



State of the Field Report: Youth Workforce Development

This 'State of the Field Report' presents the latest research regarding youth workforce development (YWFD) programming. The document is based on a review of more than 50 publicly available studies and in-depth interviews with 10 key thought leaders in the field. Study authors held consultations with USAID subject matter experts and reviewed strategic documents from 23 major donor organizations.

The report is intended to inform the design of future USAID youth workforce development programs, and guide USAID's Office of Education in setting priorities for youth focused research and evaluation. USAID also sees this document as contributing to the larger evidence base around youth workforce development.

Findings

The YWFD programs reviewed in this report were designed to prepare youth for self- and outside employment and include one or more of the following components:

- ✓ vocational training;
- ✓ apprenticeships;
- ✓ entrepreneurship training;
- ✓ life skills training;
- ✓ job match; and
- ✓ mentoring.

Findings suggest that the reviewed programs have a positive impact on:

Employment and earnings – When examining the findings by target population, evidence indicates that workforce development programs improve employment outcomes and increase earnings for female, low-income, at-risk, and out-of-school or minimally schooled youth. Findings for rural or university-educated youth, and male youth are less clear.



“The goal of workforce development should be to grow a young person not fit them into a job.”
~Study participant

Skills development – The reviewed studies show that youth are gaining skills that foster outside employment, including specific vocational skills, interviewing, resume development, and job search support. Entrepreneurship interventions show gains in knowledge and skills in customer service, marketing of products, accounting, record-keeping, and understanding the market. Benefiting youth are also realizing life skills such as a positive work ethic, financial literacy, and other developmental assets including honesty, responsibility, and the ability to make decisions through these programs

Re-enrollment in education – Select studies reported that after participation in a program, that some youth who forgo labor market integration do re-enroll in basic education programs or continued their learning in vocational training programs.

Policy change – The evidence suggests that favorable changes in the policy environment can be achieved in countries that support youth-focused programming and institutional capacity building. However, more research is needed on the impact of policy reform and institutional capacity development efforts and their contribution to the scalability of workforce development programs.

Gap Areas In The Research

There are four areas that require further research, including the need to:

- 1. Determine what components are essential for workforce development programs to be successful, and which of these is most cost-effective.** While there is evidence that participation in workforce development programs has an impact on youth employment and earnings, the best mix of components needed for success is not clear.
- 2. Establish what components work best for specific segments of youth – especially rural and university-educated youth.** Due to a lack of available studies that focus on a particular population, it is less clear how youth workforce

development programs affect certain groups of youth – especially rural or university-educated youth.

- 3. Understand the life skills youth need for employment and entrepreneurship.** Life skills have become a regular component of workforce development programs offered to youth. However, the definition of life skills varies between interventions and the specific links between these skills and acquisition of employment and increased earnings have not been made.
- 4. Investigate further the most cost-effective ways to achieve scale and sustainability in youth workforce development.** Most donor and other development organizations reported interest in further research on scale and sustainability for youth workforce development programs.

Next Steps

Through its efforts to develop a youth-focused research and evaluation agenda, USAID is advancing the YWFD evidence base. We are committed to taking the issues addressed in this report to the next stage of development.



“Something that I’ve been thinking... how much workforce development for young people is really about the job. So I get a little worried when we are only talking about the job, the job, the job. When in reality it is the youth and what they hope to achieve that is more important.”

~Study participant