

## Chapter 4. Older Persons and Green Volunteering: the Missing Link to Sustainable Future?

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### Abstract

*The empirical study featuring in this paper is contextualised within the statistics provided by a national survey on older volunteerism. Older volunteers are nowadays viewed as a valuable resource, a reliable and experienced labour pool. In Malta, many persons aged 60 and above volunteer many hours each month in local environmental organisations in their goal to preserve the earth for future generations even though they will not personally see the benefits. Through the data emanating from a qualitative survey this paper highlights the possible positive returns accruing from green volunteering in later life which are of a physical, cognitive, and social nature. It thus argues that there is a potential for a greater number of older people to volunteer in green non-governmental organisations. It is on this basis that a number of policy options and action strategies to improve the engagement of older persons in green volunteering are recommended. These include expanding the participation by older persons who are ageing actively, presenting green volunteering as a course module in pre-retirement educational programmes, advertising green volunteering as a means of self-actualisation rather than as a form of unpaid work, and designing green volunteer roles that do not necessitate high levels of education.*

### INTRODUCTION

The subject matter of the discussion in this paper is the interface between volunteerism and sustainable development, with an emphasis on the role that older adults can play in ensuring a better future. In most countries there is a strong interest at local, state, and national level in strengthening volunteering roles in environmental management. Malta is certainly no exception. However, the field is firmly located in, and around, the younger and adult “territories” of the life course, with older persons being generally excluded from both policy positions and empirical research. This paper delves into the patterns of older adults in green volunteerism, and the extent to which such activities can be individually enriching and socially beneficial to the community, whilst at the same time also leading to better

levels of sustainable development. The premise of the argument is that the presence of older persons in green volunteerism holds an important potential for a sustainable future. The presentation of this argument is divided into four sections. The first provides an overview of the background context – namely, older persons, volunteering, and green volunteerism in later life. Whilst the second section provides some information on the methodology of the study, the third provides an analytical appraisal of the data emanating from a qualitative survey. Finally, the paper recommends a number of policy options and action strategies to improve the engagement of older persons in green volunteering.

### THE BACKGROUND CONTEXT

Malta’s population has evolved out of a traditional pyramidal shape to an even-shaped block distribution of equal numbers at each age cohort except at the top (NSO, 2011a). Whilst in 1985 the percentage of the 60+ and 75+ cohorts measured 14.3 and 3.8 percent, during 2010 the total number of persons aged 60 and over totalled 95,145 representing 23 per cent of the total population. The largest share of the elderly population is made up of women, with 55 per cent of the total. Single families headed by older females predominate, with older women being more frequent users than older men of health and social care services. Population projections indicate an increasing trend in the percentage of population aged over 59, from 23 per cent in 2010 to 38 per cent in 2060. This is due to a decline in birth rate (1.3 per family), and an increase in life expectancy at birth for men/women from 70.8/76.0 years in 1985 to 77.7/81.4 years in 2005. The *2009 Statistics on Income and Living Conditions* reveal that older persons are at a higher risk of poverty than their younger counterparts (ibid. 2011b). The risk-at-poverty rate for persons aged 60 and over stood at 19 per cent while that for younger age groups stood at 14 per cent. From the same survey, it also resulted that nearly 65 per cent of the elderly felt that they could not afford to pay for one week’s annual holiday away from home and 11 per cent could not afford to eat a meal that includes meat, chicken, fish (or vegetarian equivalent) every second day. Moreover, 31 per cent

**Table 1 : Maltese population by sex (2010)**

Age	Men	Women	Total	% of population
Total	207,586	210,031	417,617	100
0-59	164,762	157,710	322,472	77
60+	42,824	52,321	95,145	23
60-74	32,426	35,509	67,935	16
75+	10,398	16,812	27,210	7
60-64	14,931	15,416	30,347	7
65-69	9,929	10,997	20,926	5
70-74	7,566	9,096	16,662	4
75-79	5,236	7,593	12,829	3
80-84	3,090	5,088	8,178	2
85-89	1,562	2,911	4,473	1.5
90+	510	1,220	1,730	0.5

Source: National Office of Statistics, (2011a)

said that their household could not afford to face unexpected expenses of €450 and over and 13 per cent said that they were not able to keep their home adequately warm. The number of employed older persons is relatively low as only about 7.1 per cent of the older population was in gainful employment in 2010 (ibid., 2011c).

Of course, the aforementioned statistics do not throw light on the more humanistic dimensions of ageing and later life. This paper embraces the following qualitative definition of older persons: “people, whatever their chronological age, who are post-work and post-family, in the sense that they are less or no longer involved in an occupational career or with the major responsibilities for raising a family” (Findsen and Formosa, 2011: 11). Similar to international trends, the 2005 Census reported a negative correlation between age and educational status (NSO, 2007). As much as 65 per cent of persons in the 60+ cohort had a primary level of education or less, with 80 percent holding no educational qualifications. Some 17 percent of persons aged 60+ were illiterate. Although Census data is not broken down by gender, research has found older women to hold a lower educational level compared to men (Formosa, 2005). However, as a result of the implementation of educational policies in the post World War II years – especially the Compulsory Education Ordinance in 1946 which set the compulsory school leaving age at fourteen – older cohorts boast a better educational record than the preceding ones (ibid, 2010). This means that in the

coming two decades the educational disparity between older and younger cohorts will be more equitable.

#### *Volunteering*

Industrial societies are characterised by an increase of people’s life-and health-expectancy so that a large percentage of citizens enjoy some fifteen to twenty years of active retirement. While this can take many different forms, the present research focuses on the extent that older persons participate in volunteer work. Throughout this study volunteering work is defined as “unpaid work provided to parties to whom the worker owes no contractual, familial or friendship obligations” (Wilson and Musick, 1997: 694). The setting up of voluntary organisations under Maltese law is regulated by the Voluntary Organisations Act (Government of Malta, 2007). The law was introduced by means of Act XXII of 2007 with the intention of regulating a wide-ranging sector which had hitherto been largely left to its own devices. The law also established the office of the Commissioner for Voluntary Organisation, who is the authority in charge with overseeing the enrolment process for voluntary organisations. According to the Voluntary Organisations Act, a Voluntary Organisation is an organisation which is created or established for any lawful purpose, as non-profit making, and is voluntary. The law also establishes a procedure for the enrolment of Voluntary Organisations in a “Register of Voluntary Organisations”. Enrolment requires the

fulfilment of a number of requirements, including the submission of annual accounts and identification of the administrators of the organisation. It is noteworthy that it is not enrolment which confers the status of "Voluntary Organisation"; any organisation that fulfils the above criteria is a Voluntary Organisation. However, enrolment confers a number of important advantages to the organisation. An enrolled Voluntary Organisation may (i) make collections without the need to obtain any further authorisations, (ii) receive or be the beneficiary of grants, sponsorships or other financial aid from the Government, any entity controlled by the Government or the Voluntary Organisations Fund, (iii) be the beneficiary of any policies supporting voluntary action as may be developed by the Government, (iv) receive or be the beneficiary of exemptions, privileges or other entitlements in terms of any law, and (v), be a party to contracts and other engagements for the carrying out of services for the achievement of its social purpose at the request of the Government or any entity controlled by the Government.

The National Statistics Office has also published a number of reports relating specifically to local volunteering. The *Time-use study* (NSO, 2004) collected information on how the Maltese population, aged 10 years and over, spends its time. Data shows that volunteering time, both on week-

days and weekends, tends to increase with rising age (*tables 2 and 3*). Persons aged 65 years and older engaged in volunteerism for about 0.7 and 0.9 hours every weekday and weekend respectively (national average 0.4/0.8). The same study reports that retired persons in Malta engaged in volunteerism for about 0.8 and 1.0 hours every weekday and weekend respectively.

More recently, the 2009 *Survey on Income and Living Conditions* (NSO, 2010) revealed that 27,250 persons aged 12 and over (8 per cent of the total population in this age bracket) were doing some form of voluntary work. Just over half these persons were contributing in a voluntary organisation, while 41 per cent were working in other institutions. Fifty-two per cent of voluntary workers were females.

When analysing the distribution by age, 36 per cent were aged between 25-49 while 32 per cent fell within the 50-64 bracket. As regards the number of volunteers aged 65 and over, this was reported to amount to 3,690 – or 4.2 per cent of the total number of persons aged 65 plus in 2009. The largest proportion of persons doing voluntary work (32 per cent) were doing so through membership organisations. They were followed by organisations engaged in social work activities (28 per cent) and religious organisations

**Table 2: Volunteer work (hours and per cent) per weekday and weekend by age**

WEEKDAYS								
Age	10-14	15-24	25-34	35-44	44-54	55-64	65+	Total
hrs/per cent	0.5/2.1	0.2/0.8	0.1/0.4	0.2/0.9	0.2/0.8	0.8/3.3	0.7/2.9	0.4/1.7
WEEKENDS								
Age	10-14	15-24	25-34	35-44	44-54	55-64	65+	Total
hrs/per cent	0.9/3.8	0.5/2.1	0.5/2.1	0.7/2.9	0.8/3.3	1.0/4.2	0.9/3.8	0.8/3.3

Source: National Statistics Office, (2004)

**Table 3: Volunteer work per weekday and weekend by employment**

WEEKDAYS							
Status	Employed	Unemployed	Student	Retired	Housekeeper	Other	Total
hrs/per cent	0.3/1.3	0.3/1.3	0.3/1.3	0.8/3.3	0.4/1.6	0.7/2.9	0.4/1.7
WEEKENDS							
Status	Employed	Unemployed	Student	Retired	Housekeeper	Other	Total
hrs/per cent	0.6/2.5	0.6/2.5	0.8/3.3	1.0/4.2	0.8/3.3	0.9/3.8	0.8/3.3

Source: National Statistics Office, (2004)

(21 per cent). Forty-six per cent of persons engaged in voluntary work participated actively in the organisation’s activities, while a quarter had an administrative role, with the remainder having a supportive role. Forty per cent of these workers had been doing voluntary work for more than 10 years, while 32 per cent had been involved for less than 5 years.

The most common purpose for doing voluntary work was that people felt it was their moral duty; persons citing this reason comprised 47 per cent of the total. This was followed by 23 per cent of persons who said they did voluntary work to meet new people or for recreation, and another 12 per cent said they did so out of sympathy for the needy. Nineteen per cent of persons provided other reasons. When asked how many hours they spent volunteering in a typical month, one-third said they spent less than 10 hours in such activities. The survey also revealed that a further 27 per cent spent 10-19 hours, while 25 per cent volunteered for 30 hours or more. Males tended to spend longer hours doing voluntary work than females; the average number of hours per month stood at 26 and 21 hours respectively. Persons doing informal voluntary work were most likely to spend more time volunteering. Indeed, persons in this category spent an average 40 hours per month volunteering, as opposed to 27 hours for persons working within a voluntary organisation and 20 hours for those volunteering with another entity. Unemployed and retired persons, as expected, spent more time volunteering than persons who were working, though persons whose status was “other inactive”, such as housewives and students, spent the least time doing voluntary work. Of all those aged 12 and over living in private households, 5 per cent were members of a voluntary organisation.

*Green volunteerism in later life*

In recent years, green volunteerism has gained increasing visibility as an example of civic engagement. Following Bushway and colleagues, green volunteerism

“includes either group or solitary activities that may be formal – where people commit their time and skills to an organisation on a regular basis, such as docents at a nature preserve or park – or less formal – such as regular participation in outings to remove invasive weeds.”  
 Bushway *et al.*, 2011: 1

The benefits of green volunteerism are various. They are however much more evident, when “environmental volunteer activities directly engage members of the public in the generation of data and discussion of issues of personal and public concern, confidence in science-based decision making in environmental management may be reinforced” (Bushway *et al.*, 2011: 2). Green volunteerism also produces mental and physical health effects, as well as a connection to the natural world that is within the realm of the spiritual (Becker, 2001). The participation of older adults in green volunteerism has been given scant attention in academia. The 2008 Cornell National Social Survey, conducted by the Survey Research Institute (SRI), specifically addressed citizens’ connections to environmental management (Bushway *et al.*, 2011). As much as 80 percent of respondents felt that they would do what is right for the environment, even if it meant spending additional time and money, with respondents being unanimous in their responses regarding the importance of maintaining the environment for future generations. Similar trends were noticed when data is limited to adults aged 55 plus (table 4).

**Table 4: Connections to environmental management among adults over 55**

Would do what is right for the environment no matter the cost	83%
Think we should maintain the environment for future generations	96%
Have a membership in environmental organisations	12%
Engage in volunteer activities related to the environment	15%

Source: Bushway *et al.*, (2011: 3)

Librett and colleagues (2005) have conducted empirical research on the participation of older persons in green volunteerism. This study reported that older adults who volunteered in environmental activities were nearly “three times more likely to meet physical activity recommendations than those not volunteering on environmental projects” (Bushway *et al.*, 2011: 4). Although it may be argued that further research is needed to validate this statement, these findings support the thesis that environmentally-based volunteer programs could “simultaneously improve individual health, increase access to physical activity for the community, and improve the environment” (Librett *et al.*, 2005: 12). Pillemer (2010) provided a number of reasons why environmental volunteering and civic engagement has the potential to be highly beneficial for older people. These include

- ...volunteering that involves physical activity, as does most environmental volunteering, has major health benefits for older persons;
- environmental volunteering promotes better health outcomes because it leads to increased exposure to nature...;
- environmental organizations are age-integrated; unlike many senior centers and related facilities, they bring together people of different ages in meaningful activities;
- ...environmental volunteering has been more successful in [engaging men in later-life volunteering] because it is consistent with older men’s lifelong patterns...  
Pillemer, 2010: 11

Pillemer also examined the possible difficulties that older persons face in taking part in green volunteerism and reported three potential barriers

First, some people felt they had insufficient expertise or knowledge about environmental issues and science to contribute effectively. Second, they were unaware of opportunities for environmental stewardship in their communities and were unsure how they could become involved. Finally, environmental volunteer activities were not perceived as socially fulfilling compared with other types of opportunities [e.g., volunteering in schools or churches]. Pillemer, 2010: 12

## METHODOLOGY

This paper developed as a follow-up study to a national survey on older volunteerism in Malta commissioned by the office of the Commissioner for Voluntary Organisation (Formosa, forthcoming). The aim of the follow-up study, which elicited the data and discussion presented herein, was threefold – namely, to (i) unearth the participation patterns of older persons in Malta involved in green volunteering, (ii) to make recommendations about a number of policy options and action strategies – at national, local, and community levels, and (iii), to improve the engagement of older persons in green volunteering. This generated four key objectives namely:

- gathering information on the character of green volunteerism in later life;
- discerning the motivations that inspire and encourage older persons to engage in green volunteerism;
- uncovering the benefits that ensue from participating in green volunteerism for older persons; and
- developing social policy strategies to recruit and support older persons as green volunteers.

Due to the character of the aforementioned aim and objectives, the study opted for a qualitative methodology which “is concerned with how ordinary people manage their practical affairs in everyday life, or how they get things done” (Neuman, 2002: 71). More specifically, qualitative studies constitute the “systematic analysis of socially meaningful action through the direct detailed observation of people in natural settings in order to arrive at understandings and interpretations of how people create and maintain their social worlds” (*ibid.*). The deployed method of data collection consisted of the “semi-structured interview” with fourteen older persons participating in green volunteerism. In semi-structured interviews, the interviewer is normally required to ask specific open-ended questions but is free to probe beyond them if necessary with the interview developing as a joint product of what the interviewees and interviewers talk with each other. Therefore, semi-structured interviews contain the advantages of both standardised and non-standardised interviews such as flexibility, control of the interview situation, and collection of supplementary information (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 1996). Data was analysed following Glaser and Strauss’s (1967) grounded-theory

approach which advises to assign codes, annotations, and memos to data arising from observations, conversations, and interviews.

## OLDER PERSONS IN GREEN VOLUNTEERISM

In Malta, one finds many non-government organisations engaged in green volunteerism. Key organisations include (i) *Friends of the Earth* which aims to be the human voice of the earth to bring about a peaceful, just, equitable and sustainable society, respectful of present and future generations by inspiring change and promoting solutions; (ii) *Flimkien ghal ambjent ahjar* which lobbies for the better preservation and use of the heritage of the Maltese islands, not only for the sake of preservation but also as an agent of social regeneration in areas such as lower Valletta, the Three Cities and Gozo; and (iii), *Nature Trust* which lobbies to get legal protection for various plants and animals in the Maltese Islands, helping to save from extinction some of the local endemic species, as well as engaging in environmental education. All three organisations were contacted with the scope that coordinators link the research with possible older volunteers for interview purposes. However, this strategy proved unsuccessful since, despite the aid of coordinators, no older volunteers made themselves available for interviewing purposes. Faced with such a failure, and running out of time, older volunteers were successfully contacted and interviewed through snowball sampling. The list of interviewees, and their key characteristics, is presented in *table 5*.

The participants in the study were all over 60 sixty years old, in full-time retirement, and devoted many hours per week of unpaid volunteer work to improving the environment. The character of their work in green volunteerism was various:

■ James is involved in activities that protect the environment, halting environmental destruction, and saving wildlife. He is active in fund raising and in various campaigns such as those related to climate change and those against the introduction and use of genetically modified food. James is very concerned that natural sites are being turned in property development sites and claims that he is ready to do all he can to “halt the rape of Malta”.

■ Rita works with families and young children to bring about greater levels of awareness on a myriad of environmental issues ranging from tree planting and waste management. She believes that the promotion for green living must be based on a bottom-up approach as politicians will not draft and implement eco-friendly policies unless citizens pressure them to do so. Rita is very concerned about the way consumerism is denting people’s quality of life.

■ Carmen helps with the farming of organic products and volunteers in promoting eco-friendly products ranging from dishwasher liquid to cosmetics. She is very conscious of the harms that the “dangerous chemicals found in most daily items such as food, cleaning apparel, and even toys” is doing to the environments and our bodies. Carmen dreams and hopes that one day organic food and eco-friendly items will be staple items in family’s shopping lists.

**Table 5 : List of interviewees**

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Education attainment	Volunteering hours per week
James	65	male	secondary education	10
Rita	66	female	primary education	8
Carmen	63	female	primary education	10
Joe	69	male	primary education	random
Peter	69	male	secondary education	random
Michael	70	male	secondary education	random

■ Peter is engaged in monitoring activity that threatens wild birds, such as illegal hunting and trapping, and urban development in conservation areas on the Maltese islands. He is also interested in taking a more active part in monitoring the quality of the sea and the air. Peter believes that we cannot take the environment for granted and that one has to ensure that economic development does not harm the earth system.

■ Joe and Michael are involved in earth cleaning campaigns such as beaches and valleys. They are both concerned about the extensive use of plastics that people use for and during their outings, items which cannot be recycled, and end up building mountains of public dumps. Joe and Michael are also deeply concerned about the plastic and other non-biodegradable rubbish which ruins the eco-system and pose a threat to both wildlife and vegetation.

#### *Motivations*

The study uncovered three key types of motivational categories amongst green volunteers – namely, altruistic motivation, ideological motivation, and leisure-time motivation. Volunteers provided altruistic types of responses when asked why they volunteer, highlighting how they want to preserve the earth for future generations, limit the destruction of natural areas, and engage in sustainable living:

Everything I do is for future generations for my children, and their grandchildren. We have made so many mistakes in recent years, destroyed so many fields, and polluted the air we breathe and the sea which we enjoy so much in the summer, that I feel a responsibility to try, as much as possible, to improve the local environment. Future generations have a right to a much cleaner environment.

*Peter*

Others were motivated by an ideological commitment, driven by post-materialist values. These volunteers prioritised the preservation and sustainability of eco-friendly environments over material advancement and profit:

Success must not solely be measured by how much money we have in our pockets. It is meaningless to have the best available car possible and then having children suffering from asthma because these cars are pollut-

ing the environment. We have to think about quality of life in a holistic manner. If we have to earn a bit less but then experience a much cleaner environment, then so be it.

*Joe*

Finally, some volunteers who have significant leisure time on their hands are motivated to engage in volunteering, as a means to do something enjoyable and interesting, or to enhance personal development by learning new skills and gaining training. Indeed, some volunteers were not driven by some progressive or radical motives in their engagement in green volunteerism, but only did so because they enjoyed the work and perhaps more importantly, the company of fellow volunteers:

I am no extremist. I have voted all my life for the [Nationalist Party] which, in many ways, is directly responsible for the destruction of the sites that we are now working hard to preserve and conserve... I engage in [green volunteerism] because I enjoy it, gives me a purpose to live, retirement can be quite a problem if you do not have tasks to do and objectives to reach. I also enjoy meeting the people who volunteer beside me in [the organisation].

*James*

#### *Individual benefits*

Volunteers indicated that they experienced improved physical functioning as a result of “helping out”. Perceptions of positive changes in their physical health were highly common amongst older volunteers:

Since I started volunteering in [this organisation], I feel healthier. I move more and am less at home where I tend to overeat. When volunteering you are always on the go, walking, going up and down the stairs... When we stop for Christmas and Easter periods, or when it is too hot such as August, I start feeling stiff. I worry that if I will stop volunteering I will start suffering from arthritis.

*Peter*

The experience of volunteering also resulted in improved levels of emotional well-being, life satisfaction, self-esteem, and overall morale. Respondents reported that the act of engaging in green volunteerism instilled in them higher degrees of happiness, optimism, and self-worth

on one hand, and fewer symptoms of depression, anxiety, and somatisation on the other.

I have always suffered from depression. I worry a lot, about everything. Working and raising my children made me very depressed because I was always waiting for something bad to happen. When I retired my depressive symptoms increased as I had too much time on my hands and so little things to do. Volunteering keeps me active, keeps me doing something. Actually, it has made me happy!

*Rita*

Volunteering in eco-friendly activities aided older persons in combating loneliness, as volunteering leads to social networking, and is also useful in gaining “useful” social contacts. In other words, volunteering emerged as a successful strategy in combating both social isolation and social exclusion. In short, green volunteering resulted in improved levels of social capital:

The best thing about this is that, in addition of doing something good for the environment, is that you meet same-minded people, and that you make many friends. I am not very good at making friends, I am very shy, but at the organisation I am meeting other retirees, just like me, and we talk and help each other. We also meet for a coffee when we are not volunteering.

*Carmen*

#### *Environmental benefits*

The study also noted that green volunteering on behalf of older persons leads to a range of environmental benefits such as (i) enhancing the environmental and aesthetic values of the area, (ii) rehabilitating areas for future generations to enjoy, (iii) conserving native flora, fauna and remnant vegetation, (iv) fostering community support and stewardship of natural areas, and (vi), encouraging active community involvement in the management of natural areas. Indeed, green volunteering produces practical environmental improvements at a relatively low cost. As Church and Elster (2002: 32) underline, “while the direct environmental impacts of most local projects are indeed limited and are mostly restricted to improvements in their own localities ...the collective impact of such projects on national targets for sustainable development is increasingly significant”. Indeed, a related benefit of environmental

volunteering is the impact it has on the environmental awareness, knowledge, attachment and sense of responsibility of volunteers.

It is also positive to note that Foster-Smith and Evans (2002: 207) report that the monitoring by volunteers is not generally “significantly different” from that collected by scientists, indicating that volunteers who are appropriately trained have the ability to collect data accurately and thereby make valuable contributions to environmental knowledge. At the same time, green volunteering results in a number of educational benefits for participants such as (i) learning more about environmental problems and proactive solutions, (ii) learning and building new skills for the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, (iii) getting actively involved and learn new skills for managing natural areas, (iv) creating peer pressure as volunteers go out into the community as advocates and encourage others to also learn and change their attitudes and behaviour, (v) adding variety to one’s work experience and make contacts with potential employers, as well as (vi) gaining on-the-job experience before committing to further education or a career change (The Volunteer Coordinators Network, 2011). Although there is no data in this study that can explicitly confirm these benefits, the responses given in the survey implicitly suggest that it is very likely that the older persons who engage in volunteerism benefit from the above-mentioned positive outcomes.

#### **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

On the basis of the foregoing recommendations are being made for the adoption of policy options and the formulation of action strategies – at national, local, and community levels with the aim of improving the engagement of older persons in green volunteering. These include expanding participation by older persons who are ageing actively, presenting green volunteering as an option in Pre-retirement Programmes, advertising green volunteering as a means of self-actualisation rather than as a form of unpaid work, and designing green volunteer roles that do not necessitate high levels of education.

*Expand participation by older persons who are ageing actively.* Older adults who are ageing actively attend community centres, go to the cinema, restaurants, theatres, and libraries, as well as spending extensive time with family, friends,



and acquaintances. Undoubtedly, many of these older persons would be very willing to engage in green volunteerism. Eco-friendly societies must engage in more efficient recruitment strategies that will involve locating new volunteers in such places through effective and efficient advertising.

*Present green volunteering as an option in Pre-retirement Programmes.* There is a real urgency in planning and carrying out learning programmes for those persons who are nearing retirement age. In such learning programmes a component focusing on “green volunteering” should be included. Volunteering in eco-friendly is to be presented as an interesting and constructive way to spend time in later life. Facilitators in pre-retirement programmes are to present learners with the vast range of eco-friendly volunteer organisations in which one can join and become active during retirement.

*Advertise green volunteering as a means of self-actualisation rather than as a form of unpaid work.* Running counter to the general emphasis on paid work, an educational campaign on green volunteering is warranted, one which presents this activity as a way to make new friends, do something worthwhile as regards the environment, and achieve personal fulfilment and self worth. It must be stressed that green volunteerism promotes better health outcomes, as it leads to increased exposure to nature, and that – unlike senior centres – they hold a potential for inter-generational activities since they bring together people of different ages in meaningful pursuits.

*Design green volunteer roles that do not necessitate high levels of education.* As older people with a high level of education and who are in better health tend to participate more actively in volunteering opportunities, space should also be provided for older persons with lower level of education and those who have health problems. In other words there is a need to ascertain that there are available roles for people who might be in relatively poorer health and in low-income brackets by offering transportation, reimbursement for travel and free lunches.

## CONCLUSION

This paper discussed the findings of study on older persons who are engaged in volunteer work with eco-friendly non-governmental organisation. It is safe to assume that their work makes a very valid contribution to the preservation of the earth and the sustainability of the economy. At the same time, the positive effects that green volunteerism holds for the older persons themselves were also highlighted. A number of policy options and action strategies to improve the engagement of older persons in green volunteering were recommended.

What has to be underlined is that for green volunteering to improve both its presence and quality, eco-friendly organisations must also do their part by working hard to become more “age-friendly”. Such organisations must be well disposed to make special and necessary accommodations to cater for the different and maybe specific needs of older persons. Most importantly, locations of work must be made more physically accessible, and a range of volunteer jobs is to be provided for people with different physical and cognitive abilities. This, of course, implies making more efficient transportation arrangements, and offering more daytime activities given that many older people tend to be reluctant to leave their homes late in the evening and at night. In other words, there is an urgent need for eco-friendly organisations to recognise the heterogeneity of the older volunteer population, and that a “one size fits all” approach will not work in ageing societies. Addressing adequately these issues may go a long way in increasing the intake of older persons in green volunteerism, as well as more intense levels of involvement. Perhaps this might be part of the solution, in eliminating one of the key missing links that is acting as a constraint to a more sustainable future.

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