

FUND FOR EVALUATION IN YOUTH EMPLOYMENT:

Building the Evidence Base for What Works

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Photo Sven Torfinn

ABOUT YEN

YEN (Youth Employment Network) is an interagency partnership of the UN, ILO and the World Bank set up after the Millennium Summit in 2001 to find new and durable solutions to the youth employment challenge. The network is a global platform whose goal is to prioritize youth employment on the development agenda and to exchange knowledge on effective policies and programmes to improve employment opportunities for youth. A major concentration of YEN's work under its recently revised strategic direction is supporting the rigorous evaluation of innovative youth employment programmes.

BACKGROUND

There is a severe lack of rigorous evaluations of youth employment programmes, especially in developing countries, which has led to a large evidence gap of not only “what works” in the delivery of youth employment programming but more precisely “how and why it is working”. An analysis of the [Youth Employment Inventory](#) reveals that only 15% of youth employment programmes show evidence of net impact. Improving the evidence base for designing and implementing youth employment schemes will enhance delivery effectiveness while producing reliable information for policy makers allowing them to make informed decisions on resource allocation and programming priorities.

In 2009 YEN organized two learning events entitled “YEN Evaluation Clinics”. The objective of these Clinics was to teach youth employment practitioners the basic techniques for conducting rigorous impact evaluations and recommend strategies to improve and strengthen evaluation plans. The Clinics revealed that three major bottlenecks restrict the growth of the evidence base for youth employment:

- 1) The limited knowledge and skills among youth employment practitioners and policy makers to allow them to initiate and undertake impact evaluations.
- 2) The insufficient production of impact evaluations showing what works, what's not working and why in youth employment programming, especially in developing countries.

- 3) The lack of communication and dissemination of new and existing evidence and serious limitations on how to use evidence to improve and restructure programmes.

To address these challenges, YEN initiated "The Fund for Evaluation in Youth Employment".

The first phase of the Fund will operate for 5 years: 2010-2014. Initial funding of \$970,000 has been provided by the Jacobs Foundation and the Danish Africa Commission. The design of the Fund relies heavily on experiences accrued from the [World Bank's Spanish Impact Evaluation Fund \(SIEF\)](#) and the [International Initiative on Impact Evaluations \(3ie\)](#).

THEMATIC SCOPE

The Fund's first call for proposals will concentrate on impact evaluations of *youth entrepreneurship or self-employment programmes in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Recently, entrepreneurship programmes have been receiving increasing attention from governments, donors and multilateral agencies as an alternative job creation strategy. Given the limited absorptive capacities of existing formal labour markets in the developing world, promotion of youth entrepreneurship and self-employment is one of the few feasible options to create employment opportunities both in the informal and formal economy. Nevertheless, the evidence to support positive impact of entrepreneurship schemes is extremely weak.

Impact evaluations should use a proper counterfactual and seek to answer two fundamental research questions:

1. What are the most effective strategies or combination of strategies for improving income, business development, and employability amongst current or promising young entrepreneurs?
2. What is the best way to ensure the most cost effective delivery of entrepreneurship interventions in these settings?

The evaluators/project teams are encouraged to study the following outcome indicators:

1. Changes in employment.

2. Changes in income or business development (profits, assets, turnover, staff, business networks).
3. Changes in skills and psycho-social outcomes:
 - a. Hard skills
 - Technical: vocational, job search, business acumen
 - Livelihood: savings, financial literacy, productivity
 - b. Life skills:
 - self-efficacy and self-control, ability to express oneself verbally, workplace ethics, leadership, communication.

FUND DESIGN

Intervention strategy

The Fund for Evaluation in Youth Employment employs an iterative strategy of LEARNING-APPLYING-SHARING. The three interlinked but distinct components attempt to cover the entire value chain of the evaluation: (1) building the capacity of practitioners and policy makers to evaluate their programmes, (2) commissioning a series of evaluations which contribute to the evidence base, and (3) sharing results to improve youth employment policies and programmes.



1 - Learning component: YEN Evaluation Clinic

“Evaluation Clinics” are intensive 3-4 day trainings that focus on knowledge sharing and learning between youth employment programmes with the goal of improving current

evaluation practices. The Clinics provide access to specialized knowledge and support via hands-on consultations from evaluation experts while providing a platform to initiate and improve evaluation designs. Learning is facilitated through the application of evaluation concepts and techniques to live case studies. Live case studies are selected through an application process and will be eligible to receive financial support from the Fund. Tangible outputs of the Clinics are draft evaluation concept notes for each live case study.

In addition, youth employment policy makers and practitioners can improve their knowledge on evaluations by participating in YEN's online Evaluation Groupsite and periodic webinars teaching key evaluation concepts.

2 - Application component: Financial support

Project teams that submit a sound evaluation plan following participation in the Evaluation Clinic will be eligible to receive a grant to cover the costs associated with conducting their evaluation. Conducting impact evaluations can be expensive depending on the sample size and the selected evaluation method. The Fund's contribution to the evaluation will range from US\$30,000 to US\$60,000, which in most cases means projects will have to bring in co-funding to supplement the costs. Small to medium sized evaluations are especially encouraged to apply.

3 - Sharing component: Dissemination of results and lessons learned

Better evidence has limited practical value if it is not understood and used to improve policy and programmes. Experience has proven that producing reliable evidence is only the first step towards changing to a culture of evidence based decision making. The challenge will be taking lessons learned from impact evaluations and communicating them in an effective, timely and appropriate manner to practitioners and policy makers.

A major strength of YEN is its access to policymakers responsible for designing and delivering national policy in youth employment. YEN's Lead Country Network will be an important avenue to disseminate results of impact evaluations. YEN's close partnership with the World Bank will provide a platform for wide communication of evidence. An effective strategy of web-based dissemination will also be developed making use of a wide range of web-based fora including YEN's website, the global Youth Employment Inventory and the YEN Evaluation Clinic Groupsite.

Innovation and targeting

The focus on innovation stems from calls from policy makers to propose new solutions to the youth employment challenge. Added selection weight will therefore be given to projects that propose evaluation of innovative or “out of the box” entrepreneurship interventions or evaluation designs.

Direct beneficiaries of the Fund will be Project Managers/Coordinators responsible for evaluating their projects. Participation of research firms and academic institutions is strongly encouraged. Project managers will be accompanied by a taskforce of evaluation specialists who will provide the high level of technical assistance required to conduct an impact evaluation.

SELECTION OF EVALUATIONS

Call for proposals

An annual call for proposals will be launched asking youth employment projects to submit applications to receive support. The inaugural call for proposal will be launched on June 25, 2010. The closing date will be September 7, 2010 and shortlisted proposals will be asked to attend an Evaluation Clinic in late October 2010. Application forms will be available via YEN’s website.

Grant recipients will go through a two stage selection process:

- Stage 1 Shortlist Application: Interested applicants will be asked to submit brief application forms which will provide short details about the project and the scheduled evaluation. The taskforce will shortlist qualified applicants and they will be asked to participate in the next Evaluation Clinic.
- Stage 2 Concept Note: Clinics will serve as a platform for taskforce members to work with evaluation teams to refine and improve their evaluation plans. Within two months after participation in the Clinic, evaluation teams will submit detailed concept notes on the evaluation and cost-benefit analysis plans. The taskforce will

reconvene to review and rate the concept notes and give final grant approval for those proposals deemed ready for evaluation.

Eligibility

Research requirement (see Annex)

Proposed studies must contain prospective and rigorous, experimental or quasi-experimental identification strategies to ensure that programme impact is measured vis-à-vis a valid control/comparison group.

Theme

Supported evaluations will be reserved for interventions in the youth entrepreneurship field whose objectives involve creating self employment opportunities, developing entrepreneurial skills and competences, and counteracting social and financial capital constraints that hinder young entrepreneurship.

Eligible Countries

Sub-Saharan Africa

Working Language

English

Institutions

Applications will be accepted from the following types of institutions:

- NGOs
- Governments
- Research firms
- bi-multi lateral agencies
- Academic institutions

It is strongly encouraged to submit proposals for partnerships between programme/project implementing organizations and research/academic institutions. While implementing organizations provide the subject for study and context, research institutions can bring appropriate study designs, data collection techniques and analysis tools that will complement the evaluation.

Selection criteria

Priority will be given to evaluation proposals that demonstrate the following characteristics:

1. Sound methodological design (use of a control group preferably identified prospectively),
2. Relevance of evaluation question (strength of question for discovering unanswered questions),
3. Innovativeness (in the intervention as well as in the evaluation design),
4. Potential for impact,
5. Quality/experience of technical team, and
6. Strength of dissemination plan (sharing results with youth employment community, policy makers, practitioners, etc).

Costs

Experience suggests that the costs of conducting impact evaluations can be high. Data collection can easily reach 80% of the total evaluation budget. The Fund for Evaluation in Youth Employment seeks to prove that impact evaluations can also be completed with smaller, “shoestring” budgets. Projects with reasonably small sample sizes as well as projects which can offer co-funding are encouraged to apply. Local research institutions and survey firms are an alternative for more affordable data collection processes.

Selection taskforce

Grant recipients will be selected by a small taskforce of evaluation experts. Experts will come from institutions with experience and knowledge on impact evaluation. The taskforce will also act as an extension and advocate of the Fund. Meetings of the taskforce will be organized through tele-services. A high level of commitment and engagement will be required from the taskforce. In some cases, consultants could be employed to serve on the taskforce.

ANNEX: YEN EVALUATION PRINCIPLES

Definitions:

- 1) Impact evaluation assesses the changes that can be attributed to a particular intervention, such as a project, programme or policy. In contrast to outcome monitoring, which examines whether targets have been achieved, impact evaluation is structured to answer the question: how would participants' well-being have changed if the intervention had not been undertaken? This involves counterfactual analysis, that is, "a comparison between what actually happened and what would have happened in the absence of the intervention."
- 2) Cost benefit analysis involves weighing the total expected costs against the total expected benefits of one or more actions in order to gauge the efficiency of the intervention.

Evaluation framework:

- 3) Applications for support must indicate their strategy for development of a control group. A range of methodological options exist to build a counterfactual. These options include both experimental and quasi experimental designs. Further information is provided at <http://go.worldbank.org/7M4NUSKE10>.
- 4) Worthy impact evaluations provide both qualitative and quantitative evidence (mixed method). Qualitative techniques require high levels of participation from stakeholders and include focus groups and open ended surveys.
- 5) The basis of a quality impact evaluation revolves around four key inputs: (1) a logical results chains that indicates measures from inputs to outcomes, (2) a clearly defined evaluation question which serves as the research hypothesis, (3) an appropriate strategy for identifying the counterfactual, and (4) techniques for collecting robust data. The four inputs will serve as the basis for analysis during Evaluation Clinics.

Communicating results

- 6) As important to the production of new evidence, how evaluations will communicate the results of their evaluation should be clearly addressed. This should include dissemination via events, workshop, and websites. It is also envisioned that each completed evaluation will produce “a brief”, which is a simple, easy to read report on the major outcomes, challenges, and lessons learned from the evaluation.
- 7) Engaging policy makers is an important part of dissemination. Special attention will be given to proposals in countries that are members of YEN’s Lead Country Network. Project teams should make attempts to involve policy and government stakeholders in conducting evaluations thereby ensuring an “authorizing environment” has been created.