



International
Labour
Organization



*Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.*

The background features a large, abstract graphic composed of overlapping triangles in shades of blue and grey. Three photographs of young people are integrated into the design: a woman in the top left, two women in the bottom left, and a man in the bottom right.

YOUTH VOLUNTEERISM AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT FOR ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

ISSUE BRIEF

YOUTH
CO:LAB

About the International Labour Organisation

The only tripartite United Nations agency, since 1919 the ILO brings together governments, employers and workers of 187 member states, to set labour standards, develop policies and devise programmes promoting decent work for all women and men.

About the United Nations Volunteer Programme

The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme contributes to peace and development through volunteerism worldwide. We work with partners to integrate qualified, highly motivated and well supported UN Volunteers into development programming and promote the value and global recognition of volunteerism. UNV is administered by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and reports to the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS Executive Board.

About the United Nations Development Programme

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) partners with people at all levels of society to help build nations that can withstand crisis, and drive and sustain growth that improves the quality of life for everyone. On the ground in more than 170 countries and territories, UNDP offers a global perspective, as well as local insights to help empower lives and build resilient nations.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations, including UNDP, or the UN Member States.

Youth Co:Lab, UNDP's Asia-Pacific youth entrepreneurship initiative, is positioning young people front and center in order to solve the region's most pressing challenges. Led by UNDP and Citi Foundation, in partnership with Baoshang Bank as well as network partners such as TechStars and MaGIC, the initiative aims to instigate, catalyse and sustain youth innovation by supporting the region's youth-led start-ups and social enterprises.

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Executive Summary

The focus of this Issue Brief is to explore to what extent youth volunteerism contributes to the economic empowerment of young people in Asia and the Pacific, due to the skills which may have been developed during volunteering. The Brief is a result of a desk study on volunteering and youth unemployment and underemployment throughout the region, accompanied by a number of interviews with current and former volunteers.

The Issue Brief first breaks down the challenges of youth unemployment, underemployment and informality in Asia and Pacific, as well as rapidly changing skill requirements, which are barriers for young people entering the labor market. The Brief moves on to discuss the various forms of volunteering in the region, as well as the skills volunteers may develop during volunteering. The last section explores which of those skills are relevant to employability and labor market access for young people and discovers the benefits of volunteering for youth entrepreneurship.

A number of recommendations are made on employability including but not limited to the importance of skill needs anticipation and skills development relevant for labor market access and entrepreneurship, followed by recommendations for volunteer serving organizations and volunteers themselves. These include, for example, to design volunteer programmes to empower women and expose them to new work environments and for volunteers to volunteer more strategically to expand social capital and networks, which are crucial for finding employment in markets dominated by informality.

1

Introduction

Today's economic reality in Asia and the Pacific does not provide a thriving and supportive environment for the 750 million young people living in the region. A decline in long-term capital investment, the drop in productivity growth rates and unequal distribution of gains from growth has led to a severe lack of decent work in the region, marked by informality and poor work quality and conditions. This affects young people in particular, who find it difficult to transition from education into accessing the labor market. Finding decent employment is also hindered by the skills gap or 'skills mismatch' between the market needs and the expectations of employers, and the skills developed in traditional educational and training institutions on the other hand. Studies suggest that the impact of prolonged unemployment has lasting effects on young people, especially on productivity and revenue on a long-term scale.

With one of the world's highest youth labor force participation rates at 44 percent (ILO, 2017a), youth unemployment is an urgent priority on the development agenda in the region and remains a challenge that is only slowly being addressed through youth development agendas, national action plans and social policies targeting young women and men directly. Countries can only capitalize on demographic changes when targeted approaches across relevant sectors are implemented. Scaled and sector-specific policy and decision-making is important with regards to the 2030 Agenda, which depicts a global vision for sustainable development requiring a translation into action at the national level. Youth-employment focused policy is a key part of this picture, both for national policies and the programmes of international organizations. Given

the increasingly limited resources available to these actors, understanding the underlying drivers of the challenges to development becomes an urgent need. The reason for this study and Issue Brief is to provide an overview into this important context of youth unemployment across the Asia and the Pacific under the perspective of volunteerism and skills development.

In order to respond to the economic challenges and to move towards evidence-based approaches, development programmes focus more and more on skills development. Skill building is generally viewed as a device to improve the efficacy and contribution of labor to overall production. Individuals with more sophisticated professional skills are more qualified and tend to be viewed as workers that contribute more significantly to the economy. However, skill development can also be an instrument to empower the individual. 'Skills anticipation' examines how labor markets are developing and, consequently, how jobs, skills and learning needs are changing. Anticipating contemporary and future skill needs helps individuals understand what type of education and training to follow and enterprises to identify the skills they need. Policy-makers can therefore formulate informed decisions to adapt education and training systems to new skills in demand.

Training programmes and volunteer projects are seen as offering the opportunity to develop new skills and build capacity, as well as try new vocations and gain experience. Current formal volunteer programmes, such as the Australian Volunteers for International Development programme, tend to list economic empowerment and valuable work experience as part

of their aims. However, impact assessment of such programmes is often conducted on a short-term and self-reported basis. In Asia and the Pacific, there is a severe lack of scientific studies on the development of skills through volunteer projects and to what degree volunteers might find employment faster or easier than people who do not volunteer. However, volunteering is widely spread in cultures and societies across the Asia-Pacific region, with high degrees of informal volunteering in local communities and religious contexts.

The analysis in this document is based on literature review, journals, reports and research, including publications by the International Labor Organization (ILO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Volunteers programme (UNV). The research was further enhanced by a number of interviews with UN Volunteers and volunteers from other organizations from Asia and the Pacific. The scope of the analysis is limited in terms of geographic dimension to the sub-regions of East Asia, South Asia, South-East Asia and the Pacific. The specific challenges to access decent work for young people differ widely across the region which includes industrialized economies, for example Japan, Korea, China, Singapore and Australia, as well as low and middle income countries (LMICs) with emerging economies, such as Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia, where vulnerable and informal employment still dominate the labor market. This group also includes least developed countries (LDCs), for example Cambodia, Laos, or Vanuatu, for which labor policies remain crucial for their overall development.



Local volunteers in Bandung, Indonesia, with representatives from UNV and the ASEAN Foundation.

To contextualize the thematic of this Issue Brief, volunteerism is defined as “a wide range of activities, including traditional forms of mutual aid and self-help, formal service delivery and other forms of civic participation, undertaken of free will, for the general public good and where monetary reward is not the principal motivating factor” (UN Resolution 56/38, Recommendations on Support for Volunteering). To complement this definition, the ILO Technical Experts Group proposes the definition of volunteer work as “unpaid non-compulsory work; that is, time individuals give without pay to activities performed either through an organization or directly for others outside their own household” (ILO, 2011). According to these definitions, internships, military service, as well as free work in family business or care do not qualify as volunteer work, though a large majority of young women and men across Asia and the Pacific carry out such types of free work on a regular basis or as a main occupation.

The traditional United Nations (UN) definition of youth as persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years (DESA, 2013) is no longer sufficient to cover the transition from education to employment, which the concept was intended to capture (Ryan, 2001). Thus, most recent studies and many programmes extend the concept of youth to persons aged 15–29, which is maintained for this Issue Brief.

Economic empowerment encompasses the employability, leadership and social skills of young people. Employability here is not limited to the capability to gain or move into initial employment; the term extends to the ability of maintaining employment and the quality of employment, as well as job retention and progression (Hillage and Pollard, 1998). As such, the term implies the acquisition of the right professional and social skillsets.

The specific nature of volunteering makes reporting on the volunteers’ role and contributions, as well as his or her motivations and skills development difficult. (Hirst, 2001). In addition, there is limited research available on the link between different support structures in place for volunteers within volunteer programmes which impact employability (Rochester, 2009). In the attempt to capture relevant discussions and hard evidence, the research for this Issue Brief was limited to recent sources, including but not limited to research papers and policy briefs, and scientific studies.

2

Socio-Economic Context

Regional Overview

The region of Asia and the Pacific contains more than 60 percent of the world's total population, including over a billion young people aged 15-29 (UN DESA, 2017). From 1950 to 2010, the region has seen a continuous increase of the youth population leading to a youth bulge phenomenon, where the labor force outnumbers those outside of the working age population (ILO, 2015b).

The Challenge of Youth Employment

Compared to the other regions of the world, the Asia-Pacific region has one of the lowest unemployment rates with an estimated average of 11 percent in 2017; however, significant sub-regional variation is present. Youth unemployment in the region has grown since 2007, leaving young people 3.8 times more likely to be unemployed than adults (ILO, 2017a). Across Asia, the trends remain mixed, as visible in the graph below. In the Pacific Island countries, youth unemployment remains a big challenge. For example, in Fiji the youth unemployment rate was 18.2 percent in 2016 (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2017).

The low regional average of youth unemployment is, however, marked by decent work deficits and high levels of informality. In fact, the current labor market reality of Asia and the Pacific has extremely high degrees of informal employment and vulnerable employment. When young people have found access to employment, very often the quality of employment is of concern, with a majority of jobs not qualifying

as 'decent work'. According to the ILO, decent work encompasses opportunities for employment that are productive and deliver a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration. Furthermore, the position must also ensure freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives, and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men.

In low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), vulnerable and/or informal types of employment are almost an inescapable reality for young people from a low income background. In higher income countries (HICs) temporary and other non-standard forms of employment are becoming the norm (O'Higgins, 2017). There is also a prevalence of part-time work in certain countries (ILO, 2015a). High levels of youth underemployment point to difficulties in securing an adequate place in the labor market, as well as to underutilized productive capacity.

Informality in the region covers traditionally own-account workers with or without employees, workers in small unregistered companies, workers contributing to family businesses, and workers not receiving annual leave and/or social security. Informal employment accounts for as much as 85 percent of non-agricultural employment in India and 73 percent in Indonesia (McKinsey & Company, 2015). The informal employment sector of Nepal just a decade ago in 2008, with agriculture taken into account consisting mainly of subsistence farming, covered

96.2 percent (Serrière, 2014). Vulnerable employment covers all own-account workers and all unpaid family workers, including child labor and bonded labor. In Nepal, up to 2.1 million of the total child population of 6.2 million are engaged in economic activities (ILO, 2014a).

Informal, vulnerable and underemployment have an important impact on youth employment since young people are typically unable to escape poverty and informality without measures to support their reintegration into education or into better work opportunities for older youth (ILO, 2014a). The formality of employment is the best indicator for job quality: formality is linked to greater job stability, higher income and access to other benefits, such as pensions and health care (Kring and Breglia, 2015).

Young women and men experience different employment patterns than the rest of the population. According to the World Bank, young people face particular difficulties in entering the labor market and are more greatly affected by economic fluctuations (Biavaschi et al., 2012). Most of the region has experienced a transition from agriculture to low-wage industrial production, and via the development of technology and a high-tech industry to a service-based economy (Asian Development Bank, 2015). The labor market continues to face challenges, such as economic slowdown in China, regional rapid population growth, changes within the workplace, skills shortages, and others. This is accompanied by little employment growth predictions for the near

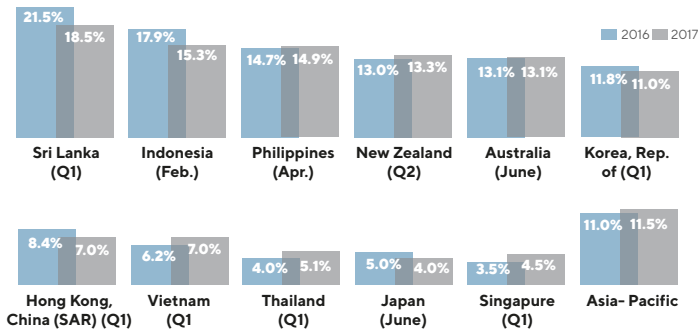
future due to the problem of ‘jobless growth’ of economies across Asia and the Pacific.

Across the region, young people are more educated than the adult population but also experience more vulnerability, which can be seen, for example, in teenagers’ concentration in low-quality jobs (ILO, 2014). Despite increasing education rates, a large part of the region’s youth do not have secondary education, including general or quality Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) (Liu, 2013).

The entry into employment is further hindered by informal recruitment and challenges during the formal recruitment processes, including a large amount of young people across Asia struggling to provide correct information on recruitment forms (HR in Asia, 2017). In Cambodia, a former volunteer from a wealthier background with schooling in Europe explained her and her friends resort to local headhunters when searching employment, since the hunt for higher paying jobs in the business sector is very difficult without personal contacts to firms and employers in Phnom Penh.

Former and current volunteers from Indonesia and Cambodia, both UN Volunteers and volunteers from other organizations or contexts, see their peers struggling to gain employment that qualifies as decent work. The volunteers explained how secondary education is still not available to many young men and women, their families considering it too expensive or even too dangerous. Families also

Youth Unemployment Rates, latest available period in 2017 and same period in 2016 (in percent)



ILO, Asia-Pacific Labour Market Update, September 2017, figure 2 (ILO, 2017b).

oftentimes rely on the income of their older children. A volunteer from Indonesia acknowledged her friends struggled to fill in job applications, as this is not taught in school nor university, and their parents are unable to assist with the recruitment processes having changed drastically. Despite increasing education rates on average across the region, education and recruitment remain barriers for young people to entering the labor force.

Effects of Youth Unemployment

Though the region's youth unemployment rates are better than those of other parts of the world, it is important to acknowledge the effects of unemployment on young people. Global studies and research suggests unemployment among young people has a negative impact on human and social capital, especially during prolonged unemployment (IAVE, 2013). Some researchers claim prolonged unemployment may permanently impair productive potential and, thus, influence long-term personal development, as well as patterns of employment, pay and unemployment (Matsumoto et al., 2012). High unemployment rates can create or reinforce marginalization within communities, as well as cause the breakup of communities as young people migrate

to find work. Unemployment also leads to an increase in the number of young people seeking employment in dangerous or illegal work and can increase the occurrence of social unrest as research links youth unemployment and high risk behaviors as well as social and political turbulence (Matsumoto et al., 2012).

It is important to highlight that women across all countries of the region are less likely to be employed. For young women, the prospects of employment are some of the smallest with unemployment rates remaining considerably higher for young women compared to young men. For example, in Sri Lanka the unemployment rate in the first quarter of 2017 for young women was at 23.1 percent compared to young men for whom the rate is at 15.6 percent. In the Philippines, while the overall youth unemployment rate increased by 0.2 percent, the rate for young women climbed from 15.8 percent to 17 percent (ILO, 2017b). If employed, young women are more likely to experience vulnerable employment. Furthermore, if employed in informal, vulnerable or even decent employment, most countries in the region experience a severe gender pay gap, where men's salaries are higher than those of women working in the same positions and conditions.

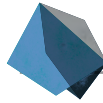


Teaching physics with the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV) programme.

Growth of NEETs, Inactivity and Discouragement

The percentage of young people who are neither in employment, nor education and training (NEET) in Asia and the Pacific is 23.3 percent (ILO, 2017a). In Indonesia, for example, over 60 percent of NEETs have a junior secondary level of education and a quarter has at least a senior secondary education (ILO, 2015a). Young women NEET represent the largest portion of this group, but tend to have the same levels of education as young men. The reasons for this phenomenon are culturally driven tendencies as women often perform domestic duties and raise children. Many young people who are inactive and not enrolled in any education have high levels of human capital, encompassing their knowledge, habits, social and personality attributes, which constitute an important amount of lost productivity represented by NEETs. The portion of inactive youth does not appear to be declining over time; rather, it is increasing due to higher more and longer enrollment in school.

In many countries in Asia and the Pacific, especially in emerging economies, no career services are featured



“This is something that is lacking in Indonesia: young people don’t know how to prepare their CV or how to do interviews. These are skills that aren’t taught in school, no communication or organizational skills [are taught], or how to be a team player.”

**- Melania Niken, Volunteer
in child protection**

in formal education or TVET and many youth policies and institutions do not yet address the issue of youth unemployment sufficiently. Nonetheless, governments in the region are becoming increasingly conscious and take more targeted action, for example with the first ASEAN Youth Development Index published in 2017, or at the national level with the 2017–2019 Marshall Islands National Action Plan on Youth Employment for example.

3

The Labor Skill Demand

While industrialized economies in HICs see new forms of digital labor (Graham et al., 2017) and digital talent platforms gain increasing importance (McKinsey & Company, 2015), a large majority of labor markets across Asia and the Pacific still consists of informal and low-skill employment. This section of the Issue Brief examines the skills employers are seeking, both required skills and those not required but which will improve.

Current demand of skills

Many studies and available data does not provide much insight into local and regional job performance in terms of skills utilization, nor into the perspective of employers on how well their employees utilize their skills and what skill needs should be anticipated for the future (OECD, 2017a). However, the importance of skills anticipation and the issue of skill mismatches is gaining increasing importance in research and policy. The ILO, for example, has undertaken two Labor Demand Enterprise Surveys (LDES) in Nepal and Vietnam. It should be noted, in the Asia-Pacific region, a large portion of jobs come from micro, small and medium enterprises (SMEs). In South-East Asia, SMEs account for over half of all employment. Thus, the role of SMEs as employers and their demand for skills is crucial.

Employability consists of employment-related human and social capital, which are the skills and personal attributes considered important by the industry and which graduates must obtain in order to secure employment (Bridgstock, 2009; Holmes,

2013). Thus, a person with high employability is more likely to find employment (Kamerad and Paine, 2014). A distinction is made between hard skills, which are job-specific, technical skills, and soft skills, such as communication, problem solving, teamwork, adaptability, and others.

Studies report a trend of mismatched skills in the labor market across the region. Higher unemployment rates among the most educated youth imply a mismatch between education and skills demand in the labor market (NIS and ILO, 2013). There is an increasing focus on making TVET relevant to the socio-economic context and more inclusive. Understanding the demand side is of high importance, which requires an examination of the nature of skills demanded by employers and the optimal utilization of those competencies in the workplace (OECD, 2017a). For this, employers need to examine the alignment of the competences of workers to the demands and needs of their place of employment (OECD, 2017b).

Results from completed labor demand surveys in the region show employers tend to rate discipline, job-appropriate skills and technical knowledge as the most important for their employees. In Nepal, the two most important characteristics they look for in candidates are education or training and work experience (46.1 percent and 38.4 percent respectively) (ILO, 2014a). Another preference employers in Nepal indicated was to hire adults over the age of 29, further reinforcing the current difficulty young people face when entering the labor market (ILO, 2014a).

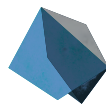
As part of the LDEzS in Nepal, local formal employers were also asked about occupations they perceived as opening up in the next two to three years. The majority of questioned enterprises were in manufacturing (72 percent), followed by accommodation and food services (7.8 percent), wholesale and retail trade (6.1 percent) and agriculture, forestry and fishing. The results reveal a very weak demand for highly skilled workers, which is yet another indication graduates in these contexts face poor employment prospects in the immediate future. The occupations perceived to experience the most recruiting in Nepal were precision workers in metal and related materials at 13.1 percent and manufacturing laborers at 11.5 percent (ILO, 2015b).

Anticipating future changes to the labor market in the region due to an increase of Information and communications technology (ICT) and technology, a change in skills demand can be foreseen, based on studies from HICs with technologically advanced economies. The research indicates jobs requiring some ICT skills also require a strong level of complementary skills, such as foundation skills (literacy, numeracy), soft skills (planning and organization) and behavioral skills (communication and teamwork) (IFTF, 2016). Employment that requires advanced ICT skills depends on employees being able to solve problems, learn, adapt, and apply new methods and technologies as well as in-depth technical knowledge. Furthermore, jobs using ICT increasingly require a foreign language, with English becoming a prerequisite in more places of employment in formal employment in HICs. While jobs in the region do not yet feature ICT requirements nearly as often as in technologically advanced regions, some LMICs in Asia and the Pacific are seeing this increase already. It is, however, important to recall this trend tends to be limited to the formal sector, which remains small due to informality predominating many big labor markets in the region.

In fact, skill supply and demand vary drastically across the region, making it difficult to provide trends and meaningful assumptions for all of Asia and the Pacific. HICs with industrialized economies have put into place professional skills development programmes, as part of their formal education systems and through specialized training programmes. For example, Australia already uses market-based mechanisms to steer TVET programmes, with

5,000 registered training organizations delivering nationally recognized courses within an accredited Australian Qualifications Framework. In China, the New Enterprise-based Apprenticeship Program was launched in 2015 to involve employers in the provision of job-related training adapted to their skill needs in joint action with local institutions. Thanks to the close regional ties between countries, governments of LMICs can learn from such programmes, with ample opportunity for bilateral or regional collaboration to close the economic and development gaps throughout the region.

In LMICs, many young workers cannot afford to join training programmes or to volunteer since their employment and income needs are immediate in order to support themselves and their family. These circumstances prevent them from investing in skills development or a prolonged period of employment search to find the best employment opportunity. For example, factory work provides an immediate route to earn money while government training programmes delay earnings by weeks, if not months or years. When facing a choice between low-skill work and skills development, many young people in Asia and the Pacific choose the low-skill labor force (UNV, 2017). When no immediate low-skill employment opportunities are available, many young people



All young former and current volunteers interviewed for this study shared their impression and experience that the decisive elements during recruitment are technical skills and professional experience. Employers recruiting high-skill labor might value the mention of appropriate soft skills on a job application, but seemingly do not base their recruitment decisions on them. For low-skill labor, the interviewees shared that there is close to no mention of soft skills during the recruitment phase, which is oftentimes informal. However, soft skills demonstrated 'on the job' might be the only way for advancing one's career in the low-skill labor sectors where there are oftentimes little opportunity for professional growth with the same employer.

prefer to migrate for immediate earnings instead of finding training opportunities and developing skills.

Some LMICs are taking action on reducing the skills gap, for example the Philippines with its National Technical Education and Skills Development Plan 2011–2016, which works with secondary and tertiary schooling systems as well as specific training and apprentice programmes in enterprises, communities and provincial training centers. In India, the public-private partnership titled National Skills Development Corporation works to create better training capacities in a variety of occupations (Palanivel, 2016). In Vanuatu, the National Youth Development Policy reforms curricula to better match the skills in demand in the labor market, including integrating ICT skills into the training (ILO, 2016a).

Labor Skills Demand in the Future

In order to facilitate policy development, the future trends in skills demand have to be anticipated. What are the professional skills employers will require in the near and far future?

Firstly, putting skills to better use in the workplace is important for workers, firms and broader society. From the perspective of the employee, a better use of skills is associated with job related well-being (Morrison et al., 2005). Poor use of skills creates job dissatisfaction and can be related to increased turnover (Felstead et al., 2017; Okay-Sommerville and Scholarios, 2013).

Secondly, the differences and sub-regional variation across the Asia-Pacific region is of importance here as well. For example, Singapore has experienced impressive economic growth and has a comprehensive workforce training system. In comparison, emerging economies such as Cambodia still see the informal sector dominating the labor market in the near future. In the short-term and foreseeable future, social capital will remain relevant to employment, which includes an individual’s professional contacts, networks, employment leads and social relationships (Spera et al. 2013). As the supply of skills from formal education is failing (Liu, 2013), the gap for non-repetitive cognitive skills will remain.

Though today’s labor market of the Asia-Pacific region is not yet dominated by ICT, it is undeniable technology is changing the world of work by job

substitution, job creation and job transformation (Cedefop, 2017). Innovation cycles are becoming much faster, and big data, cloud computing, 3D-printing and the platform economy are changing product markets, business models and work, and skill needs.

This change does not limit its effects on HICs with industrialized economies only. For example, in 2017, India’s \$160 billion IT industry laid off more than 56,000 employees, which some analysts believe was a worse spree than the one during the 2008 financial crisis (Quartz, 2017). CEOs of IT companies themselves stated that digitization and automation brought about a disruption of traditional roles, leading to a reassessment of the capability of companies’ talent pools in order to stay market relevant. The wave of layoffs was targeted at employees from all levels with outdated skills. In the long run, automation is likely to increase the number of jobs for workers with niche skill sets, but lower-level workers will face increased unemployment. Nearly one-third (700,000 people) of the low-skilled workers in India’s IT sector stand to lose their jobs by 2022, but less than 5 percent of Indian tech employees are equipped to handle high-skilled jobs, such as data scientist and data analyst due to a lack of trained talent (Quartz, 2017).

Today, the reach of digitalization and automation is greater: in the past, technology replaced mainly routine, low-skilled manual work. Now it can perform non-routine work, such as financial market analyses, surgery and legal searches. Technology is polarizing the labor market, creating high-skilled, well-paid jobs and low-skilled, low-pay jobs, hollowing out the middle of the labor scale. New technology sectors also tend to employ fewer people per company, though the ICT boom has created many new jobs that did not exist before.

In 2017, this influenced the garment industry with a number of big factories shutting down in Asia, which is a big part of some of the largest economies in the region. The low labor costs in Asia are starting to lose the fight against automation: ILO estimates about

56 percent of employment in Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam is at a high risk of being automated in the next decade or two, with clothing and footwear manufacturing jobs among the hardest hit (ILO, 2016b). Some countries in the region might skip high degrees of industrialization entirely, moving to a labor market dominated by service jobs, such as in the Philippines or some areas of the Pacific.

In the long-term, the World Economic Forum expects nearly half of jobs in industrialized economies globally to be automated out of existence, as part of a Fourth Industrial Revolution (Cedefop, 2017). The skill forecasts for these contexts suggest that jobs in the future will combine digital with technical, soft and behavioral skills. Jobs expected to decline until 2025 are skilled agricultural workers, crafts and related trades and clerks. Those expected to grow are professionals in business, administration, ICT, science and engineering, requiring more advanced cognitive (literacy, numeracy, foreign languages, problem-solving, learning to learn) and non-cognitive skills (communication, planning, customer service).

Technology can perform tasks and rapidly collect and synthesize data but people must decide what the tasks should be and what the data mean. Therefore, required workplace skills will shift to the ability to solve problems and make decisions (IFTF, 2016). Employers will also seek applied knowledge, which is the ability to logically analyse information, as well as people skills that focus on cross-cultural competence, social intelligence and virtual collaboration (IFTF, 2016). Technological change will accelerate skill obsolescence, meaning most future skills adjustment must take place in the workplace during adult life.

Entrepreneurship

Many current policies and programmes envision entrepreneurship as an option to create employment for young people in Asia and the Pacific. Encouraging youth entrepreneurship and self-employment has many benefits, as young people are able to create decent work opportunities for themselves and others, while contributing to the economic development of their country. In addition, the experience of developing a business can teach an invaluable set of skills to entrepreneurs.

In the Asia-Pacific region, entrepreneurship mainly covers SMEs, which account for an average of 96 percent of all enterprises and 62 percent of the national labor forces (ADB, 2014). The vast majority of these SMEs are small businesses and enterprises, as opposed to tech startups. Entrepreneurship is by far no easy option, regardless of whether the business endeavor is a small shop or a tech startup. Young people especially experience difficulty accessing credit due to a lack of credit history. They are also limited by the shortage of savings, strict credit-scoring regulations, long waiting periods and complicated documentation procedures (Schoof, 2006). A volunteer from Indonesia explained her plan to launch her startup project once she got married. She sees marriage, with support from her future spouse, as her enabling environment to start a small business. She commented that, as a young female entrepreneur, she does not feel supported by government policies, nor by the industry and traditional funding mechanisms.

Three main groups of skills have been identified to be required by entrepreneurs: technical (including communication, problem solving, technology implementation), business management (including human resources management, marketing, finance, accounting), and personal entrepreneurial skills (self-control and discipline, risk management, leadership) (ICF and Cedefop, 2014). There are an increasing number of initiatives to strengthen the required skill set among young people to encourage entrepreneurship. For example, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Japan and China have started to incorporate trainings as part of their formal education curriculum to promote an increase in soft skills relevant to entrepreneurship.



Global celebrations, International Volunteer Day 2015. Reforestation and cleaning action in Afghanistan.

4 Skills Developed through Volunteerism

What is Volunteering?

Volunteerism is one of the oldest and most traditional expressions of human behavior based on reciprocal exchanges and sharing. The perspective on volunteerism has been changing, broadening the understanding of what volunteering is, both formal and informal, and what it means to society. With relationships and their potential to enhance the well-being of individuals and communities at its core, volunteerism is a key component of many civil society organizations, as well as social and political movements. Volunteerism also thrives in education, health, and environmental programmes, and a range of other public and private sector programmes worldwide. In addition to formal voluntary engagements, volunteerism has also been an important element and an integrated component in many cultures and religions. This is particularly common in Asia and the Pacific. The core values of volunteerism are strengthening solidarity, reciprocity, and mutual trust between people, as well as promoting social inclusion and the empowerment of vulnerable people (Leigh et al., 2011). Whether visible or an underlying element, helping the community and others without financial or reward is an integral part of every society.

UNV distinguishes four kinds of volunteering: mutual aid or self-help, service to others, participation or civic engagement, and advocacy or campaigning (UNV,

2009). One of the principal elements of volunteerism is the unpaid and non-compulsory nature of the work undertaken for others outside of their own household. The distinction between formal and informal volunteerism is made:

Formal volunteering are non-obligatory and unpaid actions that are undertaken in an organizational setting for the benefit of other people, a specific organization, cause or society as a whole.

Informal volunteering are non-obligatory unpaid actions undertaken outside a formal organizational context or the volunteers' household, providing time, help or support for the benefit of other people, a specific cause or society as a whole. (Gavelin et al, 2011)

It is important to note survey models tend to use a more narrow definition of volunteer work, oftentimes excluding informal volunteer activities. Surveys often limit the definition of volunteerism, especially in terms of the notion of household, which varies in different cultures.

Volunteers seek projects or voluntary work that are in accord with their values (Clary and Snyder, 1991). Research conducted for the Asian region seems to support this theory (Wang and Wu, 2014). The specific reasons for why volunteers in the region

donate their time to voluntary causes can differ, with no evidence-based, primary data available on the entire region. Research suggests that volunteer work often involves a form of social obligation, for example cultural or religious traditions, or expectations from peers or family (ILO, 2011a). Volunteers may also expect benefits for themselves in the future as a form of ‘investment’ (Prouteau and Wolff, 2006). These benefits might be an increase of social capital, career development, or involving religious beliefs, such as building social good in Buddhist or other faiths and traditions.

The volunteers consulted discussed how many tasks completed by young people as part of tradition or community engagement are not labeled volunteerism. For example, supporting events at a youth center, the mosque, church or temple, or engagement in a student association at university is rarely recognized as volunteerism even though they are perfect examples of volunteering as per the common definition. Without the understanding of their community engagement as an engaged citizen the volunteers highlighted many young people most likely do not recognize their social and community engagement as activities and experiences adds

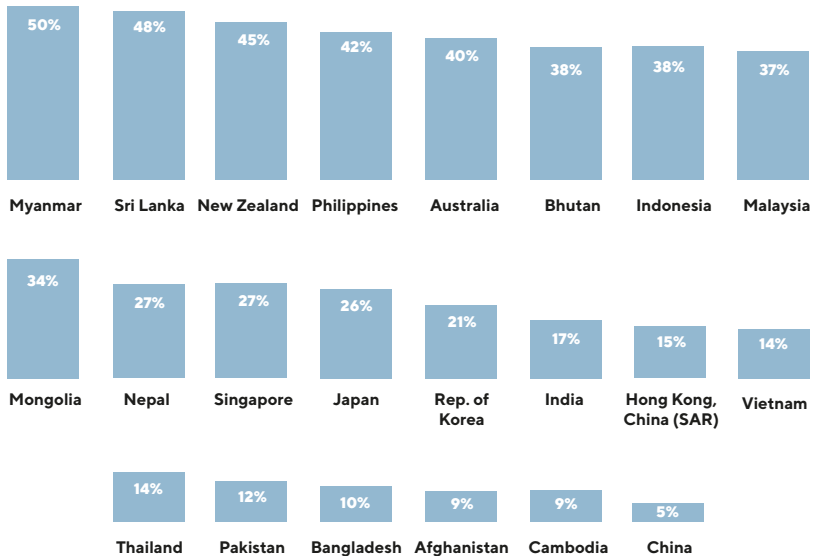
value to and/or enhances their skillsets, especially during the search for employment or their career progression.

Volunteering Rates in Asia and the Pacific

When it comes to volunteering rates, current measurements of volunteering rates produce results with very wide variations. This is in part due to the different questions being asked in surveys, and also due to terminology and definitions, cultural understanding of volunteering and volunteerism, and data sampling. These factors represent big challenges to estimate volunteering rates across different cultural contexts. Nonetheless, data from the Gallup World Poll and the World Values Survey allows an interesting insight into volunteering in Asia and the Pacific.

The most recent Gallup World Poll shows strong sub regional variation among the countries across Asia and the Pacific, with some of the lowest and highest rates in the world. Some countries in South Asia and South-East Asia show a remarkable rise in percentages of documented volunteering, with rates in the rest of the region seeming relatively

Volunteering Rates in Asia and the Pacific



Adapted from Gallup World Poll, 2015

stable overall. For example, Sri Lanka sees nearly half of its population volunteer, and Nepal reports over 50 percent for its own population. In terms of participation in volunteering time, Myanmar and Sri Lanka lead the global ranking (CAF, 2015). Very high rates are also reported for India, Indonesia, and the Philippines, where a lot of volunteer work takes place in religious and community contexts. Alternatively, volunteer rates in China captured by the Gallup World Poll seem low with less than 5 percent of surveyed individuals stating they have volunteered in the previous month, placing it at the bottom of world rankings (CAF, 2015).

Unfortunately, there is a severe lack of primary data on volunteering rates for the Island Countries in the Pacific. A high regional Pacific average of 36 percent of individuals volunteering is achieved in the results of the Gallup World Poll through responses from Australia and New Zealand.

The more recent surveying waves of the World Values Survey did not include questions on volunteer engagement in Asia and the Pacific. The World Values Survey data included questions on voluntary work in the survey wave of 2000-2004, asking participants about the type of organizations they are volunteering for. The results tend to differ noticeably from those of the Gallup World Poll with Bangladesh, Vietnam and China leading in terms of most voluntary work for cultural activities, for example. In addition to information on volunteering rates for cultural activities, the World Values Survey also provides insight into organizations related to social welfare, sport and recreation, peace movements, political parties, conservation, environmental and animal rights, youth work, health, as well as church organizations and women's groups.

Overall in Asia and the Pacific, volunteer rates are influenced by local culture and traditions of community engagement. Without the appropriate data, it is difficult to assess whether volunteering rates and formats are changing and evolving. Traditionally, volunteering for cultural and religious organizations

or related activities is the most common form of volunteering across the Asia-Pacific region (UNV, 2015). Many religious faiths in the region, especially the religions of Buddhism, Islam and Catholicism, consider voluntary work an important element of their religious practice. Faith-based organizations may function as volunteer mobilizers with monks, preachers and elders oftentimes mobilizing people for voluntary action in the community and the place of worship. Sport volunteerism is oftentimes forgotten, but sports associations and activities are massively popular in the Asian-Pacific region, especially among young people.

Many governments leverage volunteerism by creating structures and institutional mechanisms for volunteerism to thrive and for it to contribute to national development goals and social inclusion. Frameworks of laws and institutions provide volunteers with opportunities and structures to volunteer within and also enable governments to mobilize and deploy volunteers systematically. Effective volunteer infrastructure at the national level requires a favorable policy and regulatory framework, as well as recognition and promotion of volunteerism and committed national leadership. In Cambodia, for example, the National Youth Development Policy includes promoting volunteerism as a key strategy for youth development. The Cambodian National Youth Action Plan 2016-2018 also sets volunteerism as a priority strategy. China's new regulation on volunteer services took effect in December 2017 to encourage volunteer activities in China through effective regulatory infrastructure.

In addition, a number of countries in Asia-Pacific have state and state-sponsored volunteer programmes or independent programmes supported by the national government for local, national and sometimes international volunteering. Examples for this are the Australian Volunteers International organization and Masyarakat Relawan Indonesia. These programmes train, place and support volunteers in non-government organizations, associations, schools and other institutions. There are also many schools and universities across the region that feature a volunteering component in their curricula, suggesting or even requiring a certain number of volunteer work hours from students before graduation.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) and corporate volunteering has been growing in importance in Asia from a relatively weak position a decade ago (Shakeel, 2015). Corporate volunteering traditionally involves a company giving their staff volunteer opportunities, time and sometimes even incentives to volunteer for a cause of their choice or as part of a CSR policy (Chapple et al, 2014).

Volunteerism is also an increasingly common and important element in the work of national and international development organizations, as well as organizations working in humanitarian action on disaster preparedness and response. For these organizations, volunteering is a useful tool to engage communities and build capacity, as well as utilize local knowledge and networks. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, for example, created one of the largest volunteer mobilizing networks with presence in almost all countries of Asia and the Pacific.



UNV Communication Specialist speaks to Vietnam Volunteer Information Resource Center volunteers in Hanoi, Vietnam

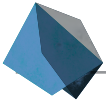
A more recent form of volunteerism is online volunteering. People volunteering online commit their time and skills over the Internet freely and without financial considerations for a social cause or the benefit of society. This form of volunteering has eliminated the need for volunteerism to be tied to specific times and locations, increasing greatly the freedom and flexibility of volunteer engagement and complementing the outreach and impact of volunteers serving in situ (Leigh et al., 2011). UN Volunteers manages an online volunteering programme, which connects NGOs, governments and UN agencies with online volunteers. In Asia and the Pacific, the most volunteers registered on this platform come from India, China, Australia, Pakistan and Indonesia, possibly indicating easier accessibility in countries where ICT skills are valued for employment or learned as part of formal education. This new form of volunteerism enables persons with disabilities to volunteer actively in areas of interest for them. The UNV Online Volunteering service provides opportunities allowing persons with disabilities to volunteer their strengths, abilities and skills, and make a tremendous impact on the lives of others as well as their own.

Work Skills and Capital Developed through Volunteering

Many volunteer programmes and projects claim they provide opportunities for volunteers to develop and build skill sets. Most research suggests volunteers develop social capital through voluntary work (ILO, 2011a). Social capital refers to the range of connections on which people draw in their daily lives. These connections are often a manifestation of volunteerism, including membership of informal, local associations and more formalized groups. The concept of social capital encompasses social resources, including networks, social relations and associational memberships based on the trust, mutual understanding and shared values on which people draw when there is a need for cooperation. Social capital relevant to employment includes an individual's professional contacts, networks, employment leads and social relationships (Spera et al., 2013).

Many volunteer programmes and projects also aim to develop human capital, which covers skills, knowledge, ability to labor and good health. In this

context, researchers distinguish again between hard skills and soft skills: Hard skills are job-specific, technical skills, which are often the main criteria for recruitment. Soft skills, also referred to as core skills or portable skills are transferable between jobs. Most of these soft skills are not part of curricula in formal education institutions and cannot be taught in the same manner as technical skills in a classroom. Some depend on personal endowment and need to be learned and exercised in a real life environment in order to be promoted, depending on personal experience and diverse exposure.



“As a volunteer, I learned how to liaise with the government, which means learning how to be diplomatic and how to adjust communication. I improved my negotiation skills.”

- Danang Nizar, Volunteer in disaster risk reduction

Volunteering programmes are the ideal context for young women and men to develop and practice these soft skills. Skills development and the process of self-development are also mutually reinforcing (Karajkov, 2013). As part of human capital, volunteering has also been reported to generally increase confidence and self-esteem (Low et al., 2007, Williams et al., 2001, and Newton et al., 2011). Volunteering activities tend to require resourcefulness, equipping volunteers with experience in different environments to use community resources and acquire soft skills such as time management, orientation, handling organizational cultures and adapting to different rules and procedures. Moreover, attitudes and

behavior can be shaped and reinforced as a result of volunteering, encompassing a wide range of qualities from punctuality, work readiness and flexibility, to keeping an open mind and expressing readiness to both learn and teach (Krahn et al., 2002).

Furthermore, volunteering also positively influences the civic engagement of volunteers. Youth participation in many countries of the region is challenged by institutionalized, cultural and other forms of adultism (Young & Szama, 2006; Zeldin et al., 2000). ‘Adultism’ is a term which encompasses behaviors and attitudes that dismiss young people to the extent of discriminating against them and are based on a bias towards adults (Gong and Wright, 2007). Social capital, gaining experience that contributes to building leadership, becoming resourceful and acquiring a readiness and willingness to learn are driving forces for civic participation, which can be acquired or strengthened by volunteering. Volunteerism has been shown to promote social cohesion, social networks, trust, outreach and participation and in some cases shape social norms. This strengthens community social capital as individuals and societies jointly benefit from face to face interactions among individuals creating common bonds and shared aims through joint engagement in activities, providing benefits beyond employability, namely tolerance, breaking cultural barriers and opening space for civic engagement (Templer and Lawson, 2017).

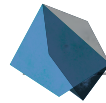
In addition to social and human capital, volunteerism can build physical capital, which includes basic infrastructure such as roads, water and sanitation, irrigation, schools, health posts, energy, tools and equipment. The best example for the value of volunteering in building infrastructure is the response to the April 2015 earthquake in Nepal, where UN Volunteers undertook technical assessments of damaged structures and supervised cash-for-work brigades which cleared and recycled debris. Volunteers also trained and mentored grassroots organizations in the implementation of community-based projects, facilitated the delivery of livelihood assistance to earthquake victims and implemented local disaster risk management initiatives (Budhathoki, 2016). Volunteering can also contribute to developing financial capital, such as savings, credit, income, trade and remittances through community programmes as well as political capital through

awareness of and participation in political processes supported by relevant legislation, policies and institutions.

Moreover, volunteerism provides the opportunity for both young men and women to work in non-traditional environments and positions in cultural contexts which are still gender segregated with gender typical occupations or activities. For example, a female volunteer in Sri Lanka found herself volunteering as part of an ICT team working on technology and innovation, a predominantly male field in the local context. Volunteering opened the avenue for her to gain insight in the work environment and she discovered her passion and ambition to build a meaningful career in this field.

There is evidence that, through volunteerism, women are challenging traditional places and roles in society and are experiencing greater empowerment beyond the work place. In India, for example, volunteering in social movements has contributed to addressing social and political issues that affect women's lives, while creating social networks and generating resources that protect and empower fellow women in situations of vulnerability (UNV, 2012). Additionally, when women volunteers and activists raise awareness of such initiatives, they increase and improve the greater public understanding of the importance of gender issues (Bortee, 2011). Some other studies, however, suggest that volunteering itself is subject to the same structural barriers to participation as found in the labor market (IVR, 2004), making it important for volunteer serving organizations to consider gender and inclusiveness priority issues in their programme design.

A joint programme between UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women and UN Volunteers named 'Partners for Prevention' revealed in the lessons learned the benefit of the project's volunteerism approach. By recruiting volunteers from the community as facilitators and having participants design and implement their own community volunteerism projects, the volunteers embraced the notions and behaviors of prevention of violence against women and girls not only during the workshop, but shared what they learned more informally within their families and peer groups. Through volunteerism, the concept became rooted in the community itself due to the individuals and communities embracing, leading and integrating prevention of violence against women and girls into their daily lives (Gevers, A. et al, 2018).



A former volunteer from Indonesia reflected on her volunteer assignment with an international organization and explained her empowerment as a young woman is the biggest gain from the experience. In a culture where young people, especially women, tend to remain quiet during meetings and are discouraged from taking initiatives in places of work, she learned to be confident and to speak up in meetings and big events. She says this is a skill that she could not have learned anywhere else and which will serve her for life, especially in her career.



Linking Youth Volunteerism, Skills Development and Economic Empowerment

Studies Linking Volunteerism to Employability

Currently, there are no studies isolating and examining the link between volunteerism and enhanced youth employment in the region. Even at the global level very few studies on volunteerism and access to employment exist. Most research projects and programme reports evaluate data sets with small sample sizes usually over shorter periods of time. However, the theme of volunteerism and its effect on employment requires large-scale and long-term studies in order to present convincing evidence without bias or other determining factors.

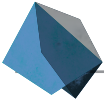
One such study in a different regional context was conducted in the United States in June 2013 by the Corporation for National and Community Service. While from another region, the study is very interesting due to its scientific approach and methodology, with large sample sizes and long periods of surveying. Though the cause-and-effect cannot be established, the results of this study suggest a statistically significant and highly stable association between volunteering and employment. The study found volunteering is associated with a

27 percent increase in odds of finding employment (Spera et al., 2013). Interestingly, the study also found chances of employment for young people is higher when volunteering only once a month, with the rate dropping as the number of volunteer hours per month increased. Without further information the reason for this phenomenon is unclear, though one can hypothesize: Given that young people's free time tends to be limited due to schooling and work, sacrificing too much personal time to volunteer work could have a negative impact on work commitments. More studies on this, especially in different regional contexts, would be very helpful and interesting.

Skills and Capital Developed through Volunteering

Despite the lack of evidence-based studies in the Asia-Pacific region, a number of points linking youth volunteerism, skills development and economic empowerment can be deduced based on the analysis of labor skills demand and skills developed through volunteer programmes. Firstly, strategically planned volunteer programmes with enough support for volunteers lead to increased experience and the development of hard skills and usually a

wealth of soft skills. In addition, depending on the volunteer project and environment, volunteering is a useful opportunity for exposure to the world of organized work and new workplaces (IAVE, 2013). For many young people, volunteering can be the first documented work experience, which can be difficult or almost impossible to attain in a context of high youth unemployment (IAVE, 2013).



“Employers tend to look for someone with experience, so fresh graduates have a tough time [finding a job]. Everyone graduates at the same time, so it’s very competitive because everyone tries to stand out from the crowd.”

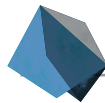
- Melania Niken, Volunteer in child protection

A survey in the China Daily showed that, out of 1,044 employers, more than 60 percent prefer a candidate with experience volunteering in the remote Western region of China. Employers said the values they sought in their employees were dedication, integrity and good communication skills usually developed in the volunteering service. A vast majority among these employers who employed former volunteers stated they were satisfied with their performance (China Daily, 2010). The passion and dedication of volunteers seems to translate in this context into a strong and dedicated commitment to a place of employment, which is valued by employers. Additional soft skills acquired during the volunteering experience can set former volunteers apart from those without this type of experience.

While the China Daily survey highlights soft skills, research suggests that many employers look mostly for job-related skills and job-specific experience during recruitment. Former volunteers indicated volunteer programmes with the most impact on economic youth empowerment are those which facilitate the development of job-specific technical skills and work experience relating directly to the professional field or position of interest. Many of the

former and current young volunteers indicated in their search for employment in a very competitive market for both low-skill and high-skill jobs, employers seemingly select potential candidates mainly based on technical qualifications and job-specific experience with little emphasis on soft skills during recruitment. The interviewees said it is only at the job interview stage where they can display their soft skills but oftentimes the interview discussions are limited to teamwork and management skills, as opposed to communication, organizing, adaptability, etc.

As stated previously, the majority of unemployed young women and men across the region rely on informal networks to search for jobs. In particular, the lack of effectiveness of labor market information processes hinders their access to employment. For example, in Nepal only 9.1 percent of young people found a job through newspaper advertisements, and while 16.3 percent are registered at an unemployment center, only 1 percent found a job this way (Serrière, 2014). In this context, the increase of social capital through volunteering can be even more beneficial to young people during their employment search, with volunteerism a useful tool for creating and maintaining useful contacts.



“My time as a volunteer helped me to develop a wide network, which became the biggest asset and helped me to find a job afterwards.”

- Danang Nizar, Volunteer in disaster risk reduction

It is not uncommon a volunteer is hired in the organization or company they volunteered for (Karajkov, 2013). When hiring, organizations and enterprises often prefer to contact a former volunteer rather than looking for a completely new candidate, saving them costs, effort, and time. This process has the benefit of an existing relationship with the former volunteer, which limits the risk of skills underutilization or wrong expectations. Additionally, the exposure to a specific work environment can also be useful for an individual without work experience to test whether it suits their preferences, allowing young people to make more informed training and employment decision, if their context allows it.

Other than contributing to enhanced youth employability, volunteerism also helps to overcome gender barriers by providing opportunities for both young men and women to work in non-traditional environments and positions. Volunteering can lower the barrier to “trying out” activities which do not conform to traditional gender roles, which has been observed to be successful in specific case studies in the region (ILO, 2011b).

Moreover, volunteerism can act as a low-cost and productive way to encourage governments and the private sector to try out new models of employment. For example, the Local Governance and Community Development programme in Nepal engaged volunteers for ICT support through UNDP, UNV and the UN Capital Development Fund, building an online government presence in the country. After the volunteer engagement came to an end, the volunteer positions were professionalized into work contracts. In this example of formalized volunteering, new employment positions were created as a result of testing out a new model or occupation with volunteers.

As the CSR sector is increasing, companies also create more employment positions to coordinate volunteer involving programmes. Many of the big companies in Asia and the Pacific in the chocolate, coffee or tobacco industry, for example, have increasingly strong community programmes to mitigate negative effects of farming and resource exploitation, and to move towards increased sustainability. An illustration of such a programme is the Mars Ambassador Programme in Indonesia, which is working on, among others, coral reef rehabilitation in Sulawesi. Hundreds of employees from the region and beyond come to volunteer for this programme every year, helping sustainability and marketing benefits, as well as employee and community engagement. Mars also has a global Mars Volunteer Programme for its employees, with new employment positions for volunteer coordination created in recent years (Willow, 2014).

Youth Entrepreneurship

The research tends to suggest a link between youth volunteerism and skills development beneficial to young entrepreneurs. As previously explored, youth entrepreneurship faces the constraints of lacking experience, relevant skills and knowledge, as well as poor leadership and management skills, a lack of strategic thinking, teamwork and problem-solving skills. Combined with a lack of support, funding mechanisms and an unfriendly business environments, startups and young businesses tend to have a very high failure rate.

In Asia and the Pacific, however, SMEs accounted for an average of 96 percent of all enterprises and 62 percent of the national labor forces (ADB, 2014). The vast majority of these SMEs are small businesses and enterprises. Tech startups are still suffering from high failure rates, with more than 90 percent of startups in India failing in their first five years, for example (IBM, 2017). While SMEs can still be entrepreneurial in their endeavors, many smaller firms and businesses in the region are established out of necessity or are long-established family businesses.

Volunteerism cannot directly provide government support or funding mechanisms, but young volunteers can gain valuable experience before starting their own business. Volunteering with different SMEs can be especially useful, providing first hand practical

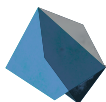


In Thimphu, Bhutan, the only UN Volunteer in the country, together with UNDP Bhutan and in cooperation with the Tarayana Foundation, mobilized local volunteer students from YHS Tarayana School Club.

education about all the elements of a business and its day-to-day operations (Karajkov, 2013). The experience can also help young entrepreneurs to gain insight into different types of businesses and sectors, allowing them to make a more informed decision about where to start their own endeavor without the risk of failure and loss of financial investment. It is important to recall here, however, the difference between internships or traineeships and volunteering, which should always be dedicated to a social cause. Volunteers can engage with SMEs for the benefit of the community, carrying out activities that both develop their skill sets and help acquire experience, but also contribute to providing services or building infrastructure for the community.

Many young people in Asia and the Pacific engage in unpaid family work on a regular basis, which should be classified as informal employment rather than volunteer work. Though both family work and internships can help young people develop or strengthen important life and professional skills, the motivation compared to volunteerism tends to be very different. Volunteering offers the opportunity for exposure to widely different contexts, as well as a more flexible engagement possible while in

school, at university, or whilst already employed. Furthermore, as the current and former volunteers have also testified, volunteering tends to increase confidence and even self-sufficiency, which are skills more difficult to develop in family contexts where there might be less leadership opportunities and exposure to new contexts. Many young people in the region are not yet exposed to tech or ICT work environments. Considering the recent emergence of a larger and stronger startup scene in many countries, such as in Vietnam, India and Singapore, volunteering can be a valuable entry point for young people interested in building their own startups. Though formalized volunteer opportunities in this sector are still limited, an increasing number of interesting projects offer young people insight and experience. For example, private sector partners from the ICT sector such as CISCO and SAP are working with UN Volunteers providing opportunities for ICT trainings and ICT volunteer positions, as well as mentoring and support for a number of volunteer projects that are transitioning into tech and social startups. Less formalized opportunities can include volunteering during events or forms of community engagement. Realistically, these opportunities are currently only available to a minority of the population of young



Recently, more research and studies are exploring the psychology behind successful entrepreneurship. One example of such studies and accompanying theories is the Grit Scale developed by Angela Duckworth, which consists of a survey measuring the grit, or the passion and perseverance for long-term goals, of entrepreneurs (Duckworth & Gross, 2014). Volunteer work in areas of interest of an entrepreneur can increase the score of his or her Grit Scale, indicating more dedication and higher chances at success with their personal business endeavor. The Grit Scale and psychology theory behind it is still somewhat disputed in a complex field requiring more studies.

men and women in Asia and Pacific, but an increase of engagements and attempts at reaching marginalized groups and rural areas should be noted.

In India, which ranks third globally in terms of number of startups, lack of innovation, lack of skilled workforce, lack of sufficient funding, inadequate formal mentoring, bad business ethics, and a lack of experienced leadership are cited as reasons for failure of the large majority of new startups (IBM, 2017). Volunteering in this sector can build the skills needed, as well as provide mentoring relationships. Young people can gain leadership experience and learn more about good business ethics, which can be reinforced and strengthened by the increased social awareness that oftentimes comes from volunteer experiences, which are beneficial to social inclusion and civic participation.

Two Indonesian volunteers transitioning their project into a tech startup explained that the idea came from volunteer engagements which helped them to see the needs of their community. The volunteer experience led to the goal of creating a social startup, not focused on revenue but rather a cause which improves the quality of life of marginalized groups in the community. Their startup 'Tune Map' building a mobile application for visually impaired people which maps the condition of roads and sidewalks in

Bandung, Indonesia, making it easier for them to move independently about the city.

Many young men and women in the region indicate they depend on family as a major source of investment and encouragement (UNV, 2017). Expanding their social capital through volunteering expands the circle of support to other sources and actors, creating an enabling environment for young entrepreneurs to gain additional support outside their families. With lack of sufficient funding being cited as a major challenge for young companies, an increase of social capital, networks and contacts can be a crucial tool for a young person intend on building their own successful startup endeavor.

Job Retention, Career Progression and Motivation

Employability itself is not limited to entering the labor market by finding a job; it also encompasses job retention and career progression. It can be argued that soft skills are crucial for job retention and career progression, with communication, leadership and teamwork skills, critical thinking and problem solving, and organizational and self-management skills allowing for increased productivity and continued learning of hard skills 'on the job'. Some studies suggest that employability is enhanced directly by strengthening soft skills (OECD, 2017). Especially in the context of informal employment and skills underutilization where there are often no formal training opportunities or further job training for career progression, soft skills and a readiness to learn and teach others can be the key for job retention and progression.

The same applies to SMEs, which indicate the lack of skills as the main obstacle for their work. SMEs oftentimes do not have the funds and the time for training staff, with most of the learning done on the job. Furthermore, they often do not possess the capacity to do well-planned recruitment and choose to address the skills gap by working harder rather than working smarter, meaning the recruitment of more employees to make up for a lack of productivity instead of recruiting employees with the most suitable skills (Kitigawa, 2001). The fact that SMEs

are by far the largest type of employer in the region of Asia and the Pacific emphasizes their importance in the context of youth unemployment.

Becoming lifelong learners is beneficial for young people for both low-skill and high-skill labor, as both ends of the labor market spectrum experience changes towards temporary employment that is more prone to vulnerability. In addition, with levels of informality still being drastically high in Asia and the Pacific, transitions to more decent work will take more development over longer periods of time in LMICs. Volunteering in different contexts that lead to more confidence, better communication skills and adaptability, as well as enhanced social capital and better networks in the community and beyond, is highly beneficial to young people seeking employment in LMICs, especially without TVET and other formalized opportunities for skills development.

Looking towards the future, a multitude of studies suggest an increasing number of tasks are likely to be automated. It is clear flexibility and readiness to adapt and learn will become crucial for job retention and career progression. Digital skills are changing especially fast with 10 percent of adult workers in the European Union already at high risk of technological skills obsolescence today (Cedefop, 2017). With

automation and ICT slowly increasing in the Asia-Pacific labor market, it is crucial for young men and women to invest just as much in soft skills than hard skills to ensure chances at job retention and career progression.

Volunteerism is also demonstrated to have an effect on attitudes, behaviors and values, and the psychosocial aspects of individual health. A volunteer occupation creates sense of self-worth and instills self-esteem, increasing well-being. Volunteers report increased motivation and a sense of being of value to others (IAVE, 2013). These effects are beneficial to combat the negative impacts of unemployment. As such, volunteering is a process of ethical learning, allowing not only for skills development but also personal development and growth. The social capital, experience and leadership, resourcefulness and the readiness and willingness to learn continuously that can be acquired through volunteering are elements that compliment employability and economic empowerment. As driving forces for participation, these skills, behaviors and attitudes enable young people in the region to become more actively engaged in political decision-making processes, from the community level to the national level. Young people can become more involved in shaping policies and their country's economy to provide better opportunities for all.



Conclusion and Recommendations

As the first section of this Issue Brief exposes, the problem and the solution for youth employment is in the labor market. In order to maximize the gains generated by volunteer programmes and their skills development components, the structural causes of unequal labor market opportunities must be addressed at the level of national labor policies (Peck and Theodore, 2000; Wilton, 2011). The move towards a formalized labor market and economy, away from informal and vulnerable employment, is crucial as formality is linked to greater job stability, higher income and access to other benefits, such as pensions and health care. While the main responsibility for this change lies with national governments, targeted volunteer programmes can increase the civic engagement of communities and populations, providing spaces to contribute to building better policies and capacity. These actions and changes on all sides and from all actors are necessary for the economic empowerment of young men and women in Asia and the Pacific, to enhance employability, reduce barriers to access and anticipate the labor needs of the future.

The Issue Brief demonstrates a number of different links between volunteerism, skills development and employability, as well as to the economic empowerment for young people. It gives critical insight into how volunteerism can help young women and men not only to develop important skills that can support the access to the labor market through exposure to work environments and networks but also allows volunteers to acquire attitudes and behaviors increasingly crucial for job retention and career progression. Strategic changes in the labor market and labor policies would maximize the impact of formal volunteer programmes, as well as informal volunteer activities across Asia and the Pacific. On the other hand, a more favorable national policy and regulatory framework, recognition and promotion of volunteerism for peace and development and committed national leadership, provides more effective volunteer infrastructure on the national level, which state programmes, volunteer serving organizations and volunteers themselves can rely on to strengthen the impact of volunteering and enhance skill development of volunteers.

Key insights revealed for employability

It is critical to examine the reality of the current labor market in Asia and the Pacific and anticipate future trends and labor skill demand

- As a course of action, countries in the region should continue strengthening institutional capacities to build skills that match industry and market needs. This process of producing and building on available labor market and skills intelligence can contribute to achieving a better balance between skill supply and demand to promote economic development through targeted skills investment by the various stakeholders. Skills anticipation can identify current and possible future skill mismatches and inform policy decisions on how to address them.

Soft skills with a focus on adaptability and a readiness to develop new skills on a continuous and consistent basis will become increasingly important during all phases of employment

- With the lack of soft skill recognition among employers during recruitment, the continuous increase and improvement of formal education and professional training in the region might change this habit in the future.
- Similarly, with automation replacing low-skill labor and an increase in competitiveness for high-skill labor, becoming lifelong learners will help young people in both LMICs and HICs where labor markets are dominated by informal employment or temporary and part-time positions.

More evidence-based studies of high statistical certainty are necessary in order to fully understand the success of volunteering and forms of free labor as a skills development opportunity

- National governments should expand their own citizen surveys and international and national

organization can gather more data from their own programming. This data collection should include specific questions on volunteering to provide a more detailed insight into the impact of volunteer work on employability across the region.

- There is a need for more research and studies into other forms of free labor which do not qualify as volunteering, for example child care, housework or work in family businesses. This research can provide insight into other opportunities of skills development, which are a reality for a majority of young people in the region.

Volunteering in new environments can break down gender barriers and stereotypes, empowering young people to join new work sectors

- This is of particular importance in countries that see their labor markets dominated by informal employment, where policies to empower women tend to be less effective. It is critical gender dynamics of skills development are considered for young women for more decent employment.

Entrepreneurship

An enabling environment is required to empower and support young entrepreneurs with their businesses and startups

- Support in education, training, investment and empowerment is critical for young entrepreneurs.

There is a need for more appropriate legal frameworks for startups and improved accessibility of information as well as varied financing mechanisms suitable to young men and women

- Without an appropriate legal framework and accessible regulations for licensing businesses, the environment is too challenging for young entrepreneurs to succeed, or for young people to become interested in entrepreneurship. Financing is one of the main reasons of young business endeavors failing, making varied financing mechanisms crucial for entrepreneurship.

Volunteer projects can build entrepreneurial skill sets to enhance youth entrepreneurship in a market dominated by SMEs

- Recognizing volunteer experience and encouraging more formal volunteer programmes in entrepreneurship contexts can contribute to more socially and community aware projects with better business ethics, as well as more grit and perseverance for long-term goals, leading to increased chances of success of the business endeavor.
- Volunteering provides an opportunity to develop soft skills, especially leadership which is a key characteristic for successful entrepreneurs.

High tech startup failure rates can be curbed by volunteers gaining experience, developing mentor relationships, building networks that allow an access to funding, and learning good business ethics

- Volunteer involving organizations can support young entrepreneurs by providing opportunities to gain insight and experience in SMEs and the tech startup sector, as well as helping relevant targeted skills development.
- Research and data should contribute to a discussion on the recognition of skills, which include but aren't limited to ambition, passion and dedication, in order to determine different ways to evaluate motivation which can be crucial information for small businesses during recruitment of employees.

Key insights on volunteerism

Volunteer programmes

States are recommended to develop and strengthen their national volunteer policy and infrastructure

- An effective national policy and regulatory framework, recognition and promotion of volunteerism for peace and development, and committed national leadership provides a favorable volunteer infrastructure. State programmes, volunteer serving organizations and volunteers themselves benefit from clear structures, regulations and protections, strengthening the impact of volunteering.

Volunteer programmes need to become more strategic to allow both hard and soft skills development

- Since employers traditionally select candidates based on their job-specific, technical skills, more volunteer programmes aimed at increasing the economic empowerment of young men and women should facilitate targeted skills development, especially for technical, hard skills.

Volunteer certification and recommendations, as well as highlighting the specific skills developed and experience acquired, directly contribute to the enhanced employability of the young volunteers

- In the absence of formal career advisory institutions and programmes, volunteer involving organizations are recommended to support volunteers in their skills and network development, as well as the valorization thereof through certification or other forms of recognition. Teaching how to highlight soft skills for the search of employment is of high value to young volunteers.
- More governments and institutions need to develop frameworks for the recognition of volunteer experience and skills development, as well as for coordinated support for volunteer opportunities and continuous volunteer engagement.

Volunteer involving organizations should provide more targeted opportunities for their volunteers to develop their social capital in a safe and strategic way

- Given the high rate of young people accessing employment through informal recruitment, volunteer involving organizations should support their volunteers more actively in developing their social capital and networks. Volunteers should be encouraged and empowered to benefit from knowledge sharing and networking opportunities. Training volunteers in relationship-building is beneficial

for both the volunteer and the organization, as both benefit from an increase of exposure and a growing network of contacts.

Organizations need to recognize gender dynamics and inclusivity behind skill development

- In order to overcome social and societal barriers, volunteer programmes must be designed to be inclusive with outreach and empowerment of young people in marginalized groups or rural areas, as well provide opportunities for young women to gain experience and insight in nontraditional work environments.

Volunteers

Young volunteers should understand how their volunteer engagement can help them develop

relevant skills, contacts and networks for employment. Social capital and networks are key to employment, especially in informal settings or when launching an entrepreneurial endeavor.

- This can also be relevant when volunteers anticipate skills required for future employability and match volunteer opportunities accordingly.

Young women and men should highlight hard and soft skills and experience acquired during volunteering when seeking employment

- Young volunteers can maximize their chances at finding employment by not only highlighting their volunteer activities, but also the specific hard and soft skills acquired during volunteering, as well as any relevant volunteer experience similar to work experience.

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