

SUMMARY BRIEF OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS FROM THE USAID/RWANDA YOUTH ASSESSMENT SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS



USAID Rwanda

PURPOSE

Conducted by YouthPower Learning at the request of the USAID Mission in Rwanda, the purpose of the youth assessment was to utilize a positive youth development lens to answer several broad questions. The first was to better understand the life goals of youth (defined in Rwanda as aged 16-30) and to identify the challenges that youth face in reaching their potential. The assessment also aimed to pinpoint what is working well to support youth in Rwanda and enable them to actualize their potential economically, civically, politically, socially, and with good health. The final goal was to identify the opportunities these bright spots (and remaining gaps) present. This overview presents assessment findings that emerged from consultations that were conducted from April to May 2019. The assessment consisted of a desk review, 30 key informant interviews, and 24 youth-led focus group discussions with 180 youth over three weeks in all five Rwandan provinces.

FINDINGS

Overall, the assessment affirms that Rwandan young people (ages 16-30) have a clear and common set of goals for their futures. They envision self-sufficiency achieved through economic independence and the ability to provide for and support their families, and they see this path as most available to them through self-employment. Youth recognize that formal sector jobs are rare, and while desirable, frequently out of reach. Young people in Rwanda see what the future might hold and place faith in the goals they have as well as those laid out by the government for youth employment. At the same time, they also see a series of almost insurmountable obstacles that impede their own

progress and that of their peers. The various transitions to adulthood, which are marked by steps such as educational attainment, obtaining and cultivating land, building a house, getting married and starting a family, and economic self-sufficiency are frustratingly out of reach to the vast majority of Rwandan youth. This has created a general sense of dissatisfaction; leaving a generation at risk of not fulfilling its own promise and ambitions.

The top three priority areas that youth across all age groups and locations identified as key issues to achieving their goals and promise of their future were:

- **Livelihoods development:** The desire for the requisite tools and opportunities to engage in productive self-employment activities
- **Education and skills for work-readiness:** Practical, skill-based training that leads to employment
- **Reproductive autonomy and health:** Early pregnancy is a significant barrier for young women to achieve economic self-sufficiency.

All of the youth who participated in the focus group discussions indicated that they thought young people like them were either neutral or unsatisfied with their daily lives. None of the youth thought that in general, youth were satisfied. This finding was remarkably consistent.

The key pathways that youth identified that would help them address these priority areas included access to youth-friendly financial services, skills



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development that meets the demands of the labor market, and creation of opportunities to find viable livelihood options in agriculture.

Youth also advocate for the creation or expansion of confidential youth-friendly safe spaces and places to support their health needs, including reproductive health, mental health, sanitation, and nutrition. Many pointed to the need for greater substance abuse prevention services and programs as well, along with programs that help generate better support and communication among families.

While there are opportunities for many youth to engage in community efforts, there is a desire for more youth-led activities and initiatives, with adults in supportive or facilitative roles. Many youth reported a strong desire among their peers for greater parental and family support as young people work toward learning, participating, and benefiting from and engaging in a rapidly changing Rwanda.

Youth that are most vulnerable are those that had access to fewer assets. Some of the significant features of these assets could be defined by whether they completed school or possessed a trade certificate, were working or having work experience, possessing networks or family support, living in an urban setting with greater access to resources versus in a rural environment, being younger or over the age of 25, gender, physical assets, (such as land, livestock, or a phone), or their disability status.

BRIGHT SPOTS FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN RWANDA

There is strong government support for youth and public support for creating youth economic opportunity. The Government of Rwanda has placed a high priority on and mobilized resources in support of youth employment. It has also successfully sensitized young people on the value and reality of self-employment as a key livelihood pathway. The National Employment Programme (NEP) aims to create a national framework coordinating skills training and finance initiatives with the goal of creating 200,000 non-farm jobs per year. The Business Development Fund (BDF) is a mechanism to assist young people in accessing financial services to support self-employment and has the potential to serve as a financial catalyst. Young people are aware of these resources and want to leverage them.

The Rwanda system for Technical, Vocational Education and Training (TVET) offers valued programs with an opportunity for continued improvement. The TVET system in Rwanda provides

important skill-building training and is a critical part of the youth employment ecosystem. Many young people describe the technical skills they receive in practical, favorable terms. The areas for growth and improvement are ensuring these skills are driven by local labor markets, expanding opportunities for training to more rural areas, establishing more opportunities for workplace learning, and enhancing support for financial services upon completion or certification. An additional bright spot is the coordination among the Government of Rwanda and donors to enhance the overall quality and relevance of TVET training; significant progress has been made in recent years.

Youth-friendly centers are creating welcoming, trusted sources of service delivery; these offer great potential to reach youth for health, education, civic engagement, and employment outcomes. These centers offer youth valuable services in a confidential and flexible manner, while also serving as community hubs offering recreational/arts activities, and as such are quite popular among young people. There is already a strong culture of youth clubs in Rwanda. Focus group participants in Huye were notably strong advocates of the youth-friendly health center in their region. They cited the value of the services, how trusted the staff were, and the range of activities (crafts, sports, music, etc.) offered by the center as elements that made it a desirable youth friendly space. Youth Empowerment for Global Opportunity (YEGO) centers (“yes” centers), when adequately staffed and programmed, are valued spaces as well. The opportunities here are to establish quality standards, developing partnerships for service delivery, and ensuring there is a trained cadre of youth service providers and/or adults who have the capacity to apply positive youth development principles to support young people via these safe places and spaces (in various milieus).

There is a strong ethos and practice of community minded work in Rwanda that integrates young people into the existing structures. Young people have the expectation of making contributions to their community through Umuganda (monthly days of community service) and through existing entities such as the National Youth Council (NYC), which are present from the national to the community level. Young people want greater opportunities for leadership and decision-making roles in community structures, which requires preparation and support for adults to successfully integrate and partner with youth, as well as young people who want to develop their leadership skills. This may require special attention and focus for young women, who are often pulled into household roles and responsibilities.

BOX 1: EXAMPLES OF MAJOR PROGRAMS SUPPORTING YOUTH LIVELIHOODS

Huguka Dukore Akazi Kanoze (HDAK) - USAID's flagship work readiness project, implemented by EDC, is working to reach 40,000 vulnerable youth, including young women and youth with disabilities, in 25 of 30 districts throughout the country with key work readiness skills and opportunities, including market relevant skills, business startup assistance, and employment assistance.

Business Development Fund (BDF) - A public-private partnership created in 2016 by the Government of Rwanda, supported by the African Development Bank and Swedish Development Organization (SIDA), the BDF aim of providing SMEs with access to finance as well as credit guarantees.

Mastercard Foundation/ Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator - Harambee has a current budget of 8.5 million over five years in partnership with Mastercard Foundation to develop the hospitality sector. Harambee is a non-profit social enterprise that builds solutions with youth employment ecosystem partners, including employers and other demand-side opportunity holders across all economic sectors to match entry-level job requirements to a network of high-potential work-seekers. Their model essentially seeks to improve information, reduce barriers, and lubricate where necessary, connections between job-seekers and employers for youth 18-35 years across all regions of the country, but currently has a physical presence only in Kimisagara YEGO Center.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Increase youth earnings in the informal sector.** According to the GOR definition of formality, 95 percent of all firms operating in Rwanda are informal.¹ The greatest current gap appears to be in helping to prepare youth in existing groups (such as savings and loan groups or technical, vocational or employment programs) to develop the skills needed to prepare to access finance and the subsequent coaching and support as they start income-earning endeavours, (financial literacy, savings and loans, and business development services). This needs to be coupled with expanding opportunities for developing market-driven technical skills for youth through the TVET system and workplace learning.
- 2. Boost productivity for youth through micro, small and medium-sized enterprises for youth employment, particularly in agriculture.** While many of the youth engaged by this assessment did not show a high level of interest in agriculture-related careers or work, the fact remains that many young people from rural settings in particular do see opportunities and that agriculture remains essential to their survival for the foreseeable future. Adding value to existing efforts, such as increasing access to markets and upgrading value chains, (i.e., food processing) is critical, as is working with banking institutions to develop more youth friendly products as well as public sector institutions to reduce the barriers to formalizing business activities for youth.
- 3. Expand youth-friendly family planning along with sexual and reproductive health for very young adolescents.** Youth are concerned by the prevalence of early pregnancies among their peers and think younger adolescents should have greater access to knowledge and skills. Continued investments in safe places and spaces are essential to enable youth to access reproductive health and family planning services, along with an array of other sanitation, nutrition, and health services. Continued investigation into the dynamics of early pregnancy, including identifying effective strategies to address gender-based violence and sexual violence are also critical in supporting youth health and well-being.
- 4. Address youth psycho-social needs through holistic programs.** Young people are concerned by what they see is the increasing sense of hopelessness or dissatisfaction their peers have about achieving their goals for the future. The milestones of adulthood seem unobtainable to many. They also report that many youth struggle with parental communications and family relationships. They see this as a cause of an increase in drug use and other high-risk behavior. Successful youth programs support adults and community networks as well as young people. Many of the current USAID OVC and DREAMS programs use these comprehensive approaches, and the lessons learned should be applied to other youth initiatives as well.

¹ World Bank. "Program-For-Results Information Document (PID) Concept Stage, Priority Skills for Growth (PSG)." 2017.

5. **Apply positive youth development program approaches within programs, including involving youth in the assessment, design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of any efforts aimed at supporting them.** This assessment included training and supporting youth researchers to facilitate youth focus groups and analyze information. Young people in Rwanda are the ones that are best positioned to understand their life circumstances and help lead the changes that need to occur. It is also equally important to prepare and engage the adults and supporting youth and to work with them as partners.
6. **Be intentional in targeting segments of youth populations.** New or existing programs should have systems to monitor and assess project results on various segments of the youth population of highest priority. Without this

intentionality, projects may not reach the most vulnerable youth or those with fewest assets, (younger girls, from rural areas, out of school, etc).

7. **Foster strategic institutional collaboration and coordination in supporting youth.** Because youth are such a large proportion of the population, there are a myriad of stakeholders that intersect with and prioritize youth in different ways. The Ministry of Youth has strong leadership and can work with other key stakeholders to serve as a lead convener and coordinating body to elevate positive youth development principles within other sectors such as economic growth, employment, health, and education in youth services. They can also lead and support structures, such as the National Youth Council that can serve to cultivate and elevate youth leaders as a means of reaching other development goals.

Authors:

Katie Green, Independent Consultant for Making Cents International
 Emmanuel Bagaye, Independent Consultant for Making Cents International
 Rachel Blum, Independent Consultant for Making Cents International
 Lindsey Woolf, Making Cents International
 Cassandra Jessee, International Center for Research on Women/
 Making Cents International

CONTACT

YouthPower Learning
 Making Cents International
 1350 Connecticut Ave, NW, Suite 410
 Washington, DC 20036 USA
www.YouthPower.org

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USAID YouthPower Learning generates and disseminates knowledge about the implementation and impact of positive youth development (PYD) and cross-sectoral approaches in international development. The project leads research, evaluations, and events designed to build the evidence base related to PYD. Concurrently, YouthPower Learning employs expertise in learning and knowledge sharing to promote engagement and inform the global community about how to successfully help transition young people into productive, healthy adults. YouthPower Learning supports the implementation of the 2012 USAID Youth in Development Policy to improve capacity and enable the aspirations of youth so that they can contribute to, and benefit from, more stable, democratic, and prosperous communities.

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