

Volunteer Youth Engagement and Performance of Humanitarian Organisations in Kenya: A Case of Kenya Red Cross Society

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effect of volunteer youth participation in decision-making and community service on performance of humanitarian organizations in Kenya, using the Kenya Red Cross Society (KRCS) as a case study. The study adopted a descriptive research design with a quantitative approach. Data were collected from a sample of 810 respondents comprising youth volunteers, staff, and governance members drawn from KRCS's 47 county branches and eight regional offices. Structured questionnaires were used, and quantitative data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics summarized respondent characteristics, while correlation, ANOVA, and multiple regression analyses established the strength and significance of relationships among variables. Results revealed statistically significant positive relationships between youth engagement and organizational performance. Participation in community service had the strongest influence ($\beta = 0.640$, $p < .001$), followed by decision-making participation ($\beta = 0.130$, $p < .001$). The findings also highlighted regional gender disparities, with male dominance in the North Eastern and Upper Eastern regions and higher female participation in Coast and West Kenya. Overall, the study concludes that meaningful youth engagement enhances organizational efficiency, innovation, and community outreach. It recommends institutionalizing inclusive decision-making structures, strengthening youth-led community service initiatives, and addressing gender and regional imbalances to optimize the contribution of young volunteers to organizational performance.

Keywords: volunteerism, youth engagement, decision-making, community service, organisational performance, Kenya Red Cross Society

Background of the Study

Youth volunteer engagement has increasingly been recognized as a cornerstone of organizational sustainability, innovation, and social transformation in humanitarian and development settings. Globally, young people under thirty-five constitute more than half of the world's population (UNFPA, 2023). Institutions such as the United Nations and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) emphasize that youth are not merely beneficiaries but co-creators of humanitarian impact (IFRC, 2018; United Nations, 2018). Empirical evidence from diverse contexts shows that when youth participate meaningfully in organizational decision-making and community service, institutions record stronger civic participation, responsiveness, and long-term resilience (Malinen & Harju, 2017; Nursey-Bray et al., 2022). Studies in the United States, Australia, and Finland demonstrate that active youth volunteerism builds social capital, strengthens leadership, and enhances institutional performance through community-driven initiatives (Barber, Mueller & Ogata, 2013; Englert & Helmig, 2018). Across Africa, the demographic weight of youth presents both a challenge and an opportunity for inclusive growth. Over seventy-five percent of Africans are below thirty-five years of age (African Union, 2021). Continental frameworks such as the African Youth Charter (2006) and Agenda 2063 identify volunteerism and civic participation as vehicles for transformation. Empirical studies from Nigeria, South Africa, and Kenya show that youth engagement in governance and

community service contributes directly to program quality and community wellbeing when institutions provide structured platforms for participation (Udoma, Umoh & Etuk, 2024; Ovcharova, 2020; Falessi, 2020). These findings underscore that genuine inclusion of youth in decision-making and service delivery enhances accountability, innovation, and public trust—core indicators of organizational performance.

In Kenya, young people below thirty-five forms approximately seventy-five percent of the population (KNBS, 2019). National frameworks such as the Kenya Youth Development Policy (2019) and the National Volunteerism Policy (2015) position youth as central to achieving Vision 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals. The Volunteerism Policy defines volunteering as freely given service for public benefit and highlights coordination, recognition, and protection of volunteers (Government of Kenya, 2015). It explicitly recognises youth volunteers as key partners in promoting social responsibility and institutional performance. Within this context, the Kenya Red Cross Society (KRCS) stands out as the country's largest humanitarian organisation and a model of structured youth engagement. Established under Cap 256 of the Laws of Kenya (1965), KRCS operates as an auxiliary to national and county governments, guided by the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. Youth constitute over eighty percent of its volunteer base (KRCS Strategic Plan 2021-2025). Their roles span community service activities—such as health campaigns, environmental conservation, and social outreach—and representation in decision-making through branch, regional, and national youth assemblies. However, despite strong policy frameworks, internal assessments reveal persistent gaps in the extent to which youth participation in governance translates into measurable organizational outcomes (KRCS, 2022).

Globally and locally, evidence affirms that organizations which institutionalize youth voices in leadership and empower them to serve communities record enhanced operational efficiency, program effectiveness, and legitimacy (Barnett & Brennan, 2008; Dekel, Geldenhuys & Harris, 2022). Yet in many humanitarian settings, youth decision-making remains limited to consultative roles, and community service contributions are rarely measured against organizational performance metrics. This study therefore focuses on two critical dimensions—volunteer youth participation in decision-making and volunteer youth participation in community service—to examine how they influence the performance of humanitarian organizations in Kenya, with the Kenya Red Cross Society as the case study. The analysis is timely as KRCS prepares to review its Youth Policy (2025) and develop the next Strategic Plan (2026-2030), offering an opportunity to embed evidence-based approaches that strengthen youth inclusion, community outreach, and institutional sustainability.

Organisational Performance

Organisational performance refers to the extent to which an organisation effectively achieves its objectives through efficient resource utilisation, service delivery, and stakeholder satisfaction (Englert & Helmig, 2018). In the humanitarian context, performance goes beyond financial metrics to encompass program effectiveness, operational efficiency, sustainability, and community impact (Lough & Matthew, 2014). Englert and Helmig (2018) established that volunteer motivation and organisational climate directly affect performance outcomes in nonprofit institutions. Similarly, Nencini, Romaioli, and Meneghini (2016) found that a supportive organisational environment fosters satisfaction, retention, and productivity among volunteers. For humanitarian organisations like KRCS, organisational performance is measured through responsiveness to crises, program reach, volunteer retention, and community trust. Research shows that volunteer engagement is a key determinant of organisational performance, especially in service-oriented institutions (Malinen & Harju, 2017; Dekel, Geldenhuys, & Harris, 2022). Volunteer motivation, leadership inclusion, and recognition have been found to enhance efficiency and adaptability (Worker et al., 2020; Nursey-Bray et al., 2022). Within the Red Cross Movement, youth volunteers form the backbone of operational delivery, driving innovation, outreach, and long-term sustainability (IFRC, 2018). In this study, organisational performance refers to how volunteer youth engagement influences operational efficiency, program effectiveness, sustainability, and community outreach within the Kenya Red Cross Society.

Youth Participation in Decision-Making

Youth participation in decision-making entails the inclusion of young people in leadership, policy formulation, and organisational governance processes (Georgeou & Haas, 2019). Effective participation empowers youth to

influence policies and strategies that affect their communities, fostering ownership and accountability (Lough & Matthew, 2014). Studies have shown that inclusive decision-making enhances organisational innovation and legitimacy (Barnett & Brennan, 2008; Dekel et al., 2022). Within KRCS, decision-making is institutionalised through youth assemblies and representation at branch, regional, and national levels. However, reports indicate that youth voices are not always equally weighted in final governance decisions (KRCS, 2022). As Millora (2025) cautions, tokenistic participation undermines empowerment and limits the potential of youth to drive change. This study explores how effective youth participation in decision-making contributes to organisational performance through improved governance, transparency, and program effectiveness.

Youth Participation in Community Service

Youth participation in community service represents volunteer involvement in activities that promote societal wellbeing, such as disaster response, health outreach, and environmental action (Nurse-Bray et al., 2022; Ovcharova, 2020). Community service enhances social cohesion and civic responsibility while improving the organisation's connection to local populations. Studies indicate that youth-led community initiatives foster resilience and strengthen institutional-community partnerships (Worker et al., 2020; Udoma et al., 2024). For KRCS, community service embodies its humanitarian mandate. In KRCS Community service includes youth-led and youth-driven initiatives such as visit to children's homes, Community Clean-ups, Tree planting, Students mentorship, blood donation drives and other relevant initiatives. For this study, this does not include participation in disaster response activities or the core activities of KRCS that are not youth led. This study examines how youth engagement in community service enhances organisational performance by improving community outreach, responsiveness, and public trust.

Kenya Red Cross Society Profile

The Kenya Red Cross Society (KRCS) is a humanitarian organisation established in 1965 under Cap 256 of the Laws of Kenya, mandated to act as a voluntary aid society auxiliary to both the national and county governments in accordance with the Geneva Conventions and the Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. This legal framework empowers the Society to complement government efforts in delivering humanitarian assistance, promoting health, and building community resilience during both peace and conflict. The statutory objectives of KRCS include providing relief to victims of disasters or armed conflict, improving health and preventing disease, promoting the Junior Red Cross Movement among youth, and advancing humanitarian values of solidarity, dignity, and mutual understanding. These objectives provide the legal and moral foundation for the Society's mission of alleviating human suffering and enhancing national resilience.

KRCS operates through forty-seven county branches coordinated by eight regional offices and a national secretariat in Nairobi. Its Strategic Plan for 2021-2025 identifies three strategic pillars-disaster management, health and social services, and organizational development-with youth engagement mainstreamed across all areas. Guided by the KRCS Youth Policy of 2015, youth participation is institutionalized through Branch, Regional, and National Youth Assemblies that ensure representation in governance and program delivery. Youth constitute over eighty percent of the organization's volunteer base, serving as first responders, advocates, and community mobilisers who translate humanitarian principles into practical action at the community level.

Youth engagement at KRCS is anchored in the Four-Part Youth Programme, which promotes community service, intercultural understanding, dissemination of the Red Cross Fundamental Principles, and protection of life and health. Through this framework, youth volunteers participate in humanitarian response, environmental conservation, health promotion, and peacebuilding initiatives. To enhance inclusivity and relevance, KRCS has expanded youth programming into thematic areas that address contemporary humanitarian challenges, including governance and leadership, livelihood empowerment, conflict prevention, peacebuilding, health, and climate action, with innovation serving as a crosscutting theme. These frameworks position youth as agents of change who design and implement locally appropriate solutions to emerging crises while advancing the organization's humanitarian mission. As KRCS prepares to review its Youth Policy (2025) and develop its Strategic Plan (2026-2030), examining how volunteer youth participation in decision-making and community

service contributes to organizational performance is essential for sustaining effectiveness, innovation, and institutional resilience in line with its national and international mandate.

Statement of the Problem

Youth in Kenya represent both a strategic asset and an untapped potential for national development. Despite constituting the largest demographic group, young people continue to face structural barriers to meaningful participation in governance and institutional processes. According to the National Council for Population and Development (2017), youth unemployment remains high-estimated at 67 percent-while underemployment, exclusion from decision-making, and limited leadership opportunities continue to restrict their contributions. Although national frameworks such as the Kenya Youth Development Policy (2019) and the National Volunteerism Policy (2015) recognise the role of youth in driving transformation, these commitments have not always translated into measurable outcomes within institutions that rely heavily on volunteerism.

The Kenya Red Cross Society (KRCS) has made deliberate efforts to integrate youth into its governance and programmatic structures through the Constitution (2015), Youth Policy (2015), and Strategic Plan (2021-2025). Youth serve as volunteers, peer educators, and community mobilisers across the country. However, while these frameworks exist, the extent to which youth participation in decision-making and community service contributes to organizational performance-particularly in terms of operational efficiency, innovation, sustainability, and community trust-remains insufficiently examined. Internal assessments reveal that many young volunteers perceive their participation in governance as limited or symbolic, with few opportunities to influence institutional decisions or evaluate the impact of their community initiatives (KRCS, 2022).

This disconnection between policy intent and practical implementation weakens the transformative potential of youth engagement. Without empirical evidence on how structured youth participation affects organizational outcomes, humanitarian organization's risk underutilizing their most significant human capital resource. As KRCS prepares to review its Youth Policy (2025) and develop the next Strategic Plan (2026-2030), a clear understanding of how volunteer youth participation in decision-making and community service shapes organizational performance is both timely and necessary. This study therefore seeks to address this gap by examining how these two dimensions of youth engagement influence the performance of humanitarian organizations in Kenya, with a specific focus on the Kenya Red Cross Society.

Objectives of the Study

The study will be guided by the following objectives

1. To assess the effect of volunteer youth participation in decision-making on performance of KRCS.
2. To analyse the effect of volunteer youth participation in community service on performance KRCS.

Justification/Significance of the Study

This study is both timely and strategic for the Kenya Red Cross Society (KRCS) and the broader humanitarian sector. At the institutional level, KRCS is preparing to review its Youth Policy (2015) and Constitution (2015) in 2025, alongside the formulation of the Strategic Plan (2026–2030). These concurrent processes present a unique opportunity to embed evidence-based insights on youth engagement into the organization's governance, policy, and operational frameworks. The findings of this study will provide empirical guidance for these reforms by demonstrating how volunteer youth participation in decision-making and community service contributes to organizational performance. The results will help KRCS strengthen youth inclusion across its Four-Part Youth Programme and related thematic areas, including governance and leadership, livelihoods, health, peacebuilding, and climate action. By establishing how these dimensions of youth engagement influence performance indicators such as operational efficiency, program effectiveness, sustainability, and community outreach, the study will inform program design, monitoring, and resource allocation to maximise the impact of youth volunteerism.

At the policy level, the study supports the implementation of the National Volunteerism Policy (2015) and the Kenya Youth Development Policy (2019) by providing empirical evidence on how structured youth engagement drives institutional and national development outcomes. It also aligns with Kenya's Vision 2030 and the African Union's Agenda 2063, which identify youth participation as a catalyst for inclusive growth and social transformation. The research will provide policymakers, development partners, and youth leaders with practical models for integrating young people into decision-making and community programs, offering insights that can inform policy reviews and national frameworks on youth empowerment.

Within the humanitarian sector, the study contributes to the global Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement's agenda on youth inclusion by highlighting how meaningful youth participation can enhance organisational adaptability, sustainability, and community trust. Lessons from KRCS will be valuable to other National Societies and humanitarian organizations seeking to institutionalize youth leadership and service as pathways to effectiveness and resilience.

From an academic perspective, this study addresses a critical knowledge gap by empirically linking volunteer youth engagement to organizational performance in a humanitarian context—an area that remains underexplored in Africa. It enriches the growing body of literature on youth volunteerism, leadership, and organizational development, providing a framework that scholars can adapt for future studies. Ultimately, the study is significant because it reframes youth not as passive beneficiaries but as strategic partners and co-creators of institutional excellence, offering practical and theoretical contributions that advance both scholarship and humanitarian practice.

Scope of the Study

This study focuses on examining how volunteer youth participation in decision-making and community service influences organisational performance within humanitarian organisations, using the Kenya Red Cross Society (KRCS) as the case study. It is confined to KRCS operations across Kenya, encompassing youth volunteers, staff, and governance members at branch, regional, and national levels. The study is limited to two dimensions of engagement—decision-making and community service—and their relationship to organisational performance indicators such as efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability, and community outreach. Although contextualised within KRCS, the findings are expected to provide insights applicable to other humanitarian organisations and National Societies in the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

THEORETICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is anchored on the Ladder of Youth Participation Theory developed by Roger Hart (1992), which conceptualizes youth engagement as a continuum of eight progressive levels ranging from manipulation to youth-initiated, shared decision-making with adults. The model emphasizes that genuine participation occurs when youth are trusted, empowered, and given meaningful roles in influencing decisions that affect them and their communities. It provides a useful framework for understanding how volunteer youth participation in both decision-making and community service contributes to institutional outcomes such as innovation, accountability, and sustainability. In humanitarian contexts, the Ladder Theory underscores the transition from tokenistic to meaningful participation as a driver of organizational legitimacy and performance. When youth volunteers move beyond being implementers to active contributors in planning and governance, organizations benefit from improved responsiveness, creativity, and community trust (IFRC, 2018; Nencini, Romaioli & Meneghini, 2016). Within the Kenya Red Cross Society (KRCS), this framework explains how inclusive decision-making structures and youth-led community service strengthen operational efficiency and program effectiveness through shared ownership and collaborative leadership. The Ladder of Youth Participation aligns closely with contemporary organizational behaviour perspectives that associate empowerment and involvement with higher motivation, retention, and performance (Englert & Helmig, 2018). By integrating this theory, the study situates youth engagement as both a developmental and strategic process—one that transforms volunteers from passive actors into co-creators of humanitarian impact. The theory therefore provides the conceptual foundation for analyzing how structured youth participation in decision-making and community service influences the overall performance of humanitarian organizations such as KRCS.

Empirical Literature Review

Empirical research on youth engagement consistently affirms that meaningful participation enhances organizational performance through improved efficiency, innovation, and community trust. Studies have demonstrated that when youth are empowered to participate in decision-making and community service, their contributions strengthen program quality and institutional legitimacy (Georgeou & Haas, 2019; Englert & Helmig, 2018). However, the depth and quality of this engagement vary widely across contexts, and few studies have empirically linked these dimensions to performance outcomes within humanitarian organizations.

Evidence from global and regional contexts underscores the value of youth inclusion in governance structures. Nencini, Romaioli and Meneghini (2016) found that participatory leadership in volunteer organisations fosters loyalty, motivation, and collective accountability. In South Africa, Ovcharova (2020) observed that intergenerational mentorship and shared decision-making improved volunteer retention and project sustainability. Similarly, Malinen and Harju (2017) in Finland established that youth involvement in strategic decision-making enhances organisational adaptability and community trust. Yet, several scholars caution that youth participation remains largely consultative or symbolic, limiting its transformative potential (Millora, 2025; IFRC, 2018).

Community service has also emerged as a critical pathway through which youth contribute to institutional performance. Studies in Nigeria and Kenya reveal that structured volunteerism improves social cohesion, operational reach, and program effectiveness (Udoma, Umoh & Etuk, 2024; Falessi, 2020). Nursey-Bray et al. (2022) found that youth-led community initiatives build social capital and resilience, while Wei et al. (2025) linked volunteer service accessibility and motivation to higher levels of civic responsibility and institutional trust. Within the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, youth-led service initiatives have been shown to enhance both community outcomes and internal organizational learning (Worker et al., 2020).

Despite this growing body of evidence, a key empirical gap persists regarding the measurable relationship between youth volunteer engagement and organizational performance in humanitarian settings. Most existing studies emphasize participation forms or motivational factors rather than institutional outcomes. In Kenya, few have systematically analyzed how youth decision-making and community service directly influence organizational efficiency, sustainability, and program effectiveness. This study therefore addresses this gap by providing empirical evidence from the Kenya Red Cross Society on how structured volunteer youth engagement contributes to humanitarian performance and organizational resilience.

Summary and Research Gaps

Existing studies demonstrate that youth engagement contributes to organizational effectiveness, innovation, and resilience across various sectors. However, most of these studies have focused on single dimensions of engagement, specific programs, or non-humanitarian settings, leaving key knowledge gaps regarding the holistic relationship between volunteer youth participation and organizational performance in humanitarian contexts. Research by Checkoway and Aldana (2013) and Zeldin, Krauss, and Collura (2014) confirmed that youth inclusion in governance and shared decision-making enhances accountability and adaptability, but both were limited to Western non-profit contexts. Similarly, Mwangi (2019) highlighted that youth participation in county governance in Kenya improved civic trust, yet engagement remained largely tokenistic. Udoma, Umoh, and Etuk (2024) and Ovcharova (2020) established that youth volunteerism fosters motivation and project ownership, but neither examined formal humanitarian institutions. Studies from Asia, such as Abd-Rahman, Halim, and Syed-Abdullah (2025), also linked shared decision-making to sustainability but within environmental NGOs rather than humanitarian organizations.

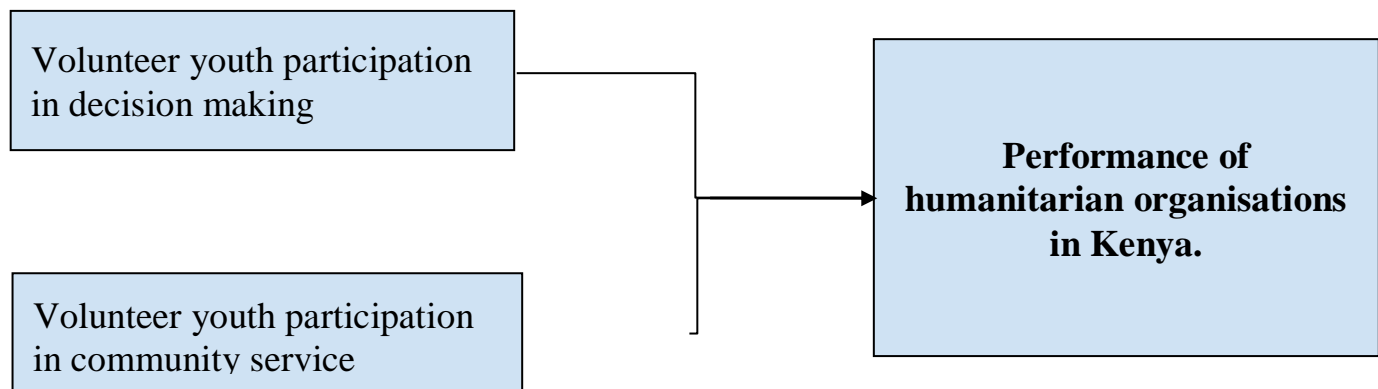
In the area of community service, Nursey-Bray et al. (2022) and Maharjan and Khanal (2020) found that youth-led volunteerism builds community resilience, teamwork, and leadership. Walsh and Black (2015) and Lough and Matthew (2014) further associated community service with improved organizational reputation and governance. Nevertheless, these studies largely remained descriptive or lacked quantifiable measures linking service engagement to institutional performance. Collectively, previous research highlights that while youth participation in decision-making and community service enhances engagement quality and program outcomes,

few studies have empirically measured these effects within the structured systems of humanitarian organizations. This gap is particularly pronounced in African contexts, where youth form the majority of the volunteer base but limited evidence exists on their contribution to organizational performance. This study therefore seeks to fill this empirical void by analyzing how volunteer youth participation in decision-making and community service influences organizational performance within the Kenya Red Cross Society.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A conceptual framework illustrates the relationship between study variables and guides the research process. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2019), it represents the researcher’s view of how variables relate, indicating the expected direction of influence. In this study, volunteer youth participation in decision-making and community service are the independent variables, while organisational performance-measured through efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability, and community outreach-is the dependent variable.

Figure 1:Conceptual Framework



Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive and explanatory research design using a quantitative approach. This design was suitable for analysing relationships between volunteer youth participation in decision-making and community service (independent variables) and organisational performance (dependent variable) within the Kenya Red Cross Society (KRCS).

Target Population

The study targeted a total population of 151,871 individuals within the Kenya Red Cross Society (KRCS), encompassing youth volunteers, staff, and governance representatives distributed across the organisation’s national, regional, and branch structures. The largest group comprised approximately 150,000 youth volunteers (98.7%), drawn from eight regions and forty-seven county branches who actively participate in humanitarian and community programs. In addition, the study considered 710 staff members (0.4%) working at both operational and strategic levels, as well as 1,161 governance representatives (0.9%) serving at the national, regional, and branch levels. This comprehensive population was selected because it reflects the full spectrum of actors involved in KRCS’s decision-making and community service processes, providing an appropriate foundation for examining how volunteer youth engagement influences organisational performance

Sample and Sampling Technique

The study employed a proportionate stratified random sampling technique to obtain a representative sample from the Kenya Red Cross Society’s (KRCS) diverse population. The target groups comprised youth volunteers, staff, and governance members drawn from the organisation’s 47 county branches, eight regional offices, and national headquarters. Stratification ensured inclusion of respondents across all operational and governance levels. Using Yamane’s (1967) formula for sample size determination, a total of 810 respondents were selected. The sample consisted of 664 youth volunteers, 115 governance members, and 31 staff, proportionally reflecting the population distribution. This approach ensured balanced representation and reduced sampling bias, allowing for generalization of findings across KRCS structures.

Data Collection

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered online. The tool captured respondents' perceptions of youth participation in decision-making, community service, and their effect on organisational performance. The instrument's reliability was confirmed through Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding 0.8.

Data Analysis and Presentation

Quantitative data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics summarised respondent characteristics, while inferential tests-including correlation, ANOVA, and multiple regression-were used to determine the strength and significance of relationships among variables. Results were presented using tables and figures for clarity and comparison.

Summary of findings

The study examined how volunteer youth participation in decision-making and community service influences the performance of humanitarian organizations, focusing on the Kenya Red Cross Society (KRCS). Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics were used to summarize respondent characteristics, while correlation, ANOVA, and multiple regression analyses determined the strength and significance of relationships between the independent and dependent variables. Descriptive results showed that most respondents were youth volunteers aged between 18 and 35 years, reflecting KRCS's youth-dominated structure. Gender distribution varied across regions, with male volunteers predominating in the North Eastern and Upper Eastern regions, while female participation was higher in the Coast, West Kenya, and Central regions. This variation highlighted a persistent gender imbalance in volunteer engagement and leadership opportunities across KRCS branches. The findings further indicated that while youth were active in community service activities such as health promotion, environmental conservation, and humanitarian response, their involvement in formal decision-making structures remained limited, often confined to consultative rather than strategic roles.

Inferential analysis established statistically significant positive relationships between youth engagement and organizational performance. Correlation results indicated that both decision-making and community service were positively associated with operational efficiency, program effectiveness, sustainability, and community outreach. ANOVA results confirmed that variations in levels of youth participation significantly influenced organizational performance outcomes ($p < 0.05$). Multiple regression analysis revealed that youth participation in community service had the strongest predictive influence on organizational performance ($\beta = 0.640$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that structured and well-supported service initiatives enhance KRCS's operational efficiency, innovation, and community trust. Youth participation in decision-making also had a significant positive effect ($\beta = 0.130$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that inclusive governance and leadership involvement improve institutional accountability, adaptability, and performance. The results demonstrate that meaningful youth engagement contributes substantially to the performance and sustainability of humanitarian organizations. However, the findings also reveal inconsistencies in how youth engagement frameworks are applied across regions, with gender disparities and uneven representation in governance structures affecting the overall quality of participation. Addressing these gaps through mentorship, targeted leadership training, and inclusive recruitment practices would enable KRCS to harness the full potential of its youth volunteers. Overall, the study concludes that volunteer youth participation - particularly through community service and decision-making- serves as a critical driver of organizational performance by enhancing efficiency, innovation, and community connection within the Kenya Red Cross Society.

CONCLUSION

The study set out to examine how volunteer youth participation in decision-making and community service influences the performance of humanitarian organizations, using the Kenya Red Cross Society (KRCS) as a case study. The results clearly demonstrate that meaningful youth engagement significantly enhances organizational performance across multiple dimensions, including operational efficiency, program effectiveness, sustainability, and community outreach. Participation in community service emerged as the most

influential determinant of organizational performance. Youth-led initiatives health promotion, and environmental conservation were shown to strengthen program delivery, community trust, and innovation. These findings affirm that community service provides a platform through which youth volunteers translate humanitarian principles into practical outcomes, reinforcing KRCS's mission and public credibility.

Youth participation in decision-making also had a positive and significant effect on performance. When youth are actively represented in governance and planning processes, they contribute new ideas, promote accountability, and enhance the organization's adaptability to emerging challenges. However, the study found that youth participation in formal decision-making remains limited, particularly in upper governance levels, and that gender disparities persist across regions, constraining equal access to leadership and engagement opportunities. Overall, the findings confirm that youth engagement is not merely a programmatic activity but a strategic driver of organizational excellence. Empowering young volunteers through structured community service, inclusive governance, and leadership development directly strengthens institutional effectiveness and sustainability. For KRCS, integrating these insights into the forthcoming Youth Policy (2025) and Strategic Plan (2026-2030) will be crucial for building a more inclusive, innovative, and high-performing humanitarian organization. The conclusions also extend to other National Societies and humanitarian institutions seeking to institutionalize youth participation as a foundation for resilience, trust, and impact.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions, several recommendations are proposed to strengthen volunteer youth engagement and enhance organizational performance within the Kenya Red Cross Society (KRCS) and similar humanitarian organizations. First, institutionalize meaningful youth participation in decision-making by reinforcing youth representation in governance structures at branch, regional, and national levels. Mechanisms such as participatory planning forums, mentorship programs, and youth advisory committees should be formalized to ensure that youth input influences strategic and operational decisions. Regular feedback loops between youth representatives and senior management would promote transparency and accountability.

Second, strengthen community service as a platform for youth leadership and innovation. KRCS should increase investment in youth-led community initiatives related to disaster response, health promotion, and climate action. Providing small grants, technical mentorship, and recognition opportunities will motivate sustained participation and improve program quality and community impact. Third, address gender and regional disparities in youth engagement by adopting inclusive recruitment, leadership training, and representation quotas to ensure equitable participation across all regions. Finally, integrate findings into organizational learning and policy reform, particularly in the upcoming Youth Policy (2025) and Strategic Plan (2026-2030). Embedding youth engagement indicators within performance management systems will enable KRCS to monitor, evaluate, and continuously improve its approach to youth inclusion, ensuring long-term organizational sustainability and impact.

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