



# CRITICAL FACTORS FOR SUCCESSFUL SKILLS-BASED YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMMES

Based on experiences  
in the Youth Building the Future  
Programme in Latin-America

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# ABBREVIATIONS

<b>CONAMYPE</b>	The National Commission for Micro and Small Enterprises
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>INJUVE</b>	National Institute for Youth
<b>IYF</b>	The International Youth Foundation
<b>LMA</b>	Labour Market Analysis
<b>MENA-YES</b>	MENA Youth Empowerment Strategy
<b>NEET</b>	Youth not in employment, education or training
<b>SAC</b>	Sector Advisory Committee
<b>SENAC</b>	Serviço Nacional de Aprendizagem Comercial
<b>TVET</b>	Technical & Vocational Education and Training
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development
<b>YBF</b>	Youth Building the Future
<b>YEE</b>	Youth Economic Empowerment

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2015 Plan International, with support from global consultancy firm Accenture, began a three year programme called *Youth Building the Future* (YBF), which aims to equip young people in targeted regions in Brazil, Colombia and El Salvador with the necessary skills and opportunities to engage in employment and entrepreneurship. YBF is part of Plan International's Youth Economic Empowerment approach (YEE), operational in over 40 countries to support young people's transition into decent work.

The purpose of this study - focused primarily on field research carried out as the YBF programme develops - is to address the demand for applied research on good practices within youth employment programmes. It does so by providing an overview of the critical factors which must be taken into account if youth employment programming is to foster significant and sustainable development outcomes for the young people taking part in them. The research points to skills training, job placement and mentoring as critical priorities and in this study these factors are organised in accordance with the three main stages of youth employment programming: 1) Exploration and Engagement; 2) Implementation; 3) Sustainability.

These stages remain the same both in terms of facilitating pathways into employment as well as promoting entrepreneurial opportunities and, as summarised below, they provide the framework for the main chapters in this report.

## **1. Exploration and Engagement defines the target group, analyses the context in which the programme will operate and begins to scope out potential partnerships, activities include:**

- 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.

## **2. Implementation focuses on consolidating partnerships, designing the programme, training and engaging staff and putting support systems in place:**

- Programmes with a particular focus on jobs should engage with the private sector to maximize the chances of successfully placing young people into the labour 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.
3. **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 include:**
- Recognizing 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.
  - Inviting partners to participate in training and also seeking to ensure that there is a constant revision of partner curriculum, including training institutes, public sector and private companies on topics like gender awareness, sexual and reproductive health, and the employment of vulnerable youth.

## Corporate Engagement: the private sector perspective

Partnerships and links with the private sector are crucial to ensure successful outcomes for youth employment programmes. In order to get a better understanding of the drivers of corporate engagement 16 companies, eight in Brazil and eight in Colombia, were interviewed for a detailed “deep dive” study.

Most companies mentioned both social and economic motives for their involvement. Yet in the majority of cases, according to the analysis of the interview material, the main reasons for their engagement can, in fact, be classified as economic. This does not mean that discussions about corporate engagement should rely solely on economic arguments. On the contrary, depending on the context, a mix of arguments is probably more effective.

In the course of the research companies also mentioned other reasons for participating in youth employment programmes: ranging from laws imposed by the government to enforce apprenticeships for youth, to friendships with Plan International staff. The networks of corporate focal points within Plan International were also shown to be key; a considerable number of companies were willing to participate as they ‘trusted’ Plan International staff due to earlier interactions and established relations with other programmes. However even companies who were willing to participate, for whatever reason, only accepted a few young people each and there is much work to be done to build more effective engagement with the private sector.

## Research Aims and Methods

This report aspires to inform and assist the different stakeholders involved in youth employment solutions, such as NGOs, policy makers, corporations and training institutes. In addition, it aims to contribute to the expansion of the YBF model to other parts of the world and to provide guidelines for skills-based youth employment programmes outside of the YBF framework.

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, as discussed previously, a separate ‘deep dive study’ with private sector employees. For the field work the research team spoke to the following groups of stakeholders:

- 54 youth, including two focus group discussions with young women only
- 25 company representatives
- 17 teachers (both life skills and technical courses),
- 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 generalizations from the findings.

Finally, the scope of this study is broad. More specific research on the various topics covered is advised. **The aim is not to be prescriptive, but to provide guidelines, framed as a set of critical factors**, to be discussed and reflected upon by practitioners to help improve the conduct and impact of youth employment programming.

# CRITICAL FACTORS: AN OVERVIEW

## 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 signed memoranda of understanding (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 labour 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 will enhance young people's practical experience
24. Prioritise access to finance for entrepreneurs
25. Recognize 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. Invite partners to training and input into curriculum revision.
32. Maintain good relationships and clear channel of communications with all partners, before, during and after the completion of the programme.



# INTRODUCTION

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 (Solutions for Youth Employment, 2015).

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 (Herranz, 2016). 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.<sup>1</sup>

This research is a further contribution to the body of knowledge supporting youth employment work.

## 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 (see text box one). 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 prioritise 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 or 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 research organisation, KIT Sustainable Economic Development (also known as the Royal Tropical Institute) was responsible for the applied research component, the results of which are summarized in this report.

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<sup>1</sup> See for more info <https://www.s4ye.org/>

## YBF 2015-2018

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.

*Source: Plan International Study Data 2016*

## Demand for applied research

The topic of 'youth' and specifically youth employment has been firmly established on the development agenda with development organisations carrying out youth employment programmes in many different countries. A range of interventions is possible, such as skills training, mentoring and coaching, promoting entrepreneurship, employment services or subsidized employment. With specific regard to skills training, a lot of individual impact studies are available, but only a few studies provide a meta-overview of programme effectiveness. Evidence from the studies which do exist is somewhat divided. A recent study conducted by the ILO and World Bank concluded that "in low- and middle-income countries, skills training and entrepreneurship interventions produce the greatest impacts. Skills training and entrepreneurship promotion interventions yield positive results, on average, especially in terms of income gain" (Kluve et al, 2016).<sup>2</sup> Yet a 2015 study by Blattman and Ralston is less favourable. They argue, based on a review of the evidence, that "skills training [and microfinance] have shown little impact on poverty or stability, especially relative to program cost."

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, which this study attempts to address, 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.

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<sup>2</sup> The ILO and World Bank Study separates entrepreneurship promotion and skills-training intervention, with the former category concentrating on creating access to credit, start-up grants and micro-franchising, although acknowledging training is often an integral component of entrepreneurship promotion. This report focuses on skills-based interventions for both employment and entrepreneurship while including access to finance for entrepreneurs.

## Critical Factors

Based on a brief literature review and fieldwork in the three targeted countries this study provides an overview of the **critical factors** which must be taken into account if youth employment programming is to foster significant and sustainable development outcomes for the young people taking part in them. Focused on skills training, job placement and mentoring such an overview will not only help to potentially scale up the YBF model across the globe will also provide a useful guide to skills-based youth employment programmes outside the YBF framework.

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 guidelines, 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:

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**Stage 1** » Exploration and engagement

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**Stage 2** » Implementation

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**Stage 3** » Sustainability

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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 and built into the programme during the early stages.

# SCOPE OF STUDY AND METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted throughout 2016 and carried out by two international lead consultants proficient in Portuguese and Spanish and one international junior consultant supporting the literature review. Plan International was in regular contact with the consultants to discuss facilitation of the field research, preliminary findings and overall progress.

This section discusses the scope of the research, the various steps that were taken to gather credible data leading to 30+ critical factors for successful youth employment outcomes, as well as the ethics policy guiding the research assignment.

## Scope

The focus of this research is on **skills building** (or training) programmes for employment and entrepreneurship. Building skills can be in the form of long-term programmes and education, however, this study concentrates on short-term technical, business and life skills training as programme-based interventions are usually set up this way. YBF involves approximately 3 months of training.

The research is concentrated primarily on **developing countries**. The field work was conducted in **Latin America** and therefore there is a bias in the examples used throughout the report and analysis.

The research focuses on critical factors related specifically to **youth employment solutions**. This means universal criteria relating to general programme management (for example good relationships with funders, proper budgeting, and results-based management practices) which might enhance overall project or programme performance have not been included. The researchers also acknowledge that some of the critical factors may not be applicable in all cases as programme design may be influenced by donor demands and other contextual factors.

Finally, one of the major determinants of successful youth employment programmes is **engagement with potential employers**. In addition to young people being trained in line with labour market demands, links to private sector companies can increase their chances of securing jobs. Therefore, the programme design for YBF includes the creation of shared value partnerships with potential employers. Originally developed by Porter and Kramer (2011, p. 66) the term 'shared value' has been defined as "policies and operating practices that enhance the competitiveness of a company while simultaneously advancing the economic and social conditions in the communities in which it operates." The aim of shared-value partnerships in the YBF programme are to demonstrate market-driven engagement between companies, government authorities, training partners and community-based organizations to support youth employment outcomes. Given the key role to be played by the private sector within this model, the research took extra care to elicit their views and experiences, conducting a series of interviews with some of the companies involved in the programme. As will be discussed later, the aim of this particular piece of research was to come to a better understanding of what motivates the private sector to engage with the YBF programme.

## Study methodology

This is a mixed-methods study, with an emphasis on qualitative data. The 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 the detailed research with potential employers mentioned previously.

Data was collected at the end of the first year and halfway through the second year of programme implementation. This allowed the research team to capture some of the changes taking place and the progress made as the programme developed. The research qualifies 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.

## 1. Literature Review

A brief literature review was conducted prior to the field work, leading to a preliminary list of critical factors. The selected literature is made up of academic and non-academic publications and reports concerning youth employment interventions. Selected literature concentrated on:

- skills-based training programmes
- short-term training
- within the context of developing countries

A range of sources were consulted:

- leading multilateral organizations in youth employment including the International Labour Organization and the World Bank
- not-for-profit organizations, for example Plan International and Save the Children,
- governments
- the private sector, for example Accenture and the MasterCard Foundation.

An initial list of critical factors was drafted and was reviewed and discussed, during a two hour online session, by a panel of youth employment experts (both Plan International staff and external consultants). The feedback received was incorporated into the preliminary list of critical factors which formed the basis for the development of the field research tools and the subsequent analysis of the data collected.

## 2. Initial Field Research

The main method for data collection was primary research focusing on the three countries implementing the YBF programme. The first phase of research took place in Brazil, Colombia and El Salvador in May and June 2016, towards the end of the first year of programme implementation. This consisted of interviews and focus groups with young people (including current students and graduates of the programme), training institutions, mentors, representatives from private companies and government officials and policy makers.

As well as taking place in the three localities included in the YBF programme, additional research was conducted in Salvador de Bahia in Brazil. Salvador hosts two other large Plan International YEE programmes on youth employment, namely *Bridges to a Future*, funded by the European Union and *Bridges to Employment*, funded by USAID. Salvador was visited specifically to gain further insight into its mentorship approach as well as to broaden the evidence gathered.

Interviews with individuals were conducted using semi-structured questionnaires, translated into Spanish and Portuguese. Written guidelines for focus group discussions (FGDs) were also developed.<sup>3</sup> Data was recorded by filling out the guidelines during the course of the FGDs.

Once data was collected it was analysed, grouped into themes and used to add to and revise the initial list of critical factors devised from the literature. Sampling of the interviewees was done in partnership with staff from Plan International. An attempt was made to speak to a range of different young people, both those starting the programme and those already enrolled. Some of the focus group discussions were held with young women only in order to allow a safe and open space for discussion of issues specific to this group. The companies were selected in close collaboration with Plan International staff as corporate engagement with programme partners is a delicate process and care was taken to ensure that the research would not harm these relationships.

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<sup>3</sup> Copies of all research tools are available on request. E-Mail [research@plan-international.org](mailto:research@plan-international.org) to request a copy.

In addition to interviews with programme staff, the research team spoke through individual interviews and focus group discussions to:

- 32 youth, including two focus group discussions with females only
- 10 company representatives
- 11 teachers (life skills and technical courses),
- 12 mentors
- 5 government officials

### 3. Validation Workshop and Additional Research

In November 2016 more primary research was conducted to address some of the information gaps that remained once the initial data had been analysed. Interviews were conducted with the following groups in Brazil and Colombia:<sup>4</sup>

- 22 youth
- 15 company representatives
- 6 teachers (life skills and technical courses),
- 6 mentors

In addition, in both countries the research team and Plan International staff took part in a workshop to review the preliminary findings and discuss five specific topics in more detail:

1. Gender-specific challenges for young women and girls
2. The role of the public sector
3. How to manage participants' expectations
4. Monitoring and evaluation
5. Sustainability

These five topics were identified as requiring additional data after the first round of field work. Data from the workshops was used to improve and enrich the list of critical factors.

### 4. Deep Dive Study

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 was asked to take a closer look at corporate engagement in the YEE programme in Brazil and Colombia, during the second phase of fieldwork in November 2016.

Data collection consisted of 16 additional semi-structured interviews with companies partnering with Plan International Brazil and Plan International Colombia under the YBF programme: eight in Brazil and eight in Colombia.<sup>5</sup> Additional research was also conducted in Natal, which hosts a Plan International YEE programme on youth employment, *Goals for a Better Life*, funded by Akzo Nobel. The city of Natal is, like Recife, located in the North-eastern region of Brazil.

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4 Due to budget constraints for the fieldwork and the smaller size of operations in El Salvador, it was decided to focus on Brazil and Colombia in this phase of the fieldwork.

5 One of the companies in Colombia was in fact a Union for hotels, facilitating corporate engagement and partnerships for Plan Colombia.



Research questions primarily centring on: 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, were used to guide this element of the investigation.

This component of the study aimed for a varied mix of companies, in terms of numbers of youth accepted, company size, and sector. However the final selection and facilitation of research participants was made by local Plan International staff in Brazil and Colombia. This was necessary because staff had direct lines of contact with the companies and were better placed to judge their accessibility.

The selected companies and some of their basic characteristics are featured in Annex One. The names of companies are kept anonymous in the table and throughout the text for privacy reasons.

## 5. Digital Survey

In addition to the field work and literature review, the research methodology included the roll out of a digital survey to collect comparable data from young people, companies and other stakeholders on a range of topics including the prevalence of and attitudes towards employability and the youths' assessment of their soft skills. Due to a limited response rate in Colombia the findings are based on 191 observations collected via online forms in Brazil. Data was collected from young people who had just started the employment programme in Recife, in two rounds: one at the end of March 2016 and a second one in mid-November 2016. A summary of the most salient findings are referred to throughout the report.

## Limitations

The research has certain limitations which should be considered when reading the findings. For instance the **sampling** of the various groups of interviewees was conducted by Plan International staff in Brazil, Colombia and El Salvador based on instructions by the research team. As such the aim was to assure an appropriate mix of interviewees and incorporate a wide variety of stakeholders and views. However as the sample size is small and data is self-reported it is hard to draw strong general conclusions from the findings. In mitigation of this, triangulation took place through asking similar questions to multiple interviewees, and across stakeholder groups in the three different countries, combined also with the findings from the literature review.

There is an enormous amount of literature available, not just on youth employment in general but also on the specific sub-topics covered by this report, such as mentorship, access to finance, labour market assessments, apprenticeships and sustainability. As such it was impossible for the **brief literature review** to incorporate all these topics fully. The aim of the research then is not to be exhaustive or prescriptive but to provide some indicators, a set of critical factors, to be discussed and reflected upon analytically by readers and practitioners in pursuit of their own goals.

This approach is also advised given the **geographical focus** of the research. As the field work was conducted in Brazil, Colombia and El Salvador the findings are perhaps more applicable to the context of these three countries and Latin-America. This geographical bias has been compensated for by adding literature focusing on the developing world in general and examples from Africa and Asia in particular.

Finally, there are also some limitations to be noted in the research interviews with private sector companies:

- Most company representatives were not prepared to offer detailed insights into questions related to the expected role of the public and private sector. Instead, they usually relied on generic answers on the importance of basic education organized by the government and the responsibility of the private sector in social engagement. As a result, the research team put more emphasis on questions that led to more insightful and profound data including questions on the status of the partnership, their relationship with an NGO like Plan International and the challenges of their engagement so far.
- Companies taking part often had a limited amount of time available. The original questionnaire was designed to last around 60 minutes. However, in practice, allowing for general introductions and some rapport building, they took considerably longer.

- Due to the number of companies interviewed and their variability in terms of size, degree of engagement, sector, and their geographical location, making generalizations from the data is limited and is further constrained by a certain selection bias, which was necessary to add more focus to the research. The research team, together with Plan International, selected companies that have an established relationship with Plan International. All of them had accepted youth trained by Plan International or at least planned to do so, effectively excluding analysis of the vast majority of companies that are **not** interested at all or are hesitant to commit.

## Ethics Policy

Throughout the research process, compliance with Plan International's Child Protection Policy was assured at all times. In addition and in accordance with Plan International's Research Policy and Standards, the research ensured appropriate, safe, non-discriminatory participation, a process of free and un-coerced consent and withdrawal and finally confidentiality and anonymity of participants.

Interviewees were asked to sign a form of consent and remain anonymous throughout the report. In some instances, companies agreed to have their interviews audio-recorded, for future reference. However in most cases this was judged to disrupt the flow of the interview and the building of rapport and confidence and therefore was not widespread, notes were taken during the interview instead.

# CRITICAL FACTORS

As previously stated the purpose of this study is to address the demand for applied research on good practices within youth employment programmes. It does so by providing an overview of the critical factors which must be taken into account if youth employment programming is to foster significant and sustainable development outcomes for the young people taking part in them. Reviewed in the following chapter, these critical factors are guidelines, relevant to a range of stakeholders active in youth employment programming and applicable both to programmes promoting entrepreneurship development as well as those leading to decent jobs with established institutions or companies. Practitioners are encouraged to review and discuss the critical factors proposed here, according to the context in which they may be implemented.

Three stages, key to designing and carrying out a skills-based youth employment programme, were identified during the initial literature review and later validated by the fieldwork. These stages provide the framework for this report and the critical factors are also organised and listed under these three headings:

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Stage 1 » Exploration and engagement

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Stage 2 » Implementation

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Stage 3 » Sustainability

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These stages are not rigid and some flexibility must be allowed for.

## Stage 1: Exploration and Engagement

During the early stage of the programme (potential) partners will have to get to know each other. In most cases, one or more actors will already have a clear interest in setting up interventions, while others are yet to be engaged with, and may not prioritise youth employment issues. For a serious intervention to take place at scale, partnerships with companies, training institutes, government bodies and other stakeholders, like community groups and trade unions, are necessary.

The work to be undertaken during the Exploration and Engagement stage is divided into three components:

- 
- A** Determination of the target group and level of socio-economic inclusion

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  - B** Labour Market Assessment

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  - C** Engagement with and commitment of partners

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### A. Determination of the target group and level of socio-economic inclusion

#### CRITICAL FACTOR 1

##### Discuss and define an age-range for the 'youth' and be clear on the implications

Generally speaking, 'youth' refers to the period between childhood and adulthood. Yet different age ranges are used to statistically define 'youth'. The most common is the UN's definition which understands youth as people between 15 and 24 years of age. This is the definition used for all UN statistics (Unesco. org). Yet the African Youth Charter refers to youth as anybody "between the ages of 15 and 35 years" (African Youth Chapter, 2006). The Commonwealth's definition of youth includes those between 15 and 29 years

(Commonwealth. org). The Ibero-American Youth Report, jointly published by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the Ibero-American Youth Organization (OIJ), defines youth as those between 15 and 29 years (Cepal. org).

This variability is reflected across youth employment programmes. For instance, under the YBF programme in Brazil, Colombia and El Salvador, youth are all those between the ages of 18-29, while in the EU-financed project *Bridges to the Future* in Salvador (Brazil) the target age group is defined as 17-24 years of age.

There is no 'perfect' age range; the transition from childhood to adulthood is a fluid process that depends, amongst other factors, on the consensus amongst different societies on what it is to be young. The place young people play in society and the roles they have and do not have are important considerations. It is, however, essential to think carefully about setting age limits for a skills-based youth support programme. The age of the participants will affect the challenges and the opportunities that present themselves during the course of the programme and holds implications for the kind of activities carried out as well as the impact reached through these activities.<sup>6</sup>

It is important to be aware of the consequences when determining the target age group. Minimizing the age range might be helpful in reaching targets as the intervention becomes more focused, but this strategy may exclude vulnerable age groups. Creating separate training groups based on age- for example one group of 16-22 year-olds and another aged between 23 and 30- is often not realistic due to budget constraints. The choices made will need to be a balance between effectiveness and the resources available.

Examples from the fieldwork demonstrate why age matters:

- In Recife (Brazil), one teacher working for the YBF programme stated that older youth (young people over the age of 25) usually have more family responsibilities; they are more likely to drop out of the training programme, finding short-term jobs which give them some additional income. These young people need to be helped by programme staff and teachers to look carefully at such opportunities when they arise. They must decide whether it would be better to continue with the programme they are on or drop out and possibly harm their long-term career prospects.
- In the *Bridges for a Future* programme in Salvador (Brazil), the research team observed strong group cohesion amongst participants and mentors. The relatively small age range (17-24) may have played a role in this – an observation confirmed by the education specialist working on the programme.
- Mentors of the YBF programme in El Salvador, which focuses on developing entrepreneurship, commented that young people who were slightly older and more mature have a better chance of success. Youth aged from 25-29 years were preferred candidates for the entrepreneurship programme as they had more life experience and more developed business opportunity ideas than their younger peers. The programme staff attempted to organize the 18-24-year olds into one group, and the 25-29-year olds into another. However, this was not always possible due to the low participant numbers; the result, in some areas, of rampant levels of violence and gangs controlling territory. One of the solutions used in El Salvador was to give young people different roles within a group; a 29-year old for example might take on more of a leadership role within his or her group of fellow students. In the words of one of the staff members:

*"For the entrepreneurship programme, a certain maturity is necessary. In El Salvador at the beginning of the entrepreneurship programme, there were many 14 year olds and they were in a stage of total exploration of their abilities and talents. This is certainly a good thing, but it requires other capabilities and a different type of focus from the programme; the younger youth are, the more follow up is needed, with a high risk that being so young increases the possibility of them choosing other paths rather than the one of entrepreneurship."*

- Research indicates that soft skills can be targeted and improved throughout childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood. Some of the literature indicates that introducing soft or life skills training with the younger age group can lead to better workforce outcomes later on because acquiring these skills early means they are more flexible. (Brunello and Schlotter, 2011).

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6 Inconsistency in the age range of youth targeted can also make it harder to compare outcomes between regions and programmes. In addition, most official data on youth is in the 15-24 age range, yet many youth employment programmes use different age ranges, which limits the extent to which this data is comparable.

## CRITICAL FACTOR 2

### Discuss and decide other relevant criteria for selecting the target group and the impact in terms of the level of inclusion

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 marginalization 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: youth is a complex, heterogeneous social category, often with a variety of different priorities, needs, responsibilities and aspirations.

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.

### CRITICAL FACTOR 3

#### Map the constraints young women might face and consider how they may be addressed

Young women face significantly more challenges than young men with regards to employment and entrepreneurship. Looking at gender-specific constraints in 32 developing countries, Elder and Kring (2016) describe a range of barriers 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:

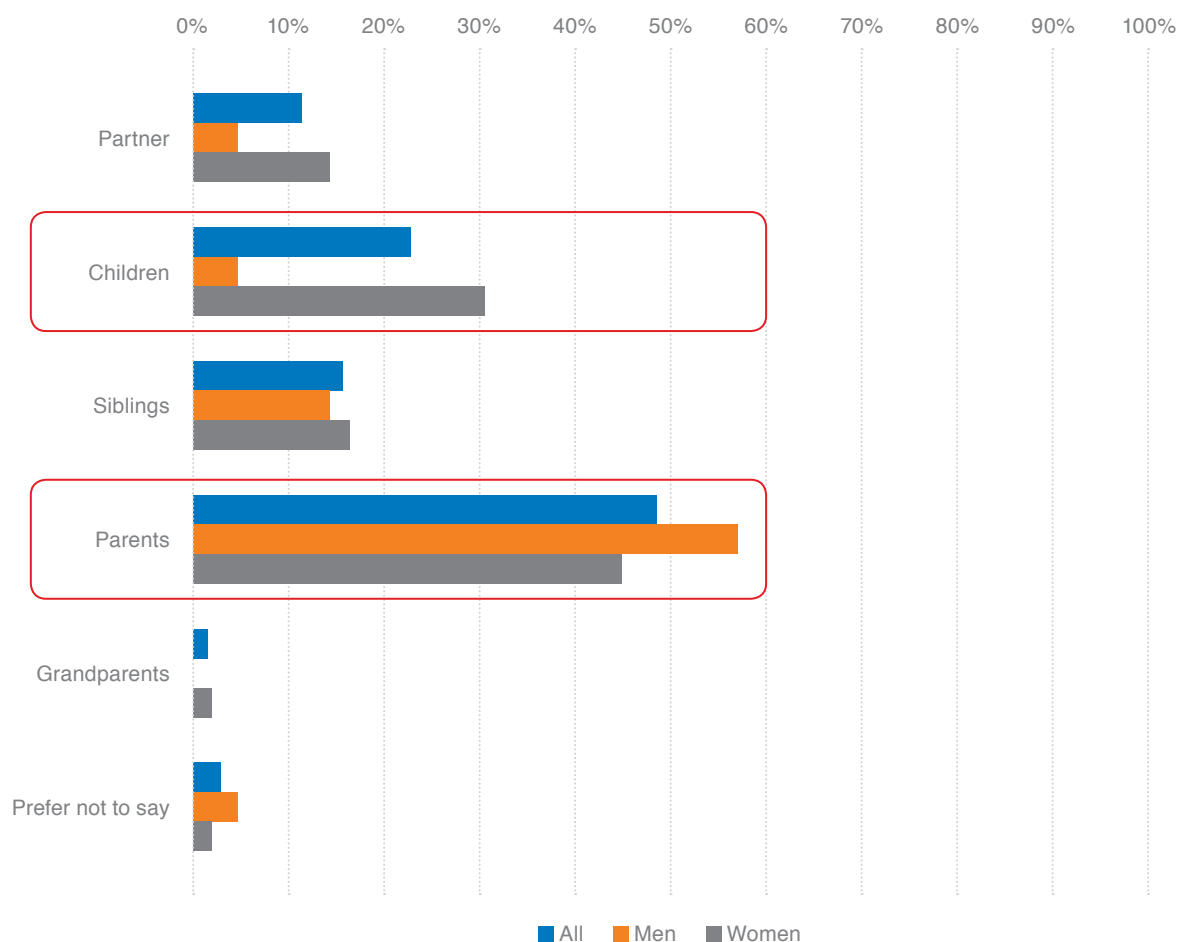
*“We found that during participation in the training programme, a family member or a young woman’s partner will usually look after their child or children. This allows young women to participate in the programme. Yet sometimes this support system breaks down, causing the participants to drop out of some of the training or discontinue the programme altogether.”*

According to one teacher working on the programme, the most effective way to deal with such situations is to “sit down with the person in question and try to find a solution. Quite often it is possible to find a creative solution, for instance asking community members to jump in and babysit.” Provision of childcare services within the structure of both the training programmes and the workplace would however be a more systemic solution to retaining young mothers in employment programmes.

The additional responsibilities and pressure to which women are often exposed, was confirmed by a digital survey in Brazil. One hundred and ninety one young people starting the Plan International training were interviewed, through internet-based surveys in March and November 2016. 26% reported that they support others financially. Of those 26%, parents were the most likely recipients of support. However around 30% of the young women providing financial support, were supporting their children compared to only 5% of the men.



**Figure 1: Recipients of financial support from Brazilian youth enrolled in YBF programme (N=191)**  
 (Survey question: Do you provide financial support to anyone in your household?)



These challenges require careful consideration when designing a youth workforce intervention.

A range of questions should be asked in the design phase to think carefully about gender inequalities and how they might be addressed. In a report on youth employment, The MasterCard Foundation (2015) suggests some of the following questions:

- What types of roles/activities do young women already take on in the household?
- Will parents let their adolescent females be trained in sectors that are traditionally male?
- Does training need to be segregated by gender?
- Will gender-segregated programmes translate into actual opportunities for females once the training and apprenticeship is done?
- What kinds of compensation differences exist for the same type of work between young men and young women?
- What concerns exist regarding safety for young women in relation to learning and earning?

However, even these questions fail to really unearth some of the deep structural constraints facing women and girls in pursuing economic opportunities. In discussing gendered perspectives of indigenous entrepreneurship, Ratten and Dana (2017) quoting a range of other studies, provide some insights into these challenges which, in turn, point to the need for systemic social norm and behaviour changes:

- Female entrepreneurial ventures are usually concentrated in businesses that are easier to establish due to limited financial support
- Women have less human capital due to educational and work experience differences that have a negative impact upon potential business ventures

- Women are pushed into self-employment rather than making a positive choice because they need flexible working so that entrepreneurship is a survival strategy for many female entrepreneurs.
- Women often go into self-employment because it is a source of financial independence and they may experience lower rates of remuneration than they would have held in previous jobs
- The disadvantages that women face in the labour market because of their gender are evident in their generally lower levels of debt finance which constrains growth rates

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, both in women-specific workforce development programmes and in workforce development programmes 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.

What is required is a rigorous assessment of the relevant gender constraints in the particular context, which can be conducted independently or as part of the Labour Market Assessment (see section A. 2). This should use an agreed framework for a gendered situational analysis looking at key domains of life such as education, health, social life, and interpersonal relations. The limitations faced by women and girls should be categorised into systemic constraints according to the geographical location, the rules, laws and customs of the area and the social and gender norms in the workplace and regarding female entrepreneurship.

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 (see textbox two).

### **Case study: Support mechanisms for vulnerable women**

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*

## B. Labour market assessment

### CRITICAL FACTOR 4

#### Conduct a practical labour market analysis

Before setting up any training the YBF programme conducted a labour market analysis (LMA) in Brazil, Colombia and El Salvador. There are several approaches to a LMA, a selection of which are outlined in textbox 3. At their core, most LMAs aim to get a better understanding of the demand for skills and the existing supply of skills. It is within the gap between supply and demand, that opportunities for employment and entrepreneurship can be found, and training designed accordingly. However, additional questions and analysis concerning variables such as policies in place, youth aspirations and culture all play a role. It is mainly the extent to which these additional questions are asked which determines the difference between the various approaches.

#### LMA: A wide variety of approaches and interpretations

There are many different approaches and tools available on how to conduct a LMA. Three of them are briefly introduced and access to more information is provided.

- One approach is **Mercy Corps'** LMA tools. These tools "have been tested in numerous countries including Haiti, Colombia, Turkey, Lebanon, Liberia, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Tunisia, Indian-administered Kashmir, and Ethiopia". On Mercy Corp's website, tip sheets and guidance can be found to inform field research: <https://www.mercycorps.org/research-resources/labour-and-market-assessment-guidance-and-tip-sheets>
- **The International Labour Organization (ILO)** has developed a training package for youth LMA. The tool provides information on which data to assemble and how to analyse IT for the assessment of youth employment at national level. More information can be found on: [http://www.ilo.org/employment/areas/youth-employment/kmf-yem/WCMS\\_302416/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/employment/areas/youth-employment/kmf-yem/WCMS_302416/lang--en/index.htm)
- **The International Youth Foundation (IYF)** published a brief toolbox on conducting LMAs based on best practices drawn from IYF's programmes. The toolbox can be accessed through: [www.iyfnet.org/sites/default/files/library/Labour\\_Mkt\\_Assess.pdf](http://www.iyfnet.org/sites/default/files/library/Labour_Mkt_Assess.pdf)

A useful framework has been developed by Workforce Connections, a two and a half year project (2013-2016) funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Office of Education and managed by FHI360.<sup>7</sup> The approach consists of seven components: system and stakeholder mapping, macro-economic trends and human capital trends, policies and regulations, the supply of, and demand for, skills, alignment, and economic context and analysis.

It is crucial to conduct an in-depth analysis on the one hand, while not making the LMA too onerous on the other. The framework chosen should at no time be interpreted as a straightjacket and should fit the purpose of the specific intervention. The level of detail of the LMA is determined by the level of detail required for the programme in place and the resources available. For instance, the macro-economic and human capital trends (component two) as well as the economic context and analysis (component five) might not have to be included if a particular sector has been pre-selected. In many instances, a certain value chain or sector has already been identified based on a previous scoping exercise or on donor demand. It should be noted however that pre-selection without in-depth analysis prior to selection may be problematic; there needs, for example, to be a strong demand for marginalised young people in entry level jobs.

The framework will also need adaptation when there is a strong regional or local focus and a need to concentrate the analysis on the targeted areas. The YBF programme in Brazil, for example, is being implemented in the north-eastern city of Recife, in Pernambuco state, which was determined before the LMA was conducted. Hence, the economic context and analysis phase paid specific attention to Recife and its surroundings.

<sup>7</sup> For more information see: [http://www.wfconnections.org/advancing\\_labour\\_market\\_assessments](http://www.wfconnections.org/advancing_labour_market_assessments)

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 emphasise 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.

## **CRITICAL FACTOR 5**

### **LMA, particularly in terms of employment rather than entrepreneurship programmes, should use local expertise to engage directly with companies**

Effective data gathering for a LMA relies on a variety of sources for data. From the field research three categories of data sources can be distinguished:

- Experts including business development professionals, value chain experts, labour economists, consultants, policy makers, employment agencies
- Companies, industry associations, unions.
- Secondary data - statistics, research

In terms of employment programmes it is crucial to spend time speaking with the private sector, including companies, but also with industry associations and sector-specialists. In many places secondary data, let alone reliable figures on age-disaggregated labour absorption rates, is scarce, so company representatives and sector experts are a valuable source of information.

Another reason is that, even if available, secondary data on a national and regional level does not always provide useful insights and entry-points for increased youth employment and entrepreneurship opportunities. It does not, for example, provide information on the perceptions companies hold about young people, whom some may view as lacking in skills and as unreliable, and the challenges they see in hiring them. For employment programmes a LMA should ideally be very practical, providing a shortlist of promising sector or value chains and a list of companies per sector that may be interested in partnership and in employing young people. The LMA is, in fact, the first step in the corporate engagement process (see also section 1.3 for more information on 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.

Key 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.

A certain level of flexibility is required as the LMA will not provide the only entry-point for engaging with companies. Direct engagement with companies that need young people with a specific set of skills for particular positions is also advised, even if the economic sector is not, overall, one with high job or

entrepreneurial prospects for youth. These companies can be identified through other partners, networks of staff members, and through other development programmes. Some examples from the field work include:

- In Recife, the YBF programme is partnering with a large supermarket chain and has set up a specific course training and preparing youth for jobs at this particular company
- In the *Bridges to the Future* programme in Salvador (Brazil), programme staff are exploring opportunities to develop a specific course with a large international car manufacturing company which should generate opportunities for young people
- Global consultancy firm, and funder of the YBF programme, Accenture, has made several introductions to companies on behalf of the programme
- As part of the YBF programme in Colombia, the union representing the hotel and hospitality sector has facilitated several partnerships with independent hotels and even some hotel chains (see also critical factor 11)
- In Colombia many YBF partnerships are the result of existing relationships with companies established by earlier development programmes. This also demonstrates the importance of tracking and maintaining relationships over time and retaining institutional knowledge.

## **CRITICAL FACTOR 6**

### **Map to what extent young people are interested in being part of particular sectors or value chains**

The interests of young people should be at the core of a youth employment and entrepreneurship intervention. If young people are not interested in working within a certain sector, despite potential jobs or entrepreneurship opportunities, it will not only significantly constrain training, recruitment and eventual job placements or successful business start-ups but also lead to increased dropout.

The LMA needs to find out what young people want to do and one way to test this is via group interviews. This can lead to surprising results. For instance, research among secondary school students in selected regions in rural Ghana (Sumberg et al, 2015) revealed that “desirable jobs were formal, salaried and professional”, whereas the expectation was that young people would be interested in entrepreneurship and farming. In addition, helping others and making a contribution to society were also judged by the students to be key to a desirable job.

In Recife, a YBF programme course leading to a job as a supermarket employee was developed jointly with a large supermarket chain. The company needed to fill 20 vacancies and there was a good chance steady employment would follow. Yet only 18 students finished the course which indicates that interest was not optimally matched. These realities need to be taken into account and included in the analysis of the potential labour supply.

## **CRITICAL FACTOR 7**

### **Pay attention to the informal economy and consider how to address the challenges of informality**

Entering the informal economy can have negative consequences. These may include lower wages, and poor working conditions, a lack of social security coverage, a lack of social representation and dialogue and employment instability (ILO, 2015c). However, informal jobs should not be automatically excluded from youth employment programmes as informal jobs or entrepreneurship opportunities are often the main source of employment in developing countries. If job opportunities are available in the informal sector, young people must be supported to enjoy equal rights and access to decent work conditions in line with relevant ILO conventions.

Formalisation can help provide better quality jobs and opportunities but in Colombia and El Salvador, it became apparent that youth participating in the entrepreneurship programme are often discouraged from formalising their businesses due to costs and unfair competition with the informal sector. In Colombia, for instance, it takes a long time to register a company and the costs are high (around \$50US) and in El Salvador young people reported that their formalised businesses have to compete with entrepreneurs who are unregistered and do not pay tax. Plan International El Salvador countered this problem by setting up youth cooperatives in order to purchase items collectively, and pay taxes as a group, thereby reducing the total amount paid. This offsets some of the disadvantages associated with formalisation.

The problem of youth unemployment is based on a myriad factors which require multiple strategies. Advocacy, to try and influence stakeholders in order to create an enabling environment is an important tool. Unless local practices and social norms regarding traditional employment and entrepreneurial pathways are addressed progress towards decent jobs and economic opportunities for young people will be slow. In programme design, therefore, it is critical right from the start to consider the role that advocacy and influencing can play. These additional strategies must be planned alongside traditional intervention methodologies, so their success too can be measured and evidence can be obtained for scale up in other areas.

## C. Engagement with and commitment of partners

### **CRITICAL FACTOR 8**

**Build commitment through signed memoranda of understanding (MOUs) or contracts with partners. If not possible, or counter-productive, find alternative ways to articulate the commitment**

In a youth employment intervention, the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders should be clearly defined (ILO, 2015). In an ideal situation, partnerships are formalised with well-defined MOUs or contracts in place. They should articulate the commitments of each partner, including the young people themselves. This will help to clarify the goals and responsibilities and provide a framework against which progress can be measured.

For example by formulating agreements on:

- the minimal number of CVs of trained youth that will be shared with the company;
- the number of youth trained by the training institute;
- the number of loans dispersed to young entrepreneurs.

In reality this is quite challenging. The field research found that at times partners are hesitant to sign formal agreements. Private sector companies in particular are not willing to sign MOUs or contracts and often a personal commitment or a 'gentleman's agreement' will be the only way forward. Funders need to be flexible about this. Critical factor 13 provides more detail on alternative steps that might be taken to strengthen partnerships, specifically for the private sector.

### **CRITICAL FACTOR 9**

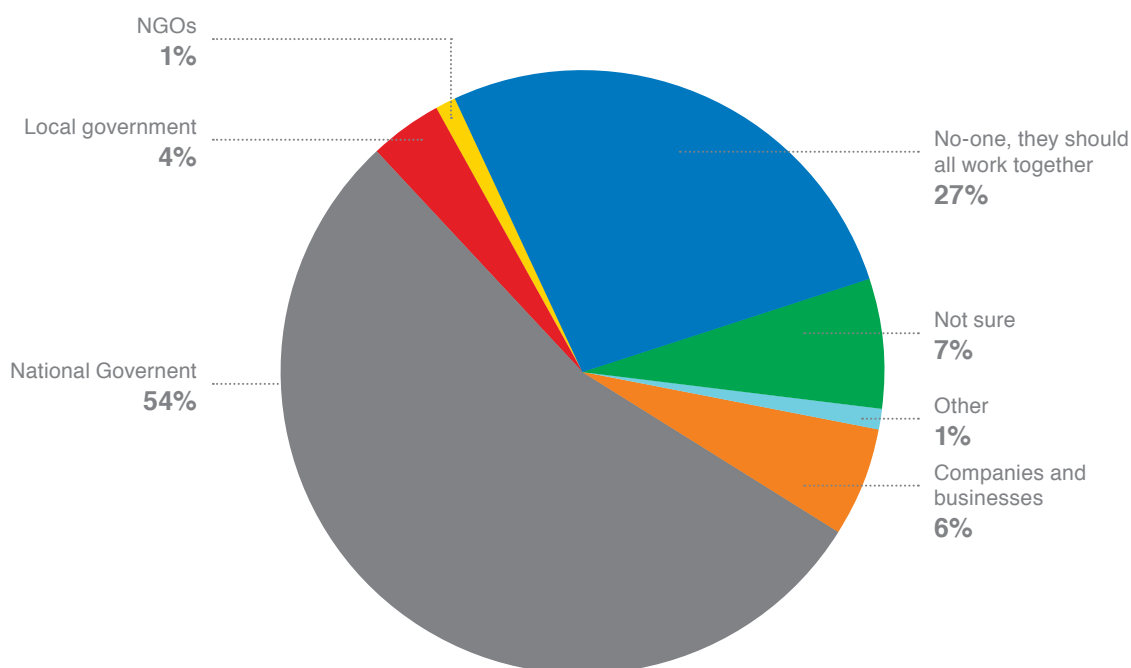
**Establish partnerships with government actors and agree clearly defined roles and responsibilities**

Although youth employment is a multi-stakeholder process, the primary responsibility for increasing youth employment and entrepreneurship lies with governments (ILO, 2008). Governments can play a multitude of roles at various levels but this will depend on their priorities and the resources available.

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.



**Figure 2: Who holds the greatest responsibility for reducing youth unemployment according to Brazilian youth N=191**



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. Table One summarizes some potential roles government actors can play. In reality however, governments are not always interested in playing their part.

**Table 1: Examples of potential government roles**

Examples	Local	Regional	National
In Colombia the local government gives an in-kind contribution to the YBF programme, providing meeting facilities as well as some basic funding	X		
In Colombia the municipality of the city of Cali convenes stakeholders for the YEE programme and hosts meetings	X		
In both Brazil and Colombia, local government centres help to spread the word about Plan International programmes and encourage youth to subscribe once enrolment starts	X		
In Brazil the TVET Serviço Nacional de Aprendizagem Comercial (SENAC) manages a job vacancy database. Youth trained by Plan International go onto this database, which increases their chances of employment. The private institution is supported by public funds.		X	X
The Brazilian government has instituted the Apprenticeship Programme by law, which requires medium and large-scale enterprises to offer 6 to 24 month apprenticeships to young people (see case-study)			X
In Colombia the course material used by the Training Institutes has been certified by the national Ministry of Education.			X
In El Salvador platform facilitation and policy advocacy is carried out by the National Commission for Micro and Small Enterprises (CONAMYPE). See case-study below.	X		X

Examples	Local	Regional	National
In El Salvador the rights of young citizens are established in the National Youth Policy (2011-2024), the Youth Action Plan (2011-2024) and the General Law of Youth from 2013. Plan International El Salvador signed a cooperation agreement in December 2016 with the National Institute for Youth (INJUVE) in order to promote economic development opportunities for young people. Together Plan International and INJUVE formulate and update youth policies at the municipal level	X		X

### Case study: CONAMYPE – platform facilitation and coordination

An example of public sector involvement through platform facilitation and coordination is CONAMYPE in El Salvador. CONAMYPE is a government entity positioned under the Ministry of Economics that works with micro and small enterprises. It provides training and advisory services as well as information to these enterprises through its local branches. It is also a governing agency of policies that support micro and small enterprises. CONAMYPE facilitates coordination and interaction between different organizations involved in strengthening the development of small business ventures.

One of CONAMYPE’s focus areas is entrepreneurship by vulnerable youth, which forms the basis for a relationship with Plan International. CONAMYPE has a letter of understanding with Plan International El Salvador to strengthen the technical capacity of the youth working with Plan International El Salvador. Both Plan and CONAMYPE provide resources to organize training. In addition, they lobby, through the National Advisory Council of Entrepreneurship, for a national policy on entrepreneurship which will help to facilitate more support by, for example, increasing access to capital, tax exemptions and cutting red tape.

This Advisory Council constitutes a multi-stakeholder platform with over 30 actors from both the public, private and research sector. Plan International participates in these discussions as it provides opportunities to network and to debate and influence policy questions and the legal framework relating to small and medium enterprise development.

*Source: Plan International, Study Data 2016*

## CRITICAL FACTOR 10

### Choose training partners that are recognised as competent by the private sector

Training can be carried out by all kinds of organisations: government, publicly or privately funded Technical and Vocational Education and Training Institutes (TVETs), as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Ideally, these partners are capable of monitoring their performance, making adjustments as needed and quickly aligning the training process to respond to the realities of the youth enrolled in training.

However, in reality, these partners are often far from perfect and there is limited choice when opting for one partner over another. The recognition of a training provider by the private sector is an important defining factor. As one Plan International staff member in Brazil put it:

*“When we mention the name of the training institute, companies become more interested and take us more seriously”*

In Brazil, Plan International partners with two reputable TVETs, one of them held in especially high regard by the private sector which facilitates better engagement with this sector.

## **CRITICAL FACTOR 11**

### **Partner with unions to facilitate identifying companies**

Unions can be instrumental in validating findings from the LMA and in facilitating introductions to their network of members. An example of this can be seen in the relationship between the Colombia YBF programme and the Hotel Association of the Cauca Valley (Cotelvalle). YBF's connection with the Cotelvalle union representing the hotel sector (see case study below) demonstrates union involvement can go beyond facilitating private sector engagement, and extend to sharing training responsibilities and resources.

## **CRITICAL FACTOR 12**

### **Engage with the private sector using a variety of strategies**

It is important to understand the motivations of corporate partners in order to engage effectively and a range of strategies should be set up to make an effective case for their participation in a programme. The style of the interaction and the arguments used will depend on the context and the company. In some cases, a formal presentation might support the initial engagement effort. In others, introductory talks have a more informal character. Whichever approach or arguments are used, outreach to companies needs to be systematically tracked with regular follow-up. Field work in Brazil and Colombia, in particular the 'deep dive' investigation with several private sector companies, revealed a variety of reasons or motives for joining the YBF programme; as well as a number of obstacles to private sector engagement, which are explored below.

#### **12.1 Understand the reasons for private sector engagement**

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**

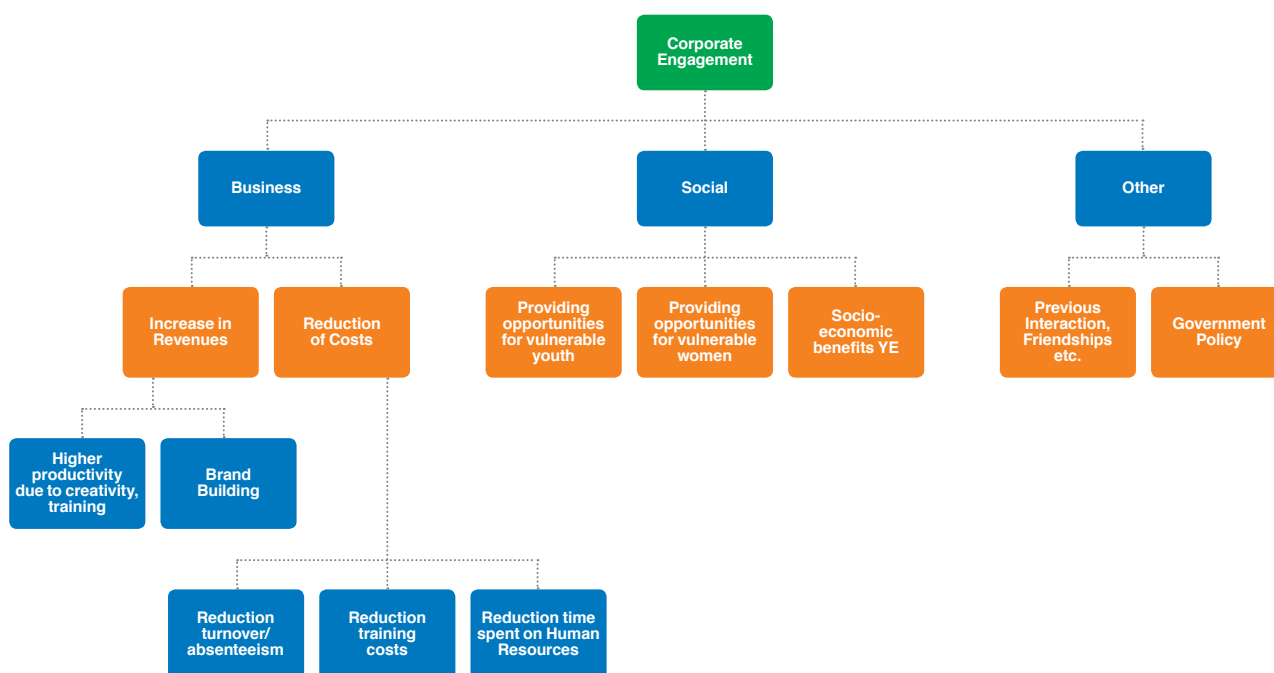
Providing opportunities for vulnerable youth people, perhaps particularly young women, in the community and a belief in the socio-economic benefits of youth employment for the broader society.

##### **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

The various reasons provided by the companies that participated in the research are summarised in the graphic below.

#### **Figure 3: Reasons for corporate engagement with youth employment programmes**



When companies were asked further probing questions about their views and experiences of the YBF programme, the research team found that in the majority of cases the main reason for participation in the YBF programme could be qualified as economic. Specific economic reasons included:

- Reduction in training costs
- Reduction in turnover, absenteeism and work conflicts. For example, one company representative said: “normally youth do not show up after a few months [ . . . ]but the trained youth are acting more responsibly”
- More professional and better prepared youth
- Young people bring creativity to the workplace

In only a few cases were social considerations given as the most important reason for engagement and these included:

- Supporting young women benefits the broader society. One company representative said that “supporting young women helps us all, as they invest back into society and the community”
- Employing vulnerable people is a way to ‘pay back’ society

Other reasons for participation in the programme that companies mentioned included:

- Five Brazilian companies were participating due to the national apprenticeship law, also known as Joven Aprendiz, or the Brazilian Apprenticeship programme. This national programme is a combination of a professional training programme with employment subsidies - through a reduction in payroll and hiring costs- and facilitates participants’ job search through a network of formal sector firms that access data on apprentices.
- Two companies initially interacted with the programme due to friendship with a programme officer. Not only can friendship help to make the necessary introductions, this ‘goodwill’ makes corporate partners more receptive to a programme’s message, approach and goals.

This is an interesting finding as a much of the literature focuses purely on the economic and social reasons underlying corporate engagement. This brief study shows other reasons can be just as relevant, although it goes beyond the scope of the report to disentangle the relative importance of friendship and networks vis-à-vis economic and societal arguments.

A further finding worth highlighting was that four companies commented that Plan International's network of corporate engagement focal points was crucial in establishing a partnership. In these instances, staff already had a pre-existing relationship with the companies and this greatly facilitated the chances of successful engagement around youth employment initiatives. Networks of this nature should be distinguished from personal friendships, as the former is not the sole motivation for engagement but should be seen as an enabling factor.

The fact that economic motivations dominate, at least in this small sample, should not be perceived as an argument against using both economic and social arguments when approaching private sector companies. A purely economic argument without any social connotations would not make Plan International's programme any different from an employment agency. And the reverse is true as well; a social programme without any economic rationale is not likely to win over many board rooms and business owners. Indeed, a combination of both arguments should be used, depending on the company and the person representing the company, while taking advantage of established networks and relationships (see also section C on partnership engagement). Corporate engagement is usually a painstaking process and it can take a long time to produce any results.

## **12.2 Understand obstacles to private sector engagement**

Where companies are reluctant to participate in a youth employment programme, their reasoning should be elicited and attempts made to provide counter arguments to alleviate any concerns.

Objections from the private sector to participating in the programme in Brazil and Colombia included:

### **1. Costs**

There is an assumption amongst companies that the development partner (i. e. Plan International in this instance) is looking for funding and additionally companies may believe that participation in a youth employment programme will involve them in additional costs.

In reality, hiring qualified youth should reduce costs. Motivated and well-trained personnel should bring down turnover and absentee rates. Human resource activities are strengthened as the development partner can provide support through the selection of appropriate CVs for the position available and will continue with additional assistance, for example mentoring, once the young person starts a new job. Moreover, training is usually paid for by the programme.

### **2. Time intensive**

Some investment in time is required, however, this can be easily offset not only by a reduction in time spent on human resources but also by some of the economic arguments for participation such as cost reduction and revenue creation.

### **3. Youth are 'lazy and not motivated'**

Perceptions of young people by employers and entrepreneurs are not always positive, which impedes their willingness to give them a chance. These negative perceptions are even less favorable to women due to gender bias and discrimination.

These findings are explored further in section 12. 3 below.

## **12.3 Understand private sector perceptions of youth**

Companies included in the research were questioned with regards to the experience they had in terms of (i) youth engagement in general, and (ii) with youth trained by Plan International's YEE programme, some of whom had been employed by the company.

Challenges mentioned with regards to youth and youth employment in general usually related more to 'soft skills' than to 'hard,' technical skills. Most companies reported that they face challenges with young people in terms of attitudinal problems, self-confidence, time-management and timeliness. One company also mentioned drug use as an issue. The following comments from private sector representatives help illustrate this finding:

*“Many young people do not always know how to present themselves or communicate well. This is key because they need to uphold the relationship with supermarkets and clients. Some have a problem with showing up on time, sometimes they want a holiday all of a sudden”*

*“There are many youth who don’t care about their job. There are a lot of problems with getting in late and absenteeism.”*

*“A major challenge is their attitude towards life; young people are careless.”*

To address such views Plan International staff suggested:

- Showing CVs to companies so that they see young people as individuals. Facilitating interaction between hesitant companies and the young people concerned prior to any commitment. This could take the form of companies visiting courses and events or allowing youth to visit their workplace
- Sharing the stories of young people who have been successfully employed

In contrast some companies mentioned the *advantages* of employing youth over adults. Examples included:

- **Youth are creative and bring ‘thinking outside the box’**  
“[We] need creative and eager people, and youth are often more creative and eager”.
- **Youth could potentially be more dedicated and loyal**  
“If time is invested in young people they pay it back. Youth are very grateful when they have opportunities.”  
“[Youth] are less inclined to complain about the work and look for other opportunities.”
- **Youth are available**  
“We need someone who is available and can work difficult hours, someone who does not have family to take care of or is married.”
- **Youth learn quickly**  
“Youth learn and are mentored more easily.”

These are interesting arguments that can be used as a part of a wider arsenal to influence companies to engage with youth employment programmes.

### **CRITICAL FACTOR 13**

#### **Allocate ample time to engage with the private sector and take advantage of existing relations**

Developing partnerships with the private sector takes time. One cannot always expect jobs to be made available in the first and second years of a programme. And even then, the number of vacancies for vulnerable youth per company will be limited.<sup>8</sup> This should be taken into account when setting targets regarding the number of young people to be employed, which is likely to be very different from the numbers successfully trained.

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<sup>8</sup> The ‘deep dive’ exercise with companies in Colombia and Brazil showed that most companies partnering with the YBF programme have only accepted a few youth after a two-year process of corporate engagement, let alone the many companies that have shown no interest.



According to Plan International staff, the corporate engagement process includes the following steps:

1. Visits to the company by programme staff; introducing the programme and sharing success stories. In some cases the first meetings start during the LMA.
2. Company attendance at events organized by the programme in order to create mutual trust.
3. A company visit by young people which might include their mentors
4. Company participation in designing improved curricula. This is optional as in many instances curricula are set and difficult to adapt (see critical factor 17)
5. Establishment of a pilot period of engagement with a company. Persuade the company to accept one or a few programme graduates, and guarantee they will be closely monitored.
6. Scale up when, and if, the pilot period of engagement is successful. In this way more young people can apply for vacancies as they become available. Scaling up can also include young people applying to other types of jobs within the same company, or jobs at the same company but in different locations or placements with partner companies in the same sector, facilitated by the original partnering company.

Again, the process can be lengthy and requires persistence. One company representative in Brazil commented:

*“We really appreciate the effort [Plan International] took. They always invited us to meetings and stayed in touch, without being pushy. This has increased our confidence and made us more interested in the programme.”*

Local ties and relations can often facilitate corporate engagement and are usually more effective than using a cold-calling approach. Some examples from the field work are listed below:

- In Colombia Plan International has placed a number of youth in jobs at companies they partnered with in previous programmes
- In Brazil, the main funder of the YEE programme, global consultancy firm Accenture, introduced Plan International to some of their former clients
- In Salvador (Brazil) a lot of companies became interested in youth trained by Plan International as they were listed in a job vacancy databank hosted by the training partner (a highly regarded TVET)
- In Brazil a restaurant chef identified eight colleagues from other restaurants who might also be interested partnering with the YBF programme

## **CRITICAL FACTOR 14**

### **Engage with companies that guarantee decent work conditions**

The ILO Conventions and Recommendations to promote decent work are the leading and guiding framework for decent work conditions, and are particularly relevant to young people (ILO, 2013).

In the case where a country has signed the ILO conventions, it is possible to verify the degree of implementation. If the ILO conventions are not in place or their implementation is limited, engagement with companies can include supporting them to adopt decent work standards.

The degree to which decent jobs standards are guaranteed by a company can be assessed beforehand. For instance in Brazil under the YBF programme a basic risk analysis is conducted before engaging with a sector and specific company. Two economic sub-sectors that are not targeted within the programme are call centres and petrol stations as job conditions are judged to be sub-standard.

However placing young people into companies is already a huge challenge and changing company working conditions and policies may be impossible, certainly in the short term. In situations where achieving ILO standards is particularly difficult, a set of minimum standards, applicable to the context, should be developed in close collaboration with other stakeholders, including donors.

## Stage 2: Implementation

The first 14 critical factors applied 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. This involves:

- A Designing the training of both technical and life skills curricula
- B Exploring internship or apprenticeship opportunities
- C Accessing finance for entrepreneurship programmes
- D Mentoring and other support services

### A. Designing the training programme

#### CRITICAL FACTOR 15

##### Ensure that training is demand-driven

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 also be engaged and consulted while designing the training modules. The case study of the MENA-YES programme, textbox six below, 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.

In practice adapting training curricula is not always feasible. Often a training course serves a broad and complex economic sector - logistics, culinary services, hospitality- in order to make the course a useful introduction to a wide range of potential jobs within that sector. The resulting generic course can only do so much to prepare young people for the job market. Another challenge is that curricula are often set with a disproportionate focus on technical skills over soft skills, especially when working in the context of established TVETs and certified course modules. Usually changes to course modules have to be verified and approved by the TVETs as well as the Ministry of Education or a related governmental body. This can take a very long time, extending beyond the duration of a short term skills-based training programme.

Bearing all this in mind, making a course module more demand-driven or practical is not always possible, at least not formally. However, there are subtle ways to influence the curriculum. In the first place, teachers often have a considerable degree of freedom to adjust the set curriculum according to their professional experience. In the words of a teacher working on the YEE programme in Brazil:

*“We have received a course guide which we follow, but it is more extensive than what we can teach. We therefore focus on what we [as teachers] find important.”*

Another way to improve technical courses is through adding a life skills course module, alongside a more technical course module. 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 (see also critical factor 22).

## Case study: Demand-driven curriculum design in the MENA-YES programme

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*

### CRITICAL FACTOR 16

#### Ensure that training is accredited so that it serves as an asset for young people when job searching

Some form of accreditation of training is 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. (Cavero and Ruiz, 2016).

In Colombia, companies were more interested in taking on young people who had completed the YBF training compared to 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."*

In both Colombia and El Salvador, Plan International staff commented that youth from regions marred by violence stand a better chance of getting a job if an NGO or the Government accredits their competencies as these young people suffer from stereotyping as 'violent' and 'reckless'. One company representative admitted:

*"In the past, as a principle, we did not hire youth coming from certain geographical areas due to the stigmatization of these areas because of the high levels of violence. Now if a youngster from one of these areas applies for work and has been enrolled in the Plan training, it is a guarantee [of quality] for us and we can hire him or her."*

In both Colombia and Brazil, Plan International worked with the existing technical modules offered by the partnering education institutes, adapting them by adding the life skills curriculum, which automatically led to accreditation of the courses. Besides an increased chance of employment upon completion, a certificate is also a token of appreciation and public recognition, which helps to boost self-confidence and motivation. In addition to a certificate, hosting a public event such as a graduation ceremony, whereby company representatives, mentors and parents are invited can also be very helpful.

## CRITICAL FACTOR 17

### Use participatory teaching methods and make sure that training is interactive

Literature indicates that young people lose interest when training is conducted by traditional methods and it drives up the level of absenteeism and drop out. Instead, effective discussion and questioning content will help to embed the skills and knowledge they need (Global Partnership for Youth Employment, 2014).

Participatory pedagogy is crucial in motivating young people<sup>9</sup> 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. Some of the reasons they mentioned included:

- Stimulating students to internalize the 'theory' in a more pro-active manner
- Helping to 'break the ice' between teachers and students at the start of a new course. As one programme participant in Brazil put it: *"Because of the interactive methods we got to know each other within the first week and became good friends!"*
- Contributing to group cohesion – a bond amongst participating youth is created by participating in exercises which push them out of their comfort zones
- Stimulating youth empowerment, which is especially important for vulnerable 'voiceless' young people

An example of participatory teaching can be seen in the life skills training course of the YBF programme in Brazil which is packed with simulations, role playing games, interactions and moments for discussion. During one exercise, gender roles are reversed and the young men and women have to come up with a brief play in which the male participants take up the role of women and vice versa. Both groups usually portray the other sex in a stereotypical manner, which provides a useful introduction for the ensuing discussion on gender roles and perceptions.

## CRITICAL FACTOR 18

### Allocate ample time to select well-qualified teachers

Good teachers<sup>10</sup> 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.

In addition, teachers should have appropriate CVs demonstrating sufficient experience of working with young people combined with personal competencies. An important skill is a capacity to facilitate group dynamics and interaction since all students interviewed during the fieldwork reported their appreciation of the interactive approach of the courses. Such skills should be tested through role playing and simulation exercises during the job selection process.<sup>11</sup> A report by the Global Partnership for Youth Employment (2014), a collaboration between the World Bank and the International Youth Foundation, provides a useful list of minimum criteria for teachers which details the required experience, personal skills and education level.

To build upon the required skills, teachers should be offered training by education specialists on a regular basis. Mechanisms should also be put in place to facilitate the exchange of knowledge amongst teachers. For instance, in the YBF programme in Brazil, teachers are seen and treated as part of the project team. In addition to a lot of informal interaction Plan International staff regularly meet formally with teachers for feedback.

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9 It goes beyond the scope of this report to fully delve into and discuss best practices regarding participatory learning methods and practices. A useful introductory text is *Strengthening Life Skills for Youth: A Practical Guide to Quality Programming* (2014) Global Partnership for Youth Employment. The World Bank & International Youth Foundation.

10 The word 'teachers' can be interchangeably used with facilitators, trainers and instructors.

11 See the report *Strengthening Life Skills for Youth: A Practical Guide to Quality Programming* (2014) by the Global Partnership for Youth Employment for more insights on how to select teachers.

## CRITICAL FACTOR 19

### Schedule and lengthen the training in line with the target group's needs

The realities and context of the target group should be taken into consideration when planning the training. For instance in rural areas, providing training at weekends or outside harvesting seasons is advised; unless, of course, it is directly related to the agricultural activities and crops harvested in that season.

YBF programme staff informed the research team that they try to plan all training in agreement with the young people participating. In Colombia and El Salvador, for both the entrepreneurship and employment training, the participants decided to have two full days of training. In Brazil, four half days were allocated per course.

Most courses are only taught in the morning or afternoon. For some courses, alternative sessions are offered in the evening. This creates flexibility for young people undertaking short-term employment or requiring flexibility due to family responsibilities including domestic work and childcare.

## CRITICAL FACTOR 20

### Manage youth expectations about the realities of the labour market and the opportunities for entrepreneurship

Managing the expectations of youth 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 realises that some of her peers are making more money in drug related activities.

This demonstrates that:

- Participating in and pursuing youth empowerment can at times have an adverse effect as it may awaken unrealistic expectations. For various reasons the participation in training programmes might not always be in line with the dreams and desires of young people: often the training does not automatically lead to finding a job or starting a business.
- 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.

Moreover, results - although never guaranteed - depend on the level of participation and commitment of the participants. And even then, an entry-level job or running your own business is hard work, often involving low salaries and long hours. Failing to convey this might lead to disappointment. It can also increase the level of absenteeism and drop-out during the programme.

Some examples of how to manage expectations effectively include:

### 1. Explicitly addressing expectations during the training

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 addressed.

### 2. Develop life plans

In all YEE programmes young people are asked to develop their own life plan, which helps them to describe their goals in detail and define practical ways to achieve these goals. For instance, the young woman, described earlier, working in the fast food restaurant defined her current job as a temporary step on a longer career-path. She could decide to use some of her salary to enter into tertiary education, or work her way up in the food service industry.

## CRITICAL FACTOR 21

### Standardise the process of selecting participants

After identifying the specific target group in the exploration and engagement phase, the targeted youth need to be told about the support programme and participants need to be selected.

Based on the experiences in the YBF programme in Latin America this process might include the following steps:

- **Basic forms** to fill out personal information. This form also includes questions which inform a 'vulnerability-score'. The higher the score, the more vulnerable the young person, and the higher the likelihood of him or her passing to the next stage of enrolment. Questions defining the vulnerability score include: the number of household members supported by the applicant, their gender, household income, and number of children, if any. This data will need to be stored securely due to privacy concerns and data protection policies.
- **Test the basic capabilities** of selected youth (language skills, writing, maths). The highest scoring participants have the best chance of getting into the programme. Those that have a lower score might, if interested, be allocated to a different course. Those that obtain the lowest score can try again in the next round of enrolment.

Enabling students to register online for the programme is worth considering given that social media has become one of the primary forms of communication. In Brazil all registration for the YBF programme is done through Plan International's website which significantly reduces administrative efforts. In addition, other social media (for example Facebook or WhatsApp) could easily link to enrolment forms. More traditional outreach channels are also used: the local public government offices may help to disseminate information on programme enrolment.

For entrepreneurship there is a distinction to be made between two approaches. Some programmes focus on entrepreneurs with an established business showing potential for further growth. Others prefer to work with talented young people who may or may not have a business plan in place, but have shown an entrepreneurial spirit or spark. The YBF programme in Colombia works with both examples. For those with a business in place already, additional information describing their current business is required upon application. Questions focus on the type of business - legal status, turnover, business plan, prospects for the future, sustainability, costs and investments, allocation of revenues. . After this aspiring entrepreneurs are thoroughly interviewed by Plan International staff.



## CRITICAL FACTOR 22

### Make soft skills training mandatory

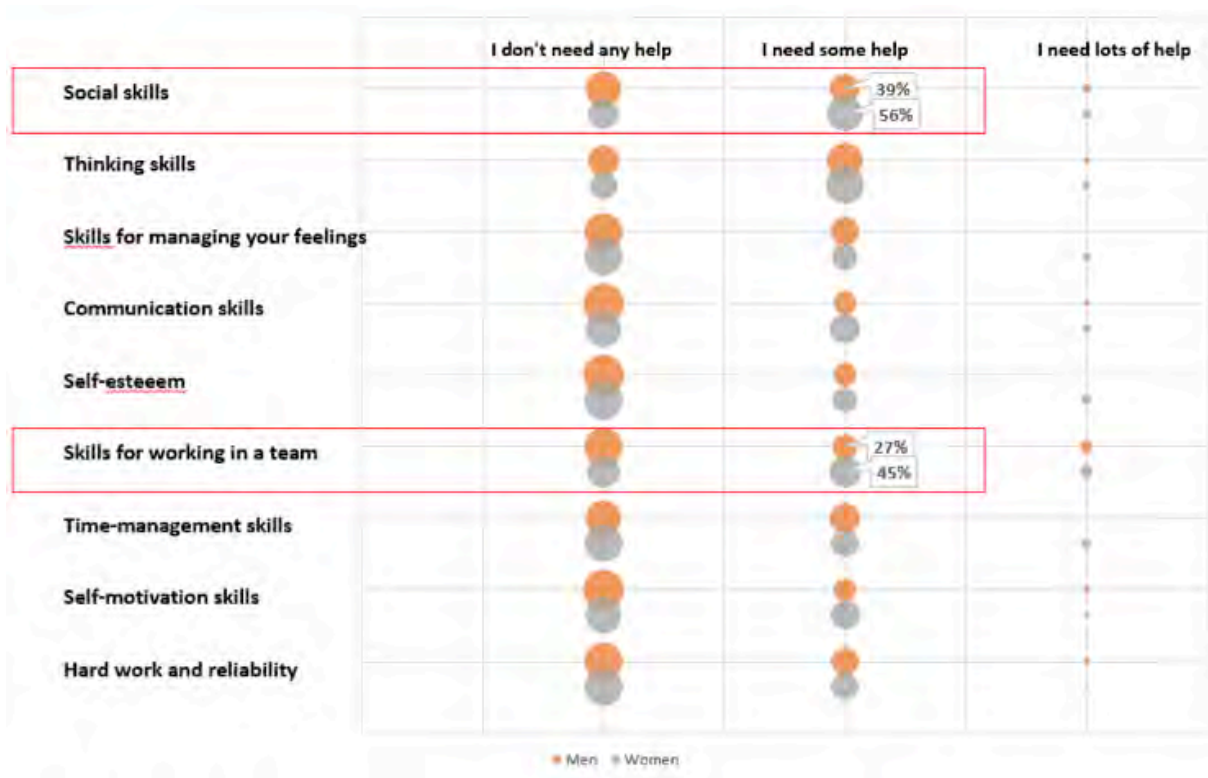
Soft skills (or life skills) are now widely recognised as crucial to youth employment and just as relevant as technical skills. All companies interviewed for this research mentioned the importance of such skills, often outweighing the importance of technical capacity. In the words of a HR manager working for a large supermarket chain in Brazil: “*We can teach young people technical skills, but the soft skills are fundamental.*” The same goes for those interviewed in Brazil, Colombia and El Salvador – they all confirmed the importance of soft skills.

Soft skills are key in terms of proper access to labour markets, but also for positive social and health outcomes. One challenge however is that a clear definition, and a consensus on the essential soft skills, is still missing (Lippman et al, 2015). Gates et al did some work on this in 2016. The study, based on a large body of literature, as well as interviews with both practitioners and researchers, recommends core life skills for three areas of intervention - workforce development, violence prevention and sexual reproductive health. The categories of core life skills identified as important for employment and entrepreneurship programmes are:

1. Positive self-concept
2. Self-control
3. Higher order thinking skills - problem solving, critical thinking, and decision making
4. Communication and social skills

Determining the specific set of soft skills and teaching methods used will ultimately depend on the context. Young people themselves will demand training in some skills but not in others. Brazilian youth starting their training programme were interviewed, through internet-based surveys, about their training needs. They scored ‘social skills’ and especially ‘thinking skills’ as a skill for which they required more help. Interestingly young women said they wanted support for ‘social skills’ and ‘skills for working in a team’ more often than young men. The results are summarised below.

Figure Four: Demand for Workplace Skills by Brazilian Youth by Sex (N = 192)



## B. Internships and apprenticeships

### CRITICAL FACTOR 23

#### Be open to internships and apprenticeships as they will enhance young people's practical experience

Both internships and apprenticeships can be a useful mechanism to promote practical work experience for young men and women. This is crucial as one of the main concerns of employers in terms of labour supply is the lack of on-the-job training available for workers (Cabrales et al. , 2014).

The difference between internships and apprenticeships is that the former are usually short-term. The latter last longer and tend to involve a more specialised set of skills, leading to a specific career path. Besides building work experience they can also help to build professional networks which will improve young people's chances of finding a job.

In addition to the case study on the apprenticeships programme in Brazil (see textbox six), the following two examples from the YBF programme in Latin America provide further illustrations of the programmes' experiences with internships and apprenticeships:

1. In Colombia there is a course which prepares young people for entrepreneurship in the leather industry. Participants with a relatively low performance (the bottom-third of the course participants) are selected for a year-long apprenticeship programme in the industry to help their development as independent entrepreneurs by providing work experience and contacts. The better performing students enter the leather industry market by themselves.
2. Plan International Brazil, in response to young people requesting more practical experience, experimented with short-term internships in several courses. However the experience was discontinued as the costs were relatively high and the success rate in securing jobs following placements was low.

Internships and apprenticeships need to be clearly defined and must meet the young people's needs The Handbook for Employers on designing and managing youth internships developed by Restless Development (2014) has some useful pointers:

1. For a valuable apprenticeship experience a clear work plan with specific learning goals should be developed jointly with the young people and the host company. This work plan requires monitoring by project staff, mentors and the host company.
2. In order to provide useful employment experiences it is crucial to that the host company is properly supported, particularly when there is no existing tradition of apprenticeships or internships. This guidance can be given through training and jointly developing job descriptions, work plans and goals. The company should also develop an induction period for the apprentice or intern.
3. Specific attention should be given to ensuring that the young person gets a written contract with clearly defined entitlements such as paid annual leave and sick leave. The apprenticeship needs to be in line with decent work standards using criteria such as a decent compensation, social protection (health, maternity, disability and unemployment protection), work organization and personal development.
4. The young person should be provided with an overview of the company structure, a briefing about his or her role, be introduced to the team and be given time to become familiar with the policies and procedures of the company.
5. The company should make sure that the team is informed about the apprentice or intern and what his or her role is to be and they should be encouraged to provide support. It is recommended that the company appoint a buddy to the apprentice, particularly in the first days of the apprenticeship. This person will be able to answer questions, introduce the new apprentice to colleagues and help him or her become familiar with the working environment.
6. The company should also assign a supervisor to support the apprentice during the apprenticeship. Together they should set performance objectives and monitor progress. The supervisor should meet with the apprentice regularly to provide feedback. It is also important to celebrate achievements and establish an open atmosphere to discuss any problems the apprentice may have.

In addition, Cavero and Ruiz (2016) note that when the apprenticeship finishes, the employer should provide “a form of certification or at least a written contract.” This will support the youth in their application for jobs. Support should also be provided by recommending the apprentice or intern to other companies if the current employer has no available vacancies.

Apprenticeships are sometimes enforced by law. For example in Brazil the ‘Brazilian Apprentice Act’ means that apprenticeships have been set up on a large scale throughout the country. Although some companies only participate because it is mandatory and therefore do not invest in their apprentices sufficiently, some research seems to suggest that the apprenticeship programme is having beneficial effects.

### **Case study: The Brazilian Apprenticeship Act**

There has been legislation dating back to 1943, but the current Brazilian Apprentice Act was implemented in 2000. The Brazilian Apprenticeship programme combines a professional training programme with employment subsidies - a reduction in payroll and hiring costs - and it also facilitates participants’ job search through a network of formal sector firms that access data on apprentices.

Training is provided by various training partners but mainly by SENAI (Brazil’s main training institution run by the National Confederation of Industry). Establishments are required to hire at least 5% of their employees who require formal training as apprentices. However, inspection and enforcement of this requirement has been limited, particularly in the early stages of the programme. Youth apprentices, between 14 and 23 years old, are often hired under non-renewable fixed-term contracts starting from six months up to a maximum length of two years. In 2015 more than 250,000 youth were hired under this programme. Recently a clause has been added that gives preferential treatment to disadvantaged youth.

One challenge, according to Plan International staff, was that some companies do not have jobs available – especially in times of economic crisis – or are simply not interested in hiring young people. In order to abide by the law companies create jobs with little incentive and a lack of support systems in place. The chances of a permanent contract afterwards are slim to non-existent. This is why apprenticeships are not a core component of the YBF programme in Recife. However both the YEE programmes in Salvador and Natal have used apprenticeships as a way into the Brazilian labour market, with placing apprentices counting as a ‘success’ and contributing to the programmes’ targets.

In a study on the Brazilian experience Corseuil et al. (2016) conclude that the apprenticeship law does increase “the probability of employment in permanent jobs in 2-3 and 4-5-year horizons.” The authors find “a positive impact on real wages that increases over time [ . . . ]the positive effects of the program are much larger for less-educated workers and for workers who had their first jobs in large firms.” As such they conclude that “apprenticeship initiatives seem to be a good stepping stone into the labour market, at least for youths in developing countries.” Furthermore the training component of the apprenticeship programme is the “main factor sustaining the good prospects of apprentices in the labour market.”

*Source: Plan International, Study Data 2016*

## C. Access to finance

### CRITICAL FACTOR 24

#### Prioritise access to finance for entrepreneurs

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 (UNCDF, 2014). 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” (UN for youth, 2013).

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 - both of these will be discussed later in this report. 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]!”*

### CRITICAL FACTOR 25

#### Recognise that savings groups can be a viable alternative when more formal instruments of finance do not work

In many contexts, the lack of financial access is a serious problem. Microfinance lenders can charge exorbitant rates while commercial banks are rarely interested in young people without collateral, especially those from rural areas (Rutten and Fanou, 2015).

In such cases, alternative finance such as youth saving groups may have to be explored.<sup>12</sup> In both Colombia and El Salvador building the saving capacity of young people is an important aspect of the financial training for employment and entrepreneurship. In some countries, increasing saving capacity and strengthening saving groups is at the core of the youth workforce intervention as illustrated below by the case study on saving groups in Uganda.

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<sup>12</sup> Markel and Panetta (2014) define saving groups as “a small group of individuals – typically from 15 to 30 – that save together and provide credit and basic insurance services to their members from these savings.”

## Case study: Saving groups in Uganda

*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*

However taken over all the evidence on savings groups is not clear cut.

Based on the findings of seven randomised control trials (RCTs) conducted in Sub-Saharan African countries, Gash and Odell (2013) conclude:

- Savings group members tended to be relatively wealthier and more socially and financially active than non-members, although overall the programmes did reach the very poor.
- The availability of savings groups clearly increased savings and the use of credit in treatment areas, but findings on asset ownership were mixed.
- In relation to business impacts the collective evidence from the RCTs was mixed.
- Impacts on health and education spending were both mixed and limited.
- Evidence in the areas of social capital and women's empowerment was surprising. Three RCTs looked extensively at both community engagement and individual empowerment, and found very little impact.
- Some impact on household resilience was detected: increased food security among treatment households suggested that shocks may have had less catastrophic results for group members

Karlan, Ratan and Zinman (2014) provide a detailed review of literature and evidence on the impact of expanded savings access (not only through savings groups). While recognising the limitations of the existing evidence, they conclude that the evidence is 'promising' in relation to: empowerment and decision-making, increasing resistance to health shocks, promoting entrepreneurial investment and activity and increasing agricultural investment and production.

## D. Mentorship and Other Support Services

### CRITICAL FACTOR 26

#### Reduce dropout rates and increase youth engagement by organising key 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.

In addition non-material support measures can be just as important. For instance in the Brazil YBF programme, staff said at times the students would find short-term employment 'for a quick buck' to support their families. In the words of a teacher:

*"Some youth drop out because they want money quickly. Sometimes even family members are exerting pressure on them."*

In such cases, Plan International staff stated they or the programme teachers speak with the youth to see if the advantages of leaving outweigh those of finalising the course. If a participant does decide to drop out they encourage him or her to enrol in the same course during the next enrolment phase. Sometimes it is also possible for the same course to be offered at a different time of the day.

### CRITICAL FACTOR 27

#### Adapt your mentoring model to different circumstances and personalities but ensure that vulnerable youth are able to build a trust-based relationship with their mentors

A lot of mentorship programmes focus on one-on-one mentorship arrangements, where one mentor and one mentee are paired. For most youth employment interventions in developing countries this is not feasible. For a development programme which aims to train several hundred, sometimes thousands, of young people, selecting and training an equal number of mentors is simply not realistic.

Numerous case studies point out the positive impact of mentors with considerable professional work experience (NESTA, 2009). 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!"*

Yet the model in Salvador (see Textbox Ten below) shows that experience is not always necessary for *employment* programmes and that there are positives and negatives to each model.



## Case study: Mentorship by peers in Salvador de Bahia

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, *Bridges for the Future*, 2014

### CRITICAL FACTOR 28

**Make sure that all mentors are fully trained and be aware that their expectations will need to be managed**

Expectations placed on mentors need to be managed, especially when working with vulnerable youth, as mentorship can be challenging and the impact on young people may be limited and take a long time to manifest itself. Public recognition and appreciation, through awarding certificates and public tributes, is one way of providing incentives for mentors, increasing their self-confidence and acknowledging their contribution to the programme and the young people's development.

The importance of training and learning cannot be overestimated. As a mentor working on the programme in Recife, Brazil, put it:

*"When we started working with the youth we were more like machines, now we are humans"*

In Salvador (see textbox eight) mentors are trained for two weeks on a range of subjects. They also attend the majority of Plan International staff meetings which makes them more involved with the programme. One of the mentors in Salvador was hired to work on the Plan International staff team.



Another important aspect of mentoring that needs to be discussed is their compensation. Although in most developed countries mentorship is voluntary, in the context of development programmes at scale, examples from the field work show mentors are more likely to be paid, as those working with the YBF programme in Brazil are. In Colombia however, most mentors worked voluntarily, indicating that there might be interest in unpaid mentorship in other developing countries. It is worth noting however that interviews with mentors and programme staff in Colombia did reveal that lack of payment makes it harder to set expectations and goals for mentors and to measure their performance.

### **Stage 3: Sustainability**

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, nor is there a comprehensive approach to sustainability, within the YBF 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. This final section therefore relies on anecdotal evidence from the YBF programme and beyond, while acknowledging that more evidence is needed to address the issue of sustainability in a more structured way.

Some of the 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 and 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.

## CRITICAL FACTOR 29

### Campaign for public sector supported systemic change

Government involvement is essential to ensure sustainability. For instance governments could legislate, or otherwise put pressure on companies, to allow young employees to continue studying alongside their jobs. Governments should also approve certificates to make sure training counts when young people apply for jobs. More generally, governments must increase their commitment to youth employment in national budgets and put clear policies in place.<sup>13</sup> Government involvement, especially at a regional and national level, is often limited. To change this programme staff need to nurture relations with relevant government officials and government institutions from the start.

Capturing and demonstrating the impact of a programme can help to facilitate a process of increased government participation and support. Plan Paraguay, regularly communicates to their partners and other interested individuals and organizations about the progress made in their YEE programme. They circulate a newsletter, and have also set up a website, as well as giving interviews to local and national media. Government interest and investment in youth employment interventions can also be strengthened through private sector engagement. The private sector will often have government connections and therefore can exert influence to enact reforms. The programme's corporate partners should be encouraged to play a more active role if possible.

From an NGO perspective, this means that youth employment programmes must incorporate advocacy or influencing strategies, based on a thorough contextual analysis, to determine who the target audience should be at national or local level and what the messaging around sustainability should be. This should be included in the Labour Market Analysis conducted at the beginning of the programme.

### Perceptions 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:

*"[The Government] should provide financial support for the mentorship programme activities."*

*"The government has a big role to play. Especially when it comes to providing access to quality primary and secondary education."*

*"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."*

*"Government should provide funding for training".*

*"The government could create employment banks and networks".*

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 lack of knowledge on public and private sector engagement with 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. Table One provides an indication of a whole range of roles and responsibilities the public sector could play.

13 Critical Factor 9 provides more examples of government support and action

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.

*Source: Plan International, Study Data 2016*

### **CRITICAL FACTOR 30**

#### **Create a monitoring database to enhance M&E and demonstrate impact**

Demonstrating impact is key when engaging the public sector. 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 (see also Textbox 12 for more on this). In order to do so it is strongly recommended that programme information is digitised. This can be useful in a variety of ways:

- **Monitoring enrolled students**

In Brazil, data entered for the YBF programme is linked to an excel-database. All data, such as enrolment forms and attendance lists, feeds automatically into the database. This makes monitoring attendance and potential drop-out much easier as teachers update these lists after every class. If a student is experiencing any difficulty, it will be recognised at an earlier stage. Even performance in class is graded and can be easily accessed by teachers and Plan International staff. When problems arise, teachers engage with students or they receive professional psycho-social support from the Plan International staff team.

- **Monitoring graduated students**

In many programmes, students still receive mentorship support, facilitation regarding job-interviews, and refresher training after graduation. In order to keep track of graduated youth and their progress and whereabouts, a well-functioning data management system is a necessity.

- **Impact evaluation**

Where causality and attribution need to be evaluated through an impact study, the availability of data is key. Quality data can be used to compare results against a baseline and measure progress. To rule out alternate causes for any observed results, the results can be measured against official data. However, official quality data is often scarce, establishing a control group by monitoring and measuring the data of youth that applied but did not get onto, the programme can be especially useful as a way of assessing its impact.

One challenge is that young people tend to move around a lot: they often change their phone number and sometimes even their physical address. It is therefore useful to collect the contact details of family and friends in case participants cannot be tracked down. Other possibilities include creating closed Facebook and Whatsapp groups or other social media platforms that the youth subscribe to as a way of staying in touch.

#### **Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning: Going beyond Basic Indicators**

The core indicators which measure programme outcomes and their impact are usually the number of trained youth with new or better employment (for employment programmes) or increased business revenue and profit (entrepreneurship programmes) after the completion of the programme.

Indicators that go beyond these basic measurements, however, are very useful; although it is also important not to make the M & E component of a programme too labour intensive. Plan International staff in Brazil, Colombia and El Salvador argued that a mere focus on jobs or completion of training was too narrow to show change in young people's lives. In the words of one staff member:

*“This is only the tip of the ice-berg. Measuring the number of trained youth, is only a means to an end!”*

Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that the specific measurement indicators must relate to the stated objectives of the programme. If the objective of the programme is stated as “train and get into a decent job” – that is what the programme is accountable for delivering. Additional outcomes can only be added if they are part of the intervention logic, and more importantly, there are programme activities that will facilitate the realization of these outcomes.

Additional variables to demonstrate impact may also be useful as part of the evaluation of programmes, specifically with regard to the increase in skills and the extent to which the self-confidence of the participants has increased. Two useful overviews of possible indicators measuring impact of youth development programmes in general (but often applicable to the context of youth employment programmes) are Positive Youth Development Illustrative Indicators (2016) by YouthPower and the Scan and Review of Youth Development Measurement Tools (2013) USAID.

Furthermore, business success can also be measured more specifically and divided into separate variables instead of focusing solely on increased revenues to show success. However, as stated, the measurement must relate to the programme objective and therefore these must also be taken into account when deciding on which indicators to measure. Another suggestion could be a KAP or indicator around business skills looking towards sustainability and resilience. For example, according to Plan International staff in Colombia, business success could be assessed against variables such as the state of accounting records, the development of a good marketing strategy and good manufacturing practices.

A final point to consider is that the youths are questioned when applying for the programme and data on their personal situations and basic capabilities is collected. This is in itself an excellent baseline for follow up mid-programme, end of programme and even for post-intervention studies in order to assess the change in the lives of the youth. To enhance this assessment it might be useful to include a set of self-assessment questions on life skills in the baseline information, and this can be followed up in later evaluations to determine any changes in their skill set.

*Source: Plan International, Study Data 2016*

## **CRITICAL FACTOR 31**

### **Invite partners to training and input into curriculum revision**

Sustainability can also be enhanced by influencing the curriculum and teaching practices of training providers. For instance under the YBF programme in Brazil, both of the two partner training institutes are adopting the principles of the life skills module designed by Plan International, after witnessing its impact on young people. As one coordinator put it:

*“The Life Skills training has been amazing. You see how much it impacts our youth. We are now trying to integrate it into our existing curricula as well.”*

In addition partners can also be trained to increase their sensitivity and knowledge on issues like youth employment, gender and sexual and reproductive health. Such training can carry a longer term impact by addressing norms and behaviour and can contribute to institutional learning. One example is the ‘gender sensitivity training’ provided by Plan International to partners in a variety of programmes, including YBF. In Brazil, training partners and company representatives are invited to demonstrations of the life skill course and are asked to participate in the role play exercises on gender and youth stereotypes. Not only does this show the participatory approach of the teaching methods used, which helps to stimulate interest and buy-in from partners, it also creates awareness of some of the issues in the workplace. One employment bank representative employment bank commented:

*“We really like the approach used. And the examples make a lot of sense. Take for instance the issue of homosexuality. I am a Christian and therefore I have my reservations. But I do think we should treat everyone with respect”.*

This quote illustrates some of the challenges that marginalized young people might face in the workplace and interventions like this provide a starting point for addressing discriminatory social norms which may be barriers to employment and sustained livelihoods. However, it is worth noting that only governments and the private sector can truly take the most successful programmes to scale.

We need them to take seriously both skill building and addressing social and gender norms in order to prepare more marginalized young people, and particularly young women, for work.

## Learning and Youth Employment Solutions

Learning is a recurring challenge in all development programmes, not just youth employment interventions; practitioners often lack the opportunity to take a step back and reflect on the implementation and impact of their activities or be able to share their findings with colleagues.

Yet by reading up on the literature and on the latest developments in youth workforce development, and by creating opportunities throughout the programme for staff and participants to share what they know and what they have learned and can inform a youth employment programme and prevent basic mistakes. Examples of good practice might include visits to similar programmes, attending conferences and regular visits to job recruitment agencies.

A considerable amount of information is available on the internet as well. Some of the main sources include:

- ILO's youth employment section: <http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/youth-employment/lang--de/index.htm>
- The youth employment inventory; a database of impact evaluation of youth employment interventions <http://www.youth-employment-inventory.org/>
- Making Cents International blog and newsletter, available through <http://www.makingcents.com>
- The Solutions for Youth Employment (S4YE) newsletter, available through <https://www.s4ye.org/>

### CRITICAL FACTOR 32

**Maintain good relationships and clear channels of communications with all partners, before, during and after the completion of the programme.**

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. There were several reasons for this:

- **Replacement of contact person at the company level**  
The company representative was new to the role and the previous contact had moved to a new job.
- **Several people responsible for HR policy at company level**  
The HR department consisted of several people who, depending on their availability, would be responsible for engagement with Plan International. However, internally there was limited communication and not all HR officials were equally informed about the progress of the partnership.
- **Lack of communication between Plan International and company representatives**  
At times, communication between companies and focal points seemed to be ad-hoc with infrequent contact.

Clear and consistent communication is therefore key. If cross-sector collaboration is to be successful, the sustainability of corporate engagement must be addressed and factored into programme implementation. In general corporate engagement benefitted greatly from the personal network and capabilities of the focal points representing Plan International. However this will also present challenges in the future if the focal point moves on to a different role.

# CONCLUSION

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 live in developing countries and their potential contribution to the societies they live in is immense. 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. Our research has identified the importance of cross-sector collaboration if this education and training is to lead to meaningful employment which will enhance the lives and opportunities of the programme participants. 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.

In this 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. It is also evident from the research that 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 is to their advantage to be involved and there are many examples of companies and governments who acknowledge this and act accordingly. A key recommendation arising from this study, is that governments and the private sector 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.



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# ANNEX ONE

## COMPANIES INCLUDED IN 'DEEP DIVE' ANALYSIS

Co.	Sector	# Youth accepted per Nov 2016	Level	Employees	Turnover/revenue
1	Drugstore chain	17 (3 Pernambuco, 14 Salvador)	National	20. 000	USD2,4 billion (2011)
2	Supermarket chain	5	Regional (Pernambuco, Paraiba)	750	USD3,3 million
3	Hotel and restaurant business	2	Local (global chain)	112	Not available
4	Ice cream and other frozen products	1	National (with focus on Northeastern region)	740	Not available
5	National post service	3	National	340 (in the region)	USD7 billion (2013)
6	Restaurant chain	6	International (but partnership with the only restaurant in Natal)	124 (at this one restaurant)	Not Available
7	Bank	1	National	Not Clear	11,7 billion Reais
8	Restaurant chain	2	International	Not Clear	
9	Garment industry, haut couture	12 youth are currently being trained; if they pass their final exam they will be hired	International	210	USD4 million
10	Garment industry, shoes	None yet	Regional	1020	Estimation by Plan International employee ~ USD 10 million
11	Hotel	1	Local (only in Cali)	10	Not clear (25 rooms on average fully booked per year)
12	Recruiting company	TBD (300 CVs shared but only few vacancies)	National (more than 300 municipalities)	1400 (21 offices in Colombia)	USD180 000
13	Garment industry, providing to Zara amongst others	3 were selected out of 22 candidates	National (but part of a Latin American group)	1100	Not clear
14	Hotel	1 (3 did an internship before, they are now working in other hotels)	Local (only in Cali)	42	Not clear
15	Union representing hotel sector	Not applicable	Local (Cauca Valley)	Not Clear	Not answered
16	Garment industry	None yet	National	Not Clear	Not answered



## 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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