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TECHNICAL BRIEF

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT: INVESTING IN YOUTH

Recent estimates from the International Labour Organization (ILO) show that youth unemployment is expected to reach 13.1 percent in 2017, up from in 2015. Alarmingly, there is a similar rise in the number of youth who are working but still living in severe or moderate poverty. These figures have different roots, some are cultural, some are due to poor economic conditions, and some are due to geopolitical disasters like a refugee crisis. However, one major factor in the youth unemployment problem is the skills gap between what students learn in school and what employers in the workforce seek. Concurrently, many developing countries are experiencing a youth

bulge — a growing percent of the population between the ages of 15 and 29 who have the ability and desire to enter the workforce. Youth development programs need to continue to bridge the gap between school and work. To do this, they should offer avenues to increase economic opportunities for young people, provide social and political stability, and arm the incoming workforce with 21st century skills. By supporting and preparing young people for real-world work, youth workforce development programs can offer new paths to development.

ABOUT CHEMONICS

Founded in 1975, Chemonics is one of the world's leading international development consulting firms. In 70 countries around the globe today, our network of approximately 4,000 specialists pursue a higher standard in development every day to help clients, partners, and beneficiaries achieve results.

EXPANDING THE BREADTH OF EDUCATION

Goal 8 of the United Nations (UN) 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) calls for "the promotion of inclusive and sustainable economic growth through meaningful work." Progress toward achieving this goal is measured by a country's ability to substantially reduce the proportion of unemployed youth and youth not actively participating in education or training. Through Goal 8, the UN seeks to address the 470 million new jobs necessary for youth entering the work force between 2016 and 2030. In order to address the growing need for productive jobs, schools must continue to evolve and promote soft skills valued in the 21st century workplace — collaboration, resiliency, critical thinking, creativity, and communication. Soft skills must be promoted while also keeping pace with technological advances in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) — the technical areas employers seek to staff.

Youth unemployment has increased to 13.1 percent globally since 2015. Slowing the rise of this figure, especially in developing countries, means increasing economic opportunity and providing the incoming workforce with marketable skills.

CHEMONICS IN WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Chemonics International works on a number of initiatives that encourage workforce development across the globe.

The Feed the Future Uganda Youth Leadership for Agriculture Activity (YLA) has taken innovative approaches to introducing workforce development in Uganda, leveraging partnerships with private and public sector actors, workforce institutions, and other stakeholders. YLA puts youth in the lead by allowing them to identify and drive forward sustainable, inclusive, and cost-effective approaches that enable youth, especially females, to participate in the agriculture sector as leaders, farmers, entrepreneurs, and employees. YLA has identified a number of unique entry points through which to engage youth, and has developed a menu of creative strategies and programs. In collaboration with the Private Education Development Network (PEDN), YLA launched Aflatoun, a global curriculum on financial literacy and social education that targets children aged 6-14 in sixty schools. To engage older youth, YLA partnered with Equator Seeds Limited (ESL) — a leading seed-production company — to provide training opportunities to 6,500 youth farmers in the fundamentals of agribusiness and entrepreneurship. The Activity also provides direct production support, though the production cycle, from ESL agronomists and other experts. These activities provide youth with better technical skills in agriculture, and enhance connections with traditional school curricula. These programs help youth in Uganda develop their technical, financial literacy and soft skills to become better assets to the global workforce.

Through the Indonesia Higher Education (HELM) students at partner universities used career centers to enrich their professional development. Centers used a mix of learning approaches, including in-person workshops, forums, and blended learning courses. All approaches provided strategic planning, ongoing professional development, and networking and mentoring to more than 3,800 students. A successful higher education institute (HEI) has graduates able to enter the workforce and become productive and engaged citizens. In 2013, the HELM project conducted a labor demand study to determine what types of industries were hiring and what they required of new employees to keep pace with market demand. From this study, the HELM team concluded that, at a basic level, there was not enough communication between the industry and HEIs. Therefore, HELM trained 416 unique individuals as part of the Strengthening Career Development Centers initiative. Of the total individuals trained, 274 were students (approximately 84 percent). Connecting youth to available work, and giving them the skills to do that work, is an essential part of closing the gap on youth unemployment.

One of the many measures the Moldova Competitiveness Project engages in to promote workforce effectiveness is increasing youth interest in STEM subjects. The project trained 3,000 students in advanced level robotics, allowing them to move to higher level programming concepts. Though the program is still new, the STEM program is already preparing students to enter STEM fields with both advanced programming skills and adaptive 21st century soft skills.

TRENDS IN WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Education is often cited as the groundwork for the future — the main way to prepare children to take on the problems of tomorrow. In order to prepare them well, though, we need to continually improve the youth development model. By continuing to include financial literacy, soft skills, and further integrating STEM, we ensure that school curricula is keeping pace with real-world employment necessities. While the youth unemployment gap is wide, integrating these areas — as exemplified by the work Chemonics is doing — allows youth to learn valuable skills that will prepare them for the ever growing and changing job market and future.