

Volunteering in Nigeria and Botswana under the spotlight

By Salah Elzein Mohamed

The scope, pattern and extent of volunteering in west and southern Africa came under the spotlight at a workshop organised in November 2005 by the International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE) in Umuahia, the capital town of Abia State in Nigeria. The theme of the two-day workshop was "Scope, Pattern and Extent of Volunteering in Nigeria and Botswana".

The workshop, sponsored by the UPS Foundation, was the culmination of an IAVE study on volunteering in Nigeria and Botswana. According to Dr Ifeoma Ekpunobi, Research Officer with IAVE Nigeria, the main objectives of the workshop were to:

- discuss the scope, pattern and extent of volunteering in Botswana and Nigeria;
- explore the roles of government agencies, international agencies and corporate bodies in promoting and supporting the development of volunteering;
- identify major issues affecting the development of volunteering in the two countries;
- ascertain the role of the youth in volunteering;
- assess the importance of ICT in volunteering; and
- develop strategies for addressing the issues identified.

More than one hundred participants attended the workshop. They represented various international agencies based in Nigeria, Nigerian national and state government agencies, corporate bodies, non-governmental organisations, as well as delegates from IAVE Botswana and Volunteer and Service Enquiry Southern Africa (VOSESA).

In her keynote address, Dr (Mrs) Rose Ekeleme, IAVE Research Coordinator for Nigeria and a member of IAVE's Board of Directors emphasised the role of volunteering in building strong and cohesive communities, and promoting trust, reciprocity and responsible citizenship. She highlighted that volunteering as a cross-cutting social phenomenon involves all groups in society and contributes enormously to the social, cultural and economic life of all nations.

The workshop participants noted that there are a lot of volunteer activities taking place in Nigeria, Botswana and South Africa, but these are not fully documented. It was suggested that despite the growing understanding of the significant role that information and communication technology plays in promoting volunteerism, accessibility remains a big challenge, especially for community-based organisations. Participants also highlighted that most funding for volunteer activities, especially in Nigeria, comes from donor agencies, while government has not been making adequate budgetary allocations to support volunteer activities. There is an urgent need for capacity building especially in the area of volunteer management.

The host country, Nigeria, was praised for the establishment of the Nigerian National Volunteer Service (NNVS) located in the Presidency. In the course of the workshop discussion, however, it was noted that volunteer activities in Nigeria are uncoordinated, lack policy and legislative guidelines, and have not received due recognition by government authorities, the corporate sector or other agencies. Participants hoped that the NNVS will partner with volunteering agencies to create an environment conducive to the growth of volunteering in Nigeria.

The workshop recommendations include a call for the establishment of a National Volunteer Resource Centre in Nigeria to promote volunteering. Participants also recommended that another workshop should be organised in the future, and called on other corporate organisations to emulate the example of the UPS Foundation that is committed to philanthropy and employee volunteerism.