

A Facilitation Approach to Youth Workforce Development and Entrepreneurship



Facilitated activities build relationships among youth, prospective employers, service providers, and education institutions to create meaningful employment linkages and skills development. Together, the right relationships promote youth workforce development and entrepreneurship.

The facilitation approach to youth workforce development is all about building the right relationships among key players. Key players in the ecosystem of youth workforce and leadership development include prospective private sector employers, education institutions, service providers, and, of course, young people looking to enter or advance in the labor market. “Facilitation” aims to create systemic change by targeting key points of influence, without involving the development actor in direct service delivery. The approach prioritizes local leadership to ensure ownership and sustainability of activities, with development actors identifying these leaders and their incentives, monitoring the impact of linkages built, and adapting program activities and points of intervention to catalyze systemic change.¹

The Feed the Future Uganda Youth Leadership for Agriculture Activity is facilitating linkages and activities by influencing all parts of the youth employment and workforce development ecosystem. The activity identifies private sector actors looking to hire youth and determines the skills gap between private sector demand and youth ability. The activity also assesses the needs and wants of youth — their preferences for working in certain sectors and their constraints and concerns (particularly gender-related) inside and outside the labor market. The activity then partners with supportive local extension-service providers and education institutions to ensure accessibility of curricula and services to close the gap between private sector demand and prospective young employees.

Uganda's Context

Uganda currently has the world's second youngest population. Every year, 400,000 young people compete for 80,000 jobs in the formal market. Though the majority of the workforce is engaged in agriculture, young people's impression of the sector — solely as a means of subsistence — creates a hurdle to promoting skills development in agribusiness and careers in agriculture commodity value chains. When surveyed about private sector employment, young people noted concerns about payment frequency and, particularly for women, sexual harassment. Surveyed employers wanted young people to come into the workforce with skillsets valuable for employment and entrepreneurship. Making a career in agriculture attractive, working with employers to address youths' concerns, and equipping youth with the soft and hard skills needed for success are key leverage points balancing these views. The youth leadership activity partners with local actors to target these leverage points and create an ecosystem for youth success.

Facilitating Linkages for Youth Opportunities

A prime example of the activity's facilitation strategy is the Agrikool-Youth events held in Mbale and Gulu, which were spearheaded by the local female-owned small business Agasha and the Youth Agribusiness Network. The events brought together 160 exhibitors, including private sector actors and more than 4,500 youth, to showcase the diversity of careers in agriculture. The events were an opportunity to share innovations and new technologies, to conduct workshops and training events for youth on soft and technical skills, and to link youth with entrepreneurship networks and employers.

The activity also identifies potential partners for youth opportunities, such as private sector operators looking to hire youth, potential youth entrepreneurship incubators trying to scale up, education institutions working to build new curricula for youth skills development, and youth producer organizations wanting to formalize their operations and relationships with buyers. Building the capacity of local partners and opening up communication channels among key players in the youth opportunity ecosystem are driving forces behind the activity. For example, the activity has partnered with Equator Seeds Limited, a Ugandan organization looking to expand its seed-grower network. This partnership has expanded training to include non-agricultural constraints youth face; for example, reproductive health. The activity has played a key role in building linkages among the youth workforce, their trainers, and the private sector by introducing each to the opportunities and challenges their partners may face and working to bridge any potential gaps.

Keeping Young Women at the Forefront

A gender assessment reinforced that young women face different constraints from their male counterparts, ranging from higher domestic responsibilities, reduced decision-making power, and fear of harassment. The activity takes a gender-sensitive approach to partner selection (as seen with the Agrikool events) by highlighting female leaders when informing youth about career opportunities, and by conducting comprehensive reviews of linkage and partnership impact on gender inequality.

Additionally, the activity is targeting out-of-school female youth to provide "second-chance" training opportunities and counter cultural norms. One of the avenues created for second-chance opportunities is through a grantee, Sing With Me Happily. This grantee trains youth through their Machinery Academy, targeting female youth and single mothers (who have often dropped out of school many times). The constant collaborating, learning, and adapting inherent in the facilitation approach allows the activity to scale and adjust gender interventions as necessary.

¹ USAID. (2015). "The Facilitation Approach at USAID: A Discussion Paper." Retrieved from <https://usaidlearninglab.org/library/facilitation-approach-usaid-discussion-paper>. (Accessed September 27, 2016).