end with lessons learned from the exercise.

- Motivations for Youth Volunteers to take action in Curbing COVID-19

The findings of the current study stipulate that among the motives for youth involvement in curbing the pandemic in Rwanda were the conducive policies, passion, and patriotism value of youth volunteers towards their country, as well as the leadership mobilizations and coordination. Thus, this communicates with the previous studies where it was found, for example, that in many scholarly approaches writing around civic engagement, in any case of their political or social circumstances, youth over the globe are motivated to take part in all the exercises for them to feel their role as 'good and participative citizens' (Banaji, 2008; Hammett, 2018). In this context, qualifying for the moral label of good citizens may go with patriotism, and passion as it was found to be among the qualities of youth volunteers during the control of the pandemic. However, in addition to patriotism, the current study also brought a combination of different factors, as stated above.

This may be supported by a response from an interview, as follows: 'We were motivated by the fervor and affection for our nation to contribute to its betterment and safeguard, and we were motivated by the support and exemplary figures by our country's authorities' (YV-1). The other interviewees contributed by adding the role of government policies by stating that, the existing policies and guidelines of the government gave us opportunities like being represented and valued like other Rwandans, we felt that there was a contribution that we had to make, especially in controlling the COVID-19'(YV-2). Another interviewee has supported the love for the country and its citizens to be among the main motives for youth engagement in fighting the pandemic by saying: 'First, we had to prevent the pandemic from infecting many people; we were working for the country; and we had to use our efforts to control COVID-19. We also had to do it because it is our duty as citizens to prevent all evil in our society (YV-3).

- Strategies adopted by youth volunteers during COVID-19

This study improves the knowledge and understanding of the social innovation of utilizing an innovative technique of involving a large number of youth volunteers in curbing the spread of COVID-19 in the Huye District of Rwanda. Researchers found that innovative strategies that the youth volunteers have adopted, included being role models, campaigns on respecting instructions put in place by the government, social distancing, standing everywhere that people can't meet physically, moving house to house where necessary, and information sharing, were also among the strategies. Youth volunteers were well protected and equipped with face masks, gloves, and hand sanitizers to avoid the spread or contain the pandemic. This has a slight connection with the previous studies, and that is the case of the study, which revealed that to actualize any methodology aimed at controlling the widespread and protecting the economy, the nation needs authority that centralizes and arranges activities (Nadanovsky & Santos, 2020; Ndiang'ui & Darah, 2020). Here, it is important to see that the government of Rwanda has coordinated the processes and put in place the guidance and baseline instructions for youth volunteers' successful grassroots interventions.

The majority of interviewees supported the above-identified innovative strategies adopted by youth volunteers. This can be supported by two interviewees who gave similar opinions by saying 'We used the campaign, especially on hand washing with clean water and soap, wearing a mask, and keeping a meter distance, we also provided advice to the local citizens' (YV-11, LC-1). Another interviewee continued by saying, 'We used information sharing methods from house to house for even those who refused to listen to the plans against COVID-19' (YV-7). On being the role model, one of the local citizens who were among our study participants just said, 'They (youth volunteers) set an example in complying with the

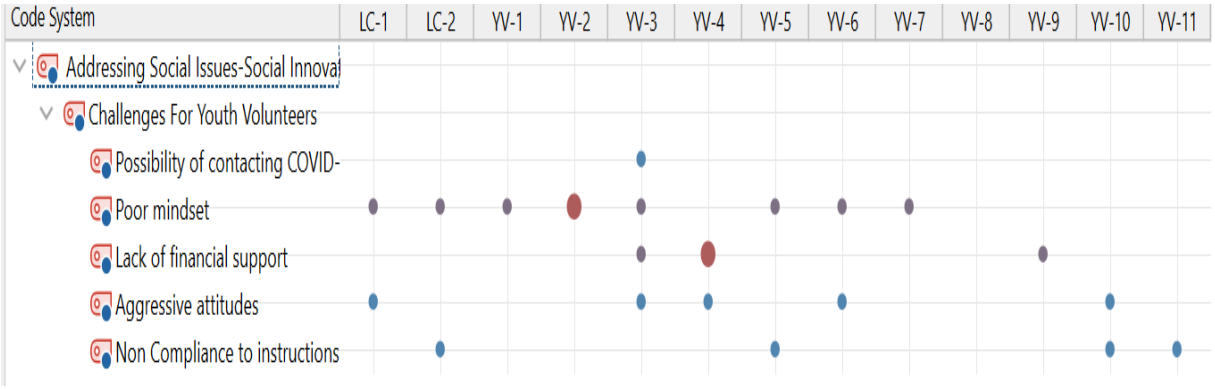
established measures, thus making others take them as an example, and they completed their task through tireless day and nights for campaigning on measures against the pandemic' (LC-2).

- Perceived Challenges for Youth Volunteers while Curving the Spread of COVID-19

Among the perceived challenges that youth volunteers faced were the possibility of contracting COVID-19, a poor mindset (lack of will to understand the instructions put in place), a lack of enough financial support, aggressive attitudes, and non-compliance from citizens who were not willing to cooperate or comply with guidelines (Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

*Perceived Challenges for Youth Volunteers when Curbing COVID-19*




The above-coded challenges were extracted and grouped from the interviews with youth volunteers and opinion leaders among the citizens and grouped into five categories as per their occurrence as challenges encountered by youth volunteers and each of the coded challenges is explained and supported by the statement from interviews. As it is clear on nodes, poor mindset, and aggressive behavior were the most reported challenges referring to their occurrences while the possibility of contacting COVID-19 was less reported and that is because youth volunteers were equipped with protective materials like face masks, gloves, hand sanitizer but also with good knowledge on how to protect themselves.

## 4.1 POSSIBILITY OF CONTACTING COVID-19

The research participants reported that there were risks for youth volunteers to contact or spread the virus themselves. This is the case where one interview said:

*'The big challenge we had while taking part in controlling COVID-19 in Rwanda was that we were at the front line, standing in public areas and there was a big risk for us to contain the virus and if so, there would have been another possibility for ourselves to spread it to others' (YV-11)'*

## 4.2 POOR MINDSET

The poor mindset in this context refers to the context where individuals who were to benefit from the intervention of youth volunteers tended to prioritize the satisfaction of their present needs and desires over the strategic consideration of prospects or the accumulation of savings for long-term objectives. In other words, they were trying to resist youth volunteers to let them be involved in activities that may put their lives at risk of containing COVID-19 without remembering that this would take their lives. This is supported by the statement of one of the interviewees who said:

*' While standing somewhere taking part in controlling the pandemic, people found it difficult to understand our guidance which would help them escape the pandemic. It required us much and continued efforts to educate them but lucky at the end of the day they understood (YV 11).*

## 4.3 LACK OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Other challenges include not having enough financial incentives for youth volunteers to accomplish their talks. This finding completes what was found by the previous studies that the role of the government is very crucial in controlling the citizens' behavior, like where it was found that contrasts in citizens' adherence activities will be affected by their recognition of almost the government's plans and the data accessible to direct their behaviors (Al-Hasan, 2020). Another interviewee has added that:

*The first challenge was that I didn't feel that I was more capable in terms of money and that we lacked enough financial support to use ourselves at work. But the government was facilitating transport for example which helped a lot.(YV-9)*

Another interviewee reported that:

*There were bad words and beatings by the people. The long distance to work and the lack of enough tickets given to us made it difficult. It was hard to find lunch. We had to*

*overcome those challenges by continuously campaigning and working with the local government daily (YV-4).*

## 4.4 AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR

The results from the interviews show that some of the people were reacting very badly either verbally or physically toward youth volunteers. One of the youth volunteers reported*: '……. and the residents were shouting at us to prevent them from going shopping and in their businesses. There were bad words tentative of beating us.' YV-6*

## 4.5 NO COMPLIANCE WITH INSTRUCTIONS

The term noncompliance with instruction here was employed to delineate a scenario when an individual has completely failed or refused to adhere to a prescribed set of guidance by youth volunteers during the intervention against the pandemic. For instance, this is where one of the interviewees reported:

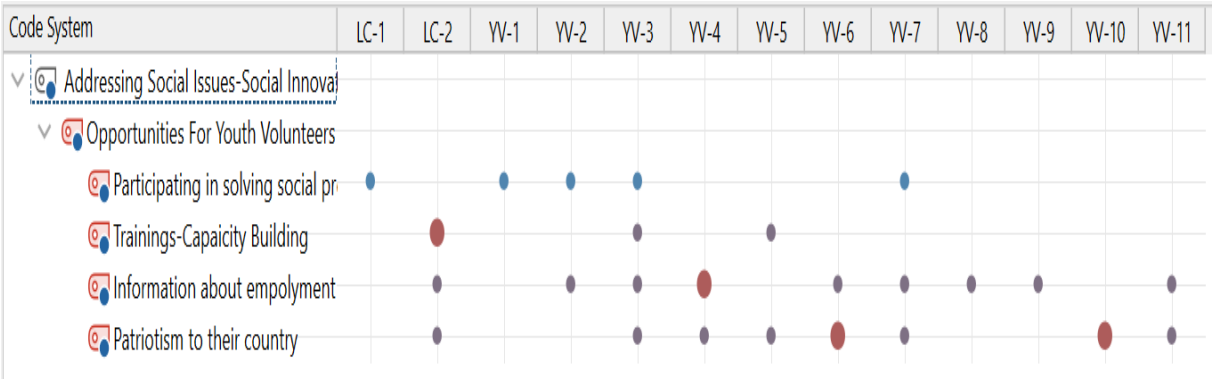
*'During our interventions, some people were rejecting our instructions, refraining from listening to us rather decided to continue in their affairs by ignoring our guidance. This was among the difficult times of our intervention because we did not have the option of enforcing the guidance by force and there were not enough police officers in helping to deal with those kinds of people.*

- Opportunities for Youth Volunteers during the COVID-19

Despite several challenges faced by youth volunteers during the controlling of COVID-19, there were several opportunities for them during the exercise as well. Opportunities include the fact that they were provided with some training, which later made them competitive in the labor market; they were allowed to participate in solving social problems; and they showed love for their country (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2**

*Perceived Opportunities for Youth Volunteers when Curbing COVID-19*




Looking at figure two it is clear that access to information about employment occurred high followed by patriotism or expressing love to their country which makes them the major opportunities enjoyed by youth volunteers. On the other hand, access to training and participation in solving social problems occurred less which makes them the fewer opportunities enjoyed by young volunteers while they were taking part in controlling the pandemic in Rwanda.

## 4.6 PARTICIPATING IN SOLVING SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Interviewees reported that it was an opportunity for the youth volunteer to have their hand in helping the country to solve its social problems, which can be considered as a giving back opportunity in some cases. This is the case of one interviewee who reported:

> *'We were provided with fast service everywhere because we were present in all initiatives aiming at controlling the pandemic as a barrier to our society. It was a big opportunity to participate in the enforcement of the government's measures against COVID-19 (YV-1).*

## 4.7 TRAINING-CAPACITY BUILDING

They were also receiving training concerning their interventions. One of the interviewees responded by saying:

> *'we were given training and helped in learning new things. Also, because the country encourages us as young people to take every opportunity available, it is the one who gives us the measures of the government, especially against COVID-19' (YV-5).*

## 4.8 INFORMATION ABOUT EMPLOYMENT

Some of the youth volunteers were young graduates or those who have completed high school or some of the University education. Meaning that they were yet employed somewhere. During their voluntary intervention in controlling COVID-19 in Rwanda, it was an opportunity for them to chat with various people including employers which resulted in them having information about employment opportunities. This is supported by the words of one of our interviewees who said:

> *While intervening in controlling COVID-19 in Rwanda, Youth Volunteers had an opportunity to speak to people who may be their future employers and it was an opportunity for youth volunteers to show their competencies. As a matter of fact, after the pandemic, several youth volunteers were employed in the local government where they started as volunteerism staff, and later, their appointment as public servants was formalized (LC2)*

Another interviewee reported: *Participating in the fight against COVID-19 allowed us to get to know our colleagues who work in the same sector, and it helped us to get to know the higher management people in our country who may later be our employers (YV-6). The claim was also supported by another interviewee who said:* 'chances are that when there are opportunities, we are the first ones to offer them and introduce us to the labor market through being valued because we volunteered in difficult times' (YV-9)

## 4.9 PATRIOTISM FOR THE COUNTRY

On expressing love for the country one of the interviewees reported:

> *'It was a chance for us to present the love we have towards our country, thus making us feel that we should participate in government activities, getting to know high officials is also an opportunity that made us feel that we should continue to participate in the government programs.' (YV 10)*

It was also found that, among other opportunities, they were also receiving a small incentive to help them buy drinking water and transport. This finding is in the sense that the pandemic has created opportunities for young citizens who were actively involved in its control. A research participant said:

> *'In my life, I can say that I have reaped the benefits and development, and we were not paid however in some cases we were facilitated with bonus to help us communicate and or in transport. I have appreciated this much because the bonus they gave me was productive in the sense that I was able to make a weekly savings in a youth association (YV-9)'.*

In reading the interviewees' comments on opportunities and challenges that youth volunteers faced during their involvement and considering the aspect of social innovation as a way of addressing social issues (Moulaert & MacCallum, 2019), the most occurring opportunities were found to be patriotism and the opportunity to have access to information related to job opportunities through networking between youth volunteers themselves as well as between them and the leadership. One of the most common challenges was found to be a poor mindset, followed by negative attitudes towards youth volunteers by some of the beneficiaries of their interventions.

- Lessons for Youth Volunteers in taking part in controlling COVID-19.

Through a combination of challenges and opportunities for youth during their involvement in curbing the spread of COVID-19 in Rwanda, they have also learned some lessons from the assignment. Among those lessons learned include learning how to protect themselves and others, giving back to their country without expecting any pay, cleanliness, as well as public speaking. One of the interviewees supported this with his statement:

> *'We learned these lessons from this activity: to help the country in its activities relating to curbing the spread of COVID-19, to help our people progress in all ways, we learned lessons on how to protect ourselves from COVID-19 and prevent it from others or any other pandemic that will come to the country' (YV-7).*

This finding complements a finding of the study carried out in Korea, which stated that the lessons learned from Korea's reaction to countering the attack of COVID-19 give interesting suggestions for open healthcare directors and operations administration specialists. The lessons learned from the primary wave will be an important asset for reacting to the resurgence of the infection (Lee & Lee, 2020). This shows that the lessons learned by youth volunteers in Rwanda may play a great role in containing future emergencies. As far as public speaking is concerned, an interviewee added:

> *'The lesson we learned was that we have to love our work, and we learned the lesson of dedicating ourselves to the country without expecting too many rewards. It helped us learn how to speak in public and how to brief others' (YV-4). One of the local citizens who was among our interviewees commented on the lessons that youth volunteers*

*learned from their involvement in curbing the pandemic where he said 'Those children (youth volunteers) learned the lessons of self-control, not going out with many people, and being clean'(LC1).*

- Social innovation and the mapped opportunities and challenges for youth volunteers

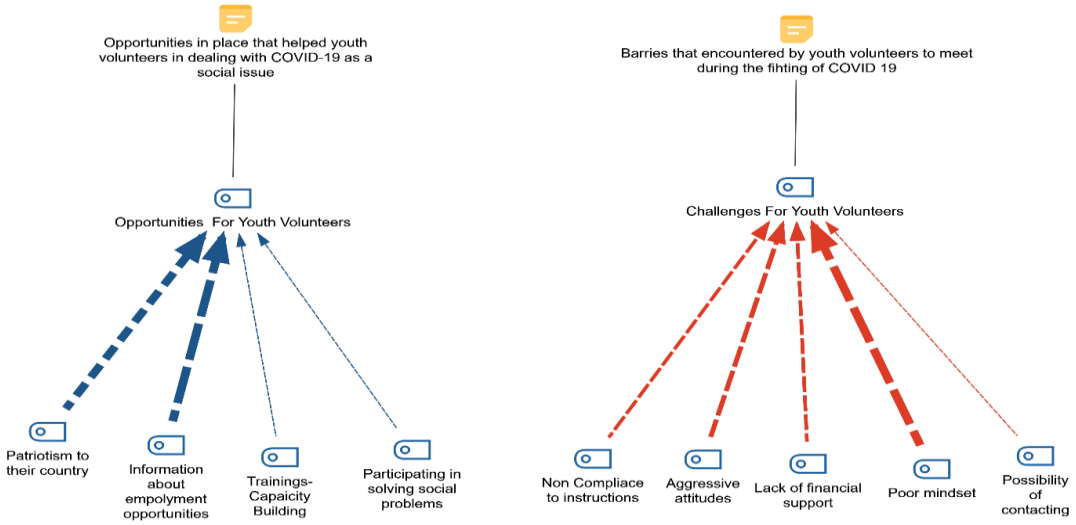
During the outbreak of a pandemic, social innovation is needed because familiar solutions don't exist, and/or the outcome of familiar solutions is unpredictable. Moreover, social innovation was needed to deal with the pandemic. The intervention of youth volunteers here is considered a case of social innovation and co-creation that was put in place in Rwanda to rapidly enforce the government's instructions to curb the COVID-19 pandemic in Rwanda. This is in line with the previous study which found that social innovations played a vital position during the COVID-19 period and we would assume that this would be the same in the process of recovering from the consequences of the coronavirus pandemic (Chesbrough, 2020)

The theoretical basis of using social innovations for solving social problems like the COVID-19 pandemic was discussed, considering its definition by Moulaert & MacCallum (2019) as a way of dealing with social issues through a transformative intervention. As previous studies have shown that youth volunteer groups take on larger roles in contributing to local well-being through dealing with social issues (Barnett et al., 2008), the current study identified that Rwandan youth volunteers were blessed to take part in solving social problems in addition to other opportunities.

Using MAXQDA software, the most occurring opportunities and challenges were mapped (see Figure 3), whereby the most occurring opportunities were found to be the patriotism of youth volunteers to their country, which was an opportunity among them, and this facilitated their intervention in other opportunities, including the opportunity to access information relating to job opportunities, access to capacity building through training by the government, as well as contributing to solving societal issues. On the side of challenges, the mapped most occurring challenge was the poor mindset of the citizens who were resisting respecting interventions by youth volunteers, and as a result, the citizens had aggressive attitudes towards youth volunteers. Other challenges included a lack of financial support for youth volunteers, even though a small number of incentives were paid to them. This was followed by noncompliance by citizens with the instructions given by youth volunteers, as well as the possibility of contracting the pandemic.

**Figure 3**

*Mapped Opportunities and Challenges for Youth Volunteers*




Generally speaking, the findings of this study suggest that despite the challenges and opportunities encountered by youth volunteers during their involvement in fighting COVID-19, they also learned some lessons from the assignment, such as that volunteerism was an opportunity to contribute to the country's journey in solving social issues without expecting a pay, as was the case for the previous studies, which found that volunteerism is an opportunity to serve communities (Withers et al., 2013). Having seen that the interventions of youth volunteers were targeted at contributing to dealing with societal issues, this justifies the relevance of the innovation concept to the current study.

## 5 CONCLUSION

The study investigated the challenges and opportunities faced by youth volunteers while they were engaged in controlling COVID-19 in Huye District, Rwanda, where the study applied a qualitative descriptive approach. The data were collected through interviews administered to 13 research participants, comprised of youth volunteers themselves and local citizens. The social innovation concepts were used to discuss the engagement of youth volunteers as a strategy to deal with social issues, focusing on the case of COVID-19.

The interview transcripts were uploaded in MAXQDA, a qualitative research analysis tool to visualize and map the findings for better presentation, and the findings revealed that several opportunities were identified, and the most occurring was found to be the patriotism spirit of youth volunteers, followed by an opportunity to have access to information relating to

job opportunities. Among the main challenges, the most prevalent were the poor mindsets and aggressive attitudes of citizens toward youth volunteers because they were not willing to comply with their instructions. In addition, youth volunteers learned some lessons, including the spirit of giving back to their country without expecting direct pay, learning to speak in public, and much more.

This study contributes a lot to the field of social work in the sense that it documents how social innovation concepts relate to describing challenges and opportunities for youth interventions during pandemics. Practically going forward, the government and practitioners can invest more in decreasing the identified challenges and enhancing the identified opportunities for youth volunteers to be more productive in their future interventions.

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