



DO EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS HELP PREVENT CRIME AND VIOLENCE AMONG YOUTH?

AN EXAMINATION OF THE EVIDENCE IN SUPPORT OF
THE USAID YOUTH WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
LEARNING AGENDA

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INTRODUCTION

This brief analyzes whether programs that incorporated employability skills development activities prevented or reduced youth crime and violence. The brief presenting the results of a literature review and landscape analysis of interventions that included any of the four employability activities: Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), competency-based business training, entrepreneurship programs, and focused employability support as part of reintegration programs. (See [Text Box 1](#) for definitions of key terms used in this brief).

The brief summarizes the complex economic, political, and social challenges faced by young people and the theory of change connecting employability interventions to preventing and reducing violence among youth. The brief also provides an analysis of implementation and evaluation reports that specified crime and violence prevention or reduction as a goal or outcome.

This brief is intended to help U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) staff, Missions, and implementing partners understand what interventions or strategies hold potential to prevent crime and violence in youth employability programs and to build a broader evidence base to inform future programs.

Text Box 1: Key terms used in this brief. (USAID 2019a)

The terms **employability skills** and **workforce development** are used interchangeably when referring to programs, activities, or interventions in this brief.

Employment is defined as activities that generate actual or imputed income, monetary or in kind, formal or informal.

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET): A comprehensive term referring to education, training, and skills development specific to a task or situation relating to a range of occupational fields.

Competency-based business training and development: Refers to programs that provide transferable skills needed for economic and social integration and active citizenship, which may include job-agnostic business skills such as literacy, numeracy, soft skills, problem solving, communication, negotiation, and self-advocacy for stable employment and working conditions.

Access to finance embedded in entrepreneurship programs: Defined as including access to finance information and support within training programs to launch and manage a business, with the aim of reducing financial barriers to successful entrepreneurship.

Focused employability support as part of reintegration programs: Refers to the incorporation of TVET, competency-based business training, and entrepreneurship training into reintegration programs designed to support youth transitioning out of armed conflict or gangs and back into mainstream society.

RESEARCH APPROACH

As part of the USAID Center for Education's commitment to evidence-based programming, the Center for Education's Youth Workforce Development Learning Agenda includes a focus on understanding the connection between violence prevention and youth workforce development. (USAID 2019b)

This aspect of the Learning Agenda informed the research questions addressed in this brief:

- **Primary Question:** To what extent are workforce development programs effective at preventing youth from participating in crime, violence, or violent extremist groups? (See [Text Box 2](#) for definitions of these specific terms.)
- **Secondary Questions:**
 - I. What are the common employability activities that are believed to prevent or reduce youth violence?

2. What evidence currently exists that supports or refutes the linkage between employability activities and youth violence prevention or reduction? In what specific contexts does this evidence occur?

Text Box 2: Terms used to describe violent phenomena in this brief.

The terms **crime**, **violence**, and **violent extremism**, while similar in concept, are not interchangeable. The term **youth violence** is used in this brief to describe all of these concepts, which are defined below.

Crime refers to any action that violates criminal law and may or may not involve violence.

Violence is the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation. (USAID 2020a)

Violent extremism refers to advocating, engaging in, preparing, or otherwise supporting ideologically motivated violence to further social, economic, political, or religious objectives. (USAID 2020b)

The research team from the USAID Center for Education followed a two-step process. First, the team conducted a literature review to assess the theoretical understanding of the link between youth workforce development programs and youth violence prevention or reduction. In total, over 36 documents representing 37 projects were included in this brief. The research team divided the literature by region to ensure sufficient global coverage of the review. A search of publicly available databases using key terms commonly associated with youth workforce development yielded both grey and academic literature. A list of this literature is included in the annotated bibliography.

Utilizing the theoretical understanding derived from the literature review, the team then conducted a landscape analysis of youth employability interventions to assess whether the theorized benefits of these interventions resulted in prevention or reduction of youth violence in practice. The USAID Development Experience Clearinghouse was used to identify reports with the following criteria:

- Described workforce development programs, interventions, and activities directly focused on the youth population
- Mentioned youth crime and violence prevention or reduction explicitly in the intervention report, either as an intended outcome or as qualitative or quantitative evidence

The findings from this analysis are presented below, followed by a set of recommendations for consideration to bolster the ability of youth employability interventions to prevent or reduce youth violence.

LIMITATIONS

The limitations of this study were a lack of measurable evidence demonstrating a linkage between reduction in youth violence and youth employability activities; and a narrow scope of activities included in the final analysis.

The landscape analysis uncovered limited measurable evidence on the connection between youth employability interventions and youth violence prevention or reduction. One of the challenges in assessing youth violence prevention is the difficulty in measuring the counterfactual, i.e., the amount of violence that was prevented or reduced as the result of an intervention. Many intervention reports evaluated in this study cited quotations or anecdotes as the primary way to present outcomes; additionally, many reports did not include systematic data collection on reduction or prevention of youth violence. Therefore, the research team was conservative in drawing conclusions from the findings and presents opportunities to address these limitations in Recommendations.

Another limitation of the analysis was the narrow scope of activity reports included in the study. Although the literature review covered a broader scope of donors, the landscape analysis focused mainly on USAID-supported interventions.

FINDINGS OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW

A solid foundation of evidence of the factors contributing to youth violence is necessary to substantiate the theories of change linking employability to violence prevention and reduction discussed throughout this brief. The following demographic, economic, and social trends were identified in the literature review as possible contributing factors to youth violence.

Text Box 3: Push-Pull Factors Affecting Youth Violence

Numerous external factors put youth at higher risk of engaging in violence, referred to in this brief as **push-pull factors**.

Push factors are those that drive people towards violence, including state repression, relative deprivation, poverty, and injustice. These factors are usually situational and predispose individuals to support violent or criminal groups.

Pull factors are strategies and tactics that violent groups use to attract individuals to affiliate with them and/or justify the use of violence, such as ideology, group belonging or status, and material incentives.

HIGH YOUTH POPULATION—THE YOUTH BULGE

The **youth bulge** refers to a phenomenon where people aged between 15 and 29 constitute about half of the population. The youth bulge presents both an opportunity and a challenge. If the rising youth

population can be employed in productive activities, the average income level per capita should grow, and the youth bulge will become a demographic dividend. (Lin 2012) However, the labor market in many countries is unable to absorb the growing youth population, thus leading to ballooning unemployment among young people and increasing youth poverty. (Khurma, et al 2020) The push factors resulting from the youth bulge in the Middle East, North Africa, and the Horn of Africa makes the region's youth vulnerable to the pull factors of radicalization and recruitment by violent Islamic extremist organizations.

POVERTY AND LACK OF OPPORTUNITY

Youth poverty and a lack of economic, educational, and leadership opportunities can perpetuate feelings of hopelessness and frustration, unnecessary idleness, and a likelihood to engage in unrest. (Fehling et al, 2016) In Latin America and the Caribbean, youth from poor households living in unequal societies have a higher likelihood of engaging in criminal and violent behavior. (Cunningham et al, 2008) An analysis of census data in Mexico found that high unemployment among males with low education is linked to a higher crime rate, a finding that is exacerbated if the region has a large male youth bulge. (Juárez et al, 2008)

Push factors such as lack of opportunity can negate the benefits of education and job training. A skill matching survey conducted in Ghana and Uganda found that 40% and 25% of employed people, respectively, reported that their skills were not being used on the job. (Fox et al, 2020) According to a report issued by the World Bank, "There is mounting evidence that frustrated educated youth who have no access to jobs or who do not have the relevant skills to get suitable jobs are far more inclined to support violent extremism." (de Silva 2018)

Although no causal relationship has been identified between poverty and violence, income inequality has been shown to lead to higher rates of crime and violence. (Cunningham et al, 2008) Youth unemployment can be considered a push factor because it is associated with poverty and insecurity. Conversely, youth unemployment can also be a pull factor as gaining material resources and a sense of belonging may be perceived as payoffs for joining a violent or criminal organization.

INTEGRATING YOUTH VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND REDUCTION OUTCOMES INTO EMPLOYABILITY ACTIVITIES

There is a widespread belief that youth employability activities are a valuable lever to reduce the prevalence of youth crime and violence. The literature review found that policymakers view skills and vocational training programs as important starting points for targeting youth and young adults in crime and violence prevention programs. For instance, the World Bank recommends explicitly addressing the objective of countering violent extremism within employability programs rather than solely focusing on employability and job creation opportunities using a "do no harm" approach. (de Silva 2018)

Employability activities have been included as key programmatic levers within a theory of change intended to increase resilience against radicalization and enhance community security and stability. (Michele Grossman, Research Chair in Diversity and Community Resilience at Deakin University, defines resilience as the "ability to resist and challenge the social legitimization of violent extremist propaganda, recruitment and ideology.") The intended intermediate outcomes of these activities include lowered

unemployment rates and improved livelihood opportunities, which contribute to greater economic stability and reduced youth idleness.

Employability activities are instrumental in providing youth with the assets, agency, and ability to contribute to their communities. Integration of youth employability activities into programs intended to prevent or reduce youth violence aligns with USAID’s Positive Youth Development Framework, which posits that youth participation is key to economic development, building resilient societies, and ending the cycle of poverty. (USAID, accessed December 9, 2020) Empowering youth to discover and grow their individual and community strengths can serve as a foundation for future youth violence prevention programs.

USAID blends systems-level investments in the broader enabling environment with an individual-level focus on the personal characteristics that make an individual more likely to be a victim or a perpetrator of crime or violence. The updated USAID Crime and Violence Prevention Field Guide refers to a public health methodology which utilizes the socio-ecological model to analyze the various interrelated risk factors at the individual, relationship, community, and societal levels. (Mizrahi et al, 2021) Thus, helping young people develop the protective characteristics and resilience that buffer them against the push-pull factors related violence should be considered in combination with relationship-, community-, and societal-level factors. Furthermore, the literature emphasizes the role of peer networks and the contribution of social capital, with Magis (2010) and others suggesting that exposure to a diversity of views and networks was critical for building tolerance.

EVIDENCE FOR LINKING EMPLOYABILITY ACTIVITIES TO YOUTH VIOLENCE

The literature review found that there is no simple causal relationship between employability interventions and youth violence prevention. The theory of change linking employability activities to reduced youth violence is largely assumed to be true rather than demonstrated by evidence. As a DFID evidence assessment for conflict prevention found, the “linkages between knowledge, attitudes, behavioral change, and armed violence prevention and reduction are frequently asserted rather than demonstrated.” (de Silva 2018)

Several studies were examined in the literature review that reflect the challenge in asserting the theory of change linking youth employability to prevention of youth violence. The findings of these studies support the understanding that vulnerability to youth violence is influenced by a variety of factors, with youth employment playing an ill-defined role in the larger vulnerability landscape.

- A Mercy Corps study of participants of a technical and formal education program for youth in Afghanistan found that 84% gained employment and improved their economic standing at the completion of an employability activity; however, there was no measurable drop in their support of armed insurgency, and the study authors concluded that participants did not become less violent. Similarly, a survey of youth in Somalia found no relationship between a change in employment status and a willingness to engage in political violence. (Proctor 2015)
- A World Bank study referenced in the USAID Crime and Violence Prevention Field Guide found that ninis (a term used to describe youth in Central America who are neither working nor attending school) who are not adequately supervised by an adult have a higher probability of engaging in risky behavior, especially those that live in communities where gangs or other

criminal organizations are present. The study emphasized that while the majority of ninis do not engage in violence, a large portion of those who engage in violence are ninis. (Mizrahi 2021)

FINDINGS OF THE LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

The following sections present a summary of findings from the landscape analysis of interventions that incorporated any of four main employability activities. The aim of this analysis was to determine whether the theory of change linking youth employability activities to youth violence prevention and reduction is supported by evidence from the field.

Findings are grouped by employability activities, and discussion of each employability activity includes a table with a summary of the main interventions used to prevent or reduce youth violence, sample cases examined in the landscape analysis that leveraged these interventions, and the push-pull factors addressed by these interventions. The cases examined in this analysis are presented in more detail in the [Appendix](#).

TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (TVET)

TVET can include secondary or post-secondary training in skills tailored to specific trades and occupations to provide youth with the requisite skills to enter the labor market. (Fox, 2020) The United Nations – African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID)'s Community-Based Labor-Intensive Projects in Darfur found that 98% of participating youth in a TVET program gained necessary livelihood skills to secure employment. (UNAMID 2014)

Traditional TVET programs that focused on developing technical skills to support job placement were the primary focus of this analysis. However, soft skills are critical to employability and are often integral components of TVET programs.

While surveys of activity participants found that youth believe that TVET interventions helped build the skills and confidence needed to find employment, these same surveys found weak or no linkages between TVET interventions and violence prevention. The relationship between TVET interventions and violence prevention were largely evidenced in activity reports via anecdotal quotes from community members and youths.

Exhibit 1: Technical and vocational education and training

INTERVENTION AND ACTIVITIES	CASES EXAMINED IN ANALYSIS	ASSOCIATED PUSH-PULL FACTORS
Vocational training: Equip youth with specific skills needed for existing jobs in the regional labor market	UNAMID’s Community-Based Labor-Intensive Projects in Darfur (UNAMID 2014): Provided vocational skills training and temporary employment to youth through implementation of community projects	Economic marginalization
Creation of jobs marketplace: Use mobile technology to create an online marketplace that enables employers and job seekers to connect	USAID’s SCORE project in Kenya (Kollmorgen et al, 2019) Created an online portal where the government and private sector can list open opportunities, making it easier to youth to access employment opportunities.	Economic marginalization
Shift perceptions of TVET: Launch behavior change campaigns to change youths’ perceptions of TVET programs	USAID’s K-YES project in Kenya (Kageha 2020; Blum et al 2020): Initiated a behavior change campaign to reposition vocational training and blue-collar jobs positively among the youth	Self-esteem Personal empowerment

COMPETENCY-BASED BUSINESS TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

Youth often experience frustration resulting from a lack of knowledge of how to find employment opportunities, which may result in risk of violence. Competency-based business training and development is a type of job-agnostic training that provides transferable skills needed for economic and social integration and active citizenship. These may include business skills such as literacy and numeracy, soft skills training such as problem solving, communication, and negotiation, and personal agency to self-advocate for stable employment and working conditions. (Fox et al, 2020) Competency-based business training aims to empower youth with agency over their economic status.

Due to limitations in empiric data availability, this analysis did not find strong evidence for the linkage between competency-based business training interventions and youth violence prevention and reduction. However, many activity reports indicated that youth and community members valued these interventions for enabling youth to find secure employment in society and increasing their levels of respect in local communities. Additionally, some activity reports indicated that community members wanted competency-based interventions expanded to other youth at risk of recruitment by organized violence groups.

Exhibit 2: Competency-based business training and development

INTERVENTION AND ACTIVITIES	CASES EXAMINED IN ANALYSIS	ASSOCIATED PUSH-PULL FACTORS
Competency-based business training: Develop skills agnostic to a specific job or sector	USAID’s KTI project in Kenya (Chemonics 2014): Developed a curriculum for business skills development and access to finance training USAID’s Empleado Futuros project in Honduras (Banyan Global 2018): Provided life skills and basic labor market competency training to youth in communities vulnerable to gang violence	Access to material resources Sense of belonging Self-esteem
Change private sector attitudes of youth: Incentivize the private sector to invest in competency-based training opportunities for youth	USAID’s YouthPower project in El Salvador (Blum et al, 2020): Conducted a communications campaign to change perception of vulnerable groups to contribute to the workforce	Economic marginalization

ACCESS TO FINANCE EMBEDDED IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROGRAMS

Entrepreneurship is often viewed as a viable economic opportunity in response to weak labor market demand, including a lack of jobs exacerbated by regional youth bulges. (Khurma et al, 2020) However, a major challenge to youth entrepreneurship is the difficulty in accessing financing opportunities. (Schwartz and Yalbir, 2019) Offering entrepreneurship training to launch and manage a business without supporting access to finance may result in increased youth frustration. Therefore, this analysis defined entrepreneurship programs as those that included information on and linkages to access to finance. To date, there is limited evidence on whether entrepreneurship programs result in youth violence prevention.

Exhibit 3: Access to finance embedded in entrepreneurship programs

INTERVENTION AND ACTIVITIES	CASES EXAMINED IN ANALYSIS	ASSOCIATED PUSH-PULL FACTORS
Access to finance support: Offer credit or start-up grants or link youth to institutions that provide financial and technical support to entrepreneurs	USAID’s KTI project in Kenya (Chemonics 2014): Provided youth in the formal and informal sector with training on banking services and products and connected youth with financial institutions	Access to services

FOCUSED EMPLOYABILITY SUPPORT AS PART OF REINTEGRATION PROGRAMS

The incorporation of TVET, competency-based business training, and entrepreneurship training into reintegration programs is the final activity viewed as a lever for youth violence prevention. Oftentimes, youth transitioning out of armed conflict face social marginalization or exclusion, making it difficult to

integrate back into society. These employability interventions aim to support youth in their transition out of armed conflict or gangs and back into mainstream society by providing them with access to the labor market.

Reintegration programs often deliver comprehensive support and are most effective when employability interventions are coupled with psychosocial support and soft skills training. The evidence indicates that comprehensive support is needed for successful reintegration, including employability activities, soft skills training, and therapeutic approaches.

Exhibit 4: Focused employability support as part of reintegration programs

INTERVENTION AND ACTIVITIES	CASES EXAMINED IN ANALYSIS	ASSOCIATED PUSH-PULL FACTORS
Short-term employment: Provide opportunities for employment for youth transitioning out of conflict situations	The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO)'s Community Violence Reduction program (United Nations 2021): Hired 150 community members including youth and ex-combatants to build a local marketplace to serve as place for dialogue and social cohesion	Social marginalization

SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS

The theory of change underlying this brief posits that employability interventions can lead to lowered unemployment rates and improved livelihood opportunities, which may result in a broader outcome of increased resilience against recruitment to violent and criminal organizations and enhanced community security.

The literature review found a hypothesized connection but no simple causal relationship between youth employability interventions and youth violence prevention and reduction. The landscape analysis also did not find a clear causal connection between employability activities and youth crime and violence prevention.

Overall, the available evidence suggests that many factors promote resilience to youth violence. Most of the robust empirical work has highlighted the role of individual traits contributing to violence prevention, including: positive identity and self-image, self-efficacy, optimism, and positive social relations. Significant findings have also highlighted the importance of education and awareness-raising interventions outlining the risks of violent extremism and the strategies for prevention.

USAID activity reports examined in the landscape analysis often collected and reported evidence that employability interventions led to the intermediate outcomes of better employment and livelihood opportunities. However, evidence for the broader outcome of reduced youth violence is largely mixed, with some activities reporting improvements because of employability interventions and others finding no statistically significant improvement. When evidence was reported, it was often anecdotal in nature, or based on small datasets or qualitative surveys.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR USAID EMPLOYABILITY ACTIVITIES

The literature review and landscape analysis identified the following opportunities for improving employability activities to better contribute to youth violence prevention and reduction.

INVEST IN EVIDENCE COLLECTION

USAID employment activities should prioritize collecting evidence on the relationship between employability interventions and youth violence prevention and reduction. Specifically, implementers should consider how evaluation of the causal pathway between youth employment interventions and violence outcomes can be more purposefully integrated into the design of activities. Implementers should also develop interventions that have a specific objective to prevent or interrupt the spread of violence. Developing a robust evidence base will enable USAID to identify employability interventions that prevent or reduce youth violence and their appropriate contexts for deployment.

INTEGRATE SOFT SKILLS TRAINING INTO TRADITIONAL TVET PROGRAMS

Traditional TVET programs typically do not equip youth with the soft skills necessary to succeed in the labor market. TVET programs should more consistently offer soft skills training, ideally by integrating these concepts into technical skills training curricula. This expanded approach empowers youth by improving their technical and analytical thinking abilities. It also creates a sense of purpose, resulting in sustainable employability and greater societal inclusion. (de Silva 2018) Incorporation of both technical and soft skills into TVET programs could address the push factor of social marginalization and the pull factor of personal empowerment, thus having a better likelihood of preventing youth violence.

INTEGRATE JOB SKILLS TRAINING INTO FORMAL EDUCATION

Several of the employability interventions described in this brief are intended to help youth who have left the formal school system to gain skills needed to transition to the workplace. In Sub-Saharan Africa, for example, 60% of youth aged 15-17 do not attend school. Analysis finds that investment in formal education is sometimes a better lever than investment in vocational training. (Van Zyl 2020) However, it is not always realistic to focus solely on supporting the formal school system, given the multiple factors that lead to attrition and the significant numbers of youth already out of school. There is an opportunity to incorporate career and workforce preparation skills training into upper primary and secondary school for youth before they leave. Incorporating work readiness skills and attitudes into the formal education system alongside interventions that prevent youth from leaving the formal education system will help to address social marginalization caused by school attrition.

CONDUCT MARKET ASSESSMENTS TO ENSURE TRAININGS RESPOND TO JOB DEMAND

Employability activities must ensure that training programs prepare youth for available jobs in the local labor markets. Evidence shows that additional education without corresponding job opportunities could foster instability due to increased frustration among educated youth. (Urdal 2012) In fact, unemployment may be a less significant driver of youth crime and violence than youths' frustrated expectations. (Van Zyl 2020)

Before launching any employability activities, a labor market assessment should be conducted to understand the current job and self-employment landscape and potential opportunities for youth so that employability interventions can be tailored to this context. Strengthening the likelihood of graduates finding employment after they complete training will better address the push factor of economic marginalization that may compel youth to engage in violence.

INCORPORATE GENDER-SPECIFIC LENS INTO PROGRAM DESIGN AND EXECUTION

Youth violence programs should address the needs and priorities of young females as well as males and create opportunities to capitalize on their female strengths and contributions. Currently, few employability activities specifically focus on reducing female youths' engagement in violence through workforce development programs, as there is an underlying assumption that male youth should be the main population of focus. Despite limited evidence that women are direct perpetrators of violence, women often serve as supporters or facilitators of violent groups. (Van Zyl 2020) For example, in Kenya, women are the "invisible infrastructure" for al-Shabaab. Women are found to play prominent roles in al-Shabaab's recruitment efforts, to support intelligence gathering, and to provide shelter and care for extremists. (Salifu 2017)

The reasons young females get involved in crime and violence are often similar to those of males, including frustration with their economic and socio-political conditions. However, females also experience gender- and sex-specific vulnerability factors, and experience vulnerability factors differently than males. Therefore, there is a need for activities to incorporate a gender lens to employability interventions and provide females with customized materials and training, particularly in conflict situations. (Fehling 2015)

INCORPORATE BROADER SET OF STAKEHOLDERS IN PROGRAM DESIGN

It is imperative that youth employability activities receive buy-in from local communities in order to prevent frustrations that lead to violent extremist recruitment. Employability activities often do not address the primary sources of governmental or institutional capacity that drive violent extremism. (Schwartz, 2019) Therefore, involving local stakeholders in program design will better address the push factors of economic and social marginalization by providing youth with broad community support, and address the structural challenges of the job market. It is recommended to incorporate systems mapping for risk reduction to build capacity and commitment within civil society and across community level partners at the national, local, and community levels. (USAID 2020a) Involving youth, the local

government, civil society, and the private sector is key to the successful design and execution of employability interventions and to prevent them from being counterproductive. (Van Zyl 2020)

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APPENDIX: EVALUATED YOUTH EMPLOYABILITY PROGRAMS BY ACTIVITY

TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING ACTIVITIES

COMMUNITY STABILIZATION AND VIOLENCE REDUCTION IN DARFUR (UNITED NATIONS–AFRICAN UNION HYBRID OPERATION IN DARFUR (UNAMID) 2014)

UNAMID’s Community-Based Labor-Intensive Projects (CLIPs) aim to support community stabilization and violence reduction in Darfur by providing vocational skills training and temporary employment through implementation of community projects. UNAMID identifies relevant vocational skills by conducting a market survey to determine local specializations that are high in demand. They also provide on-the-job training and temporary employment by employing youth on projects to rehabilitate local community infrastructure.

Vocational training and job placements were influential in promoting community violence reduction in Darfur by addressing both the push factor of economic marginalization and the pull factors of access to material resources and social status. Survey results of program participants show that CLIPs had positive results by providing youth with employment and contributing to a secure community environment. Following the program, 98% of participating youth stated that it helped them to gain necessary livelihood skills required to secure employment, and approximately 70% were confident about finding jobs after completion of the program. Importantly, 68% stated that the program had a strong impact on strengthening community cohesion and promoting peace in their respective communities. One program participant stated, “I run my own tailoring workshop and have a daily income, which is sufficient to live a good life. This training opportunity has positively changed my life. I consider my current standing as socially and financially stable.”

EMPHASIZING YOUTH JOB PLACEMENT IN SOMALIA (EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT CENTER (EDC), 2011)

USAID’s Somali Youth Livelihoods Program (SYLP) focused on providing Somali youth with technical skills training in traditional vocational areas (i.e., carpentry, plumbing, and tailoring) and non-traditional market activities (i.e., media/journalism, market research, and water filtration production.) Youth with varying levels of education, training, and literacy were targeted for this activity.

The creation of an online job marketplace, InfoMatch, was a notable innovation of this program. Employers could advertise new job opportunities on InfoMatch; all youth involved in the SYLP activity were registered in the InfoMatch system, which notified them of opportunities for which they were qualified. The program emphasized placement outcomes, resulting in 78% of youth placed into jobs, internships, or apprenticeships after training.

A survey of program participants assessed indicators relevant to organized violence prevention and reduction, including youths' "sense of identity" and "opposition to use of violence in the name of Islam." One likely driver of positive program impact was the strong branding of the SYLP program in Somalia, which influenced youths' sense of positive self-identity. Overall, program participants felt more prepared to enter the job market and had more optimism about their ability to work towards a better future. Private sector representatives stated that they were more likely to hire a youth participant from the SYLP program because they displayed higher levels of skills, self-confidence, and leadership.

Overall, the evidence for a link between employability activities and organized violence reduction was mixed. While the initial program was designed to focus on communities with the highest levels of instability, security concerns in those areas resulted in shifting of program activities to different communities. This led to an interruption in the program and may resulted in the program's implementation in communities with a lower incidence of violence in the name of Islam. There was no statistically significant difference in opposition to use of violence in the name of Islam between SYLP participants and the control group of non-participants. This was largely driven by survey results from non-participants which indicated no support for Jihadist violence among Somali youth in the communities surveyed. Concerningly, program participants in one community were less likely to oppose the use of violence in the name of Islam than the non-program participants surveyed.

YOUTH AS A STABILIZATION PRIORITY IN SOMALIA (DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVES, INC., 2016)

Transition Initiatives for Somalia (TIS) focused on increasing the visibility and confidence in the Somalia government. TIS worked with stakeholders across the public, private, and civil sectors to design collaborative partnerships that fostered economic growth, strengthened confidence in government, and improved safety.

One component of TIS focused on delivering employability interventions targeting youth. The district Baidoa was struggling in its ability to create economic opportunity for youth. Members of the community, including parents, were worried that idle youths were at high risk of being recruited by Al-Shabaab. As part of TIS planning sessions, the Baidoa local government and local citizens identified the building of a youth vocational center as a priority for stabilization of the district.

One year after the opening of the youth vocational center, youth who received vocational training expressed that the program contributed to violence reduction. One youth participant stated: "Before the center was constructed, youth were idle with nothing to do. Many youths were at risk of joining militia groups, being trafficked, or indulging in drugs. We had little hope for our future... Following the construction of this center, many youths enrolled and have gained valuable skills that have helped them earn a living."

Another youth who participated in the vocational training commented that it increased his confidence in government and raised his awareness of the importance of youth engagement in stability initiatives. He stated: "With this training center, I am assured that I will be a benefit to the community and will contribute to stability and development of Baidoa. We appreciate the efforts of our local administration in considering this need and recognizing the importance of youth in the promotion of peace and development."

COMPETENCY-BASED BUSINESS TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

CONNECTING HIGH RISK YOUTH WITH JOB SKILLS TRAINING IN HONDURAS (BANYAN GLOBAL, 2018)

The Empleando Futuros activity in Honduras was launched in 2016 to increase security in high-crime areas of Honduras by providing workforce development opportunities for youth at risk of engaging in violence. The program targeted youth living in municipalities identified as having the largest incidence of violence and gang presence in the country: Tegucigalpa, San Pedro Sula, Choloma, La Ceiba, and Tela. Youth in the program were currently out of school and had no more than a high school degree, and were either unemployed or underemployed.

The first phase of the program focused on job skills training, life skills, mentoring, and basic labor competencies. It also provided cognitive behavioral therapy sessions to the youth participants. The second phase of the activity delivered TVET training in a specific trade, and the third phase provided support for job placement.

The activity experienced a high dropout rate, especially as the youth transitioned from phase one of the activity to phase two. There was a small decline in the risk of violence among those that started the program but did not complete it. The study found that the risk of violence increased for the control group and the participants that completed the program. However, the increase in incidence of violence for the group that completed the program was exacerbated by two outliers with high violence scores at the end of phase one. Due to the small number of participants in the completed program group, these two outliers skewed the results.

This program demonstrated the potential for job skill building interventions to reduce youth violence, however, more information needs to be collected. Furthermore, the high dropout rate indicates that ensuring continuity of participants throughout the program should be an area of focus.

DELIVERING LEADERSHIP SKILLS TRAINING AS PART OF CVE PROGRAMMING IN KENYA (RTI INTERNATIONAL, 2020)

The Kenya Youth Employment and Skills (K-YES) Program improved employment opportunities for marginalized youth. The program primarily focused on unemployed and underemployed youth who had not completed secondary education. In the final two years of the program, K-YES received additional funding to incorporate countering violent extremism (CVE) programming into the program. CVE programming was incorporated into holistic youth development initiatives with a focus on transferable skills training. The ultimate goal of CVE programming was to help young people realize the role they can play in designing and delivering sustainable CVE programming.

K-YES delivered training in social and leadership skills to 4,200 youth in 39 areas that were identified as high risk for violent extremism. The program connected youth that participated in social and leadership skills training with other development opportunities in their community and enabled them to learn about other employability training opportunities with K-YES.

Although no evidence was collected on whether K-YES contributed to youth crime and violence prevention, anecdotal reports found that local stakeholders believed the interventions were beneficial. Both youth and other community members noted the positive impact that K-YES had in increasing youths' self-esteem and sense of hopefulness, positive outlook, and morale. This positive mindset enabled youth to become active in their communities and promoted a healthy, peaceful society. (USAID 2016)

ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROGRAMS

CONNECTING YOUTH ENTREPRENEURS WITH FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS IN KENYA (CHEMONICS 2014)

The Kenya Transition Initiative (KTI) was launched in June 2008 to reduce political and social volatility and vulnerability to violence. Youth engagement was a key tenant of the program because youth comprise about 60 % of Kenya's population; however, the majority of youth don't have opportunities to access employment or education, nor spaces where they are free to express themselves without fear of retribution.

In response to rising unemployment rates, both the government and non-profit organizations focused on institutionalizing programs that promote entrepreneurship among youth. Entrepreneurship was viewed as an alternative opportunity for employment, resulting in reduced likelihood that youth would be successfully recruited by extremist groups or engage in other violent activities.

KTI focused on providing financial empowerment (a necessity to successful entrepreneurship) among youth by launching a two-day county banking fair across four target counties. Through the fairs, youth were able to connect with financial institutions and learn about financial products and services to help them sustain their business ventures. These banking fairs also created an opportunity for stakeholders to engage in discussions with youth about resisting extremist ideology.

The program did not report any evidence on the link between these entrepreneurship activities and youth violence prevention. However, it was reported that creating a connection for youth to access financial services and mentorship increased youth's commitment to avoid illegal groups and instead leverage legal opportunities to improve their economic situations.

FOCUSED EMPLOYABILITY SUPPORT AS PART OF REINTEGRATION PROGRAMS

Short Term Employment for Ex-Combatants in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) 2021)

In DRC's North Kivu province, periods of violence have contributed to poverty and intercommunity tensions. Youth often don't have access to employment and are at high risk of being recruited by armed groups. As part of a countering violent extremism program in the region, MONUSCO implemented an activity that delivered short-term employment in the form of a local marketplace. The activity hired 150 community members, focusing on single mothers, widows, youth, and ex-combatants.

Ultimately, the marketplace improved socioeconomic conditions in the province and created an additional space for people to come together for dialogue and social cohesion. This activity was especially impactful for ex-combatants--in addition to providing employment, it was a way for ex-combatants to reintegrate with society, which reduced the risk that they would rejoin armed groups. Anecdotal reports indicated the activity had initial success in reducing youth crime and violence. An implementing partner found that the recruitment rate of youth and ex-combatants had declined since the market was built, and that there were fewer violent conflict incidents in the community since the activity was implemented.