YEEP Evaluation Brief and Lessons Learned

Evaluation Brief

Globally, unemployment has increased rapidly over the past 3 years as a result of the global economic challenges facing the world. More than 1.4 billion people are living in poverty across the globe. The incident of poverty is so extreme that these people can barely survive; and around 25,000 of them die from hunger each day whilst a new billionaire is created every second day.

Young people account for approximately 34% of the national population, estimated at six million. Youth in Sierra Leone are faced with numerous challenges including securing decent employment in an economy that is characterized by a lack of job opportunities, especially in rural communities. Limited employable skills, work experience and low educational levels of many young people are responsible for the unemployment situation they are experiencing. The country is also trying to recover from the effects of an 11 year civil war which ended in 2002.

The YEEP is one of the foremost youth development programmes implemented in Sierra Leone geared specifically at empowering the youth sector to participate effectively in national development processes and programmes. It is designed to strengthen national policy, strategy and coordination frameworks for youth employment and establish, on a national basis, basic support services for youth including business development support and youth career advice all geared towards increasing their employability. The YEEP is part of UNDP’s package designed to assist the Government of Sierra Leone to target development investments to the youth sector as a strategy to achieve the MGDs.

The Youth Employment and Empowerment Programme (YEEP) consists of the implementation of the Business Development Services (BDS), The Career Advising and Placement Services centres (CAPS), The Graduate Internship Programme (GIP), Sierra Leone Agricultural Business Initiative (SABI), and Policy development and institutional development programme.

The Evaluation report is geared towards assessing the contributions made by YEEP with specific emphasis on the support to youth employment and empowerment and institutional capacity building activities for NAYCOM and MoYA 2011-2013. The report will a) assess the role, management, and achievements of UNDP NAYCOM in the implementation of Business Development Services (BDS), Graduate Internship Programme (GIP), and Career Advisory and Placement Services (CAPS) programmes, b) review the extent of the likely impact and their relevance to the overall intended outcomes and their overall sustainability, c) assess how programmes expected outcomes contribute to both accountability and learning, with primary focus on learning and d) extract the model of best practices by assessing YEEP according to the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria (Relevance, Sustainability, Effectiveness, Efficiency and Impact).

The consultant employed desk audit and review of documents, interviews, questionnaires, ethnological and participatory methodologies such as focus group discussions to collect the data for the project report. Although there are factors which limit the scope of the study, the outbreak of the Ebola virus presents the main threat for the study. This includes a) limiting the timeframe for administering the survey in the field, b) preventing the International Consultant from traveling to Sierra Leone to participate in the
administration of the survey, c) limiting the use of Focus Group discussions and other participatory methodology to collect data in the field and d) reducing the visit to some communities that are deemed a ‘risk’ for the local consultant to observe businesses and meet with beneficiaries of the YEEP.

The evaluation concludes that the YEEP was a successful youth development initiative which has contributed to enhancing participants’ employability, strengthening their self-confidence as well as developing trust between facilitator and participants in the programme. Participants highlighted the fact that they have received tremendous benefits/skills from participating in the YEEP. They stated that their participation in the YEEP has enabled them to gain employment in the job market.

Overall, a) the YEEP was effectively managed and the various components of the programme including the Business Development Services (BDS), Graduate Internship Programme (GIP), and Career Advisory and Placement Services (CAPS) programmes achieved their anticipated outcomes; b) the components of the YEEP were relevant to the overall intended outcomes of the project; c) the YEEP possesses the tremendous element of sustainability in the long term as a result of its capacity to mainstream and replicate its outcomes and models of best practices across and within governmental institutions and other developmental partners and networks (vertically and horizontally); and d) the lessons learned and models of best practices in youth development identified possess the capacity to contribute to accountability and learning in youth development. The report also highlights weaknesses in the YEEP design, management and implementation and puts forward a set of recommendations to enhance the performance of such programme in the future.

Lessons Learned

- Identifying the nature and level of capacity of partners at the early stage of the project is very crucial. Without this process, it will be hard to determine whether engagement with partners is in the right direction and how much more is to be invested in getting result.
- Strengthening the policy environment to increase access to affordable financial services for micro, small and medium enterprises is important to create the environment for employment and sustainable livelihoods for youth.
- Within programme design, it is imperative to devise strategies linking the initiatives addressing development challenges of youth with job creation and sustainable livelihood initiatives.
- Monitoring and evaluation of the projects by all stakeholders including donors, implementers, beneficiaries and communities are key necessities to enable the project to achieve its required results/outcomes.
- The main challenge to youth employment, is the need for the Universities, tertiary Institutions and training centres to adapt their curriculum and strategies to the emerging demands of the employment market.
• Joint working, engagement and ownership of the key stakeholders, specifically youth, on the management boards and part of the decision making process and governance of projects are crucial for the successful implementation of the project.
• Even though in this case interests and expectations matched market opportunities, often young people face constraints in making realistic decisions as they may lack reliable information sources.
• Assessing market opportunities and understanding the expectations of young people are crucial to programme planning. A major difficulty initially was the lack of market opportunities assessment and of a pre-registration beneficiary survey prior to vocational training and guidance.
• The programme is successful because it covers the demands of a growing sector. The IT industry estimated that sub-Saharan Africa will have 400 000 vacancies in this sector in a few years’ time due to a lack of qualified specialists. Closing such skills gaps is probably the quickest way to combat youth unemployment.
• The cooperation between a private company and public donors leads to wide outreach and demand-driven training programmes.
• Fees being charged for the courses improve the sustainability of the academies. However, this has the potential to inhibit access of poor youth, although reduced rates are offered to the unemployed.
• Importance of the coordination of programme to ensure the delivery of outcomes to target communities and sectors.
• Critical to working in cooperation and collaboration with a range of development partners who are working in the youth development sector is to pool resources to effectively deliver youth development programmes in communities and districts where they are most needed.
• Youth when given the opportunity to develop their potential can contribute to community and national development.
• Capacity enhancement of local staff is very crucial for the successful implementation of YEEP and other youth development initiatives. Therefore recourses should be provided to support the enhancement of the institutional capacity of NAYCOM and MoYA to enable the benefits of YEEP to be retained and nurtured.
• Involving youth in design of projects and programmes and the implementation of strategies produce maximum results.