

Youth volunteering, employability and sustainable livelihoods

Exploring the role of the
corporate sector

INSIGHTS PAPER

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FOREWORD

In 2022 IAVE gave renewed focus to raising awareness and understanding of how the corporate sector can influence and support volunteering as an agent of sustained systemic change to help young people enhance their employability and find employment. IAVE's initial goal was to share knowledge and commence conversations to enable more innovative involvement by business including working in partnership with leadership for volunteering organizations to create a community of practice.

IAVE commissioned an academic to provide 'stimulus material' and challenge questions to inform a series of dialogue sessions. These dialogue sessions took place over a period of six months culminating in a global dialogue at the World Volunteer Conference in Abu Dhabi, October 2022. The dialogues involved participation from some 100 volunteering organizations across 75 countries. This *Insights Paper* is important as it reflects a truly global diversity and engagement. It sets out what participants in the dialogues shared about this important global issue, what is currently happening and more importantly what needs to happen in the future to enable volunteering to be part of an effective response to support and enable young people to build more sustainable livelihoods. One of the important messages is that tackling these global challenges requires sustained commitment and cross sectoral collaboration.

IAVE hopes that both the initial *Challenge Paper* and this final *Insights Paper* will inform and challenge people about the needs of young people to create sustainable livelihoods and thrive economically and garner even greater support for the role volunteering can play in helping to make a positive difference.

IAVE intends to continue our focus on this issue, building stakeholder partnerships and seeking resources to take impactful action.

Nichole Cirillo

IAVE Executive Director

I. Background and Context

There is strong evidence that volunteering is an effective pathway for young people to develop skills, knowledge and networks to enhance their employability and participate effectively in sustainable livelihoods. However, the world of work is fast changing in complex ways. Global issues such as increasing inequalities, gender imbalances, the climate crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic impact both the ways young people volunteer and their chances for employment. All these concerns compound the fact that young people are three times more likely to be unemployed as compared to adults. Regional and country differences mean that not all young people are impacted equally. For instance, about 90% of young people in South Asia, Southeast Asia and Africa tend to be employed in precarious and informal contracts. Close to 40% of young people in Africa are considered 'working poor' – they are in employment but do not earn enough to get out of poverty.

The International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE) commissioned a *Challenge Paper* to highlight these issues and convened a series of dialogues to explore how the corporate sector can better build on volunteering by the youth as a pathway towards enhancing young people's employability. Aware that context plays a role in how these issues manifest, the series began with four regional dialogues: Europe, Africa, Asia (all online) and Latin America (in person in Mexico City) culminating in a global dialogue during the World Volunteer Conference in Abu Dhabi in October 2022. The dialogues were participated by volunteer-involving organisations (both state and non-state), corporate sector representatives, academics and young people themselves. The conversations were both exploratory (i.e., identifying issues, sharing of best practices) and action-oriented (i.e., ideating key actions, listing potential partners). **Individuals from some 100 organizations across 75 countries participated in the dialogues.** The list of countries and organizations participating can be found at Annex 1.

The original question posed was: **What could corporate sectors do (or are doing) to support volunteering as an agent or pathway to enhancing young people's employability and gain employment?**

Following insights from the four regional dialogues and IAVE's aim of focussing on concrete actions (i.e., beyond talking about the issues), the question was restructured for the global dialogue to read: **What actions need to be taken by the corporate sector with other actors to facilitate and support young people through their volunteering journey to develop skills, knowledge and attitude towards enhancing their livelihoods, employability and/or entrepreneurship?** It is notable that the question has expanded on two fronts. First, the focus is not only skills development but also in gaining knowledge and attitudes. This is in response

to the regional dialogues' emphasis on the more holistic development that volunteering facilitates. Second, there is a recognition of other pathways to economic empowerment beyond employment such as livelihoods and social entrepreneurship – an aspect that continued to feature prominently during the global dialogue. Three sub-questions were discussed during the Abu Dhabi session:

- ▶ Moving forward what ideas and actions are needed to provide a volunteering experience that develops the skills, knowledge and attitude of young people to improve their opportunities and employability options?
- ▶ What needs to be put in place for organizations such as educational establishments; employers; government; and young people themselves to better recognize the skills, knowledge and attitude of young people gained through their volunteering experience?
- ▶ If the corporate sector is one actor who are the other actors that need to be engaged to create success and sustainability?

In gathering a diversity of experts and advocates of youth volunteering from different country contexts to respond to these critical questions, the dialogues were able to surface nuanced understandings on this issue, sharing of best practices and ideating solutions and actions. As a stimulus for these discussions, IAVE's *Challenge Paper* provided a snapshot of the global issue of youth unemployment. This current document, aptly named as an *Insights Paper* could be considered as a collective response to these challenges. The next section of this paper outlines six key themes and ideas that have emerged from the IAVE dialogues, based on the questions above. Drawing from these insights a framework for action is proposed that could be a starting point for volunteer organisations, corporations and other actors to develop responses to further build on volunteering as a pathway for young people's employability, entrepreneurship and sustainable livelihoods.

II. Emerging insights

1. Common language on employability skills gained through volunteer involvement

Across the dialogues, there was a common agreement that volunteering plays a valuable role towards skills building and social network development that could later enhance employability. However, many participants noted the current **lack of common vocabulary or framework for young people to talk about and express the skills and knowledge they gained through volunteer involvement**. In the regional dialogues, there was an observation that young people often fail to talk about these skills in professional or work contexts and, at the same time, corporations and employers fail to recognise volunteering as 'work experience'. During the Europe dialogue, participants shared that young people rarely talk about volunteering during job interviews or fail to include them in their CVs and resume. The participants reflected that this might be partly due to young people's common understanding that volunteering is benefitting others and the wider community – unable to make visible the benefit of volunteer involvement to the young volunteers *themselves*. Some observed that many young people they work with fail to recognise that these skills are transferrable to other contexts beyond volunteering.

Therefore, developing a vocabulary or framework meaningful to and valued by both volunteers and employers is essential. Discussions from the global dialogue point to the need to "assist volunteers to 'translate' skills out of volunteering into 'HR language'". The need for a 'framework' also suggests the need for a sophisticated vocabulary that recognises the diversity of skills developed and knowledge gained and how they contribute to the continued personal and professional development of volunteers. In other cases, these skills may be related to competencies in young people starting their own businesses as entrepreneurs or contributing to local livelihood practices. How can corporations better recognise and validate the skills gained through volunteering so they can contribute to increasing young people's employability? There are examples of how this is done, such as the work of Wales Council for Voluntary Action on [turning volunteering experience into employment](#). By developing a shared language, these outcomes, skills, knowledge and values gained through volunteering become more explicit to young people and to the corporate sector alike.

2. Recognising volunteer effort and competencies

Beyond the use of a shared framework above, another key theme that emerged from the dialogues was the importance of recognising volunteering competencies in concrete and transferable ways. Particularly during the global dialogue in Abu Dhabi, an emerging theme from the discussion was the need to recognise, validate and certify skills and competencies

gained through volunteer involvement. Certifications that result from these processes are seen as effective means to ‘evidence’ skills gained and carry a currency in the world of work. Some suggested strategies include:

- ▶ Developing **standards and guidance** on volunteer participation that could then be the basis for certifying volunteer competencies
- ▶ **Professionalisation** initiatives within volunteering programmes such as working with corporations to implement capacity-building programmes responsive to the needs of the job market
- ▶ **Validation** of skills through a volunteer organisation accreditation programme to ensure the quality of volunteer experience, including the training implemented
- ▶ **Micro-credential** programmes such as accumulation of volunteer badges that focus on developing in-demand skills and know-how on specific topics and competencies.

When designed with key stakeholders, these pathways could have significant impact on raising the profile of volunteers – such as through the development of national (e.g., government-recognised), regional (e.g., transferable and with equivalency across countries) and even international certification and recognition of skills. However, participants also noted the need to be critical about efforts to ‘formalise’ volunteering activities that may be otherwise informal, flexible and founded on community solidarity. During the Europe dialogue, a couple of participants noted that professionalisation and formalisation may put too many restrictions on more communal forms of volunteering such as mutual aid and self-help groups. Therefore, careful attention must be given that these strategies do not further alienate local volunteers because of bureaucracy, paperwork and other potential constraints.

Underlying these efforts was a commitment towards increasing the public recognition of the role of volunteering in communities. Giving rewards, setting up volunteer awards and giving exemplary youth volunteers certificates of achievement were given as examples. These accolades have been found not only to develop young people’s self-esteem and social status (and consequently their confidence to look for jobs) but also provide information that could be referenced in young people’s CVs, resumes and profiles.

Finally, an important aspect identified during the global dialogue was the recognition of effective and impactful volunteering as a competency in *itself* and not only a pathway to learning other skills and outcomes and/or as an act towards the common good. Volunteering could then be considered a core competency that needs to be recognised and valued to create, develop and retain talent within organisations.

3. Clearer volunteering to employment pathways

Several participants were also concerned not only about building employability skills but also ensuring that engagements lead to actual employment. During the Europe and Africa dialogue,

this was referred to as a clear volunteering to career pathway. To this end the following insights were shared:

- ▶ Explore the possibility of designing youth volunteering programmes that meet corporate needs. This includes involving local corporations in designing, training and capacity-building programmes for volunteers
- ▶ Making corporations aware of the learning and skills outcomes intended by existing volunteering programmes.
- ▶ Conduct youth volunteering fairs where corporations are represented and, in turn, voluntary organisations learn what is required.
- ▶ Establish volunteer placements in corporations
- ▶ Curating a list of corporations (at the local, national or regional levels) that have explicit focus on engaging younger populations in volunteering in their companies.

Some participants suggested that corporations need to be aware of the difference between employability through volunteering (i.e., skills development to be more employable) versus volunteering into a job (where the pathway towards paid employment is clearer). Volunteering in company activities for example, could be a steppingstone for volunteers towards a more permanent job in the company or the organisation. A participant from Kenya shared that in their experience, members of a volunteer network were more intentional in ensuring that their volunteers secure future employment by establishing networks and working relationships with local businesses and enterprises as well as ensuring strong skills-matching strategies.

In establishing a more direct volunteering to employment pathway, there is the need to ensure that skills gained from volunteering respond to the skills required for work and life. Many recognise that volunteering is a useful opportunity not only to train young people with technical, instrumental and content-related skills (e.g., social media training, project management) but also skills such as communication, teamwork, project management, responding to feedback and other ‘life’ skills that are increasingly vital in the world of work and in developing enterprises.

4. Meaningful youth volunteer engagement

The focus on employability must not steer the focus away from making volunteering in itself a valuable experience for young people. This notion of creating meaningful volunteer engagement for young people also featured quite strongly in the conversations across the dialogues. A number of participants noted that when young people engage in volunteer roles meaningful to them and with issues that they are passionate about, they would be proud to talk about their work – including in job and work settings.

Engaging young people meaningfully means putting the effort in to understanding not only their needs but also the pre-existing knowledge and skills that they bring into the volunteer organisations and corporations. In the Latin America dialogue a participant shared, “companies

must focus on what skills young people already have and what they want. Most of the time it is taken for granted that what young people need is employment, without considering that they can be entrepreneurs. We have to learn to listen to them and generate solutions that contribute to their life project.” The emphasis here is to take young people’s aspirations and abilities as starting points in developing volunteering for employability programmes. During the global dialogue, there was a suggestion, for instance, for corporations and other actors to be more deliberate in matching young volunteers’ skills with the level/complexity of tasks within the organisation. These could be within three categories:

- ▶ Graduate volunteering – opportunities for fresh graduates in universities or technical vocational programmes to enhance skills gained through formal school.
- ▶ Experienced volunteering – individuals who have had some previous experience (around 2 years) and whose volunteer involvement will count as professional experience.
- ▶ Professional volunteering – individuals who are able to volunteer time and expertise on more complex tasks developed throughout years of involvement with a cause.

Another important aspect of youth involvement that was identified was youth leadership. Meaningful youth engagement requires a recognition of the leadership skills of young people and creating decision-making spaces where they can participate. In recognising young people’s leadership, the dialogues highlighted that corporations could also develop youth-led grant giving programmes where young people are given the freedom to design their own pathways for employment. Experiences from the African region highlighted how youth leaders themselves can become influencers within government, civil society and the corporate sector, taking their ideas forwards to impact policy and programme design.

Finally, during the Europe and Asia dialogue, it was also recognised that meaningful youth engagement requires specific skills and resources (e.g., implementing participatory approaches, youth-centered programming) that not all corporations and volunteer organisations possess. Within NGOs and corporations that work with volunteers, conversations during the global dialogue have pointed to the need for continued support and financing towards effective volunteer management, particularly when focussing on the youth population. It has been recognised that creating, training and retaining a youth volunteer pool takes time and resources that needs to be supported.

5. An expanded view of youth economic participation and empowerment

Participants were aware that the conversations we were having around employability were conducted against the backdrop of worsening economic crises and significant job losses across different contexts. One of the groups during the global dialogue for example, has highlighted that the lack of employment likewise changes young people’s volunteer involvement. For example, the lack of jobs and being in contexts where resources are poor, might indirectly

pressurise young people to volunteer. In the Latin America dialogue some participants shared that volunteering can ‘buy young people time’ while waiting for employment. This includes both in the economic sense (i.e., stipended volunteering providing young people with income) and in the social sense (i.e., they stay away from other anti-social activities such as participating in dangerous gangs). A participant during the global dialogue highlighted that in the UK, despite the tightness of the job market, it has likewise been difficult to recruit youth volunteers because some paid works are available and preferred by them (which, as observed, do not necessarily require previous experience or advanced skills). Across the dialogues, inequalities within the youth cohort were emphasised – different groups of young people experience unemployment and volunteering differently. Young people with disabilities, young women, rural youth – all face differing barriers to participating in volunteering and accessing work.

Inculcating the value of volunteering early in life was also identified as a potential strategy into securing future employment. There was a suggestion of including volunteering in the school and university curriculum, so it becomes part of the learning outcomes of formal education. Some participants also emphasised the importance of looking at the diverse ways by which people volunteer (i.e., not only through volunteer programmes) – such as volunteering in local communities, mutual aid and self-help groups and international volunteering.

Understanding the economic situation of young people, there was a point raised on the need to look into other pathways of economic empowerment beyond employment – such as sustainable livelihoods and social entrepreneurship – an idea that featured prominently during the Africa dialogue. Volunteering therefore should not only be seen as a pathway for young people to become more ‘hire-able’ employees but that it is also a basis to develop their social entrepreneurship skills and youth leadership skills that could contribute to local livelihoods. During the global dialogue, a group emphasised that when organisations embed youth leadership and social entrepreneurship into volunteering programmes – youth can become job creators themselves.

6. All hands-on deck: partnerships beyond corporations

The importance of developing cross-sectoral partnerships was also seen as an important aspect of building youth employability through volunteering. Corporate sectors being one actor, there are many others that need to be engaged with. During the global dialogue, the following actors were identified:

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------|
| ▶ Public sector | ▶ Politicians |
| ▶ Volunteer involving organisations and infrastructures | ▶ Local Chambers of Commerce |
| ▶ Media | ▶ Family units |
| ▶ Academic institutions | ▶ International organisations |
| | ▶ Youth |

- ▶ Governments
- ▶ Unions and Worker organisations
- ▶ Universities
- ▶ Vocational training and institutions
- ▶ Business Groups
- ▶ Social media influencers
- ▶ Local communities
- ▶ Faith based organisations
- ▶ Sports and Recreations
- ▶ High schools
- ▶ Student councils and unions
- ▶ Youth development organisations
- ▶ Employers
- ▶ Youth work services and youth development organisations

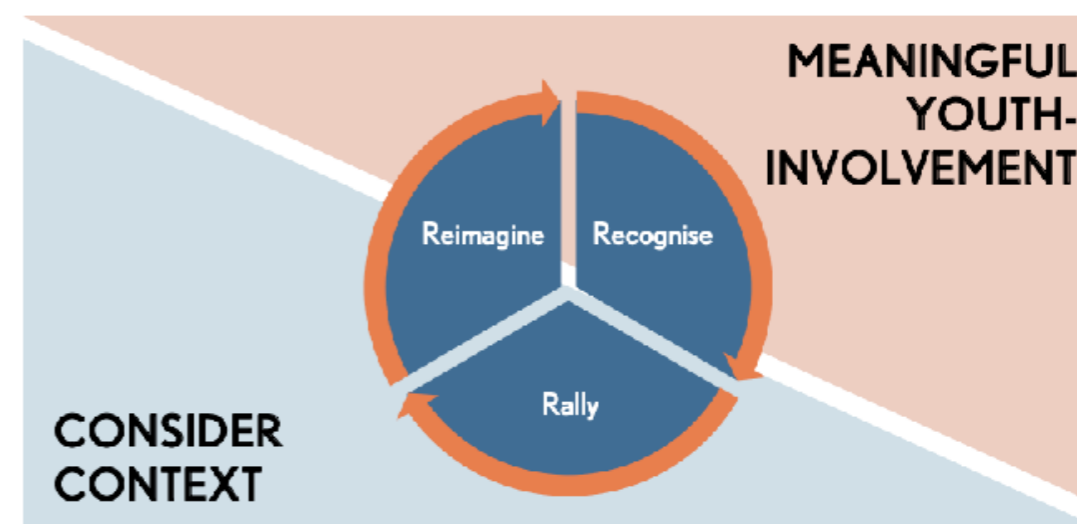
Cutting across the insights above is the importance of actors working together. For example, to recognise volunteering skills (see point 1 and 2 above), higher education institutions need to be involved. During the Africa dialogue, skills building through volunteering s often took place through collaboration with universities and technical-vocational schools which significantly helped in certifying competencies. There were also examples on how schools and other education institutions were able to develop courses and other modules that generates value through volunteering. Involving media channels and social media influencers was also identified as an important strategy to raise the profile of volunteering as a skills-building pathway. There was a suggestion about working with youth ambassadors who can use social media to provide examples on how volunteering skills have been used in their jobs.

Even *within* companies, collaboration is needed. During the Asia dialogue it was identified that volunteering is often lodged within the corporate social responsibility programmes of companies. The participants emphasised that a more holistic approach is needed such as involving human resources and upper management representatives in the team as well. They could bring important insights into hiring practices and skills needed for the job market.

Collaboration at the individual level was also emphasised. Intergenerational partnerships and conversations have been highlighted as one of the effective means of developing employability skills through volunteering. This includes specialised mentorship programmes from experts in the field and providing young people with access to one-to-one training with a more experienced adult. Intergenerational solidarity – that is older generations supporting young people (in respectful and equal manner) through mentorship, role modelling and peer-learning – was identified as an important strategy.

III. Youth volunteering, employability and sustainable livelihoods: towards a framework for action

Indeed, the IAVE dialogues have provided a more nuanced understanding of the issue of youth unemployment and how volunteering is a cross-cutting activity that could build skills for employment and sustainable livelihoods. Aware that this issue is ongoing and changes depending on contextual realities, this document does not aim to provide the ‘final word’ on the topic but more of a springboard for future conversations and action. Drawing from the conversations during the dialogue, a framework for action with three elements and two overarching principles is proposed below.



Actions towards enhancing youth employability, entrepreneurship and livelihoods through youth volunteering in partnership with the corporate sectors could take account of three elements:

- ▶ **Recognise:** valuing volunteering and creating a common vocabulary for recognising skills and knowledge gained through volunteering in informal (e.g., constructing a shared language when talking about these skills) and formal ways (e.g., certification, validation and accreditation of youth skills). Such a framework could be used as a tool for developing new programmes but also assessing existing programmes.

- ▶ **Rally:** developing a more holistic involvement of the corporate sector and other stakeholders. Creating a space – such as regular forums, involving corporations in volunteer programmes, committee membership – for stakeholder discussions and shared action.
- ▶ **Reimagine:** innovation is an important element in developing programmes that strengthen the link between youth volunteering and employability. This could include restructuring existing programmes (such as skills training for volunteers) to ensure that they are responsive to the needs of the job market or local enterprises.

Across the dialogues two principles have emerged as important considerations in any action towards youth employability through volunteering:

- ▶ **Consider context constantly:** there is no one size fits all when it comes to approaching these issues and corporations and other stakeholders need to explore how their programmes can be diversified and be made relevant to the local communities or youth groups that they work with. For example, skills for employment needed in one context may not be applicable in another.
- ▶ **Youth involvement:** young people should be part of the conversation. It is clear from the dialogues that young people's participation in key decision-making processes are vital for these programmes to work. Conscious and meaningful spaces must be created for young people to feed into various stages of programme development – from assessment to design to implementation.

It is clear from the dialogues that volunteering is valued by many actors as an important and effective pathway towards giving young people a better chance at economic empowerment – may that be through employment, developing their own enterprises or participating in local, community livelihoods. Corporations, in collaboration with a number of stakeholders, could play an important role in enhancing such a pathway, particularly when this is able to provide support, guidance, funding and concrete opportunities for young people in their communities.

ANNEX I

COUNTRY	ORGANISATION
Algeria	National Association of Volunteer Work
Argentina	RACI
Argentina	The Walt Disney Company
Bolivia	CEBOFIL
Botswana	IAVE Youth Advisory Committee
Brazil	Atados
Burkina Faso	AREACCD/Bobo Benevolat
Burundi	Charite Sans Frontieres (CSF)
Canada	TELUS
Chile	Youth National Institute of Chile
Chile	Red de Organizaciones de Voluntariado
Chinese Taipei	Volunteering Taiwan
Colombia	National Volunteer System
Costa Rica	University of Costa Rica
Democratic Republic of Congo	CNOVD
Dominica	I Have a Right Foundation Inc.
Dominican Republic	Alianza ONG
Ethiopia	African Union
Georgia	Helping Hand
Germany	Freiwilligen-Zentrum-Augsburg
Germany	IAVE Board Member
Ghana	Caring Volunteers Network
Ghana	Coalition of Volunteering Organisations
Ghana	CENVAST
Ghana	IAVE Youth Advisory Committee
Guatemala	IAVE Board Member
Guyana	Ministry of Culture, Youth & Sport
Haiti	ACTIVEH
Honduras	Fundacion Terra
Hong Kong, China	Agency for Volunteer Service Hong Kong
Hong Kong, China	IAVE Youth Advisory Committee
India	iVolunteer
India	Tata & Sons
Indonesia	Indorelawan
Ireland	Volunteer Ireland
Israel	Ruach Tova
Israel	Israeli Council for Voluntarism
Italy	CSV Lazio
Jordan	Naua

COUNTRY	ORGANISATION
Kenya	VIO Society
South Korea	Volunteering Korea
Lebanon	Volunteer for Lebanon
Malawi	Community Initiative for Social Empowerment
Malaysia	Nama Foundation
Mauritius	Halley Movement Coalition
Mexico	Cemefi
Mexico	Grupo Modelo
Moldova	Volunteer Centre RVC
Mongolia	Network of Mongolian Volunteer Organizations
Montenegro	Association for Democratic Prosperity - Zid
Morocco	Collectif Marocain du Volontariat
Mozambique	Conselho Nacional Do Voluntariado
Nepal	Nepal Development Initiative
New Zealand	Volunteering New Zealand
New Zealand	Volunteering Canterbury
Niger	Agence Nigerienne de Volontariat pour le Developpement
Northern Ireland, UK	Volunteer Now
Pakistan	University of Central Punjab
Palestine	Sawaed19
Panama	Voluntarios de Panama
Panama	Banco General
Panama	Sinergia507
Peru	Proa
Peru	Peru Voluntario
Peru	CENAVOL
Philippines	Philippine Coalition on Volunteerism
Portugal	Pista Magica
Russia	National Volunteer Centre
Rwanda	Rwanda Volunteer Network
Scotland, UK	Volunteer Scotland
Scotland, UK	Dumfries & Galloway Youth Council
Sierra Leone	VIONet
Slovakia	Platform of Volunteer Centres and Organizations
South Africa	Discovery
South Africa	Lungelo Youth Development
Spain	Telefonica
Spain	Iberdrola
Spain	Accenture
Spain	Idealist.org
St Lucia	Volunteer St Lucia
Switzerland	Novartis

COUNTRY	ORGANISATION
Tanzania	IAVE Board Member
Thailand	Volunteer Spirit Network
Togo	National Agency of Volunteering in Togo
Togo	Association JSA
Trinidad & Tobago	Volunteer Center of Trinidad & Tobago
Uganda	Yes Empowerment Services
Ukraine	Ukrainian Volunteer Service
United Arab Emirates	Emirates Foundation
United Kingdom	Fujitsu
United Kingdom	Credit Suisse
United Kingdom	University of East Anglia
United States	UPS
United States	Viasat
United States	Dell Technologies
United States	Google
United States	IAVE Board Member
Uruguay	Institute of Communication & Development
Venezuela	Voluntario Papa la Comunidad
Vietnam	National Volunteer Centre
Wales, UK	Wales Council for Voluntary Action
Zimbabwe	ZNCWC
Zimbabwe	VIONET Zim



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