



BETTERTOGETHER CHALLENGE

Innovating with Venezuelans
for a brighter future



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

THE BETTERTOGETHER / JUNTOSESMEJOR CHALLENGE

Lessons Learned and Impact in Supporting Venezuelan Migrants and Host Communities Through Innovation

December 2022

This document is the result of an effort to crowdsource, fund, and scale forward-thinking, sustainable solutions that improve the lives of Venezuelans and host communities across Latin America and the Caribbean. The information and statements presented herein are those of the authors, and do not necessarily represent the wider agency.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACRONYMS	4
MESSAGE FROM USAID	5
INTRODUCTION	6
The Venezuela Regional Crisis	6
THE BETTERTOGETHER / JUNTOSESMEJOR SOLUTION	8
Approach	9
An Open Call for Innovations from Solvers	9
Support to Solver Organizations	10
Development Innovation Principles in Practice	12
Challenge-Wide Lessons Learned	14
Communications	15
Design and Launch	17
Implementation	18
Acceleration	20
Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning	21
OVERALL CHALLENGE IMPACT	23
The Collective Impact	23
Lessons Learned by Technical Area Across the Challenge	24
Agriculture, Agroforestry and Food Security	24
Water, Sanitation and Hygiene	25
Digital Technology and Media	25
Education, Vocational Training, and Youth	27
Entrepreneurship, Economic Growth, and Finance	28
Gender Equality and Women’s Economic Empowerment	31
Xenophobia, GBV, and Violence Prevention	32
SUMMARY IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE WORK WITH MIGRANTS IN CRISIS	34
ANNEX I: BETTERTOGETHER / JUNTOSESMEJOR SOLVER ORGANIZATION PROFILES	36



ACRONYMS

APS	Annual Program Statement
CLA	Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting
DI	Democracy International
FAA	Fixed Amount Award
FIU	Florida International University
FY	Fiscal Year
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HIAS	Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
IDIA	International Development Innovation Alliance
IRC	International Rescue Committee
IT	Information Technology
IYF	International Youth Foundation
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
NCC	National Coordinating Coalition
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OFAC	Office of Foreign Assets Control
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
RESET	Restablecer y Empoderate Como Un Sobreviviente Educado y Transformado
RCSTT	Rape Crisis Society of Trinidad and Tobago
SAM	System for Award Management
SEL	Social-Emotional Learning
SMS	Short Messaging Service
TPM	Third-Party Monitoring
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	United States Dollar
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene
WELCOME	Women Exercising Leadership for Cohesion and Meaningful Empowerment



MESSAGE FROM USAID

Since 2014, deteriorating economic and political conditions in Venezuela—marked by devastating hyperinflation, shortages of basic medicine, and limited food availability—have contributed to escalating humanitarian needs. These dire circumstances have spurred an exodus of migrants to surrounding countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. The migrants encountered further challenges following their arrival, such as xenophobia, unemployment, and issues accessing basic services. They also place additional strains on host communities already struggling with COVID-19 and other ongoing issues.

In fiscal year (FY) 2021, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) responded with more than \$377 million in [funding for the Venezuela regional crisis](#), targeting areas such as food security, health, and economic recovery, among others. Beyond meeting acute humanitarian needs, USAID recognized that confronting this crisis requires building long-term resilience through new and innovative ways of thinking about development. Equitable, inclusive, and sustainable responses to the challenges, both inside Venezuela and across the region, must be built upon the priorities, knowledge, lived experiences, aspirations, and expertise of the people who confront them every day.

As part of this, the [BetterTogether/JuntosEsMejor Challenge](#), jointly led by USAID and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), identified, funded, and strengthened ground-breaking solutions to one or more aspects of the Venezuelan crisis. With the generous support of the challenge, 33 solver organizations received 35 different awards (25 supported by USAID, and ten by the IDB), operating programs across ten countries, including Venezuela from FY20 to FY22. Through this, they have dramatically improved the lives of nearly half a million people and counting, 44 percent of whom were women.¹ We are proud that 83 percent of the awards USAID made were to locally based organizations,² ten were to Venezuelan-led organizations, and more than half were new USAID partners. A complete list of the USAID-funded solver organizations and summaries of their technical focus is included in the annex to this document.

The BetterTogether/JuntosEsMejor final report shines a spotlight on the considerable impact of the USAID-supported solver organizations funded by the challenge, as well as lessons learned to benefit future programs, especially those operating in non-permissive or crisis and conflict environments. The breadth of the challenge's reach across geographies and technical sectors is a testament to the magnitude of the crisis, as well as the ingenuity of solvers from the affected communities and from across the globe. Read through the report to learn about a creative social media campaign that provided information on support services to thousands of migrants in Colombia while countering xenophobia in host communities; a personalized approach to supporting migrants experiencing gender-based violence (GBV) in Trinidad and Tobago; a revolutionary mobile application connecting Venezuelan women migrants in Peru with a flexible livelihood at a fair wage; and other empowering innovations.

Against a difficult backdrop, the BetterTogether/JuntosEsMejor Challenge demonstrated the power of open innovation competitions and locally-led partnerships. With modest financial and technical assistance, challenge solvers developed, tested, and scaled sustainable solutions that will continue to improve the lives of Venezuelans, migrants, and host communities in the years to come.

¹ Information based on data taken from programs that were able to count and disaggregate results by gender.

² A local organization is defined as an entity whose headquarters is in a country or region the challenge is serving. As such, the majority of the entity's staff (senior, mid-level, support) is composed of host country and/or regional nationals. Local organizations refers to both governmental and nongovernmental (private sector, non-governmental organizations, faith-based organizations, and community-based organizations).



INTRODUCTION

The Venezuela Regional Crisis

Venezuela's political and economic crisis has caused the largest external displacement of people in the history of the Western hemisphere. While recent data from inside Venezuela is limited, as of July 2022, more than seven million people, or one in every seven Venezuelans, have fled the country, leaving behind friends, family, their communities, and professional and cultural ties.³ Those remaining must contend with devastating hyperinflation and government failures that have affected nearly every aspect of their daily lives, including:

- **Economic opportunities.** Venezuela's economy has contracted for seven consecutive years. The most recent data on gross domestic product (GDP) from 2020 shows a growth rate of -30 percent, with more than 35 percent unemployment for 2018.⁴ The lack of economic opportunities is one of the primary drivers of migration, leading to a "brain drain" that compounds the country's problems.
- **Quality service provision.** In February 2020, 40 percent of households faced recurring interruptions to their water service, and one out of every four did not have sustainable access to potable water. Likewise, access to quality education has decreased since 2015, with schools closed 40 percent of the year due to political unrest, mandatory cancellations, or limited budget.⁵
- **Access to information.** Only 20.5 percent of Venezuelan households had internet access in 2020,⁶ a dismal figure compared with the South American average of 72 percent.⁷ Without internet access—in particular during a global pandemic that has often prevented many citizens from leaving their homes—people are unable to conduct business, attend school, connect with friends and family, and obtain basic information about the economy such as the current exchange rate.
- **Public safety.** In 2021, Venezuela was the most dangerous country in Latin America for the third consecutive year, according to the Venezuelan Violence Observatory. The organization recorded more than 40.9 homicides for every 100,000 people, with a total of 11,081 homicides.⁸
- **Food security.** Without access to stable income, many Venezuelans lack the resources to buy food for themselves and their families. One out of every three Venezuelans (32.3 percent) is food insecure and in need of assistance. A 2019 survey of Venezuelan families showed that 74 percent have engaged in food-related coping strategies, with 60 percent reducing portion size at meals due to reductions in the variety and quality of what they ate.⁹ In 2017, a majority of the population lost an average of 25 pounds, and 80 percent of the population did not have a reliable food source. In 2019, the United Nations World Food Program determined that more than 32 percent of the population was experiencing moderate or severe food insecurity.

3 R4V. "Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela." Accessed March 11, 2022. <https://www.r4v.info/en/refugeeandmigrants>.

4 International Monetary Fund. "World Economic Outlook Database." October 2021 data for Venezuela. https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/weo-database/2021/October/weo-report?c=299,&s=NGDP_RPCH,PCPI,LUR,LP,&sy=2013&ey=2026&ssm=0&scsm=1&sc=0&ssd=1&ssc=0&sic=0&sort=country&ds=.&br=1.

5 Venezuela's Education System. Accessed August 25, 2022. <https://borgenproject.org/venezuelas-education-system/>.

6 Statista. "Percentage of households with internet access in Venezuela in 2020, by state." Accessed December 14, 2021. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1244220/household-internet-access-venezuela/>.

7 Statista. "Internet use in Latin America - Statistics & Facts." Accessed May 9, 2022. https://www.statista.com/topics/2432/internet-usage-in-latin-america/#topicHeader_wrapper.

8 Observatorio Venezolano de Violencia. "Informe Anual de Violencia 2021" December 12, 2021, Accessed August 24, 2022. <https://observatoriodeviolencia.org.ve/news/informe-anual-de-violencia-2021/>.

9 WFP Venezuela Food Security Assessment, published February 2020. Accessed September 22, 2022: <https://reliefweb.int/report/venezuela-bolivarian-republic/wfp-venezuela-food-security-assessment-main-findings-data>.



These problems are multi-layered and experienced differently across communities, with impacts among neighboring countries. More than 80 percent of Venezuela’s migrants have fled to other places in Latin America and the Caribbean, with Colombia and Peru hosting the majority of migrants. Nearly half of Venezuelan migrants are women, 34 percent of whom reported traveling alone¹⁰, placing them at particular risk to exploitation, social exclusion, abuse, and GBV.

This outflow has increased stress on already fragile healthcare systems, public services, labor markets, community relations, and infrastructure in host countries where Venezuelan migrants settle. Migrants struggle to access food, water, education, employment, and healthcare. Moreover, they lack reliable sources of information and internet connectivity, and they often face xenophobia and violence in their host communities.

COVID-19 Impact

The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly exacerbated the difficulties that Venezuelans face both inside and out of the country. Initially, pandemic-related shutdowns disrupted already fragmented supply chains, further limiting the availability of basic goods. Strict lockdown and quarantine measures prevented people from leaving their homes for many months, restricting access to education and employment. Migrants, who frequently work in the informal economy and have few savings or social safety nets, were especially hard-hit. Since then, although vaccines have now changed the pandemic landscape, access to them is often still limited for migrants who do not speak their host country language or who face eligibility restrictions due to their informal immigration status and limited definition by host country governments of who is “at risk” or in greatest need of a vaccine.

¹⁰ International Organization for Migration. “General Demographic Characteristics of Migrant and Refugee Women in Venezuela.”



THE BETTERTOGETHER / JUNTOS ES MEJOR SOLUTION

The [BetterTogether/JuntosEsMejor Challenge](#) was implemented from September 2019 to September 2022, with the support of more than 25 operational and outreach partners to amplify its reach and impact. The ~\$13 million challenge crowdsourced, funded, and scaled 35 forward-thinking, sustainable solutions that improved the lives of 550,000 Venezuelans and host community members directly, and 2.5 million indirectly across Latin America and the Caribbean.

Challenge competitions, such as BetterTogether/JuntosEsMejor, use open calls for innovation to source a broad range of solutions to complex challenges from solver organizations around the globe, including but not limited to nonprofits, for-profit companies, universities, and more. The challenge then monitors the solver organizations' impact on pressing development problems, and supports and accelerates those solutions that demonstrate significant potential. In this way, challenge competitions provide a common platform for partnership building and collaboration, bringing solvers from across the globe together to support shared goals.

What is a Challenge?

Challenge competitions use open calls for innovation to spark a broad range of approaches to a known problem for which the best solution is unclear. They allow challenge administrators, such as USAID, to make small calculated bets on a range of the most promising solutions, business models, or strategies, rather than assigning a single precise outcome. Under this structure, some of the interventions may fail to achieve impact at scale, while others may achieve significant results.

Challenges, such as BetterTogether/JuntosEsMejor, often do this by engaging non-traditional actors to support development and humanitarian goals. Remaining open to ideas from these unique solvers helps surface new approaches and ways of working. For instance, limited internet connectivity in Venezuela constrains households' ability to obtain basic information supportive of small business commerce, education, and other needs. To address this, the BetterTogether/JuntosEsMejor Challenge sourced a [telecommunications company](#) to introduce a low-cost experimental business model for internet service provision in urban areas in Venezuela.

This challenge was designed around the theory that *IF* innovative ideas and solutions from local Venezuelans and other solvers around the globe were funded, tested, and scaled; *AND* their networks were expanded; *THEN* this would elevate their voices and ingenuity; helping to create a marketplace of tested and ready-made solutions based on effective approaches, evidence, tools, and lessons learned. As a result, Venezuelans would be empowered to create better lives for themselves and others, alleviating the effects of the regional crisis.

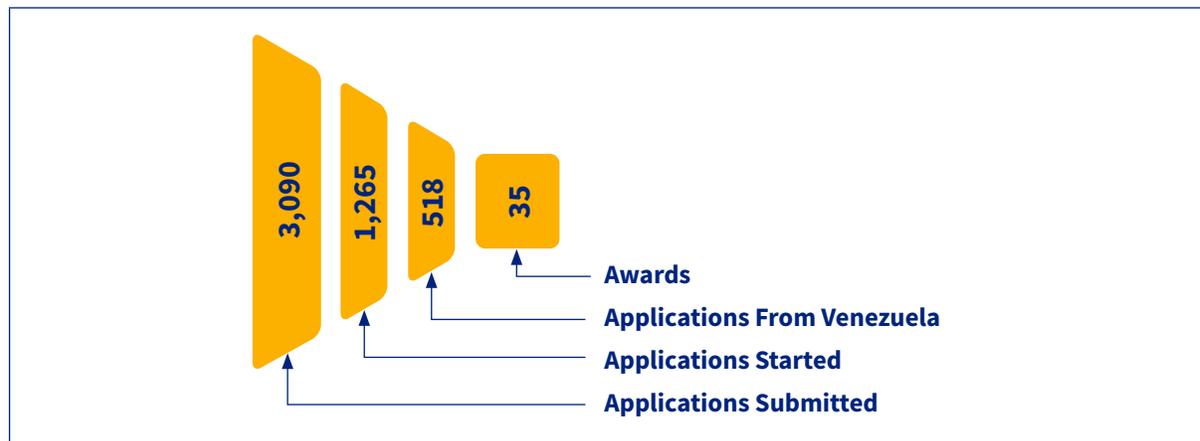
Approach

AN OPEN CALL FOR INNOVATIONS FROM SOLVERS

Given the diverse challenges faced by Venezuelans inside and beyond the country, the challenge was launched as a one-year open call in October 2019 that sought applications from solver organizations in the following four broad areas: people, productivity, finance, and services. Solvers could apply from around the world, provided their solutions were implemented in at least one of the ten countries most affected by the Venezuela crisis.¹¹ To support this, the challenge published its Annual Program Statement¹² (APS) in English, Spanish, and Portuguese, with the intention to reach as many local and/or Venezuelan-led solvers across Latin America and the Caribbean as possible.

The challenge worked globally with the Venezuelan diaspora and other partners across its networks to promote the open call. It opted for a tiered structure to reduce barriers to entry for new organizations and to ensure that funding levels were aligned with solvers' maturity and scaling ambitions. The four tiers included:

- **Tier #1.** New ideas for awards valued at up to \$25,000.
- **Tier #2.** Prototypes ready to pilot and assess impact for up to \$250,000.
- **Tier #3.** Validation with broader market readiness for between \$250,000 and \$500,000.
- **Tier #4.** Scaling of solutions demonstrating commercial viability for up to \$1.5 million.



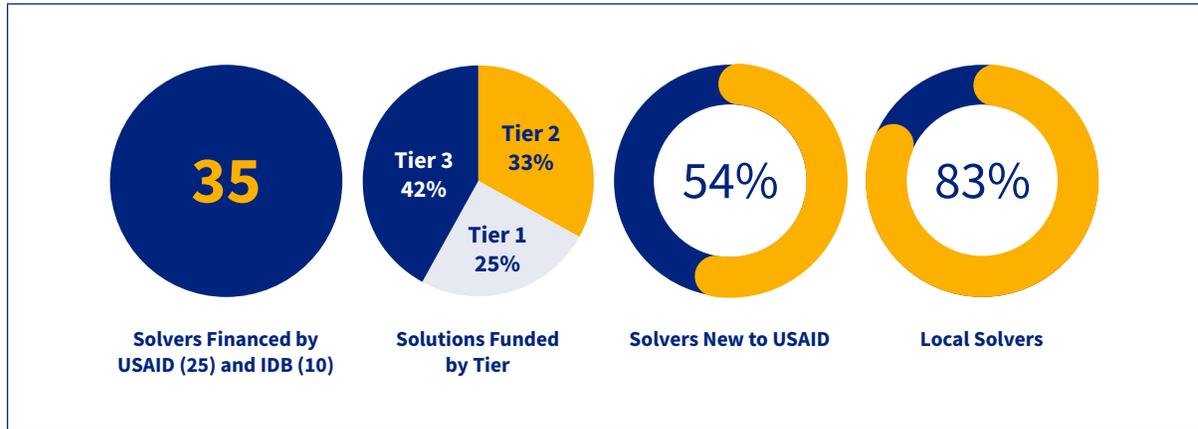
¹¹ Proposed solutions were accepted from organizations intending to implement in one or more of the following countries: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Panama, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, and Venezuela. USAID was the sole funder of solutions valued at Tier #1 (\$25,000 or less) and/or those implemented in Venezuela. IDB supported awards at the level of Tiers #2 through 4 and provided funding in all locations outside Venezuela.

¹² An APS is a means utilized by USAID to share information about an award-making process. The goal of this APS was to support the competition component of the challenge by sharing information about the challenge, including: the types of activities the challenge partners would consider; the funding available; the process and requirements for submitting applications; the criteria for evaluating applications; and additional relevant resources for prospective applicants.



The open call was refined during the year to adapt to evolving circumstances and priorities through three addenda targeting: (i) solutions that integrated COVID-19 responses into their approach; (ii) solvers working in women’s economic empowerment; and (iii) solvers responding to GBV, particularly in the Caribbean.

In total, 3,090 applications were started and 1,265 were submitted, 518 (41 percent) of which were from organizations in Venezuela. These applications were reviewed by three-person panels of expert judges, assigned from a wider pool of 256 judges with relevant regional and technical knowledge. Ultimately, the challenge made 35 awards (25 with funds from USAID and ten from the IDB) to solver organizations in ten countries, including Venezuela (see map). A total of 83 percent of the USAID-funded organizations were locally based, and 54 percent were new partners for USAID. This report focuses on USAID-funded awards.¹³



SUPPORT TO SOLVER ORGANIZATIONS

In addition to financial support, BetterTogether/JuntosEsMejor offered international publicity, access to networks, and technical assistance to accelerate approaches and organizational capacity for winning solvers. The challenge’s tailored acceleration program provided solver organizations with capacity development, leveraging mentorship from industry experts in technical areas and peer learning to identify solvers’ risks and skill gaps, and promoted the tools and knowledge to overcome them. Fundamental to the technical support was the challenge’s goal of enhancing the ability of locally-driven solutions to achieve sustainability beyond the life of their award, and scalability to national, regional, and global contexts. To this end, acceleration support to solver organizations focused on five key core areas: (i) general capacity development through work plans and strategy creation; (ii) administrative support to design procurement, finance, human resources, and operational manuals; (iii) mentorship by pairing organizations with leading experts in their field; (iv) communications, including strategic use of social media and other virtual and in-person outlets; and (v) monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) systems, including data collection tools, analysis, and evidence for evidence-based decision-making. Due in part to this holistic and responsive service offering, in a final exit survey, 100 percent of USAID-funded solvers indicated that they are in a better place to succeed as a result of participating in BetterTogether/JuntosEsMejor.

¹³ USAID-funded solver organizations that received awards under the BetterTogether/JuntosEsMejor Challenge are referenced throughout this document, with a summary of each organization in the annex. Due to the politically sensitive operating context, all identifying information, including organization or project name and/or location, have been removed for solvers implementing in Venezuela, to ensure the safety of their staff and end users.

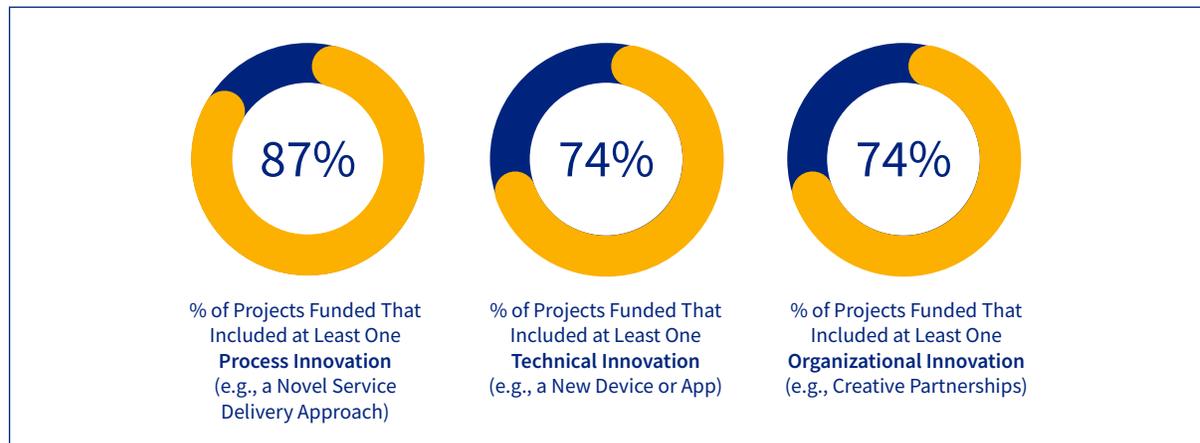


Development Innovation Principles in Practice

The International Development Innovation Alliance (IDIA) defines an innovation as “a new solution with the transformative ability to accelerate impact [that] can be fueled by science and technology, can entail improved ways of working with new and diverse partners, or can involve new social and business models or policy, creative financing mechanisms, or path-breaking improvements in delivering essential services and products.”¹⁴

BetterTogether/JuntosEsMejor was designed to source this kind of innovation through a flexible, responsive, and adaptive approach that met the changing needs of Venezuelans during the challenge period. Part of its success was based on a broad definition of innovation, which is shared by other USAID open innovation competition programs. Although in popular usage, the term innovation is sometimes limited to new technologies, BetterTogether/JuntosEsMejor supported solver organizations to implement a wide range of creative and ground-breaking solutions, including new and refined products, services, and processes. In total, 87 percent of projects included at least one process innovation, 74 percent involved a technical innovation (e.g., a device, mobile application), and 74 percent involved organizational innovations. Examples of these are:

- **Process.** The reintroduction of sustainable traditional farming methods to indigenous communities vulnerable to food insecurity in isolated regions in Venezuela.
- **Technical.** The pilot of new methods to ensure affordable internet access for urban households with limited to no connectivity in Caracas.
- **Organizational.** The creation of systematic partnerships between GBV service providers and law enforcement in Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago.



The challenge employed the following eight principles throughout implementation to support effective, adaptive, and impactful programs that were responsive to the evolving needs of Venezuelan migrants and host communities:

Collaboration and co-creation across public, private, and civil society sectors. More than 300 representatives from the public, private, and social sectors—including USAID staff and outside individuals with knowledge of the Venezuelan crisis and its impact across Latin America—were involved in co-creation efforts to design and implement the challenge. This approach ensured that the challenge problem

¹⁴ While IDIA was not involved in the challenge design, the organization’s definition and key principles for open innovation were consulted in the development process. “Why Innovation.” International Development Innovation Alliance. Accessed on August 25, 2022. <https://www.idiainnovation.org/why-innovation#:~:text=What%20is%20Innovation%3F,transformative%20ability%20to%20accelerate%20impact>.

statement and the winning solutions were grounded in a deep understanding of the unique context and issues to be addressed. The program also drew on resources from these stakeholders to provide technical assistance and mentorship in specialized industries (e.g., across technical areas, including cybersecurity, access to financial services case management, niche new product marketing, and much more).

The promotion of inclusive innovation. BetterTogether/JuntosEsMejor intentionally brought gender, accessibility, and inclusion considerations into processes used to source, design, implement, and evaluate innovations. When sourcing and evaluating applications, the challenge worked with Spanish-English bilingual judges, many of whom were from the region, to identify and elevate contextually relevant solutions. Also, subsequent calls for innovations targeted solver organizations with solutions that promoted gender equality, addressed GBV, and increased women’s economic empowerment. Furthermore, during due diligence, design, implementation, and evaluation, co-creation was employed to jointly develop milestones with grantees in Spanish, Portuguese, and/or English, depending on the country context.

Investment in locally driven solutions. The challenge worked to understand the priorities, opportunities, and gaps in meeting the needs of Venezuelan migrants and host communities. Under BetterTogether/JuntosEsMejor, USAID launched an open call for innovations with a broad scope to reflect the diverse and varied needs across the region. This yielded solutions from thought leaders in a variety of industries, including engineers, entrepreneurs, educators, activists, and more. To reach local solvers, BetterTogether/JuntosEsMejor hired a communications firm in Venezuela and generated a network of social media and private sector influencers to disseminate the open call across the region. BetterTogether/JuntosEsMejor reduced barriers to applicants by providing explainer videos, webinars, and step-by-step checklists designed to guide potential solver organizations. As a result, 54 percent of awardees were first-time recipients of USAID funds. Furthermore, during implementation, simultaneous translation services and closed-captioning were made available for all meetings, workshops, and events to support these organizations in the languages in which they were most comfortable operating.

The integration of informed, intelligence-based risks. The program made the bold decision to invest at early stages of growth, funding solvers with nascent ideas with \$25,000 (Tier #1). The challenge encouraged early stage solvers to pilot solutions and adapt approaches based on feedback and ongoing results. As one [solver](#) launching a low-cost short messaging service (SMS) in Venezuela under the challenge remarked:

“[The challenge was] critical for the birth and success of [our information] service. Without it, the project would have remained an idea.”

This solver successfully grew its user base from zero to over 60,000 users by the end of the project as a result of targeted support from the challenge.

The use of evidence to drive decision-making. The challenge conducted rigorous monitoring and evaluation of solvers’ activities, using information reported by solver organizations, as well as through third-party monitoring (TPM), to learn and adapt, adjusting milestones and providing additional targeted support as necessary. For example, a visit from a third party monitor to [Democracy International’s](#) (DI) Women Exercising Leadership for Cohesion and Meaningful Empowerment (WELCOME program) in Trinidad and Tobago helped verify the validity of adaptations to shift the program’s focus from general outreach to service provision during COVID-19 to provide survivor-centered services to survivors of GBV.

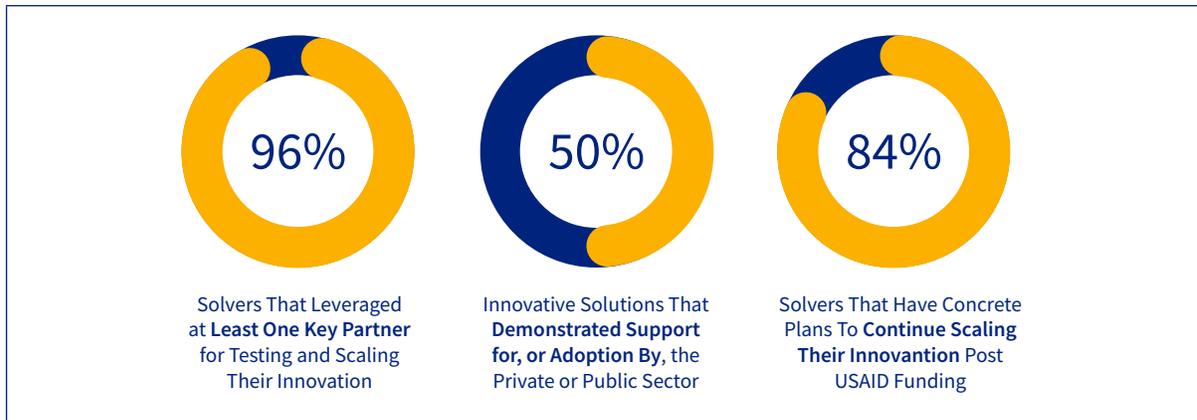
Capitalization on opportunities to learn quickly and iterate, ensuring the impact of promising innovations through Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA). BetterTogether/JuntosEsMejor acknowledged and embraced failure—and encouraged solvers to do the same—by pivoting with each opportunity to learn, adapt, and improve. For example, the challenge-supported telecommunications service provider in Venezuela faced a multitude of challenges, from engineering problems to political concerns, while trying to adapt its rural business model to an urban context. With challenge support to

integrate a CLA¹⁵ approach, the firm successfully refined a sustainable model to provide quality internet to marginalized communities and is now expanding its business. Recognizing the value of CLA techniques introduced through challenge assistance, they noted:

“We decided to formally incorporate pause and reflect activities into our processes and found that it has been of great value to the project and a source of learning for our company.”

The identification of solutions that demonstrate high potential to achieve and sustain significant impact and cost-effectiveness. BetterTogether/JuntosEsMejor provided customized support across a breadth of areas to help organizations establish long-term partnerships and attract additional investment to scale their innovations. For example, [Art for Impact’s Voices of Venezuela](#) program empowered Venezuelan migrants and host communities in Colombia through a multimedia approach that provided vital information on how to navigate immigration processes and access public services to over 30 million people with a Tier #1 award of just \$25,000. Art for Impact was one of five solvers that received additional surge support from the challenge based on the strength of the results it achieved, and ultimately leveraged this funding to gain future donor awards and investments.

The scaling of successfully proven innovations into organizations’ larger programming. Almost all the solutions (88 percent) tested and proven under the challenge are leveraging long-term partnerships and support beyond challenge funding to support scaling, and 84 percent of them have concrete plans to continue doing so. Of the total solutions, 50 percent have been supported or adopted by the private or public sector during their grant. Moreover, in addition to Art for Impact, four other BetterTogether/JuntosEsMejor solvers—[Cáritas Brasileira](#), [CDI Chile](#), [Nanas y Amas](#), and the telecommunications firm in Venezuela—have already received additional funding from USAID, the private sector, the United Nations, or the Colombian government to continue or expand their programs, supporting USAID development objectives.



Challenge-Wide Lessons Learned

When designing this challenge, the team drew on the development innovation principles outlined above and on other open innovation programs, such as [USAID’s Grand Challenges for Development](#) and [Development Innovation Ventures](#). During implementation, a number of lessons were learned that can be applied to future challenges, development programming, and humanitarian affairs broadly, especially those efforts working with migrants in non-permissive operating environments globally. These lessons are grouped into five major areas of focus: communications; design and launch; implementation; acceleration; and MEL.

¹⁵ CLA is a set of practices that help improve USAID effectiveness through systematic and intentional learning through the program cycle that allows for the dedication of resources needed to make it happen. Accessed on August 25, 2022. <https://usaidlearninglab.org/cla/cla-toolkit/understanding-cla>.

COMMUNICATIONS

A strong communications strategy was central to sourcing the highest quality applications from applying solvers, as well as supporting the solvers during implementation. During the one-year open call, BetterTogether/JuntosEsMejor leveraged its social media presence and broad stakeholder networks to raise awareness amongst potential applicants. While the level of engagement varied, at its height, there were 1,500 website visits a week (1,020 from new visitors) and almost 850,000 social media impressions on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. A majority (35 percent) of applicants reported hearing about the challenge on social media, followed by email (14 percent), personal outreach (11 percent), web searches (11 percent) and other sources (29 percent).

After awards were made to solver organizations, the challenge capitalized on the initial momentum developed during the open call by utilizing social media to promote approaches, tools, and results from the solvers outside Venezuela. The challenge leveraged USAID's prestige and name recognition to boost solvers' impact and visibility.

For solvers operating in Venezuela, the challenge prioritized the security and safety of their staff and end users and only disseminated general information on impact. Solvers within Venezuela were exempt from standard USAID branding and marking guidance and their names were never included on publicly-facing documents. Instead, they were encouraged to use word-of-mouth communication to promote their activities under the challenge via Whatsapp or other trusted, low-cost platforms and in-person with community leaders, advocates, and peer groups, among others. This protected solvers' and end users' privacy and helped them feel more comfortable participating in the challenge by publicly disassociating USAID and the United States government from the activity. As a result, the challenge mitigated the potential risk of solvers within Venezuela becoming political targets of the Venezuelan government.

Communications Lesson #1: Operating in the solvers' language of preference (in this case, Spanish) is crucial to promote inclusive and locally led solutions. Although BetterTogether/JuntosEsMejor prepared its APS in English, Spanish, and Portuguese, the majority (76 percent) of applications submitted were received in Spanish. Similarly, the program held informational webinars in all three languages, with the Spanish version attracting more than three times the number of views than the English one. Moreover, once awards were made, most of the solvers preferred to communicate in Spanish. In response, the challenge hired Spanish-English bilingual home office staff. Additionally, resources were set aside to ensure simultaneous interpretation was available for every communications event. These services were typically low-cost, at just \$4,500 dollars per event, which is inclusive of two hours of facilitated conversation and/or translation of any supporting documents or materials.

Communications Lesson #2: Staging comprehensive and targeted promotional efforts helps reach a global audience. BetterTogether/JuntosEsMejor made six award announcements over the course of 15 months. With each announcement, data analytics showed an increase in likes, follows, comments, and overall engagement across the challenge platforms, which in turn, boosted the number of applications received from solver organizations. In particular, Instagram was deemed to be of greatest importance to the challenge, with 455,000 impressions on just one award announcement post. Notably, the level of engagement received by just the challenge social media accounts alone was higher than what was obtained by USAID during an online event to promote the challenge. This is indicative of the powerful snowball effect that a single social media account can have when targeting the appropriate audience of followers.

Communications Lesson #3: In a migration context, the diaspora can serve as a powerful amplifier. The challenge was particularly successful at mobilizing the global Venezuelan diaspora (especially those living in the Miami area) through its social media and partner networks. In addition to online activity, it held a number of promotional efforts at universities with large Venezuelan student bases, strong family and business networks, and ties to the country. These included an in-person launch at Florida International University (FIU) in October 2019 and three smaller events at the FIU branch in Washington, DC, as well as

one event hosted online during the pandemic by Georgetown University. As a result of leveraging this network, the largest number of applications received was from solver organizations inside Venezuela (41 percent). This was a considerable achievement, given USAID’s limited presence in the country. The second and third highest number of applications came from Colombia (22 percent) and the United States (10 percent), respectively. During the implementation period, the Venezuelan diaspora continued to amplify the voice of winning solvers, promoting them among their professional networks via email, social media, and other channels that enhanced visibility for their approaches and supported their overall success.

Voices of Venezuela: The Friend Immigrants Can Rely On

Art for Impact rolled out the Voices of Venezuela multimedia platform in a format that employed inclusive innovation principles by remaining easy to understand, contextual, and familiar. Their diversity helped ensure that messaging is appropriate for the host community and international perspectives, especially on topics related to conflict resolution. One example of this is their innovative show [Laboratorio de Arepas](#), where they fused arepas, sci-fi pop culture, and shared culture to counter xenophobia. The program spent a year building trust by answering every question they could from the migrant community, which led to recommendations and added credibility among the Venezuelan population. For example, after creating its wildly popular video detailing how to obtain Colombian citizenship, a complex issue explained with simple language, Art for Impact opened up a line of communication with the public and said:



“A main contributor to our growth was letting the Venezuelan community know that they could ask us anything and we would respond... The construction of spaces where people feel heard and cared for became one of the strengths of Voices of Venezuela.”

Leveraging their growth, trust, and user engagement, they connected a [WhatsApp helpline](#) to their [Facebook](#) media, creating a feedback loop that drove media virality and then providing one-to-one assistance at scale. They focused on Venezuelan women, who comprise over 75 percent of their engagement, and are often the heads of household actively looking for answers for themselves and others. All this translates into action: an anonymous poll of over 400 users reported that on average each user passed along the information they received from Voices of Venezuela to help nearly 20 additional people each.

Communications Lesson #4: Using plain language, avoiding jargon, and promoting two-way communication can help engage populations with varying levels of literacy.

Every occupation has specialized words, expressions, and acronyms that become part of the discourse for its practitioners. When reaching out to prospective participants, BetterTogether/JuntosEsMejor learned that clear, simple language provided better results in reaching end users. For example, a [youth entrepreneurship-focused solver](#) in Venezuela discovered during a call for proposals that its target audience was not familiar with terms such as social innovation or sustainability. As a result, the solver had to reframe the language of the call, extending the application period to provide more time to applying participants. Likewise, Peru’s Nanas y Amas developed [Loop](#), a mobile application that connects Venezuelan women with employment opportunities, and learned the importance of providing their end users with the opportunity to ask questions and give feedback to strengthen their business model. Nanas y Amas said:

“[The end users] needed to feel that there were people supporting the Loop platform to trust it and use it.”

Finally, a solver that provides news and information via mobile messages presents a striking illustration of how two-way communication helped them to make a programmatic adjustment that drove the growth of services by 80 percent:

“Listening to the user is key. [They] told us that it would be good to have the possibility of consulting the price of the dollar. This required a [complex programming] adaptation; however, we were finally able to do it, and the result is a highly consulted topic that has been very well received by users.”

DESIGN AND LAUNCH

The challenge released an APS that accepted and reviewed applications over one year with a broad range of technical areas—people, productivity, services, and finance—across which organizations could apply. The rolling application process and broad technical focus allowed solvers to propose novel and fit-for-purpose solutions that may not have been sourced otherwise. However, aligning operations across the country contexts, multiple technical sectors, and two funding partners proved challenging.

Design and Launch Lesson #1: Designing a focused technical program scope can be difficult and takes time in highly-sensitive, evolving contexts; however, is essential for a cost-effective and targeted approach. The Venezuela crisis is politically, economically, and socially complex in scale and scope. It impacts migrants and host communities differently, depending on the location. The challenge’s broad scope was adapted to this diverse and complex context; however, significant staff time was required during the initial months of the open call to review low quality applications that were either not eligible or not particularly relevant to the situation on the ground. Ultimately, a shorter open call window with a more consolidated scope may have helped avoid this outcome, saving time for solver organizations to implement their projects. To resolve the challenges posed by an overly broad scope, during the second half of the open call, the challenge was refined through three addenda: one targeting solutions that integrated a COVID-19 response, and two others that addressed women’s economic empowerment and GBV. These targeted calls resulted in a smaller, more manageable applicant pool (44 to 139 applications per call) focused on limited technical areas and positioned solvers for more peer learning and joint acceleration during implementation, since they had similar technical areas of focus.

Design and Launch Lesson #2: Aligning institutional partners in the structure and technical design requires significant effort, and is sometimes only manageable through divergent processes, but the added value they provide in terms of legitimacy and visibility is significant. USAID’s partnership with the IDB proved pivotal to ensuring partner engagement, resource mobilization, legitimacy, and visibility across Latin America and the Caribbean. The backing and support of the IDB helped open doors among applying solvers, and engendered trust among migrants and host communities. However, timelines for decision-making and grant-making often diverged between the two partners. The IDB’s grant approval process required broad engagement across the IDB and its in-country offices, while USAID’s process was shorter. To resolve this, the challenge created a two-tracked approach whereby both donors could advance their own internal mechanisms for moving to award, with IDB’s implementation period extending another year after the USAID solvers’ funding closes. These separate timelines, however, limited the challenge’s ability to produce comprehensive closing evaluations, write-ups, and impact data summaries (resulting in separate reports, such as this one).

Design and Launch Lesson #3: To attract the right solvers, application processes and guidance should remain as clear and simple as possible. One of the primary benefits of conducting an open innovation competition such as BetterTogether/JuntosEsMejor is the opportunity to identify non-traditional partners that bring new ideas to the development space. However, despite its broad technical scope, the length of the APS proved to be a barrier to new solvers, generating inappropriate applications from organizations that may not have read the full requirements before submitting, wasting program resources on time-

consuming screening efforts.¹⁶ As the challenge progressed, BetterTogether/JuntosEsMejor addressed this issue by holding multiple webinars with prospective solvers that were recorded and made publicly available, and creating a brief application checklist that distilled application requirements into five pages in a simple format. All resources were available in English, Spanish, and Portuguese.

IMPLEMENTATION

The broad scope of the challenge enhanced flexibility, allowing solvers to pivot their project approaches as the situation on the ground continued to change and grow in complexity, particularly with the arrival of COVID-19. Still, operating in Venezuela and across neighboring countries with a diverse portfolio of new and non-traditional USAID partners necessitated careful thought on the overall implementation and risk management processes to ensure the safety of implementing partners and end users, as well as targeted achievements in a short period of time.

Implementation Lesson #1: Operating in non-permissive environments¹⁷ requires more rigorous due diligence. Conducting background checks on potential awardees can be a tedious, time-consuming process, but is necessary to ensure potential solvers' values align with the challenge objectives. The challenge developed a rigorous and standardized process for vetting solver organizations in Venezuela that went above and beyond the standard review of organizational files, budgets, and personnel searches in the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) and System for Award Management (SAM) databases. It included extensive searches across Google, including social media, news outlets, and other websites, to determine if solver organization staff, board members, or beneficiaries had linkages with the Venezuelan government. Allocating appropriate resources to due diligence involved hiring additional surge staff to provide operations support and help streamline the process.

Implementation Lesson #2: Investing time and effort in building rapport is often necessary to convince end users to participate in solvers' programs, particularly when they have been living in a situation of vulnerability and have limited trust in outside interventions. Fear of xenophobia or repercussions from migrants' informal status in host communities can lead to self-isolation that makes it difficult to engage migrants in targeted programming. Similarly, individuals living in non-permissive environments may hesitate to participate in programs run by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or other entities perceived to be opposed by state authorities, or may simply be wary of new or unknown organizations. To enhance trust, one [solver](#) in Venezuela responded by establishing greater rapport with end users via partnerships with cyber cafes to offer free internet for users that engaged in their efforts. After discovering that availability and quality of public transportation was limited, this same solver decided to provide rides to ensure end users' attendance in program activities. Another solver, Safe to Learn and Thrive Together, implemented by the [International Rescue Committee](#) (IRC), involved end users (school principals, teachers, and guidance counselors) in the program's design process to ensure buy-in and participation. With regard to deciding how to shape the programs to fit within their contexts, they said:

“The selection process of schools was done... in collaboration with the [Colombian] Ministry of Education, based on targeted needs and locations where a higher population of Venezuelan migrant families reside. The school-based strategies were developed and adapted in a highly collaborative and participatory manner inclusive of school-based stakeholders, increasing the probability of their continued implementation.”

This strategy generated trust with the Ministry of Education, resulting in the adoption of one component of the curriculum at the national level after the challenge ended. Yet another [solver applying a community](#)

¹⁶ BetterTogether/JuntosEsMejor ultimately rejected 396 concept papers because they did not meet one or more basic eligibility requirements.

¹⁷ USAID describes a non-permissive environment as a context, at the national or sub-national level, in which uncertainty, instability, inaccessibility, or insecurity constrain USAID's ability to operate safely and effectively.

[model to install, operate, and maintain water purification units](#) hired local individuals to provide refreshments for committee meetings and clean the room afterwards. Similarly, staff from an [agroforestry focused program](#) working with indigenous communities said:

“A fundamental factor for the achievement of our objectives was the formation of an inclusive local team, with three participants from [the target community] who were part of [our team] and strengthened their leadership and values. Confidence in the knowledge and experience of the local team had a positive impact on the establishment of the [agroforestry plots], thus overcoming the resistance to change.”

Another way to gain trust was through partnerships with individuals or organizations who had already earned the confidence of the program’s target audience. As an independent report of the [Rape Crisis Society of Trinidad and Tobago’s](#) (RCSTT) GBV Bilingual Hotline revealed:

“There are more undocumented than documented migrants in Trinidad and Tobago. Issues of who to trust is a big factor for many migrants. Many of them trust the Living Waters Community, and the RATTs connection with them has helped with its credibility among migrants.”

Dedicating time to build a rapport with the program’s targeted end users was important. According to Art for Impact’s Voices of Venezuela program:

“We learned over time that the community wants to see someone they can relate to, as this is often a precursor to trust.”

Implementation Lesson #3: Programs need to consider the safety and security of end users, particularly those programs offering online information or financial assistance in Venezuela.

A BetterTogether/JuntosEsMejor [solver that provides data for use by humanitarian organizations](#) initially employed an open data source platform that allowed anyone to download the datasets. In response to concerns raised by end users about the risk of the data being hacked and used by unknown entities, the organization made the information available by request only. Similarly, another solver offering a similar service responded to this issue by allowing organizations to register on their platform anonymously or under a pseudonym, so their online engagement could not be tracked. As one solver noted:

“[Local] organizations have expressed multiple times their fear in filling any type of online survey or form that can link them to an international organization or funding.”

Safety was also a concern from a financial angle. Several BetterTogether/JuntosEsMejor solvers included some form of direct financial support to end users as part of their program, such as seed capital for entrepreneurs or participant stipends. However, after learning of security concerns raised by other organizations in Venezuela that provided funding to their end users, these solvers modified their original concept. Two of them opted not to publicly promote the financial component of their initiative, while a third chose to replace the stipend with an equivalent basket of non-perishable food items. These approaches helped lower the profile of solvers’ efforts in a politically-sensitive context while meeting end user needs.

Implementation Lesson #4: Innovative approaches take time to develop; however, due diligence provides an opportunity to set milestones through co-creation that can be adapted to changing contexts via contract modifications during implementation. Using co-creation, the challenge worked with solver organizations to refine proposed activities and agree upon a set of reasonably achievable milestones during implementation under Fixed Amount Awards (FAAs). This was a foundational part of due diligence, and it helped the challenge assess and start to build each solver organization’s institutional capacity. However, because so many of the winning solver applications were submitted just before the call closed, this left the majority of the solvers with just 15 to 18 months left in the challenge to achieve their goals. Typically, projects required a minimum of two years for their solution to be tested, adapted, and gain

traction to scale. To mitigate the inherent risk that a solver might not meet all established milestones, the challenge used milestones that focused on processing, learning, and adaptation, rather than being strictly output focused. This structure harmonized and clarified expectations, while remaining open to modifications to the FAAs, as the situation on the ground evolved. This iterative and flexible approach was particularly important for early-stage solvers developing technology innovations, such as Nanas y Amas' Loop or [Cáritas Brasileira's](#) online [MigraSegura](#) platform, and those working in highly sensitive contexts or non-permissible environments. This level of flexibility is perhaps less appropriate or necessary for higher-capacity organizations, or those working to scale an existing proven model, such as IRC in Colombia.

Implementation Lesson #5: Cash flow can be a critical issue for solvers, particularly for new or early-stage organizations in non-permissive environments. Many solvers, especially those in Venezuela, do not have much, if any, cash reserves. To address this, the challenge applied detailed cash flow analyses, working with solvers to project when their purchasing needs might be greatest and then building milestone deliverables around those dates. In some cases, challenge milestones payments were broken into two separate tranches—for example, tying an initial payment for a Gantt Chart, and then a second payment for the Work Plan—instead of paying for both deliverables together. This helped to ensure that the solver could be paid quickly for an easily achievable deliverable upon the start of their grant, which in turn provided sufficient cash flow to cover the solvers' costs while they produced the subsequent, more labor-intensive deliverable. Wherever possible, the challenge also prioritized rapid payments to the most financially vulnerable solvers.

ACCELERATION

As part of the challenge support to solvers, BetterTogether/JuntosEsMejor required each solver organization to complete a one-hour diagnostic at the start of their implementation period to assess their organizational capacity, resources, and staff technical and operational needs to support project growth. The results of these diagnostics were analyzed to understand solvers' needs and priorities, forming the foundation of the challenge's acceleration and technical assistance approach. The challenge delivered workshops, mentorships, and technical assistance focused on improving capacities in the key areas that emerged as priorities as a result of the diagnostic: communications, marketing, fundraising, MEL, operations, entrepreneurship, violence and GBV case management, and cybersecurity.

Acceleration Lesson #1: Enhancing solvers' organizational capacity is critical, especially for solvers new to USAID. Although the ability to attract non-traditional USAID partners is an advantage of challenge programs, working with new and/or nascent solvers presents some difficulties. Often, they have little operational and administrative capacity to implement projects and/or to comply with USAID process requirements surrounding financial management, procurement, and documentation to ensure audit readiness. Many new solvers are unaccustomed to reporting out on technical advances as part of milestone deliverables. BetterTogether/JuntosEsMejor addressed this by building capacity early on through two-hour onboarding sessions to review FAA contractual requirements in advance of implementation, and half-day workshops to help solvers establish the specific content of technical milestones. In some cases, milestones were built around working with the challenge to develop a solver's procurement, financial, human resources, or other manuals. These efforts helped prepare solvers to continue to manage donor awards or other external investments in the future. As the founder of a [community-based solver organization providing case management services to Venezuelan survivors of GBV in Trinidad and Tobago](#) observed:

“Before, it was me, and I just did what I had to do. This is the first time I have received any significant funding and have to report on it. [Acceleration support] has helped me understand tracking and recording and reporting.”

Acceleration Lesson #2: It is important to activate a deep “bench,” or roster of technical experts for acceleration efforts to be effective in programs, such as BetterTogether/JuntosEsMejor, that have a broad technical scope. The challenge provided acceleration support across a number of subject matters

addressed by solvers under the challenge. These ranged broadly to include entrepreneurship work with Venezuelan migrants in Brazil, supporting Venezuelan survivors of GBV in Guyana, providing internet connectivity and data services in Venezuela, ensuring clean water and sanitation, among others. It resulted in the difficulty of engaging technical experts in a variety of topics as diverse as artificial intelligence, anti-money laundering and combating the financing of terrorism, business models, e-learning platform design and learning objectives, and holistic case management services. With implementation periods extending just over one year, it was crucial to quickly identify the right technical experts for a given grantee in order to provide timely, effective support. As a result, during an exit survey, 83 percent of solver organizations reported that the fast and effective technical acceleration helped them to achieve their goals. In fact, 91 percent reported that it increased their knowledge and skills, and 87 percent felt it enhanced the overall performance of their organization.

MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND LEARNING

MEL was foundational to the challenge acceleration support provided to solver organizations. Since the majority of BetterTogether/JuntosEsMejor solvers were new to working with USAID and the international donor community broadly, they required a lot of assistance in developing the building blocks of a strong MEL plan, establishing key performance indicators (KPIs), and creating learning questions to guide project thinking. As such, most grantees participated in a one-on-one two-hour workshop while creating their first milestone (a Work Plan and MEL Plan), as well as a cohort-wide workshop with other solvers on MEL tools a few months into implementation. These technical inputs were well-received by solvers and helped enhance their capacity for future projects, as well as provided a number of lessons learned for the challenge.

MEL Lesson #1: MEL must be integrated into the acceleration design process from day one. In addition to developing solvers' ability to use USAID standard reports, it was also important to create a customized tool to fill in the solvers' gaps around meeting USAID's MEL requirements early on to ensure solvers could build these requirements into their project designs. For example, [an education-focused solver](#) noted:

“Statistical reports and the data collection process and systems must be designed in the early days of educational intervention and recruitment. These reports must be in line with the data structure in [project] systems. We have gone through a learning curve establishing these processes of data extraction and creation of statistics to report the progress of the project.”

To do this, the challenge launched a simple online platform for registering and reporting out on KPIs on a quarterly basis, using the platform [Airtable.com](#). This accessible and user-friendly approach was easy for solvers to follow, and made it easy for the challenge to track results. As the solver organization staff and founders of Nanas y Amas' Loop project remarked:

“We have learned that when you measure something, it is easier to plan and to make improvements. The USAID team taught us the importance of measuring our KPIs and our publicity campaign results to learn, evaluate, and improve our strategies.”

MEL Lesson #2: TPM is an effective method to triangulate data in non-permissive and/or conflict-affected environments. TPM involves field visits by a neutral party to project sites to determine whether outputs, activities, and services are being conducted according to FAA contractual agreements and in accordance with each project's MEL Plan. The approach is meant to provide nuanced firsthand insights into the impact, challenges, lessons learned, best practices, and expansion of opportunities through field observations and meetings with project staff, end users, and community members. The challenge found that engaging a local consultant to complete these tasks allowed solver organizations to connect and share information without concern for perceived judgment or repercussions from the challenge and/or USAID. Often, it was not required to hire a TPM consultant with added MEL experience; a strong background in program design and reporting was usually sufficient. In Trinidad and Tobago, for example, the consultant was a skilled specialist in violence prevention and therefore able to meet with staff and survivors of GBV to discuss their experience on the project. Likewise, in Venezuela, a TPM consultant visited communities to



understand program activities in a targeted geographic area. The TPM consultant in Venezuela had to plan for extreme contextual realities—such as power outages, gasoline shortages, and political unrest—that sometimes inhibited the ability to travel during a given week or month. However, in most instances, the Venezuelan consultant collected quality data that supplemented the challenge’s MEL reports from solver organizations.

MEL Lesson #3: Obtaining monitoring and evaluation data from solver organizations’ end users can be tricky in a migration context, and is often resolved only through creative approaches. Several solvers found it difficult to obtain accurate, timely, and complete data when relying on responses collected from end users, many of whom were too busy to participate in long surveys, focus groups, or assessments. To address this, [one solver providing online financial services](#) employed gaming strategies to incentive engagement, and used colloquial language in surveys to make them more straightforward and fun. They learned to adapt data collection methods based on the end users’ level of connectivity, sharing results with the public when appropriate, to create a personal connection and make end users feel more invested in the process.

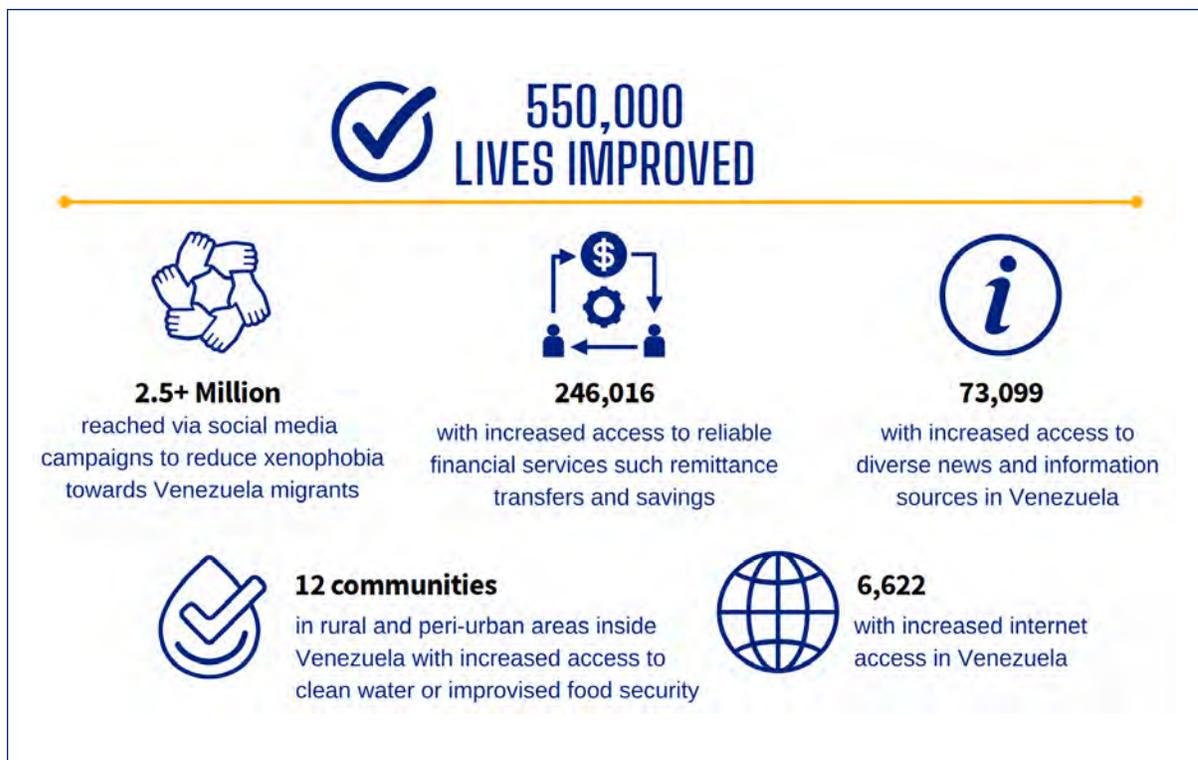
MEL Lesson #4: Participatory program design and implementation is critical to developing locally-led, sustainable solutions. The BetterTogether/JuntosEsMejor Challenge was designed to assist individuals facing extraordinary challenges as a result of Venezuela’s humanitarian crisis. Within this context, solver adaptations were based on learnings from data collected during gender and market analyses the solver organizations completed at the start of their project activities, as well as contextual mapping of needs in the education and entrepreneurship spaces. Many of solvers’ end users were balancing one or more jobs (steady and/or ad hoc), childcare, and other responsibilities that posed financial and time barriers to their participation in online bootcamps, mentoring sessions, and meetings. After learning this through surveys and assessments, solvers such as CDI shifted its [Aprendo Data](#) bootcamps to begin an hour earlier than they had originally planned to better align with participants’ schedules, and saved time for individual team mentoring that could take place at any time. In addition, CDI and other organizations such as [Instituto Terroá](#), a solver working with entrepreneurs in Brazil, purchased cell phones and mobile data, provided food or personal protective equipment (PPE), and arranged transportation as they learned more about their end users.



OVERALL CHALLENGE IMPACT

The Collective Impact

Open innovation competitions are a powerful tool for development. As BetterTogether/JuntosEsMejor demonstrated, a small amount of capital invested in local organizations that are innovatively responding to critical development and humanitarian needs can generate high-impact results while building long-term, sustainable solutions. In just over a year of implementation, testing new solutions, and measuring impact according to specific milestones, the challenge's 33 solver organizations, under 35 different awards, directly improved the lives of over 550,000 individuals. Among other achievements, solvers reached more than 2.5 million end users through social media campaigns to reduce xenophobia toward migrants; increased access to reliable financial services for almost a quarter million users; enhanced news and information for almost 74,000 users in Venezuela; provided clean water to 12 communities; and piloted a sustainable business model for internet access for over 6,600 users in a Caracas neighborhood.



Lessons Learned by Technical Area Across the Challenge

Despite working in a difficult operating context, BetterTogether/JuntosEsMejor solver organizations demonstrated the power of innovation competitions and learned critical lessons for future implementation in a variety of areas, including:



Agriculture, Agroforestry, and Food Security



Education, Vocational Training, and Youth



Entrepreneurship, Economic Growth, and Finance



Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment



Xenophobia, GBV, and Violence Prevention

AGRICULTURE, AGROFORESTRY, AND FOOD SECURITY

Overview	Key Results
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of Programs: 1 Country: Venezuela 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 394 people supported with training, tools, and equipment for much needed traditional agroforestry production in migration-prone indigenous communities

Fully-functioning demonstration plots can be powerful tools for learning in agriculture, particularly among communities with limited literacy skills. BetterTogether/JuntosEsMejor supported a solver organization that worked to reintroduce traditional agroforestry practices among indigenous communities in Venezuela that are at risk for migration. This solver found that traditional development workshops used to explain farming methodologies were often not sufficient to achieve the knowledge transfer and uptake they were seeking. For this reason, they began experimenting with small model plots that, when used as the basis for explanatory videos and presentations, allowed farmers to better understand and appreciate the methodologies. Specifically, the demonstration plots served two important purposes: (i) they provided a continuous, central, and neutrally-located venue for hands-on instruction of traditional agricultural methods and technologies, and (ii) they illustrated the benefits of effective techniques as the plots continue to grow and advance over multiple months. According to this solver:

"[Next time, we would] establish a completely functional 'showcase' of the project so that a fully functioning model can be appreciated."

Thanks to the success of the model plots, community members began replicating the techniques they learned on their own land. Other families, in turn, took note of their success and asked to join the program as well, ultimately nearly doubling the target number of end users.

Field activities must consider the potential negative effects of climate change and, when possible, create contingency plans for a variety of scenarios in advance of each season. However, milestones can also be designed flexibly to prepare for the unexpected. Climate change has caused unpredictable weather events around the world, which poses a particular challenge for farmers who rely on seasonal patterns to determine planting schedules and other agricultural activities. Despite proactive scenarios planning, these changes are still relatively new, and the solvers that BetterTogether/JuntosEsMejor worked with were not always able to predict and identify every weather risk or challenge in advance of implementation. This became a particular issue for the previously mentioned solver when extreme rain required the intervention sites be moved to higher ground after a series of storms flooded their sites at the start of the project. This resulted in delays while the solver reassessed the potential environmental impact at the new location before being able to continue advancing on project activities. Milestone planning should allow for this level of flexibility to adapt to current and future climatic trends.

WATER, SANITATION, AND HYGIENE

Overview	Key Results
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of Programs: 2 Country: Venezuela 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1,731 people in Venezuela with increased access to clean water 57 local community members capacitated to manage water treatment plans in their communities

Many families underestimated the risks of consuming contaminated water to their overall physical well-being until learning more about it through the challenge. Solvers working on water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) discovered that parents often did not educate their children on the importance of consuming water from a source they knew to be filtered, safe, and clean. This posed a major health concern, since children spend a significant percentage of their time away from home drinking water from a variety of unknown sources during school, recess, and afterward while playing in the street. Demonstrating the importance of consuming clean water with data that showed improvements in health indicators after the installation of water purification units was crucial in changing community behavior surrounding the topic. One [water and sanitation-focused solver](#) in Venezuela recorded a 24 percent reduction in waterborne illnesses at four field sites after just six months of access to a newly installed purification unit, accompanied by community awareness-raising for parents and children on the subject. The data on community health (particularly water-born illnesses) that was collected through a collaboration with volunteer medical students from the local university served as a powerful information tool within their educational and awareness raising efforts.

Installing water purification units that were easily reachable helped to ensure community ownership and is crucial to the process and transfer of knowledge. Taking advantage of existing physical and social infrastructure and building local capacity to maintain water purification equipment proved essential to the local community's ownership of that infrastructure, and the ultimate success of solvers' program efforts. One WASH solver accomplished this by installing their project's water purification units in local schools in the center of towns. School administrators were trained in unit maintenance and distribution, creating a neutral entry point to the resource. In another project to prototype water purification units, community members set up the water unit on the property of a prominent community leader, putting its control and maintenance in the hands of an external committee whose representatives are voted in and rotated each year to guarantee equal community representation.

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY AND MEDIA

Overview	Key Results
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of Programs: 6 Countries: Colombia, Brazil, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6,622 people with internet access 73,099 people with access to information 42,964 Venezuelans contributed data to improve service provision in the country—and got paid to do so 2.5 million users reached through online media engagement, providing information on services, legal aid, and more

Lack of access to information can lead to lack of demand for information. In non-permissive environments, such as Venezuela, where information is available from a single state-sponsored source or is censored entirely, people often lose the habit of seeking information—a dangerous precedent for democracy. One solver addressed the lack of demand for data by working to generate more demand among a selected

group of potential end users at local NGOs, which were recruited through workshops to raise their awareness on how they might use data to make strategic decisions in operations and management. Workshop participants were trained on how to use an online data management platform, making targeted queries for information that could help them adapt their work to the needs of the communities they support. Another BetterTogether/JuntosEsMejor information service provider in Venezuela addressed this by including suggestions to guide end users on their platform to request information on more sensitive topics, such as politics and the economy, as well as innocuous subjects such as sports and entertainment. As another data-focused solver working in Venezuela noted:

“We sometimes take for granted the availability of data in the West... The persisting importance of any particular data output will not be a long-term impact of this project—the data itself is already growing outdated; however, we expect that the ability to use [data] and the demand for data will be a long-term impact.”

Many migrants use cellular devices, making mobile applications (apps) and social media an effective means for communication; however, the timeline for developing mobile application content can be long, and is ultimately subject to restrictions imposed by Google, Apple, Facebook, and other platforms. Research, testing, marketing, and successfully establishing the content of a mobile application requires significant reviews and approvals when content is being tested among end users, and is subject to USAID’s final approval. This process can involve weeks of staff time; however, beyond this, in the case of new mobile apps, solvers must also seek Google Play and Apple App Store approval before launching the application. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, this normally required 24 to 48 hours, but challenge solver *Cáritas Brasileira* unfortunately did not realize the timeline to approve had been extended by a number of weeks during the pandemic. As a result, *Cáritas* was forced to delay launch of their online *MigraSegura* platform in Brazil and Ecuador, as well as revise the content of their communications materials to reflect the new dates when the app was finally approved. In a different vein, *Art for Impact* temporarily lost control of its social media presence when its Facebook accounts for *Voices of Venezuela* were suddenly and inexplicably locked. *Art for Impact* staff believe this action was improperly triggered by an algorithm that misinterpreted their very focused engagement with the migrant community. In both instances, Facebook’s customer service was unresponsive, leaving the team without recourse for some time. *Art for Impact* remarked:

“This was a valuable lesson for us... We are adapting our long-term strategy to rely more heavily on engaging through messaging platforms, such as WhatsApp, where there is not an algorithm that decides whether someone sees content or not.”

Universities and international equipment providers often make for neutral and strategic partners in promoting new technology and facilitating collaboration and user engagement, particularly in communities facing unwanted government scrutiny within non-permissive operating contexts such as Venezuela. One solver deploying low-cost SMS in Venezuela found that international equipment providers, as opposed to local suppliers of materials, software, and internet, were less likely to succumb to government pressure to cease operations, and therefore more readily positioned to sell equipment to their project. Another solver that is providing internet to marginalized urban communities created a strategic partnership with the local university, which served as the leading voice and the visible face of their project in the community, providing political neutrality when entering the neighborhood to conduct work, without attracting government attention. They reported that the partnership provided them with built-in authority, helping them to gain the support and product demand needed from end users. They said:

“[The collaboration] allowed us to establish alliances quickly, and we managed to be perceived as a group that sought to help, rather than as a stranger looking for business.”

Despite any challenges, most solver organizations were successful at learning and adapting, or even thriving in the digital, technological, and media space. One unique such example of innovative learning through development can be seen in the text box below.



A Spotlight on Learning and Adapting to Enhance Connectivity Through Engineering in Complex Environments

Recognizing the importance of the internet for day-to-day life, business operations, children’s schooling, and as a source of information—particularly during a global pandemic—a private firm based in Venezuela used CLA to launch a project to ensure greater internet connectivity in complex, dynamic urban contexts.

Having successfully worked in rural internet service provision for over ten years, the team was motivated to respond to the call of engaging in urban areas in the outer rings of major cities. However, the catch was figuring out how to “break into” the community without recognized legitimacy, credibility, and connections among local leaders, or clearance from the elected local community council. This is where CLA became crucial to the project’s success. The firm worked with a local civil society organization, which provided a reputable and established presence in the community thanks to prior education programming. At the same time, a university partner gave them the institutional backing to test, document, and adapt the firm’s engineering approach through pause and reflect sessions while ensuring the political coverage needed to offer internet services in a highly sensitive and controlled operating context.

From the start, CLA was integrated into the project design through an experimental plan that involved data analysis of community usage, connectivity, and perceptions. Crucial to this were regular touch points with local citizens that allowed the internet firm and its partners to take stock of achievements and difficulties and propose solutions in real time. Working with its expansive team of collaborating organizations, as well as local leaders, the company successfully kept its hand on the pulse of progress, shifting its response as necessary.

With support from USAID, the internet provider put forth the technical evidence base to successfully adapt its rural business model to an urban setting. Through scenario planning, the company posited that, with an effective outreach and communications campaign that took advantage of community relationships, they could create a sufficiently large enough user base to make their model financially sustainable (and even profitable!) while meeting an urgent need for stable internet connectivity.

More than 6,200 users have already participated in a pilot project, which showed that for as little as between \$0.06 and \$3.70 United States Dollars (USD) a month, households can secure access to safe, effective, and reliable internet services. Initial studies show that the community deems this to be affordable and uses the internet service for work, school, and recreation. The pilot results laid the foundation for decision-making regarding the scaling and sustainability of the project in other neighborhoods where it is urgently needed.

EDUCATION, VOCATIONAL TRAINING, AND YOUTH

Overview	Key Results
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of Programs: 6 • Countries: Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Peru, and Venezuela 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8,920 people supported with vocational or school-based capacity building • Two programs provided \$95,070 in seed funding to youth microentrepreneurs



Solvers that meaningfully engage end users in program design and implementation are the most impactful. For example, IRC rolled out Safe to Learn and Thrive Together, a school-based violence prevention program to ameliorate conflict between Venezuelan and host communities, in elementary schools across 24 communities in the Colombian border state of Norte de Santander. Their goal was to enhance reading and math skills amongst school-aged children through an improved learning and home environment. Making violence prevention a part of the conversation and school curriculum was put in the hands of school teachers, administrators and parents who led the conversation by selecting the 24 schools where the project was implemented, based on criteria they developed with the Ministry of Education. In addition, IRC worked with schools, parents, and teachers to organize the school action plans and tracked project activities against final outcomes, integrating overall efforts into their regular curriculum as they deemed relevant for each school community’s needs.

Innovative solutions must address the digital divide to ensure end users, especially vulnerable populations, can meaningfully participate. This was particularly true for IRC in Colombia and [Sesame Workshop](#) in Peru, two solvers that worked on education programs for migrant and host families. They found that women, particularly older teachers (for IRC) and female heads of household (for Sesame Workshop), served as the gateway to ensuring educational content reached children and their families. However, many of these users had limited exposure to and proficiency with technologies required for online engagement (e.g., Zoom, Microsoft Teams, learning platforms) particularly at the start of the global pandemic. To rectify the issue, challenge staff and technology-based solvers redesigned program activities to allow space and time for training end users on the use of technology, ensuring their speed and confidence when interacting online. While this resulted in initial delays, once resolved, it helped close the digital divide for many teachers and families, and increased the accessibility of challenge programming to underserved communities.

Migrant families in complex socio-political contexts, such as the Venezuela crisis, face difficulties obtaining documentation of their legal status, residency, and educational background, which creates barriers to accessing education and other services. This was a particular problem for a BetterTogether/ JuntosEsMejor Challenge online education program that provided scholarships to Venezuelan migrants around the globe seeking to complete their high school degrees online. Because the program was certified by the state of Florida, one of the prerequisites to entry was a certified copy of course records or transcripts from a Venezuelan institution. However, obtaining this documentation was complicated and replete with administrative hurdles for users that did not already have a copy. In some instances, the Venezuelan Ministry of Education staff began systematically requesting bribes to expedite requests from students seeking to attend the online educational program. Unfortunately, the program timeline did not initially consider this potential issue, which resulted in delays for students that could not commence their coursework on time. For the future, this solver is exploring an alternative entry requirement that would involve use of placement tests, in lieu of transcript requests, thereby eliminating a significant administrative barrier and ensuring greater inclusivity for those who need to complete their high school degrees.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP, ECONOMIC GROWTH, AND FINANCE

Overview	Key Results
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of Programs: 2 • Countries: Brazil and Colombia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 284,032 people supported with seed capital and capacity building • 246,010 people with with increased access to reliable financial services, such as remittance transfers and savings • 5,685 people with improved pathways to sustainable employment

Not everyone wants to be an entrepreneur. Entrepreneurship entails a certain level of risk that does not appeal to everyone. Many individuals prefer to apply their new skills, obtained through solvers' capacity building programs, in the formal labor market, which offers a more stable and predictable income that allows them to support their family. For example, at the conclusion of a program focused on entrepreneurship training for low-income women in Venezuela, only 13 percent of participants applied what they learned to launching a new venture, despite initially expressing interest in doing so. This solver organization will adapt their approach moving forward to better explain the risks and benefits of entrepreneurs before selecting their end users.

Entrepreneurs at all levels can benefit from financial literacy training, as well as capacity building for soft skills. BetterTogether/JuntosEsMejor solvers implemented entrepreneurship programs across a range of populations—from mothers of children receiving supplemental meals, to youth looking to monetize a new idea. They consistently found financial literacy to be a significant weakness among participants. One solver attributed this weakness to deficiencies in the Venezuelan education system and work based largely in the informal economy. Several solvers noted that end users had more limited financial literacy and weaker soft skills, such as time management and communication, than they had originally assumed. Solvers adapted their programming to include additional capacity building in both these areas. Instituto Terroá promoted financial literacy and leadership skills among new business owners in Brazil, and a bootcamp developed by CDI's Aprendo Data taught public speaking, job interviews, LinkedIn for job development, and personal brand creation to enhance migrants' employability in Chile.

Systemic approaches to address personal well-being are part of effective entrepreneurship programming. Succeeding as an entrepreneur is often as much about personal awareness and growth as it is business acumen. This can be complicated for some migrants who experience various forms of trauma—shortages of water, food, and gasoline in Venezuela; leaving their home, culture, and/or language; obstacles encountered along their travels; xenophobia and harassment in the countries where they settle; and the impact on their personal and professional lives. A lack of access to mental health care and support, coupled with the financial cost and social stigma that accompany migration, can be debilitating. As one solver focused on youth entrepreneurship in Venezuela shared:

“Emotional life, and emotions in general, are little-known territory for most participants. This disconnect is striking. The young people themselves have been surprised by the variety and nuances of many emotions that they could not recognize before, let alone name.”

As Nanas y Amas, the implementers of Loop, a mobile app that connects Venezuelan migrants with job opportunities to clean houses and offices in Lima, Peru, noted:

“Although, when a migrant person arrives to a new country, her main concern is to be able to sustain herself economically, mental health must be a priority because the lack of it is an impediment to finding a proper job opportunity.”

Programs that were most successful in economically empowering migrants included psychosocial services and/or peer support to assist migrants in navigating their emotions surrounding trauma. Venezuelan solvers' staff offer a unique peer-to-peer perspective, since they had lived through many of the same concerns and could relate and share their own experiences and perspectives in overcoming these challenges. For example, Nanas y Amas did this by adding personal coaching sessions for women with more severe mental health issues, referring them to free psychological services offered by migrant support organizations.

Seed capital can be a critical motivator, but it must be dispersed at the right time. For entrepreneurship programs implemented by solvers and designed to attract migrants with new start-up ideas, the promise of seed capital can be an important factor that drives participation. Solvers found it necessary to carefully consider the timing of disbursement for these funds, however. Waiting until closer to the conclusion of the program to release the funds helped maintain a commitment and ensured that recipients spent the money in accordance with the business plans they had developed through capacity building under the challenge.

It allowed more time for holistic financial management training, mentorship support, and other lessons imparted during the program. Still, releasing the seed capital in this way did not always allow sufficient opportunity before the end of the challenge to follow-up on the results, making it difficult to track the long-term impact. To manage this issue, solvers such as Instituto Terroá in Brazil provided seed capital to just a small subset of qualifying organizations that met minimum standard criteria in developing their business models and ensuring the funds went toward expected projections. This also allowed Terroá’s staff the opportunity for a closer relationship in engaging the startups during the disbursement period. Other solvers, such as [Scalabrini International Migrant Network](#), used the funds to support entrepreneurs that they worked with on multiple projects to ensure greater follow-up on how the money was spent. Making sure that seed funding was integrated into wider programming allowed for more time for follow-up under funding that was ongoing beyond the life of the challenge.

Instituto Terroá’s Young Changemakers Program Empowers Youth Entrepreneurs With Seed Capital

A lack of economic resources, language barriers, and challenges certifying prior educational and training credentials make it difficult for Venezuelan migrants in Brazil—already vulnerable due to their lack of legal documentation—to obtain formal employment or start a new business. Given that they are also prohibited from securing loans from traditional banks, even small amounts of financial support for the purchase of inputs, materials, or equipment can help turn an idea into a business, or advance a nascent enterprise. For this reason, Instituto Terroá offered seed capital to the Venezuelan migrants participating in its Young Changemakers program. After an intense entrepreneurship bootcamp, including sessions on business model development, pricing analysis, financial forecasting, and marketing strategies, end users were evaluated based on the viability of their business idea, their participation in mentoring sessions, the quality of their dedication and involvement, and the personal and collective impact of their ventures. Based on the results of this evaluation, the program chose to support ten enterprises with awards ranging from \$150 to \$3,000 USD in seed capital to build out their business models. Pictured here are Yenny Cartagena, founder of Yenny Cosméticos, and producer of natural beauty products with ingredients sourced from the Amazon, and Wullington Quintero, outside his beauty salon.



Economic empowerment programs should evaluate market demand before selecting focus sectors for growth. Performing market research analysis proved critical for solver organizations, particularly for those operating in new or changing contexts (due to COVID-19). [International Youth Foundation](#) (IYF) discovered the importance of market research when transferring their successfully implemented project

model from Colombia and Mexico to Panama under a USAID request to explore new country markets through the BetterTogether/JuntosEsMejor Challenge. As part of this, IYF partnered with Google to provide soft and technical skill development for a group of Venezuelan migrants in Panama within the information technology (IT) sector. However, ensuring sustainable pathways to employment proved difficult during the initial months of the pandemic. In light of this issue, IYF pivoted its organizational model during the second half of implementation, using a more market-led approach which involved meeting with employers one-on-one and in group settings to identify potential industries where the IT sector had job growth potential, despite the overall shrinking economy. Cultivating these partnerships with the private sector earlier on in the program would have ensured that graduates had ample opportunities to apply their new skills in steady jobs.

GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Overview	Key Results
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of Programs: 3 • Countries: Panama, Peru, and Venezuela 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 38,111 women received training in soft and technical skills • 998 were placed in formal jobs • 261 women participants in United States Government-assisted programs designed to increase access to productive economic resources • 457 had access to seed capital

Employing women as key staff within solver organizations is a powerful tool for leading by example in gender programming. 43 percent of BetterTogether/JuntosEsMejor solvers were entities led by women, and many others employed women at executive levels of the organization. This demonstration of empowerment is particularly compelling for communities where women do not often assume leadership roles. For example, a solver working with indigenous communities in Venezuela remarked that in the communities they serve:

“Decision-making has been assumed by women, with the support and backing of the local team. The leadership of María [a member of a local community] and a member of our team has been fundamental in establishing relationships with women, promoting them by example.”

During implementation, another solver focused on information provision noted the dearth of women actively accessing the online data platform they provided to civil society organizations in Venezuela. In response, the solver organization decided to increase its engagement with those women leaders who had accessed it, assigning them more high-profile and visible roles in analyzing the data and thereby positioning them to influence decision-making. They stated:

“Latin American culture is evolving into a more inclusive and participatory environment for women. It is imperative to account for equity in all touch points of the project including the staff, participants, partners, [and] beneficiaries.”

Women often need more training in digital literacy skills to ensure their economic empowerment.

Despite the fact that by 2020, 74 percent of people across Latin America and the Caribbean were actively using the internet, a digital literacy gender gap still exists between women and men.¹⁸ While many solvers recognized the need to provide internet connection points for their end users who lacked regular access at home, they initially overlooked the fact that this lack of access often limited women’s familiarity with digital platforms and reduced their likelihood to consistently engage with online digital communication tools. Moreover, among families it was frequently seen as natural for men to default to being the primary mobile

¹⁸ The World Bank. “Individuals using the Internet (% of population) – Latin America & Caribbean.” Accessed May 10, 2022. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.ZS?locations=ZJ>.



and internet user in the home. Having learned about these contextual norms and behaviors through the challenge, one solver organization noted that:

“[In the next iteration of our program, we plan to integrate] a series of basic content that includes the importance of having a personal email, as well as the importance of trying to have a cell phone number where [the women] can be reached safely over time, since it was observed that the constant change of telephone number makes them lose job opportunities and follow-up by potential employers.”

XENOPHOBIA, GBV, AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION

Overview	Key Results
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of Programs: 5 • Countries: Guyana, Panama, and Trinidad and Tobago 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 18,915 people supported through case management, referrals and awareness raising • 167 men were trained in positive masculinities • 18,000 persons sensitized on GBV services through social media

Lack of access to economic opportunities, social protections, and health services increases Venezuelan migrants’ vulnerabilities to GBV. BetterTogether/JuntosEsMejor solvers implementing programs to address GBV often found that migrants seeking their services were also looking for additional support, such as employment opportunities, access to healthcare, translation assistance in the case of programs in the English-speaking Caribbean, and help with immigration documentation. Although these appeals may not always have been directly related to GBV, each additional need made individuals more vulnerable to exploitation and potential exposure to GBV in the future. For this reason, solvers became adept at providing a menu of comprehensive services that included referral mapping to connect survivors with other support through wraparound service provision for migrants and families. A great example of this is [National Coordinating Coalition](#) (NCC), a Guyanese civil society organization that approached the challenge of creating the country’s first one-stop-shop service platform that leveraged 40 partner organizations to assist Venezuelan migrant women survivors of GBV in Guyana. The program was developed based on the results of a rapid GBV assessment completed in collaboration with [Ladysmith Collective](#), an outside firm contracted to accelerate their programs by helping to map the challenges, resources, and available needs in the local ecosystem.

Community referrals and peer-to-peer engagement made by migrant staff working with other migrants helped increase participation in GBV support programs. In some cases, such as that of a solver working with Venezuelan survivors of GBV in Trinidad and Tobago, hiring Venezuelan program staff that shared a common language, culture, and immigrant experience with the target population was important to the program’s success. This community-based organization trained and employed Venezuelan migrants to serve as advocates who performed outreach to, and support for, other Venezuelans in their immigration journey, thereby enhancing survivors’ willingness to take up the recommended services. When asked what worked well with their approach, the program’s research coordinator highlighted:

“Having someone who understands you as a survivor and works with you as you go through different processes; interacting with someone who speaks your language when you are vulnerable, who has shared experiences and links to your community.”

In other cases, Balancing the Scales: Men Against Gender-Based Violence, an initiative led by the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) in Panama that leveraged WhatsApp groups, male migrants recruited other male participants who wanted to educate themselves about GBV online. These men said they appreciated the opportunity to connect with other migrants on the topic. As HIAS mentioned:

“The real incentive for participating in the program is the network migrant men establish with other migrant men. WhatsApp groups stay active as a support tool but also help in finding jobs, [dealing with] migration issues, etc.”



It is important to offer a safe space for those seeking assistance. However, this can prove difficult when operating online or switching between online and in-person. A safe space may be a physical location with appropriate security protocols to ensure the privacy and protection of victims. Determining if an individual is in a setting that offers this kind of safety became particularly important for solvers, as so many of their meetings with migrants transpired online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, HIAS noticed that the men they worked with were not as willing to share opinions during virtual sessions as they had previously when meeting in-person before the start of the pandemic. To address this, HIAS made sure to shift more sensitive personal testimonies to in-person sessions with appropriate pandemic safety protocols. DI's WELCOME program also noted the need for safe, private, and reliable transportation for GBV survivors to attend appointments for referral support services. In response, they partnered with vetted taxi or rideshare companies as a solution.

Learning and Pivoting in Response to COVID-19 to Support GBV Survivors in Trinidad and Tobago

When DI applied to the BetterTogether/JuntosEsMejor Challenge, outlining a program to address street harassment of Venezuelan migrant women in Trinidad and Tobago, it seemed like an innovative approach to deal with xenophobia. The WELCOME program originally planned to implement a series of behavioral science-based interventions aimed at increasing awareness of harassment and xenophobia, encouraging bystanders to speak up against it in public spaces, and creating lasting behavioral change. However, after the COVID-19 pandemic, the way people operated in public spheres changed drastically. Public interactions diminished altogether with the onset of lockdown restrictions and social distancing norms. Instances of public sexual and xenophobic harassment decreased significantly given lower levels of social interaction in public spaces. At the same time, pandemic stay-at-home requirements led to an increase in domestic violence, intimate partner violence, and other forms of GBV.

Working together, the DI and BetterTogether/JuntosEsMejor teams quickly pivoted, designing an entirely new program to reduce the psychosocial and structural barriers for Venezuelan migrant women experiencing GBV to access the support they needed. In collaboration with a community organization widely trusted by Venezuelan migrants, WELCOME trained advocates—primarily other Venezuelan women living in Trinidad and Tobago with an understanding of its culture and systems—to provide survivors with comprehensive, personalized survivor-centered support.

Prior to this innovation, the local organization had regularly been receiving 15 GBV survivors weekly, but did not have the resources to provide sufficient support to each one, relying almost exclusively on the organization's founder's time to handle all forms of assistance. WELCOME provided institutional capacity building and assistance to develop a more systematic and sustainable implementation approach. With five trained advocates and more focused outreach efforts, the program has increased the organization's ability to support GBV survivors by eightfold. The institutional strengthening also positioned the organization to receive a direct award from the challenge to continue its work after the WELCOME program ended.

Venezuelan GBV survivors have reported improved well-being both during their active engagement with the advocates, as well as afterwards. For example, since completing the program, some survivors have moved out of their aggressors' homes, one has started her own business, one has completed rehabilitation for drug use, and two have repatriated to Venezuela. Some also felt they benefited so much from the program that they hope to become advocates themselves. As one survivor said:

"Most importantly for me, I have received good moral support in my distress. I feel valued and this helps me so much. [My advocate] has become like a mother to me and I am so thankful."



SUMMARY IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE WORK WITH MIGRANTS IN CRISIS

Open innovation competitions offer a unique opportunity for donor organizations to harness the ingenuity of local and non-traditional partners to solve some of the most pressing challenges facing the international development and humanitarian communities in their work with migrants. The BetterTogether/JuntosEsMejor Challenge crowdsourced, funded, and elevated 35 innovative solutions from organizations in Venezuela and globally that responded to the growing Venezuela migration crisis, and its impact across Latin America and the Caribbean. The challenge engaged 25 partners and positively impacted more than half a million people (44 percent women) in Venezuela and nine other countries.

The JuntosEsMejor/BetterTogether Challenge offers an example of how to design and implement flexible programming that prioritizes and addresses the diverse needs of migrants and host communities in crisis and conflict situations. This model clearly shows that supporting locally-led innovation can meaningfully improve migrants' economic, social, physical, and mental well-being. If this model is adapted and applied to other migrant communities and crises, the following key takeaways should be considered:

- **Prioritization of an inclusive, accessible, and participatory design and implementation mechanism.** Migrants, host communities, and the stakeholders that support them have a deep understanding of the unique challenges and effective solutions. Programs should be grounded in the local context by involving a diversity of stakeholders across the ecosystem. Challenges can promote meaningful engagement by opening multiple pathways for participation and feedback loops, such as in-person or virtual meetings, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, written feedback, and mentorship opportunities. Engagement can be made more accessible by taking into consideration power dynamics, establishing safe spaces held for vulnerable stakeholder groups, and ensuring participants can communicate in their preferred language. In a dynamic design process, multiple and sometimes competing priorities can emerge. However, thoughtful attention to refine and narrow the scope can lead to more impactful results.
- **Ensuring flexibility when operating in non-permissive or crisis and conflict environments.** Xenophobia or fear of repercussions, including those with informal status, can lead many migrants to self-isolate, making it difficult to engage them in targeted programming. Similarly, individuals living in non-permissive environments may hesitate to participate in programs run by NGOs or other entities frequently opposed by state authorities, or may simply be wary of new or unknown organizations. Recognizing both the external constraints and internal stressors that individuals face in these contexts and incorporating ways to address them within the program is essential. This can be done by helping to meet participants' basic needs first, focusing on mental health and overall well-being, or offering flexible scheduling to accommodate other commitments is essential. Considering the safety concerns



of individuals participating in United States Government-sponsored programs, and exploring ways to maintain a low profile and/or partner with entities that can help navigate the local political economy is foundational to success. The needs and priorities of end users can change quickly in these complex environments, making it necessary for solvers to innovate and adapt to meet the most pressing needs of the end user.

- **Allocating resources for organizational and technical capacity building to meet end user needs.** The importance of building new and non-traditional solvers' capacity to work with donors through contractually compliant, yet innovative approaches cannot be stressed enough. FAAs have proven to be a strong mechanism for establishing a timetable of reasonably achievable milestones, against which progress can be measured, with complementary acceleration support to enhance solvers' growth. Acceleration support can vary, depending on the solver organization's needs identified during diagnostics and ongoing touch points. Technical assistance topics identified under JuntosEsMejor/BetterTogether included managing cash flow analysis, creating operational and finance manuals, communications and marketing, fundraising, MEL, and/or day-to-day operations, finance, procurement, and staffing. Alternatively, some solver organizations sought mentorship, technical guidance, or engagement from thought leaders in their industry that may not have been accessible without USAID and/or other large donor organization support. The enhanced visibility and technical connectivity provided by a challenge can significantly elevate and expand local and/or regional efforts, promoting new and previously unexplored innovative ideas for adoption across a wider context.



ANNEX I: BETTERTOGETHER / JUNTOSESMEJOR SOLVER ORGANIZATION PROFILES

Access to Clean Water

Venezuela



Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH)

The solver organization applied a community model to install, operate, and maintain water purification units in community centers such as schools and soup kitchens to distribute clean water to households in a fair and transparent manner. The solver also raised awareness among community members of the importance of clean water to avoid waterborne illnesses and its role in proper hygiene to prevent other diseases such as COVID-19. Each entity operating a purification unit returns a portion of the proceeds to the organization, which in turn provides ongoing administrative and maintenance support in a financially sustainable manner.



KEY RESULTS:

- 13 water purification units installed
- Nearly 1,200 end users supplied with clean drinking water
- 344 end users increased their knowledge of water and sanitation best practices

Art for Impact: Voices of Venezuela

Colombia



Digital Technology and Media

[Art for Impact's Voices of Venezuela](#) used multimedia to empower Venezuelan migrants in Colombia with information pertaining to legal services, food aid, employment, health, and other challenges, and also helped counter xenophobia in host communities. The program connected a WhatsApp helpline to their Facebook media, creating a feedback loop driving media virality and then providing one-to-one assistance at scale. Voices of Venezuela reached over 2.5 million people through Facebook with a startup award of just \$25,000. Building off this work, they have taken steps toward sustainability through additional partnerships with five municipalities in Norte de Santander, the USAID-funded Regional Governance Activity, and further funding from other USAID partners. This work will help reduce the strain on municipal government by improving the distribution of information to Venezuelan migrants and answering questions on topics such as vaccine programs, civic participation, workforce development, and regularization. In June 2021, Voices of Venezuela was chosen as one of the ten global social impact organizations to join the Chat for Impact Acceleration (sponsored by Whatsapp, Turn.io, and the Praekelt Foundation) where they designed an updated version of their helpline.



KEY RESULTS:

- 2.5+ million people reached with information
- 37,000+ subscribers to most popular social media channel
- Service integrated into the Colombian government's Migration Information Plan for reaching the migrant community

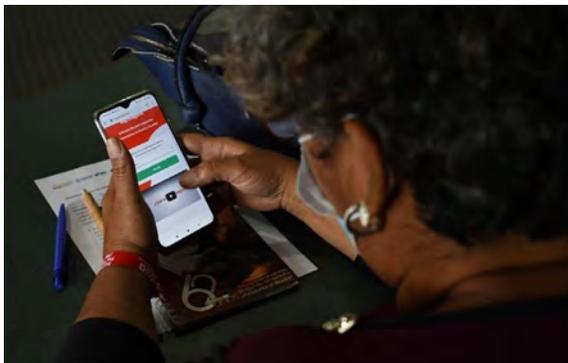
Cáritas Brasileira: MigraSegura

Colombia



Digital Technology and Media

[Cáritas Brasileira](#) launched a mobile app and web portal in Portuguese and Spanish to systematically collect and share legal, logistical, humanitarian, and other services available to migrants in Brazil and Ecuador. Through partnerships with 110 international, regional, and local churches; NGOs; and multilateral organizations, [MigraSegura](#) provided 7,479 Venezuelan migrants with reliable sources of information and support on topics such as psychosocial assistance, essential services, and legal support. The organization has received additional funding from [Cáritas España](#) to continue providing services in Brazil and Ecuador and is in talks with other potential donors to support expansion to other countries



KEY RESULTS:

- 7,479 people reached with information
- 70 percent of visitors used the information to access services and/or humanitarian assistance
- 94 percent of users expressed a positive opinion about the information the platform offers

Comité para la Democratización de la Informática Chile: Data Science Bootcamp for Employability/Aprendo Data

Chile



Education, Vocational Training, and Youth

CDI Chile and [Data Elevates](#), through their online bootcamp [Aprendo Data](#), trained 218 Venezuelan migrants in data literacy and visualization, two high-quality employment areas with strong local demand for workers. In addition, CDI offered targeted career advice and job placement counseling and hosted outreach events and online engagements with an extensive network of potential employers to help match migrants with concrete job opportunities.



KEY RESULTS:

- 173 women and 45 men successfully completed the bootcamp
- 88 percent of program participants were employed within three months after graduation

Crowdsourcing Data

Venezuela



Digital Technology and Media

An international data company and its local partners leveraged their innovative digital platform to collect data in real time directly from more than 40,000 Venezuelans to better understand local needs and improve the delivery of basic services. With the collected information, the company equipped local NGOs to use real-time data to analyze service coverage, identify gaps, and plan and monitor their services in at least six of Venezuela's 23 states, as well as in Tumbes and Lima in Peru.



KEY RESULTS:

- 121 NGOs and private organizations accessed data on humanitarian needs
- More than 8,000 active monthly users at the end of the program
- More than 1.1 million data points collected on topics such as food security, health, education, and transportation and mobility, among others

Democracy International: Women Exercising Leadership for Cohesion and Meaningful Empowerment

Trinidad and Tobago



Xenophobia, GBV, and Violence Prevention

Democracy International implemented the Women Exercising Leadership for Cohesion and Meaningful Empowerment (WELCOME) program to help 61 Venezuelan migrants experiencing GBV in Trinidad and Tobago understand their rights and options and access needed services. WELCOME connected women to trusted referral services through known community members, offered social support to promote survivors' feelings of self-efficacy, and provided the necessary information and support to encourage survivors to receive referral services by matching them with trained advocates.



KEY RESULTS:

- 61 individuals provided with GBV services
- 85 percent of GBV survivors reported that advocates helped them access support services
- Provided additional unanticipated services in response to survivor demand, including employment or financial assistance, education for survivors or their children, repatriation to Venezuela, and the United Nations Refugee Center registration

Enhancing Connectivity

Venezuela



Digital Technology and Media

A local telecommunications firm with experience providing internet access to low-income rural communities expanded to underprivileged urban areas, giving more than 6,662 new user families an opportunity to access much-needed education and financial services. With support from the challenge, the organization tested, documented, and adapted its engineering approach and business model to develop a financially sustainable, replicable, and scalable product that will help more Venezuelans get online.



KEY RESULTS:

- 6,662 Venezuelans with internet access
- Developed, tested, and prototyped a successful new business model for providing strong internet connectivity at a fair price to marginalized, urban communities in Caracas

Formal Education Online

Venezuela



Education, Vocational Training, and Youth

An online global high school certified by the Venezuelan Ministry of Education and Florida Department of Education awarded 1,503 scholarships to Venezuelans living in Venezuela, including many who were not able to complete their high school studies given the socio-political circumstances. The organization provided tablets and internet to those who did not have access at home to facilitate their studies.



KEY RESULTS:

- 1,503 youth reinserted in the educational system
- 124 students obtained an official high school diploma
- 999 students advanced one full high school semester, and the majority will continue their studies with the program

Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society: Balancing the Scales – Men Impacting Their Communities

Panama



Xenophobia, GBV, and Violence Prevention

[Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society](#) (HIAS) Panama built on previous work to reduce GBV by creating safe spaces to deconstruct unequal gender systems through a robust positive masculinities training curriculum and an ongoing analysis of power relations. The program worked with 167 migrant men to raise awareness about violence, gender and social norms, and their consequences, encouraging attitudinal and behavioral change among participants and their peers.



KEY RESULTS:

- 167 migrant men were trained in the Positive Masculinities Curriculum
- 333 end users reached
- 82 percent showed positive changes in behavior towards the concepts of masculinity and gender equality

Instituto Terroá: Young Changemakers

Brazil



Education, Vocational Training, and Youth

[Instituto Terroá](#) enrolled 88 young Venezuelan migrants into their training program that focused on developing socio-emotional, entrepreneurial, citizenship, and sustainability skills for both Brazilian and Venezuelan youth to prepare them to exercise their citizenship better and have greater employability.



KEY RESULTS:

- 55 young Venezuelan migrants trained in socio-emotional, entrepreneurial, citizenship, and sustainability skills
- 20 young participants successfully developed business ideas and plans under the mentorship approach
- Ten entrepreneurship projects received seed capital

International Rescue Committee: Safe to Learn and Thrive Together

Colombia



Education, Vocational Training, and Youth

The [International Rescue Committee](#)'s Safe to Learn and Thrive Together program in Colombia equipped teachers in schools with large numbers of Venezuelan migrant children with skills to promote a positive, safe learning environment and implement social-emotional learning (SEL) and literacy. The curriculum directly benefited more than 1,200 individuals at 24 public schools in the Municipality of Cucuta, Norte de Santander.



KEY RESULTS:

- 920 caregivers learned techniques to strengthen positive parenting approaches
- 90.5 percent of the caregivers demonstrated the use of positive coping skills at program completion
- 100 percent of teachers/facilitators reported using SEL activities with students at least once per week at the end of the project

International Youth Foundation: Conectadas 4.0

Panama



Gender Equality and Women's
Economic Empowerment

The [International Youth Foundation](#) (IYF) partnered with a local Panamanian NGO, Consejo del Sector Privado para la Asistencia Educacional, to help Venezuelan migrant women gain IT skills while addressing the lack of market-relevant technical and soft skills. The initiative, dubbed Conectadas 4.0, involved a partnership with Google to support online IT certification and connect jobseekers with concrete job opportunities for Venezuelan migrant women aged 18 to 30. This holistic approach built upon successful efforts that IYF implemented previously in Colombia and Mexico. By supporting women to secure formal careers in the tech sector, the program also helped participants develop self-reliance, resilience, and earning potential.



KEY RESULTS:

- 150 women participated in the bootcamp
- 100 percent of women who completed the program demonstrated an increase in at least one core competency
- 100 percent of women who completed the program demonstrated technical knowledge acquisition and met the criteria of the Google IT Support Professional course certification

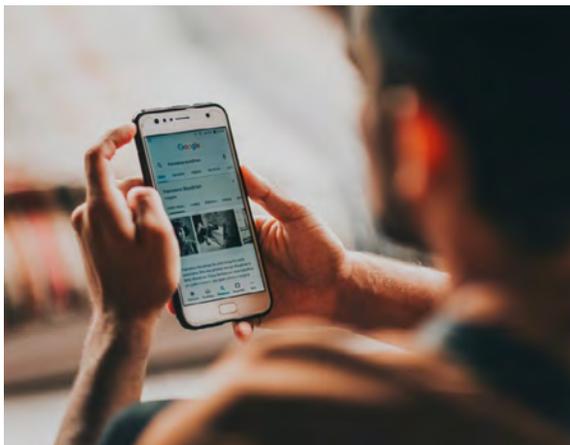
Low-Cost Information Services

Venezuela



Digital Technology and Media

A Venezuelan local organization leveraged challenge funds to pilot and scale an SMS software solution that allows Venezuelans in urban areas to receive frequent and neutral news and information, as requested by users. This service provides an uncensored means of communication when the internet is down for extended periods. With USAID support, the solution is now available to a broader user base, reducing costs and ensuring financial sustainability.



KEY RESULTS:

- Successful development and pilot of the SMS software that received positive user feedback
- More than 60,000 Venezuelans accessed the SMS service for low-cost news approximately four months after the software launch (25,000 more users than expected)

Nanas y Amas: Loop

Peru



Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment

[Nanas y Amas](#), an employment agency founded in 2009, launched [Loop](#), a mobile application that has so far connected 70 Venezuelan women in vulnerable conditions with vetted employment opportunities that ensure fair pay, security, and the chance to decide their terms of employment. Loop also empowers migrants with financial literacy to help them build a credit history and learn strategies to start saving, and helps address xenophobia in Peru through a strategic communications campaign on its extensive social media channels.



KEY RESULTS:

- 70 migrant women connected with employment opportunities
- More than 1.3 million people reached through advertising campaign
- 41 Loop partners earned 81 percent of the Peruvian minimum wage by working less than one-third of a full-time position

The National Coordinating Coalition: Migrants Support Platform

Guyana



Xenophobia, GBV, and Violence Prevention

The [National Coordinating Coalition](#) (NCC) leveraged its robust experience working with vulnerable groups and displaced communities to develop and launch sustainable services to mitigate GBV. The program closed the documented gap in GBV service provision while simultaneously equipping migrants to escape the threat of violence through improved access to formal economic activities. Working across its network of 40 partner organizations, NCC helped reduce or address GBV through wraparound service activities that included legal assistance, social and psychosocial service support, and English classes, among others. NCC plans to scale its solution by conducting formal training for police officers to strengthen the system of documenting GBV case reporting.



KEY RESULTS:

- 48 GBV survivors identified and referred to services.
- 18,528 people sensitized on GBV services through social media.
- National GBV referral pathway developed

Rape Crisis Society of Trinidad and Tobago: Ayúdate GBV Bilingual Hotline

Trinidad and Tobago



Xenophobia, GBV, and Violence Prevention

The Rape Crisis Society of Trinidad and Tobago (RCSTT) established Trinidad and Tobago's first after-hours, toll-free, GBV bilingual hotline operated by highly skilled and trained Venezuelans. It provided immediate support to Venezuelans and other GBV survivors in any part of the country and operated at critical hours of the evening and weekend (6 p.m. to 6 a.m.) when they most needed it. The hotline addressed cases of harassment, exploitation, xenophobia, depression, post-traumatic stress, and overall mental health. Users who demonstrated severe trauma were referred for ongoing clinical sessions with a trained psychosocial service counselor during regular weekday hours.



KEY RESULTS:

- Over 7,000 people reached through online and in-person outreach
- 123 individuals access the GBV call-in hotline
- 94 referral connections were successfully made for ongoing counseling services

Recovery Network

Peru, Venezuela



Digital Technology and Media

The organization hosted an online platform to match needs posted by humanitarian organizations with donations, discount products, services, and information from across the Venezuelan diaspora, private sector organizations, NGOs, government agencies, and other member groups. This local-to-local approach reached more than 60,000 end users through more than 80 member organizations.



KEY RESULTS:

- Met needs worth more than \$110,000 based on fair market value dollars identified by donor or supplier
- Offers worth more than \$1.2 million posted on the platform
- 84 percent of supplies sourced from within the region

Reliable Financial Services

Colombia



Entrepreneurship, Economic Growth,
and Finance

This fintech organization rolled out new products, such as on-ramps that allow Venezuelans to save in a stable asset, and adopted and promoted more rigorous systems, practices, and policies to reduce risk and protect consumer interests—particularly those of the most vulnerable populations accessing its financial services.



KEY RESULTS:

- More than 246,000 clients accessed financial services
- More than \$3 million in transactions processed

Restablecer y Empoderate Como Un Sobreviviente Educado y Transformado (RESET)

Trinidad and Tobago



Xenophobia, GBV, and Violence Prevention

As a continuation of the Women Exercising Leadership for Cohesion and Meaningful Empowerment (WELCOME) project under [Democracy International](#), the challenge extended three extra months to a local organization to continue implementing the advocate-survivor approach to provide support and adequate referral to 52 GBV survivors and their families (including children) in Trinidad and Tobago.



KEY RESULTS:

- Six case management specialists trained
- 52 survivors of GBV provided wraparound support services
- 91 percent of survivors report feeling supported and accessing the services they need

Revitalizing Traditional Agroforestry Practices

Venezuela



Agriculture, Agroforestry, and Food Security

The organization addressed food security challenges by providing training and materials to nearly 400 people in 16 Venezuelan indigenous communities to incorporate sustainable agricultural practices. They also empowered women with leadership programs, community engagement, and autonomy activities.



KEY RESULTS:

- 394 individuals directly involved in developing and maintaining agroforestry patios for enhanced food security
- 55,000 square meters planted
- Six new local plant species incorporated into the patios

Scalabrini International Migration Network: Employment, Entrepreneurship, and Social Innovation for Venezuelan Migrants

Brazil



Entrepreneurship, Economic Growth, and Finance

The [Scalabrini International Migration Network](#) empowered and integrated 998 migrants into the formal economy through skills development, job placement, and business development. With a particular focus on women's empowerment, the model supported 407 Venezuelan migrants to develop and strengthen their nascent enterprises through the seed capital program.



KEY RESULTS:

- 38,016 end users reached
- 998 migrants were placed in a formal job
- 407 women were granted seed capital to launch their enterprises

Sesame Workshop: Helping Children on the Move Reach Their Full Potential

Peru



Education, Vocational Training, and Youth

[Sesame Workshop](#) addressed food security challenges by providing training and materials to nearly 400 people in 16 Venezuelan indigenous communities to incorporate sustainable agricultural practices. They also empowered women with leadership programs, community engagement, and autonomy activities.



KEY RESULTS:

- 5,888 end users received educational materials
- 520,915 onsite interactions with Jardín Sésamo content
- 28,004 Sésamo chatbot interactions by targeted audiences

Women's Economic Empowerment Training Center

Venezuela



Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment

A local organization worked with Venezuelan women in vulnerable situations to roll out a comprehensive hybrid online and in-person 120-hour training curriculum to develop essential skills for food industry entrepreneurship, business development, food production, handling standards, and product management. The organization leveraged USAID funding to pilot their program with 15 women and their families, aiming to improve their lives and the lives of members of their surrounding communities.



KEY RESULTS:

- 100 percent of program participants reported a salary increase as a result of their participation in the skills development program
- 100 percent of participants showed improvement in decision making skills, creativity, innovation, and/or self-esteem

Water Purification Prototype

Venezuela



Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH)

This local organization implemented a program to provide a low-cost, energy-efficient water purification system for rural and underserved communities in Venezuela. The group developed and built a 200-liter/day solar water treatment system designed exclusively to meet the needs of remote communities. During the course of program implementation, the prototype provided 158 individuals with clean water. To ensure long-term sustainability, the organization established a management committee comprising 14 members of the local community. They also launched “entrepreneurship days” to encourage members of the community to find ways to use the potable water for agricultural, beauty, or other consumer products.



KEY RESULTS:

- Provided clean water to 158 end users
- 105 community members participated in entrepreneurship training
- 15 people participated in the entrepreneurship contest with viable business plans that will use potable water

Youth and Entrepreneurship

Venezuela



Education, Vocational Training, and Youth

The organization provided capacity building tools to 40 young Venezuelan entrepreneurs and 124 members of their teams to help them improve product quality and gain critical financial, entrepreneurial, and social skills. The program also facilitated national and international market linkages to support participants in structuring a successful business model.



KEY RESULTS:

- 77 percent of participants reported an increase in knowledge after participating in the mentorship approach
- 40 young entrepreneurs (20 female and 20 male) and 124 of their team members enhanced their entrepreneurial skills
- \$80,000 in seed capital disbursed



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE