



CRITICAL FACTORS TOWARDS SUCCESSFUL SKILLS-BASED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMMES

Youth Building the Future: Applied
Research from Latin America

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YOUTH ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Youth Economic Empowerment is becoming an increasingly important part of the international development agenda. It is key to the success of the Sustainable Development Goals. If no-one is to be left behind developing the skills, capacities and employment opportunities of young people will be crucial for their health and happiness and for the global economy. With 1.8 billion young people worldwide, we have the largest youth population in history. Around 85% of them live in developing countries. A third of these young people, the majority of them women, are not in employment, education or training (NEET). Over the next decade a billion more young people will enter the job market looking for entrepreneurship opportunities or jobs.¹



To address these critical employment issues, Plan International is committed to working with the private sector, with governments and development organisations at international, national and local level to increase young people's access to decent jobs and new business opportunities.

In Latin America, youth unemployment in 2015 was more than twice that of adult unemployment and 6 out of 10 jobs held by young people were reported to be

without benefits, social security rights or contracts.² In response, Plan International, with support from global consultancy firm Accenture, is conducting a three year programme called *Youth Building the Future* (YBF), which started in 2015 and aims to equip young people with the necessary skills and opportunities to engage in entrepreneurship and employment in targeted regions in Brazil, Colombia and El Salvador. YBF is part of Plan International's larger Youth Economic Empowerment (YEE) approach, with programmes implemented in over 40 countries. Plan International is also a founding partner of 'S4YE' (Solutions for Youth Employment), a coalition which supports stakeholders across all sectors to work together to identify, learn from and build upon successful practice wherever it is found. This co-ordination enables partners to leverage and scale up effective policies and investments to enhance young people's employment opportunities.³

This study - focused primarily on field research carried out as the YBF programme develops – addresses the demand for applied research on good practices within youth employment programmes and is a further contribution to the body of knowledge supporting youth employment work. A literature review conducted by Accenture in 2013 demonstrates that much of the literature on youth employment is diagnostic rather than practical, with limited information about what actually works. There is therefore a demand from practitioners for research that provides practical suggestions to guide them, to inform other stakeholders and to improve the quality and impact of skills-based youth employment programmes. With this in mind, the research undertaken for this study is pre-eminently practical and provides an overview of the critical factors which must be taken into account by practitioners if youth employment programming is to foster significant and sustainable development outcomes for the young people taking part in them.

This short report is based on original research published by Plan International⁴ to inform and assist the different stakeholders involved in youth employment solutions, such as NGOs, policy makers, corporations and training institutes.

1 Solutions for Youth Employment: *Toward Solutions for Youth Employment: A 2015 Baseline Report*.

2 Weforum.org.13 June 2016: Herranz, D. *Youth unemployment is a huge problem for Latin America. Here's how to solve it*. Available through: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/06/youth-unemployment-is-a-huge-problem-for-latin-america-here-s-how-to-solve-it/>

3. For more info <https://www.s4ye.org/>

4 Plan International, 2017, Klein W., Quiroga. G. Hazelzet M. *Critical Factors for Successful Skills-Based Employment Programmes*.

YOUTH BUILDING THE FUTURE PROGRAMME

YBF aims to equip young people with the skills and opportunities to engage in enterprise and employment in targeted regions in Brazil, Colombia and El Salvador.

The programme design consists of three mutually reinforcing components:

- 1 Private sector engagement and youth employment enabler networks:** creation of shared value partnerships (known as Smart Business Alliances) with the private sector, government authorities, training partners and community-based organisations, in order to demonstrate market-driven ways of engaging with the private sector and policy-makers. These networks will be formalised through joint agreements about job placements, skills training, curricula, and mentoring and will serve as key channels to facilitate job placements for youth; it is envisaged that the shared value partners will prioritize programme graduates when recruiting.
- 2 Training, placement and start-up:** the programme aims to recruit 4,000 young people, aged between 17 and 29, 60% of whom will be young women. Participants will receive either technical and vocational skills training for job placement or training in entrepreneurship. Life skills training (known as soft skills or employability skills) will also be provided. Plan International will partner with public and private institutes who will deliver quality training in accordance with requirements identified by employers. Students who successfully finish the technical and vocational training will be matched with employers and supported in finding employment by trained facilitators. Students on the entrepreneurship track will be supported by voluntary mentors, who will connect them with entrepreneurs and business people. Students on the job placement track, are not automatically allocated a mentor.
- 3 Research and evidence gathering:** this component of the programme has been included in order to increase the scale and scope of the YBF programme in Latin America. It includes the monitoring and evaluation of the programme and an applied research project. The Royal Tropical Institute (KIT) is responsible for the applied research component.

In **Colombia** the YBF programme trains both prospective entrepreneurs as well as young people looking for employment in and around the Cauca-Valley. The programme supports 2,200 potential entrepreneurs and provides job training for a further 1,050, helping a total of 2,250 young people. The Colombia economy has shown steady progress over the last decade, although growth has slowed recently due to global financial crises. Violence and the drug trade remain significant challenges for the local youth and for the programme.

The YBF programme in **Brazil** is implemented in and around the city of Recife in the state of Pernambuco. The focus of the programme has been mostly on employment. A total of 1,600

young people will be supported throughout the programme (1,540 trained for employment, 60 for entrepreneurship). A major challenge for the programme has been the recent economic and political crisis in Brazil, which limits the overall demand for labour.

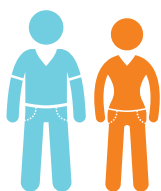
The YBF programme in **El Salvador** is smaller and focuses solely on entrepreneurship. Its objective is to train 150 (new or established) entrepreneurs and improve their business in three years. Although the economy has shown some growth, violence, gangs and drugs put youth employment interventions in the country at risk and pose clear challenges to programmes such as YBF and to youth employment prospects in general.

RESEARCH AIMS AND METHODS

The research can be described as ‘applied’ research, as much of the data is based on interviews with practitioners with the aim of actively informing existing and future youth employment programming.

A mixed-methods approach was used, with an emphasis on qualitative data. Data collection and analysis is based on a brief literature review, fieldwork conducted in Brazil, Colombia and El Salvador, validation workshops, digital surveys with Brazilian youth and a separate ‘deep dive study’ with private sector employees. For the field work the research team spoke to the following groups of stakeholders:

STAKEHOLDERS



54

YOUTHS

INCLUDING TWO
FOCUS GROUP
DISCUSSIONS
WITH YOUNG
WOMEN ONLY



25

COMPANY
REPRESENTA-
TIVES



17

TEACHERS



18

MENTORS



5

GOVERNMENT
OFFICIALS

Youth employment can be enhanced in different ways: through skills training, employment services or subsidized employment. The focus of this research, however, is on skills building (or training) programmes for employment and entrepreneurship via short-term technical, business and life skills training. The research is primarily concentrated on developing countries.

Some limitations should be considered whilst reading this report. As the field work was conducted in three countries there is a bias towards Brazil, Colombia and El Salvador throughout the report and analysis. Another limitation is the sampling of interviewees. The sample size is small and data is self-reported limiting the ability to make robust generalisations from the findings.

Finally, the scope of this study is broad. More specific research on the various topics covered is advised. **The aim is to provide guidelines, framed as a set of critical factors**, to be discussed and reflected upon by practitioners to help improve the implementation and impact of youth employment programming.

THE FOCUS OF THIS RESEARCH, HOWEVER, IS ON SKILLS BUILDING (OR TRAINING) PROGRAMMES FOR EMPLOYMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP VIA SHORT-TERM TECHNICAL, BUSINESS AND LIFE SKILLS TRAINING.

CRITICAL FACTORS: AN OVERVIEW

The data gathered from the field work and literature is based on employment programmes which attempt to ensure access to the labour market and decent jobs as well as on those focusing on entrepreneurship development.

The critical factors are therefore applicable to both types of employment skills training programmes and will help to inform those involved in youth employment programming as well as policy makers, corporations, training institutes and other relevant stakeholders interested in youth employment issues. **The critical factors are indicative, based on fieldwork and literature and should not be treated as prescriptive.** The context of every skills-based youth employment intervention is unique and readers are encouraged to discuss and review the critical factors and judge their relevance according to the particular environment in which they may be implemented.

The critical factors have been organized across three stages:

STAGE 1 Exploration and engagement

STAGE 2 Implementation

STAGE 3 Sustainability

These three stages were identified during the initial literature review and have been validated by the fieldwork as a useful framework. In practice, however, flexibility is important and there may be some overlap; **sustainability** issues, for example must be considered in the first two stages of critical factors and built into the programme during the early stages.

STAGE 1 EXPLORATION AND ENGAGEMENT

1. Discuss and define an age-range for the 'youth' and be clear about the implications
2. Discuss and decide other relevant criteria for selecting the target group and the impact in terms of the level of inclusion
3. Map the constraints young women might face and consider how they may be addressed
4. Conduct a practical labour market analysis
5. Engage directly with companies using local staff and experts when conducting the LMA
6. Map to what extent young people are interested in being part of particular sectors or value chains
7. Pay attention to the informal economy and consider how to address the challenges of informality
8. Build commitment through memorandum of understandings (MOUs) or contracts with partners; if this is not possible or counter-productive, find alternative ways to articulate the commitment
9. Establish partnerships with government actors and agree clearly defined roles and responsibilities.
10. Choose training partners that are recognised as competent by the private sector
11. Partner with unions to facilitate identifying companies
12. Engage with the private sector using a variety of strategies
13. Allocate ample time to engage with the private sector and take advantage of existing relations
14. Engage with companies that guarantee decent work conditions



STAGE 2 IMPLEMENTATION

15. Ensure that training is demand-driven
16. Ensure that training is accredited so that it serves as an asset for young people when job searching
17. Use participatory teaching practices and make sure that training is interactive
18. Allocate ample time to select well-qualified teachers
19. Schedule and lengthen the training in line with the target group's needs
20. Manage youth expectations about the realities of the labor market and the opportunities for entrepreneurship.
21. Standardize the selection process of participants
22. Make soft skills training mandatory
23. Be open to internships and apprenticeships as they can enhance young people's practical experience
24. Prioritize access to finance for entrepreneurs
25. Recognise that savings groups can be a viable alternative when more formal instruments of finance do not work
26. Reduce dropout rates and increase youth engagement by organising key support services.
27. Adapt your mentoring model to circumstances and personalities but ensure that vulnerable youth are able to build a trust-based relationship with their mentors.
28. Make sure that all mentors are fully trained and be aware that their expectations will need to be managed.

STAGE 3 SUSTAINABILITY

29. Campaign for public sector supported systemic change. 30. Create a monitoring database to enhance M&E and demonstrate impact
31. Continuously improve both teaching practices and the training of partners
32. Maintain good relationships and clear channel of communications with all partners, before, during and after the completion of the programme.

STAGE 1

EXPLORATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Exploration and Engagement defines the target group, analyses the context in which the programme will operate and begins to scope out potential partnerships.

ACTIVITIES



Discussing and **defining the age-range** of the young people taking part - this holds significant implications for programme design. 'Youth' is a very heterogeneous group with differing challenges and needs, other characteristics for example gender, education and income level, and disability also need to be discussed and defined.



Paying particular attention to **identifying the challenges young women face** in order to address them throughout the programme.



Conducting a proper **Labour Market Analysis (LMA)** is another crucial component of youth employment programming at this stage. The LMA should be practical and lead to entry-points for further engagement and should engage directly with companies using local staff and local experts.



Identifying potential partnerships with training providers, government and the private sector in order to enable cross-sector collaboration. Often one or more actors already have a clear interest in setting up interventions, while others are yet to be engaged. For a serious intervention at scale, partnerships with companies, training institutes, government bodies and other stakeholders, for example community groups and trade unions, are necessary.

SELECTING PARTICIPANTS

Many young people in developing countries are in a precarious position as they find themselves disconnected from the labour market and from any opportunities to become entrepreneurs. Therefore most youth workforce programmes target vulnerable youth by default. However in addition to unemployment, a multitude of other factors contribute to the marginalisation of young people. These might include:

age, income, geography, location, level of education, gender, race, tribe, religion, pregnancy, having children, disability, disease, violence, (lack of) access to land and the level of financial responsibility the young person has to support members of his or her household. All of these factors can affect access to the labour market and entrepreneurship development. As one Plan International staff member put it:

“THESE TYPES OF PROGRAMMES SHOULD NOT ONLY FOCUS ON THE BETTER PERFORMING OF VULNERABLE YOUTH, BUT MUST ALSO WORK WITH THOSE YOUNGSTERS WHO SHOW MANY INTERSECTING VULNERABILITIES.”

It is crucial to assess precisely who is being targeted and what this will signify for programme design and outcomes. A few examples from the field work and the literature review illustrate this point:

- **Level of education**

A selection criterion for young people taking part in the YBF programme in Brazil, Colombia and El Salvador is that they have finished secondary education. This pre-requirement for enrolment ensures that youth participating in the programme have at least a basic skill set, which facilitates their access to entrepreneurship and employment opportunities. However, it does exclude considerable numbers of the most vulnerable young people. For example in Brazil, the percentage of 25-34 year-olds with at least an upper secondary education is 61% (the OECD average is 83%), effectively excluding 39% of young people (OECD, 2015). This points to the need for programmes that either bridge the education gap or which are specifically designed for out of school youth.

- **Violence**

In 2015 El Salvador held the record for the highest homicide rate in the world for a country not engaged in war, with 104 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants and 6,657 killings in total. These figures demonstrate a 70% spike from the year before (Lakhani, 2016). Plan International El Salvador chose not to include gang members as participants in their YBF programme. Although such youth could qualify as vulnerable, their participation might destabilize group dynamics and discourage course participants who were not members of a gang. In certain parts of El Salvador, youth (especially young men) are not able to attend training courses because they are threatened by gangs who control territories and do not let in residents from areas controlled by other gangs. As a solution, Plan International El Salvador organizes courses at the local level, close to where these young people live, in order to include them.

The more challenges different groups of young people face, the more challenging the intervention can be, as more support is needed. The reverse is also true, working with less ‘vulnerable’ youth is

perhaps less complicated and can lead to more immediate results. For instance, Vivarelli (2013) argues that in developing countries “start-up size, higher education, longer previous job experience [...] and innovative capabilities [...]” are related to a positive performance from new enterprises. This will probably lead to a lower cost per beneficiary which makes scaling up the programme a more attractive proposition to donors and government departments.

Whatever final decision is made about whom the programme will target, these choices, and the reasons for these choices, should be clearly communicated to stakeholders, partners and funders, and discussed with staff members.

INCLUDING YOUNG WOMEN

Research indicates that young women face significantly more challenges than young men with regards to employment and entrepreneurship, such as:

- early marriage
- pregnancy and child care
- responsibility and workload of household activities
- lack of equal pay
- limited access to productive resources (land, technology, market information, skills, agricultural inputs, credit etc.)
- unequal provisions in family law, such as head-of-household provisions, the lack of joint-titling of land, inequitable inheritance laws and discriminatory principles in customary laws.

The experiences of young women participating in the YBF programme were found to mirror many of the challenges presented above. For example in Brazil, according to staff members of the YBF programme, young mothers sometimes have to drop out of the course to take care of their children:

“WE FOUND THAT DURING PARTICIPATION IN THE TRAINING PROGRAMME, A FAMILY MEMBER OR A YOUNG WOMAN’S PARTNER WILL USUALLY LOOK AFTER THEIR CHILD OR CHILDREN. THIS ALLOWS YOUNG WOMEN TO PARTICIPATE IN THE PROGRAMME. YET SOMETIMES THIS SUPPORT SYSTEM BREAKS DOWN, CAUSING THE PARTICIPANTS TO DROP OUT OF SOME OF THE TRAINING OR DISCONTINUE THE PROGRAMME ALTOGETHER.”

Acknowledging the challenges faced by girls and young women, Plan International has a large portfolio of girl-focused interventions, specifically addressing their needs. The YBF programme targets both young men and women, but does require at least 60% of the participants to be female. This is not enough to address the embedded gender constraints and challenges in all types of programmes – whether women specific or for both men and women. Plan International is therefore committed to the development of gender transformative youth employment programmes and recognises that workplace discrimination needs to

be addressed through fundamental social change. In the YBF programme, all training courses include strong components encouraging young people to consider gender issues in society and in the workplace. The life skills curriculum, for instance, which is generally around 20-30% of the course load, pays specific attention to gender through role playing exercises and discussions questioning gender biases. Another strategy employed is “gender awareness training” for partners and stakeholders including private sector employers and public institutions. In some cases, additional mechanisms are put in place to support women.

SUPPORT MECHANISMS FOR VULNERABLE WOMEN

CASE STUDY

In the life skills training component of the YBF programme, spaces are developed to reflect on gender, inequality, power and promotion of self-knowledge. Youth write their own ‘life plan’ and the programme promotes the creation of a support network between participants. Programme staff are in regular communication with the most vulnerable women before, during and after the training.

However in some cases this is not enough. In some of the local communities where Plan International Colombia operates, women experience serious oppression and abuse which occurs in a context of economic insecurity and lack of support networks. One of the participants in the YBF entrepreneurship programme, a young female entrepreneur aged 24 with three daughters, was a victim of sexual abuse and mistreatment. This eventually led her to attempt suicide. This shocking story, and the widespread oppression of women, encouraged Plan Colombia to put additional support in place. The YBF programme is

currently designing a meeting space for about 20 young women and creating ways to provide psychosocial support. Workshops on empowerment will be combined with alternative methodologies such as yoga and dance to help increase their confidence and independence and to encourage solidarity and understanding.

A different kind of support is provided by the creation of joint saving groups. Women’s economic dependence can perpetuate abuse, generating economic opportunities and improved savings can help reduce it. In Colombia, savings groups have been a relevant factor in reducing violence against women. By November 2016, 17 groups had been set up with 42 young women entrepreneur participants. Each programme participant is advised to form their own savings group with family, friends and other acquaintances. For more information on using saving groups see critical factor 25.

Source: Plan International Study Data 2016

THE ROLE OF THE LABOUR MARKET ANALYSIS

All these activities have a significant impact on the success, or otherwise, of the programme and it is at this early stage that the sustainability of the work needs to be addressed and factored into the programme planning. Key to this is the LMA which should include system and stakeholder mapping and a thorough analysis of the local economy in order to match supply and demand in designing training programmes and recruiting partners.

The reason for a comprehensive approach is to get an accurate understanding of the current state of affairs and figure out opportunities for and challenges to youth employment and entrepreneurship. These might not be very visible but they are pivotal. For instance if the LMA highlights the programme’s sustainability could be better achieved through enhanced government relations and policy change, this will require action from day one, not in the final year of programme implementation.

It is also important to emphasize that this mapping exercise should not be a one-off. In most situations,

the LMA should be updated at least once a year, and the programme adapted accordingly, as the situation may change rapidly in times of economic and political crisis. For example in Brazil, Plan International staff reported that over the course of one year, from 2015 to 2016, some sectors shrank by 20%. This resulted in the Plan International team re-adjusting some of their economic sectors of focus in terms of course development and corporate engagement.

The experiences of the YBF programme offer some key insights into putting a LMA into practice. Both Plan International Brazil and Plan International Colombia have changed their initial approach based on their experiences within the YBF programme. The first LMA's were heavier on high-level macro-economic data and put less emphasis on localised, targeted information. Consequently they, did not provide a lot of practical recommendations, let alone a list of specific companies to approach. In the subsequent LMAs staff members adopted a different approach leading to more specific entry-points for follow-up: for example the names of companies that showed or might show an interest in becoming involved.

Crucial to this more practical approach is to involve local staff in conducting a labour market scan for employment, preferably those with private sector experience and existing networks, as engagement with the private sector is crucial. In Brazil the first LMA was conducted by national consultants from a different region while later market updates were carried out by, the newly hired, local, corporate engagement manager. Local knowledge and connections will generally lead to more concrete outcomes.

PARTNERSHIPS

The programme design for YBF includes the creation of shared value partnerships with the private sector, government authorities, training partners and community-based organizations. The private sector is especially key to the success and sustainability of the YBF programme in terms of finding work for programme graduates, facilitating work experience during the course of the programme and contributing to a clear understanding of the local job market. With this in mind, the research team conducted 16 semi-structured interviews with private sector representatives (eight in Brazil and eight in Colombia), during the second phase of fieldwork in November 2016. Research questions were primarily concerned with: why companies choose to take part in youth employment initiatives, the challenges deterring engagement in such initiatives and the type of companies engaged in the initiatives.

Overall, companies mentioned both social and economic reasons for participation in the YBF programme:

1. Economic rationale

Economic arguments can be based on an increase in revenue: productivity increases because youth bring innovative ideas, help with brand building and work more efficiently; in addition costs decrease due to a reduction in turnover and absenteeism, in training costs, and in time spent on human resources.

2. Social Responsibility

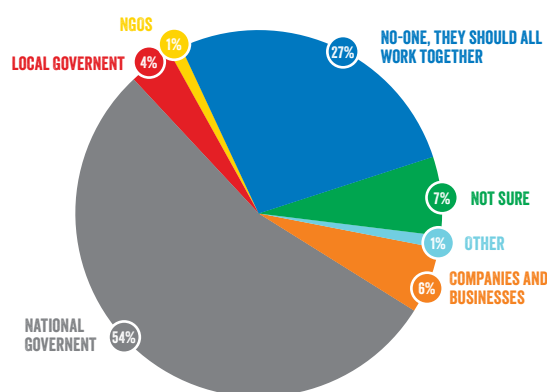
Providing opportunities for vulnerable youth people, perhaps particularly young women, in the community and a belief in the socio-economic benefits of youth employment for the broader society.

3. Other Reasons

There are additional reasons that cannot be qualified as economic or social, which include previous positive interactions with Plan International, friendships with Plan International staff, and government interventions, including legislation to stimulate youth employment

Partnerships and links with the private sector are crucial to ensure successful outcomes for youth employment programmes. However the primary responsibility for increasing youth employment and entrepreneurship lies with governments.

As the diagram below illustrates Brazilian youth starting the training offered by Plan International, interviewed through internet-based surveys, held the same view. When asked who should carry the primary responsibility for reducing unemployment 54% pointed at the national government, followed by 27% arguing for a multi-stakeholder coalition of the public and private sector and (inter)national organisations.



In addition, the LMA plays an instrumental role in assessing the status quo of government roles and responsibilities as well as providing suggestions for improvement. This engagement process should start at an early stage. Setting up partnerships with the government sector may take time and written agreements can take a very long time to be approved. Government involvement cannot be taken for granted.

STAGE 2

IMPLEMENTATION

The first 14 critical factors identified in the study apply to the initial phase of explorative research and engagement. By the next stage of a programme, target groups have been established, a LMA has been conducted and engagement with various partners has started.

The following section discusses the critical factors for successful youth employment and entrepreneurship outcomes related to the practical implementation of a programme. It focuses on consolidating partnerships, designing the programme content, training and engaging staff and putting support systems in place.

ACTIVITIES



Programmes with a particular focus on jobs should **engage with the private sector to maximize the chances of successfully placing young people into the labor market**. A range of strategies should be employed. Building partnerships and creating trust with the private sector can take time.



It is crucial to **choose capable training partners**, if possible those recognised as competent by the private sector. Training needs to be led by the demands of the local market and it is also important to have a significant part of the training dedicated to soft skills, which are as fundamental as technical skills.



Teaching should be **interactive** and use participatory teaching practices.



To enhance young people's practical experience **internships and apprenticeships** should be considered.



Where programmes are focusing on entrepreneurship **access to finance** is key. In a context where few formal credit providers exist, saving groups can be a viable alternative.



Support services can often help to increase the engagement of programme participants and reduce dropout. One support service to be considered is mentorship both during and after the programme. Mentors need to be fully trained and their expectations managed.



Throughout the programme it is important to **address the expectations of the participants**. They must be fully informed about the potential benefits of the programme, including their immediate chances of getting a decent job or starting a successful business.

CHOOSING TEACHERS AND DESIGNING THE TRAINING COURSE

Good teachers are probably the most important factor for quality training. Preferably, teachers should come from a similar background to their students (in terms of race, place of birth, economic background) as this can facilitate interaction and the creation of trust between teachers and young people. If this is not the case, they should be as empathetic and as understanding as possible in terms of the young people's vulnerabilities, context and overall experience. They need, also, to be comfortable with

participatory teaching methods and experienced enough to understand the the labour market and adapt the curriculum accordingly when necessary,

Training curricula should be in line with the demand for skills by the relevant sector of employment or entrepreneurship. Strategic partners (both government and the private sector) should therefore be engaged and consulted while designing the training modules. The case study of the MENA-YES programme provides an example of this. An additional point to reflect on is the extent to which training curricula should be visionary and take *future* demand for skills into consideration. Ideally, the LMA should consider this at the outset of training design.

DEMAND-DRIVEN CURRICULUM DESIGN IN THE MENA-YES PROGRAMME

CASE STUDY

An example of an interactive, demand-driven process of curriculum design is the MENA Youth Empowerment Strategy (MENA-YES) programme. (MENA-YES) was a \$4.5 million programme implemented from 2013 to 2016. The objective was to prepare vulnerable youth, particularly women aged 15-29, in Jordan, Lebanon and Yemen for the labour market.

In each of these countries, an LMA was conducted to identify sectors of economic growth. The programme then set up a Sector Advisory Committee (SAC) for each sector. SACs consisted of hired personnel from the private

sector and the training institutions, and the SAC members identified skills gaps and designed training outlines specific to their sector.

A competitive selection process, identified a training provider. New training curricula were developed and existing ones realigned with the training defined by the SAC; technical training was combined with soft skills training and mentoring. Graduates received a certificate upon completion of the course and were subsequently placed in internships, apprenticeships or full-time jobs.

Source: Global Communities 2016

Adding a life skills course module, alongside a more technical course module is a practical way of enhancing a pre-existing technical course. For example in Brazil and Colombia under the YBF programme, around 20% of the total course load (approximately 72 hours) consists of life skills training completely designed by Plan International. As companies consistently argue that life skills are just as important as technical skills this also makes the training more demand driven.

Some form of accreditation of training is also important. Certificates should be distributed to the participants once they have successfully completed their employment or entrepreneurship training as this can facilitate access to the job market. If the training includes an internship or apprenticeship, this work experience should also be accredited.

In Colombia, companies were more interested in taking on young people who had completed the YBF

training compared than those who had not. One of the reasons for their increased interest was that the training programme and the Plan International "brand" were recognised for their high standards. This reputation for quality training was also re-enforced by the well-recognised name of the education institutes partnering with Plan International.

The course graduates, as one of them said, also recognise the value of having a valid record of their attendance:

"IF YOU HAVE A CERTIFICATE FROM PLAN THIS IS YOUR COVER LETTER WHEN SEARCHING FOR A JOB, BESIDES IT IS A GOOD RECOGNITION OF OUR EFFORTS INVESTING IN TRAINING."

Participatory pedagogy is crucial in motivating young people and the YBF training programme relies heavily on participatory teaching methods. When interviewed, time and again, both students and teachers participating in the YBF programme said the participatory and interactive elements of the courses were extremely helpful. The interactivity, as one student commented, helps break the ice at the beginning of the course and creates a bond between all the participants:

“BECAUSE OF THE INTERACTIVE METHODS WE GOT TO KNOW EACH OTHER WITHIN THE FIRST WEEK AND BECAME GOOD FRIENDS!”

STUDENTS: RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Many young people approach the course with unrealistic expectations and managing these can be an issue as this example for the YBF programme in Colombia illustrates:

One of the young women graduating from the culinary course has successfully found a job. She now works in fast food restaurant, where her main responsibility is to fry chickens. Her wage is just above the minimum wage. She finds it hard to stay motivated, especially as she realizes that some of her peers are making more money in drug related activities.

Participating in and pursuing youth empowerment can at times have an adverse effect as it may awaken unrealistic expectations. Committing to a training programme requires sacrifice during and after the conclusion of the training. Participation in training, homework and ensuing job applications takes time. The reality is that most jobs and entrepreneurship are often hard work for little money, at least in the short-term.

As one young woman participating in the YBF programme in Brazil put it:

“SOME OF US ARE NOT REALLY MOTIVATED AND DON'T TAKE THE PROGRAMME SERIOUSLY. THEY START WITH THE COURSE BUT DROP OUT AFTER A FEW DAYS.”

It is therefore pivotal to explain clearly the sacrifices - in terms of time spent doing course homework, updating your CV, at job interviews, and preparing job application letters - that need to be made

from day one, and to manage young people's expectations for employment and enterprise development. Participation in a youth employment programme is a big step, but is only the beginning of a long-term process. In the El Salvador YBF programme, the first week of entrepreneurship training is dedicated to an induction phase in which the expectations and the responsibilities of students and teachers are discussed and clarified in order to limit disappointment and drop-out.

ACCESS TO FINANCE

Successful training of young entrepreneurs by itself is not enough. An integrated approach, which includes both training and access to finance is advised, especially for entrepreneurs just starting out. Providing access to finance for young people is, however, not without difficulty.

Approximately 80% of the global poor are excluded from access to finance. Young people, and especially young women, face additional challenges. Youth are 33% less likely to access a savings account than adults and 44% less likely to save in a formal institution. In addition they are often excluded from access to formal financial services for a variety of reasons including “legal restrictions, high transaction costs and negative stereotypes about youth”.

Access can be provided through microfinance, commercial banks, and development finance institutions. It can be in the form of loans, but also cash transfers and saving facilities. Increasingly mobile phones can also facilitate access to finance. Where possible, programmes should operate in partnership with financial institutions that have expertise in these matters to optimize financial provision.

Sometimes development programmes provide access to finance directly. For instance in the YBF programme in Colombia youth entrepreneurs are provided with a selection of the necessary inputs and materials according to the needs of their business plan. Young people first need to prepare a business plan in agreement and in collaboration with their vocational teacher. Afterwards they receive some needed materials or tools in-kind to implement their plan. In El Salvador, each young person successfully participating in the entrepreneurship program receives, towards the end of the course, US\$300 as an investment in their enterprise.

It is important not to create unrealistic expectations. Access to credit or in-kind support is conditional on active participation and business potential. One Plan International staff member in El Salvador noted:

“SOME YOUNG PEOPLE HOPED THAT THE PROGRAMME WOULD GIVE THEM MATERIAL THINGS FROM THE BEGINNING. WHEN THEY SAW THAT THEY WERE EXPECTED TO INVEST THEIR TIME IN TRAINING, THEY LEFT [THE PROGRAMME]!”

SAVING GROUPS IN UGANDA

CASE STUDY

A Working Future is a youth economic empowerment programme in Eastern Uganda. Funding and technical support are provided by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), Plan International Sweden, and Accenture Development Partnerships (ADP).

Besides skills training and the facilitation of links to the labour market *A Working Future* provides young people with access to financial services. The programme focuses on savings groups via Village Saving and Loans Associations (VSLAs) and uses them as a platform to teach the critical skills required for both formal jobs and self-employment.

Youth can opt for employment in three different ways: job placements, micro enterprises or producer group, with the vast majority choosing the latter. The results so far have been impressive:

- A total of 430 VSLA groups formed with 12,327 young people

- 99% of them employed as a result of the programme
- Average monthly income increased by 621%
- 633% increase in savings
- 39% increase in youth above the poverty line
- 94% of young people from the programme feel happier and 95% feel more empowered
- Approximately 80% less spent per beneficiary compared to other similar programmes
- In terms of links to the private sector for financial access, Plan has partnerships with Airtel Uganda and the Grameen Foundation to set up a mobile money e-wallet service, to make sure the villages groups can store their cash in a secure way. Another partnership is with Barclays Bank and the Bank of Uganda to both ensure links with formal financial services and to provide financial literacy training.

Source: Plan International, 2016

SUPPORT SERVICES

Support services can be especially useful to reach and attract the most vulnerable young people. Support can include child care, food and transport, literacy training, and flexible schedules for other work or harvest seasons.

In Brazil, Colombia and El Salvador, participants of both the entrepreneurship and employment support programmes were compensated for their transport and lunch expenses. Almost all young people interviewed during the field work said these support services were essential. Without such support, the vast majority would not be able to participate or would drop out quickly, a finding which was confirmed by programme staff. The most crucial

support service is probably the provision of a mentor which is mandatory in the case of the training for entrepreneurs and often applied also to the employment training. There are different mentoring models and these can be adapted to the circumstances and personalities involved.

Numerous case studies point out the positive impact of mentors with considerable professional work experience. This seems to be essential for an entrepreneurship training programme. In the YBF programme in both Colombia and El Salvador, mentors are entrepreneurs themselves and in field discussions young people acknowledged that this broad experience was very much appreciated. Mentors can relate to their experience and set an example. One mentor, interviewed about this, commented:

“THEY SEE ME AS AN EQUAL SINCE I AM AN ENTREPRENEUR MYSELF AND THIS CREATES A TRUST ENVIRONMENT.[THE YOUTH] FEEL I FACED THE SAME CHALLENGES THEY ARE GOING THROUGH WHICH MAKES US EQUALS AND THIS GIVES THEM THE CONFIDENCE TO ASK FOR ADVICE AND HELP WHEN NEEDED.”

One young course participant observed:

“ONE OF OUR MENTORS WAS VERY STRICT AND FORMAL, IT WAS DIFFICULT TO GET A SMILE FROM HIM. BUT HE CERTAINLY WAS A VERY KNOWLEDGEABLE PERSON ON FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT. HE TAUGHT US DIFFERENT STRATEGIES TO SELL OUR PRODUCTS AND WE LEARNED HOW TO MANAGE EXPENSES AND GENERATE PROFITS. IN THE END, WHEN WE KNEW AND TRUSTED EACH OTHER BETTER, WE CELEBRATED TOGETHER!”

MENTORSHIP BY PEERS IN SALVADOR DE BAHIA

CASE STUDY

Plan International’s Bridges for the Future programme, funded by the European Union, is based in Salvador (Bahia, Brazil). One of its accomplishments has been the development of an impressive mentoring component to the programme. In Salvador mentors are usually university students aged between 20 and 25. They are much the same age as the young people they mentor: the target age group is 17-25. Mentors and students also come from similar backgrounds, with the exception, perhaps, of the most vulnerable participants in the programme.

Programme staff said that psychology and administration students were found to make the most suitable mentors. Psychology students, capable of showing empathy towards the participants, built strong relationships with them, and the administration students taught participants how to tackle problems in a rational manner. An important difference between the mentors and the participants is that the mentors were from a university programme: in Brazil enrolment for public universities is highly competitive and private universities can be expensive, especially in times of economic and political crisis.

The mentors spend a large amount of time at the college where the courses are taught, and are therefore very available to the young people. They have a weekly half-day session with the youth they are supporting - around 30 per mentor now, going up to 60 in the next semesters - and often sit in and participate in classes as well. This enables the development of close relationships and high levels of trust between mentors and young people. At one of the graduation events the majority of students ended up in tears when saying their goodbyes to their mentor.

Another important characteristic of this type of mentorship is the camaraderie and mutual support among the mentors. They form a tight group of friends, spending a lot of time together on and off the programme. They also form pairs and sit in on each other’s mentoring sessions and classes. As one mentor put it:

“We are more friends than colleagues. This experience has changed all of our lives”

Source: Plan International Study Data, 2016

STAGE 3

SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability – the long term impact of youth employment interventions – is largely undiscovered terrain. Neither the field work nor the literature review provided many examples of enduring impact.

SUGGESTIONS FOR ENHANCING SUSTAINABILITY



Recognising that large scale impact requires **systemic change**, supported by the public and private sectors.



Establishing a **well-functioning M&E system** with digitised information to demonstrate impact and thereby enhance engagement with these partners.



Transferring training activities to existing training institutes or perhaps even the private sector, though this is not without its own challenges.



Improving the teaching practices of training providers and training partners including training institutes, public sector and private companies on topics like gender awareness, sexual and reproductive health, and the employment of vulnerable youth.

Sustainability proved to be the most difficult of the three programming stages to study. The field work reveals few examples of activities or analysis undertaken to ensure that the impact of the youth employment interventions do not end with the programme. This is perhaps unsurprising as there is no specific literature available on the sustainability of skills-based youth employment interventions and the whole area is largely unexplored.

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

Some of the research findings shed more light on the challenges of ensuring sustainability, rather than identifying solutions or critical factors to support it. However, it is clear that one way to enhance the sustainability of training and support for young people is by building partnerships with the private sector, public sector and training institutes. Working with existing institutions rather than setting up a parallel system means that these partners can continue some

of the activities after the programme has ended. For instance in Colombia Plan International teams up with one of the hotel unions, Cotelvalle. The Union organizes much of the technical training and will continue to do so. The additional activities such as life skills training, mentorship, and selecting the young people, are currently the responsibility of Plan International Colombia however without public funding it is not clear how such activities will continue.

Another route to sustainability would be for large international companies with well-established CSR policies in place to contribute some of the training costs. The benefits of skilled labour should be clear to them. However the field work revealed that corporate engagement with most companies was a lengthy and arduous process. Many companies are inclined to ignore the benefits to them in supporting young people and see only “another NGO looking for money.” Given these attitudes, it is highly unlikely that private sector companies will go much further in their contributions than they do currently. Their involvement tends to revolve around frequent interaction with Plan International staff about job vacancies and the progress of any young people accepted for a job position and, in some cases, attending events and training organized by Plan International.

The same applies to TVETs. Providing training

to vulnerable youth without financial support is not to be expected. Often TVETs who rely on public funding, lack the money to continue such a programme without donor support or additional public funds while private training institutions require tuition fees in order to remain in business.

Thus, one of the over-arching considerations for sustainability is the inter-play involved in cross sector collaboration between the public sector, the private sector and NGO’s in offering youth employment solutions. Financial considerations will always be crucial and there is no easy answer. Understanding the context and nature of the public sector, the private sector and NGO’s in any one location must inform the way in which sustainability is addressed and must be included during the initial analysis and design phase of any youth employment intervention.

Perceptions of companies on the role of the public and private sector

As part of the research project company representatives were asked a specific set of questions regarding the expected role of the public and private sector within youth employment solutions. A selection of answers regarding the role of the public sector include the following:

ANSWERS

“[THE GOVERNMENT] SHOULD PROVIDE FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR THE MENTORSHIP PROGRAMME ACTIVITIES.”

“THE GOVERNMENT COULD CREATE EMPLOYMENT BANKS AND NETWORKS”.

“THE GOVERNMENT HAS A BIG ROLE TO PLAY. ESPECIALLY WHEN IT COMES TO PROVIDING ACCESS TO QUALITY PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION.”

“GOVERNMENT SHOULD PROVIDE FUNDING FOR TRAINING”.

“THERE ARE FORUMS ON THE NATIONAL LEVEL ON CHILD LABOUR BUT NOT MUCH ON YOUTH EMPLOYMENT AND THE ROLE OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR. THE PUBLIC SECTOR COULD FACILITATE THIS.”

“GOVERNMENT HAS A BIG ROLE IN EDUCATION, AS EDUCATION PROVIDES THE MEANS FOR PEOPLE TO GENERATE INCOME.”

“PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES SHOULD PLAY A BIGGER ROLE IN TRAINING YOUTH FOR THE TOURISM AND HOTEL BUSINESSES.”

Perhaps the conclusion that can be drawn from these statements is that company representatives do have expectations of the public sector. However, the comments are generalized and do not point to one specific area of government responsibility. It could be that the persons interviewed had not thought about such a question in detail beforehand, or that there is a general lack of knowledge on public and private sector engagement with regards to youth employment. An additional explanation might be that the role of the public sector cannot be pinned down to a few specifically defined roles and expectations.

Answers relating to the role of the private sector were more generic and did not go further than an acknowledgement of their social responsibility to contribute to youth employment. Few details were given on *why* exactly private sector involvement is so fundamental and *what* this should look like. This is potentially an area for further research in order to fully understand cross-sector collaboration and what makes it work.

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Demonstrating impact is key when engaging the public sector and partnership building will be enhanced by setting up robust M&E systems. It can also be advantageous when engaging the private sector and a clear monitoring system is pivotal in order to keep track of progress made. In order to do so it is strongly recommended that programme information is digitised.

Another important aspect of ensuring sustainability is communication. Both in terms of close contact with training providers, to influence the curriculum

and improve teaching practices, but also by engaging continuously and personally with all partner organisations. While the participants from private sector companies were mostly satisfied with Plan International's work and with the young people they had employed, the one consistent recommendation for improvement was in relation to communication. In about one third of the cases, companies were not fully aware of Plan International's activities, even while hosting young people trained by Plan International.

CONCLUSION

In this summary report we have outlined some of the critical factors that research indicates should be considered in the design, implementation and sustainability of youth employment initiatives. There are no hard and fast solutions but this research does provide some guidelines to be put in place according to local circumstances and the resources available.

Youth Employment interventions have an essential role to play both in the lives and happiness of young people but also in national and global economies. 85% of the 1.8 billion young people alive today are situated in developing countries and their potential contribution to the societies they live in is immense. Decent work not only contributes to family budgets and opportunities but, especially in the case of young women, increases independence, self esteem and status within the family and community.

The importance of education and of training in this context is widely acknowledged and Plan International's YEE programmes aim to support young people with both the relevant "hard" skills and information and with the "soft" skills of analysis, communication and problem solving which are so important. Nonetheless, programmes such as YBF, however well designed and implemented, will only be effective and sustainable with the involvement of the public and private sectors. It can be to their advantage to be involved and there are many examples of companies and governments who acknowledge this and act accordingly. Governments and the private sector should come forward to play their part in scaling up interventions for young people's employment. Only then will real progress for the economy, and for equality of opportunity, be genuine and sustainable. Without skills training and employment opportunities we are wasting the talents of a generation of young people, jeopardising social and economic progress and condemning future generations to poverty and inequality.



About Plan International

We strive to advance children's rights and equality for girls all over the world. We recognise the power and potential of every single child. But this is often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion and discrimination. And it's girls who are most affected. As an independent development and humanitarian organisation, we work alongside children, young people, our supporters and partners to tackle the root causes of the challenges facing girls and all vulnerable children. We support children's rights from birth until they reach adulthood, and enable children to prepare for and respond to crises and adversity. We drive changes in practice and policy at local, national and global levels using our reach, experience and knowledge. For over 75 years we have been building powerful partnerships for children, and we are active in over 70 countries.

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