

Foresight Styles and Volunteerism Attitudes in Kenya

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Abstract. *Volunteering is essential for community development and social cohesion, yet research rarely connects volunteer attitudes with individuals’ orientations toward the future. The paper addresses this gap by examining the relationship between foresight styles and attitudes toward volunteerism in Kenya, a country characterized by high levels of civic engagement and increasing use of foresight in policy and development initiatives. Building on the Foresight Styles Assessment (FSA) framework, we administered a survey to 358 respondents across multiple Kenyan counties. Exploratory factor analysis and reliability testing broadly reproduced the four foresight styles proposed in prior research, while also revealing a contextually adapted construct labeled Future-Oriented Sense-Making and Agency (FOSMA). Regression analysis shows that FOSMA and situational adaptability are significant predictors of positive attitudes toward volunteerism, whereas reactive and tester orientations are not statistically significant. These findings suggest that value-based future orientation and a sense of collective agency play a stronger role in shaping volunteer attitudes than flexibility alone.*

Keywords: foresight style assessment, volunteerism, forward-looking, adaptability.

Introduction

Volunteering is commonly understood as the freewill contribution of time, skills, or labor, for the benefit of others or society without direct financial compensations (Cnaan et al., 1996). Volunteering is deeply rooted in religious beliefs and practices of different denominations, but also emerged as a civic activism fixing the market failures. Volunteering behavior is deeply shaped by attitudes, expectations, and orientations towards the future, and influences how individuals choose to engage, sustain participation, and imagine the social value of their inputs. However, systematic literature search in Web of Science did not find any psychometric study blending foresight (or futures studies, future orientation, or anticipatory) with volunteerism (volunteer*, civic/community engagement, or civil society), despite the formal output consisting of 422 papers. Authors’ own participant observations of civil society and policy level foresight exercises hinted that we should both conceptually blend and empirically explore the future orientation and volunteerism, which are still found in two distinct research traditions.

Kenya is a perfect fit for such adventure as it is often referred to as a top volunteer country (in the world) by different metrics, engaging between half to almost entire population. Recently (in the last five years) there are growing number of foresight projects with national, sectoral or regional foci (i.e. Nakuru county) after the first wave of future studies like *Kenya Vision 2030* (started as early as in 2006/2007) and followed up by the CARE’s Participatory Scenario Planning for the Kenya Meteorological Department in 2011.

In Kenya and across Africa, foresight studies have been used to explore youth futures, development planning, education, health systems and governance, hence, allows for an investigation of how volunteers expectations of the future shape the present action, making attitudes towards uncertainty, change, and long-term effect occupy a central position in the analytical framework. The success of these studies depends on awareness of and availability of foresight competence, which some authors argue could be assessed through the instrument of foresight style assessment (Dian, 2009 and Gary, 2009).

Literature review

Putnam (2000) argues that civic engagement (including volunteering) builds social capital in the form of networks, norms of reciprocity, and trust, which in turn facilitate coordination and collective problem-solving. Salamon et. al (2011) argue for systematic measurement and economic valuation of volunteer work to make its contribution visible and comparable in order to inform long-term policymaking and planning, thereby framing volunteering as a form of societal capacity that merits strategic attention.

Sustainable volunteer ecosystems often rely on actors (which we could call “mobilizers”) who facilitate participation and reduce barriers to entry, inspire engagement, and design inclusive opportunities for attracting volunteers. Those actors perform different roles that reflect the institutional and social processes shaping volunteering described in the literature (Hustinx et al., 2010). Here we would look at those roles through the foresight style lenses (framer, adapter, tester and reactor) of Gary (2009), which we believe has not been done so far.

Framers are led by missions and visions, they focus on long-term developments, think in systems and articulate meaningful narratives with the aim to shape the future. Framer volunteers are purpose-driven, they engage in human rights, sustainability, broader regime changes and democratic transformations. They are often social entrepreneurs or rich philanthropists, who start new civic initiatives, but could be university professors or priests, who inspire and lead their communities of students or congregation. Mutua and Kiruhi (2021) document a bit different value-based leadership among village elders, where volunteering is oriented towards long-term community empowerment. In terms of Clary et al. (1998) framers are driven by values and enhancement functions.

Adapters adjust behavior as conditions change, remain open to new information, cope well with uncertainty. Adapter volunteers step in different roles as conditions require. We could distinguish between life-cycle adaptation (i.e. volunteers engaging in activities around their kids, as they grow), relocation adaptation (based on different community needs) or rapid response adaption (natural crises). Adapters often recruit other volunteers when they change workplace and transfer the practice of corporate involvement, for instance. These are usually skill-based pro-bono services (IT, legal, construction, etc.). In terms of Clary et al. (1998) adapters are driven primarily by career and social functions. This is supported by Paine et al. (2013) finding that young people experiment while looking for a job and often test their skillsets to enhance career prospects through volunteering. This practice (motivation) could also be attributed to the testers category, but we assign it here because of Clary’s authority.

Testers are early innovation adopters; they try new methods and tools (often digital) and learn through trial and error. Tester volunteers are the first to pilot initiatives as micro crowdfunding for causes, trying digital volunteering. In terms of Clary et al. (1998) testers align best with the understanding function as they are motivated to learn through experimentation. The border line between adapters and testers is blurred. We observe a growing interest in using civic-

focused digital games in Kenya and other countries in Africa (Fisher, 2020) suggesting that game mechanics can be used to support civic learning and voluntary engagement. Games create perfect conditions for scenarios and to develop a sense of the future (Bankova, 2023). Thus, games can cultivate foresight by embedding scenario thinking, trade-offs, and collective decision-making into the gameplay.

Reactors respond to events rather than anticipating them (volunteer firefighters). They rely on existing organizational routines and sometimes after social pressure. They prefer incremental changes and see themselves as last guardians (security, tradition, cultural continuity) and are led by moral obligation. Faith-based volunteers often fit this category best. Dominated by the protective function in terms of Clary et al. (1998), reactors often engage in volunteering only when necessary to reduce the psychological stress or ego-threat associated with being left behind by external developments.

Grassroots volunteerism in Kenya is characterized by a bottom-up development philosophy emphasizing homegrown solutions to poverty (Mwangi & Were, 2019) and closely linked to the concepts of ubuntu (“I am because we are”) and utu (the Swahili equivalent). Because of the self-identification with the kinship or larger communities, which are not only present now, but will continue in the future through the descendants, the volunteering in Kenya is far more future-oriented than in liberal democracies, where volunteering is much more fixing the institutional failures of today.

Despite growing recognition of the essential role of volunteerism for the sustainable development, turbulent technological and social innovations in support of new forms of volunteerism there are still unmet important research and policy gaps, well conceptualized by Mati et al. (2025). As a response to their call for a global dialogue on the future of volunteerism we join this conversation by empirically exploring the links between foresight styles or more generally – the anticipatory capacity, and volunteer attitudes in Kenya.

Methodology

We focus on the three dimensions of attitudes towards volunteerism, identified by the literature review, which capture a) the essentiality of volunteering for community development and the broader public good, b) the motivational orientation towards enabling and encouraging others to participate in meaningful civic activities, and c) the adaptive disposition to adjust volunteering practices in response to emerging trends and evolving societal needs.

Together, these dimensions reflect a forward-looking and engaged perspective on volunteerism, emphasizing both its perceived societal importance and the individual’s readiness to actively support and innovate within volunteer initiatives. The scale applied to all survey questions is a 7-point Likert scale (1 – *Does not describe me at all*, 7 – *Describes me perfectly*).

We administered a survey (as part of the first author’s PhD work) in Kenya in two periods – first: December 14, 2024 – April 2025 and second: July 1, 2025 – August 26, 2025. The first was entirely online, using Microsoft forms and distributing it through direct emails and Viber/WhatsApp messages using personal and institutional networks of authors in Kenya, including cooperatives, faith-based organizations, universities, local and central governments, NGOs, and international organizations present in the country and resulted in 134 valid responses. We received a strong feedback that due to internet connectivity, especially outside big cities like Nairobi and Mombasa, there were significant accessibility problems limiting the completion of the relatively long survey. Thus we administrated a second wave of the survey through a paper-and-

pencil surveys and telephone interviews in the Summer of 2025, which resulted in 224 valid responses (although with fewer data than the first wave). We were able to reach out to more remote areas such as Garisa, Homabay, Machakos, Makueni, Marsabit, Nakuru, and Siaya counties and to respondents who travel a lot across Kenya (either based in Nairobi and Mombasa or coming from other places than those mentioned) due to their engagement with volunteerism and social care.

The survey included the initial 45 items (provided in the Appendix) from Dian (2009)'s seminal work on foresight styles, three questions on attitudes towards volunteerism capturing the dimensions from above, and other questions, which we will not deal with in this paper. The scale used by Gary (2009) was a six-point scale with numerical values 0, 3, 6, 9, 12, 15 with the two extremes similar to ours. In replication and adaptation studies of FSA authors have used 4, 5, 6 (mostly), and 7 point Likert scales.

The *essential* variable is the agreement of the respondent with the statement “*I believe volunteering is essential for promoting community development and meeting societal needs*”. *Reward* variable corresponds to “*I find it rewarding to create opportunities that encourage others to volunteer and contribute to meaningful causes*” and adaptation – to “*I am open to adapting volunteer activities to align with emerging trends and changing community priorities*”. Finally, we construct a composite volunteer index as an average of essential, reward and adaptation orientations for volunteerism.

With this study we first aimed to examine the cross-context validity of foresight style assessments proposed by Dian (2009) and Gary (2009) with a Kenyan sample. Second, we expect to explain attitudes towards volunteerism (volunteerism index) with one or more styles (constructs), identified through factor analysis.

The statistical analysis was conducted by IBM SPSS v.25.

Results and discussions

Exploratory factor analysis of all initial Dian's 45 items, borrowed from Gary (2009) using Principal Axis Factoring (PAF) and Varimax rotation with Kaiser Normalization was conducted. It resulted in 11 factors through 17 iterations. The sampling adequacy (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure) was excellent (0.900). Bartlett's test of sphericity: $\chi^2(990) = 5480.287$ was significant ($p < .001$) and supported factorability. The cumulative variance explained was 44.72%, which is not bad for social science. However, several factors were weakly defined (including factors dominated by single items), and some items showed low communalities (e.g., $< .30$), suggesting item heterogeneity and supporting refinement through item reduction and re-estimation. There is no space to fully report each item's characteristics, but all of them have a solid reason to be eliminated from the analysis, similar to the decision made by Gary.

We then conduct reliability analysis for the four constructs proposed by Gary (2009): adapter (12 items), framer (4 items), tester (5 items), reactor (5 items), reported in Table 1.

Cronbach's alpha indicated strong internal consistency for Adapter, Tester and Reactor styles and borderline/lower reliability for Framer style. Alpha-if-item-deleted analysis does not improve the results for adapter, tester and reactor styles. In all constructs our alphas are lower than Gary's.

Removing q26 from the Framer construct increased alpha to 0.602. Additional exploratory replacements improved alpha even further. Inclusion of q24 instead of q26 in the construct increased alpha to 0.660. In Kenya's context the item related to framing the future through values (q24) aligns better with the Framer construct, compared to by the item related to reacting to big plans (q26).

Table 1. Internal consistency of original FSA constructs for Kenya

Construct (Gary, 2009)	Items	N items	Valid responses	Cronbach's α
Adapter	q9 q12 q20 q27 q30 q31 q35 q41 q42 q43 q44 q45	12	356	0.847
Tester	q2 q15 q23 q34 q36	5	357	0.706
Framer	q6 q25 q26 q39	4	357	0.598
FramerK (adapted)	q6 q24 q25 q39	4	357	0.660
Reactor	q3 q4 q10 q29 q32	5	357	0.719

Source: Authors' own survey results and research.

In volunteer settings, motivation is often expressed as values, meaning, moral identity and faith-based duty, rather than reacting to big plans, often associated with government programs or political formations. Kenya's volunteering is predominately community-embedded, not plan-driven, and hence, religious values and community solidarity will push internal framing rather than reactive orientation.

Using the original 26 items, a Principle Component Analysis with Varimax rotation and forcing a four component solution broadly reproduced Gary's four foresight styles. While the Reactor, Tester, and Adapter constructs show strong correspondence with the original factor composition, the Framer construct appears weaker, with one item (q26) showing reduced coherence in the Kenya sample. The total variance explained is 46.332%. For robustness we redo the PCA with q24 replacing q26 and hold the four components. We observe a non-substantial increase in the total variance explained to 46.36%, but the factor structure is now cleaner conceptually.

What we observed is that Tester and Reactor composition remained unchanged but seven items "migrated" from Adapter to Framer factor (the original items from Framer stayed there). We performed additional alpha-if-item deleted exploration for the FramerK2 11 item construct, but alpha worsened at every drop, so we keep all items.

Table 2. Internal consistency of adapted FSA constructs for Kenya

Construct	Items	N items	Valid responses	Cronbach's α
AdapterK (situational)	q9 q20 q30 q35 q42	5	356	0.726
Tester	q2 q15 q23 q34 q36	5	357	0.706
FramerK2 (FOSMA)	q6 q12 q24 q25 q27 q31 q39 q41 q43 q44 q45	11	357	0.832
Reactor	q3 q4 q10 q29 q32	5	357	0.719

Source: Authors' own survey results and research.

Conceptually we need a new name, which more coherently fits the items in the construct. They include future orientation (q6, q25, q39), values integration (q24), big-picture thinking (q43, q44), possibility/optimism framing (q12, q41), agency and influence (q27, q31, q45). One plausible new construct could be Future-oriented sense-making and agency (FOSMA). The agency in Kenyan context is primarily purpose-driven and social (collective). We can continue to refer to AdapterK (no need to change it) and interpret it as a situational adaptability, as the remaining content of the Gary's notion was transferred to form FOSMA.

Next, we assign to each respondent a dominant factor by the highest mean items forming the individual factors. There are different approaches in handling the equal means and hence the groupings. Table 3 reports the descriptive statistics for aligning ties in the following preferences order: AdapterK, Tester, FOSMA and Reactor. There are potentially different dominant logics, but we subscribe to the following.

In Kenyan volunteers' setting the flexibility, quick adjustment, seeing alternatives and acting form a baseline capacity, so AdapterK reflects general adaptive functioning and could be considered as a top priority. Tester reflects an exploratory orientation of a person and his characteristics as an early adopter. We perceive it as a narrower than AdapterK because it emphasizes novelty/trends rather than broad personal agency and coping capacity. FOSMA style is more cognitive and attitudinal, so we give priority to AdapterK and Tester. Reactor style reflects the resistance to rapid changes and caution and if a tie is observed we tend to believe that more agentic styles will prevail.

Attitudes toward volunteerism

The quantitative findings demonstrate a strong normative consensus among respondents regarding the essential role of volunteering in community development and societal wellbeing. 44.1% of respondents align perfectly with the statement and only 11.2% share disagreement with the statement. This could be interpreted as that volunteering is not perceived as discretionary altruism but rather as a foundational mechanism for sustaining social systems. This particularly aligns with ubuntu and utu concepts well internalized in Kenyan society.

Similarly to prior research in African contexts which see the volunteers as mobilizers who leverage everyday relationships to promote health equity, accountability, and participation (Sandy et al., 2012), we found a perfect match in terms of feeling reward from creating opportunities for others to volunteer (41% gave highest assessment and only 13% do not feel rewards). Last but not least, 38% of respondents perfectly align with assessment that they are open to adapt volunteering to emerging trends and community priorities. Only 10% do not agree with that.

Table 3. Attitudes towards volunteerism by dominant foresight style in Kenya

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
AdapterK (situational)	85	6.0549	1.10056	3.00	7.00
Tester	59	5.5480	1.39617	1.00	7.00
FOSMA	111	6.0240	0.91200	2.33	7.00
Reactor	102	5.1830	1.24953	1.00	7.00
Total	357	5.7124	1.20266	1.00	7.00

Source: Authors' own survey results and research.

Levene's test indicated heterogeneity of variances ($p=0.001$) so Games-Howell post-hoc comparisons (Games and Howel, 1976) could be used for pair-wise tests of means of the aggregated volunteerism index. The only significant ($p=0.01$) differences in means are $\text{mean(AdapterK)} > \text{mean(Reactor)}$ and $\text{mean(FOSMA)} > \text{mean(Reactor)}$.

As a robustness test we repeat the analysis excluding respondents that have equal scores on at least two styles. There are 310 responses with clear dominant style after removing 47 ties. The biggest drop is observed in AdapterK (35 less), Tester (11 less) and FOSMA (1 less). The two pairwise differences observed earlier still hold. The level of significance of $\text{mean(AdapterK)} > \text{mean(Reactor)}$ worsens a bit ($p=0.024$) but the $\text{mean(FOSMA)} > \text{mean(Reactor)}$ is still at $p=0.01$ level. A new significant difference appears $\text{mean(FOSMA)} > \text{mean(Tester)}$ with $p=0.049$.

Our key result is robust: Reactor is consistently lower than AdapterK and FOSMA. Because removing ties pulled AdapterK down and rebalanced the variance/group composition; and FOSMA stayed high and stable while Tester stayed lower. That made the contrast between FOSMA and Tester clearer.

Dominant FOSMA respondents (in the reduced sample with no ties) reported higher volunteer attitudes than Testers, suggesting that in the Kenyan volunteer context, volunteering might be more strongly associated with future-oriented, values-based sensemaking and long-term societal framing than with novelty-seeking or trend-following orientation. This needs further testing based on the whole sample and a new strategy to deal with ties.

Finally, we regress volunteerism index against the four foresight styles and test for collinearity (based on reduced sample with 310 responses), in an attempt to explain the volunteerism attitudes through the foresight styles.

Table 4. Linear regression predicting volunteerism attitudes (tie-free cases)

Predictor / Model statistic	B	SE B	β	t	p	Tolerance	VIF
Intercept (Constant)	1.448	0.363	—	3.988	< 0.001	—	—
FOSMA	0.565	0.074	0.458	7.591	< 0.001	0.573	1.744
AdapterK	0.213	0.064	0.197	3.340	0.001	0.603	1.659
Reactor	-0.023	0.050	-0.022	-0.454	0.650	0.852	1.173
Tester	0.019	0.055	0.018	0.338	0.736	0.709	1.410

Source: Authors' own survey results and research.

Table 5. Model Fit

Statistic	Value
N (listwise)	310
R	0.602
R ²	0.362
Adjusted R ²	0.354
Std. error of estimate	0.9666
F(df1, df2)	43.277 (4, 305)
p-value (model)	< .001
Max condition index	19.751

Source: Authors' own survey results and research.

Collinearity diagnostics indicated no concerns as all VIFs ≤ 1.744 and the max condition index is $19.751 < 30$. Reactor and Tester are not significant. If we redo the regression only with FOSMA and AdapterK, the R² stays unchanged (0.362). FOSMA β coefficient is 0.568 and AdapterK β is 0.213 (little bit stronger than in the regression with the four foresight styles) and there are no collinearity concerns. This translates into FOSMA being 2.5 times more influential than AdapterK in predicting the volunteerism attitudes index. This indicates that future-oriented sensemaking and value-based agency are more central to volunteer attitudes than flexibility and adaptability per se. While adaptability remains important, it appears to play a secondary role once individuals' future framing and normative orientation toward social contribution are taken into account.

Although here we measure only attitudes, we could easily extend the results that people do not volunteer primarily because they are flexible and react on demand on the spot. They volunteer because they see a future need, attach meaning to it, and feel responsible for acting. Flexibility helps them adapt, but it does not create the motivation. Volunteering thus emerges as a form of grassroots foresight, rooted in moral commitment, sustained through social relationships (ubuntu/utu), and operationalized through continuous learning and adaptation.

Conclusion

The paper reports the first to our knowledge administration of the FSA instrument in Kenya, validates and adapts Gary's (2009) factors to the local context. It could be used for self-reflection by volunteers, as indicated by the qualitative feedback we received from many of the respondents, that the survey helped them analyze themselves and focus on the future.

Limitations of the paper lie in: the non-probability, purposive sampling approach, which was used prior in similar studies (van der Laan & Erwee, 2012); heterogeneity of data collection (134 online and 224 paper-and-pencil self-administered and telephone interviews with more missing data) and limited questions (only three) on volunteerism; different scale applied (seven points instead of the original six), but we believe the odd scales provide finer graduations of agreement and the risk of central tendency did not materialize.

Despite the outlined limitations, the paper fills an important research gap of interrelating attitudes towards volunteerism with foresight styles. We find that future-oriented sense-making and (social) agency contributes significantly stronger than situational adaptability and flexibility in explaining the understanding of volunteerism as an essential instrument for community development and its enrichment and enhancement with modern trends.

The paper findings could be used by university professors and civic mobilizers to propose future-oriented scenario-based role-playing games to develop the sense of future of the Kenyan youth.

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Appendix: FSA 45 item inventory (Gary, 2009)

- q1 I give up benefits today for future rewards.
- q2 I test new products/trends very early after they come out.
- q3 I do not rush into the future, I like to know 'what is coming' before trying it out.
- q4 I am against changes that threaten one's position.
- q5 It is important to be alert so that today's actions do not become the future's problems.
- q6 I realize how important it is to focus on future questions.
- q7 I gladly take risks.
- q8 I change my opinions often.
- q9 I am active and influence others to make changes that are needed.
- q10 I don't like changes that disrupt opportunity.
- q11 I use information on the future as soon as I can in order to win advantages for my company or myself.
- q12 I see possibilities in all situations.
- q13 I try to build a picture of the future that is filled with nuances and alternate possibilities.
- q14 I balance between past, present, and future.
- q15 I am an early follower of whatever is new.
- q16 I take the chance when it comes up.
- q17 My worldview changes based on information on what the future might signify.
- q18 I maintain control when unrealistic plans appear.
- q19 I try to start up change projects that are needed in order to address the future.
- q20 It is easy for me to associate and see new aspects of whatever occurs.
- q21 I strive for balance in my life.
- q22 I have a clear vision of my own future.
- q23 I gladly take advantage of trends that pop up when the opportunity arises.
- q24 I integrate my values into my future plans.
- q25 I am very interested in futures questions.
- q26 It is important to react when "big" plans for the future are presented.
- q27 I gladly take initiative to adjustments and changes in my workplace.
- q28 I read and take in information from many different areas.
- q29 I don't want too much change.
- q30 I can quickly adjust to new situations.

- q31** I like to help other people to be active and alert.
- q32** I hold the line when new plans are imposed.
- q33** I read a lot.
- q34** I am conscious of and follow the big trends in society, business, and politics.
- q35** I find new alternatives all the time.
- q36** I like to go along when new trends come.
- q37** I gladly try to create a trend that I can make use of.
- q38** I like to influence others.
- q39** I focus on greater future questions.
- q40** I work with today's questions.
- q41** I believe everything is possible.
- q42** I am a flexible person.
- q43** I find it easy to see how different trends interact with one another.
- q44** I want to work with the big picture in the projects with which I am involved.
- q45** I ensure that things happen when I recognize that the future requires new ways of working and living.