

YOUTH ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT PROJECT (YEPP)

End Term Evaluation Summary Findings
Partnership for Development Capacity Consult (PDCC) Limited,
Email: odongojawoko@gmail.com



Introduction

The Agency For Accelerated Regional Development (AFARD) in partnership with Center for Governance and Economic Development (CEGED) therefore secure funding from the European Union to implement a 3-year Youth Economic Empowerment Project (YEPP) in Pakwach, Zombo, and Arua district. The project goal was “to contribute to youth inclusive economic growth and poverty reduction in West Nile region of Uganda through sustainable and gainful employment opportunities.” The project envisaged impacts included: (i) 25% reduction in the number of youth living below US\$ 1.25/day; (ii) 50% increase in asset net worth; and (iii) Improved self-esteem and confidence. An external evaluation was therefore conducted to among others: (a) assess the achievements of the planned goal and objectives; and (b) identify lessons learned, and propose recommendations for future replication. Below are the findings.

Findings of the Evaluation

To note is that YEPP formed 125 youth-led Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) with 2,500 members (66% females) and supported 1,551 youth into agribusiness (horticulture and local poultry) employment pathways while 883 youth and 66 youth joined non-farm vocational and formal employment pathways respectively. YEPP also trained all the 2,500 youth in entrepreneurship, life skills, advocacy, and financial literacy. The impacts are below:

- a) Increased entry into employment: At the time of the study, 87% of the youth were already employed (84% through self-employment and 3% in formal employment). The remaining 13% had also received start-up agro-inputs.
- b) Increased adoption of good practices: Especially in: intercropping (66%), crop rotation (62%), erosion control (61%), keeping business records (36%), separating personal family and business finances (34%), rational conflict resolutions (42%), and effective communication (39%).
- c) Improved business growth: The youth in self-employment had increased their business value by UGX 50,000 (from UGX 119,000 to UGX 170,000); monthly income by UGX 21,000 (from UGX 25,000 – 46,000); duration of daily work hours by 1.6 hours (from 4 - 5.6 hours) and days worked by 1.3 days (from 4.7 – 6 days). In addition, they employed addition 916 youth (from 974 to 1,890 youth).
- d) Increased asset wealth: Financial net worth (cash, savings, and productive assets) more than doubled from UGX 1,656,655 to UGX 3,959,992. This change triggered a 10% reduction in poverty from 72% to 62%; 21% increase in food security from 69% to 90%; and a 29% increase in normal to high self-esteem from 67% to 90%. Meanwhile there was also improved women empowerment (index increased from 0.4 to 0.7).
- e) Aspirations and positive attitude towards hard work and self-reliance: With skills, jobs, and reliable income, youth have aspiration for a better future life (goals to be achieved in a particular year). There is a change in mindset from waiting for help towards hard work.
- f) Adoption of savings culture and planning for the future: After the completion of the first saving cycle, stamp values started to increase from UGX 500 to UGX 5,000 per week. Now there are groups with UGX 10,000. This change also came along with the need to plan the future.
- g) Improved gender relations among female youth: Female youth reported improved social position in their families and communities. While initially they had to depend on their parents/guardian/spouse to meet their needs, now they are able to provide for themselves (e.g., body lotions, panties, petty coats, dresses, and shoes).
- h) Accumulation of productive assets: 70% new youth bought mobile phones, 30% shoat (goats, pigs, sheep), 23% radios, and 21% mattresses. Productive assets they know as a source of wealth and security against livelihood and business risks.
- i) Improved uptake of nutritious foods: Overall, 21% new households reported having food all year round and eating three meals daily. Likewise, consumption increased for meat by 34%, dairy products 34%, sugar 32%, dairy products and meat. A married female youth had this to say,
- j) Improved quality of life: “Life has changed for the better” was a word echoed by many youth. Many new youth (40% and 36%) reported being able to meet children’s education cost and pay medical bills in private facilities respectively.
- k) Access to government space and funds: A total of 728 youths in 25 youth-led VSLA (20% of all formed youth groups) accessed UGX 100,231,000 from their local governments to expand their

Negative effects

- Local government leaders noted with concern the rise in anti-social behavior among some few supported youth (e.g., all night disco dance with heavy drinking and sexual misconduct).
- The youth involved in saloon and restaurant businesses were noted to exhibit high use of un-recommended polythene bag (kavera) that is causing environmental degradation.

Value-added to stakeholders

- To AFARD, YEEP enriched its youth programming, resource mobilization, and VSLA mainstreaming in all its programmes.
- To CEGED, the project enabled it improve on its financial and programme management system.
- To TVETs, wider visibility and business growth through increase enrolments.
- To local governments, political capital with both the youth and their communities.

Best Practices Identified

The ETE identified the following innovative best practices for future replication:

- Enterprise feasibility analysis: ensure that only high impact job markets were targeted.
- Inclusion of agro-input savings in VSLA model: ensure that youth accesses funds for improved agro-inputs timely.
- Holistic and bundled services approach: Saved cost but also equipped with the needed skills to enter and stay in the job market (technical, foundational, social, and business skills).
- Inclusive beneficiaries targeting: Enables the inclusion of more females and persons with special needs - child

mothers, youth with disabilities, youth living with HIV/AIDS.

- Youth voice and accountability: Opened public space for marginalized youth to secure UGX 100 million from local government.
- Participatory management approach: Involved the different stakeholders - youth, project staff, local government leaders, etc. - in the project management.

Lessons Learned

The ETE also identified some lessons, namely:

- Participatory selection and public vetting of beneficiaries involving all stakeholders reduces biases and corruption in favor of undeserving members.
- A holistic resource-bundle approach provides a faster opportunity for trainees to join the world of work.
- To make markets work for youth, there is need to first identify high impact enterprises that can attract them into the world of work then secure private sector support along those enterprises.
- Guidance and counseling and mentoring should be planned as an on-going activity.
- Youth-lead advocacy is more impacting than when a support agency takes a leading role.
- Land remains a critical asset for the commercialization of agriculture yet youth are dependent on family for land.
- Gender awareness is crucial in breaking the barrier social norms of gender roles and skills development.
- Young entrepreneurs need post-training and enterprise establishment support to grow and thrive.

Recommendations

To highly impact youth poverty reduction, the following are crucial:

- Maintain holistic resource-bundles approach: Through a multifaceted approach to hard and soft skilling combined with start-up grant as well as post-business support.
- Make markets work for poor youth: By conducting enterprise feasibility study for choosing high impact enterprise and private sector partnership building and capacity building.
- Ensure adequate budget: The Skills Development Fund (SDF) implemented by Enabel and PSFU propose €600 per youth for adequate and quality skilling to occur.
- Adopt climate-smart agriculture: Through for instance climate smart technologies such as small-irrigation, weather-based insurance, as well as agro ecology.
- Engage the community to support youth employment: So that they support the selection of deserving beneficiaries; shun gender stereotype to break gender barriers; provide moral and financial support to trained youth; ensure access to land; provide reliable local markets.
- Support TVETs: To develop comprehensive budgets and by constructing basic childcare facilities.
- Promote linkage banking: So that VSLA members build financial/credit history and access more financial products necessary to support their business growth.
- Provide business growth development support: For young entrepreneurs to thrive through targeted business mentoring and coaching as well as marketing of youth products.
- Leverage on local governments youth projects: For youth to access additional fund to boost their enterprises.

In conclusion, the evaluation posits that YEEP was well planned and it achieved its intended purposes. The project took into consideration the needs of the targeted youth, the implementing partners and local and national governments development priorities. With a robust and participatory programme management approach, the project was able to mobilize 2,500 youth into active savers and investors into primarily (84%) self-employment in agribusiness and non-farm vocational trades. With steady jobs and income, 10% exited extreme poverty. Likewise, majority have aspiration for a good future, positive attitude towards hard work, improved self-esteem, and accumulation of more productive assets.