The YES newsletter: Promoting youth entrepreneurship and skills development
Foreword from Country Director

Peer to peer learning

Promoting youth employability

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A word from the SNV Country Director

It is my pleasure to launch the first YES newsletter highlighting stories from our work with the youth in West Nile. Youth unemployment is a challenge in Uganda, currently standing at 80%. With an estimated 50% of the country’s 35 million people under the age of 15, we cannot afford to sit back. Unemployment is of particular concern in Northern Uganda, which remains the most economically depressed region in the country. The vast majority of youth in Northern Uganda have limited educational opportunities, lack the skills necessary to actively participate in the labour market and remain unemployed.

SNV Uganda, together with local partners AFARD and CEGED are implementing a three-year Youth Employability through Enterprise and Skills development (YES) project in the districts of Nebbi, Arua, Yumbe and Moyo in the West Nile Sub-region of Northern Uganda. The overall objective of this European Union funded project is to reduce poverty by creating sustainable economic opportunities for 5,000 youth (30% female) in West Nile by 2017. This is being done through technical and entrepreneurial skills development, apprenticeship, on-the-job training and coaching for the youth so that they are ready for employment or self-employment. The project is also linking youth to relevant market opportunities and providing on-going coaching and mentoring for employed and self-employed youth.

Jeanette de Regt - Country Director
I like the project name YES. YES is a confirmation of the project’s commitment to get the youth to work hard. Let us do our part and use the support structures to link us. YES, we can do it” Deputy CAO Nebbi Jessica Ogentho

The project has already empowered 2,000 youth to start their own business and generate income within a period of one year.

Aware of the skills gap that many youth grapple with, we entered into partnership with 14 Business, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (BTVETS) institutions to promote internship for the youth. The YES project team developed a set of tools to support internships at the BTVETs and assisted the instructors in supervising the students. Not only did the 300 youth who took part in phase one of the internship programme gain hands-on, practical experience, the principals and instructors in these institutions gained valuable insights regarding the mismatch between the skills offered by their institutions and labour market demands. The institutions have all committed to revising their courses to address the gap.

“I learnt a lot from the internship training. Lessons I picked from the joint supervision will help us revise our course contents and tailor them to the current needs of the job market.” – Orio Wilson, Principal Nile Institute of Management Studies, Arua District.

70 private sector enterprises (PSEs) and nine individuals offered placements for interns.

“Without practical knowledge generated through internships, we are simply raising half-baked students who are useless in the job market. PSEs help us to bridge this gap by offering internship placements for our students and, ultimately, contributing to the strategic plan of providing valuable skills to Ugandans.” – Adubango Meck Jakech, Principal Moyo Technical Institute, Moyo District

This newsletter gives an insight into the programme from the perspective of the youth being supported by the YES project. I would like to thank our partners and the European Union for their contribution towards empowering the youth in West Nile.

Power in peer to peer learning

One of the challenges that was evident at the start of the project was the negative attitude most youth had towards agriculture. Many had tried and failed to yield much in agriculture due to the erratic and unreliable weather patterns.

Furthermore they had no peers that had succeeded in agriculture to mentor them. Youth to youth learning is a peer based approach that seeks to empower groups that have low levels of social capital and are often disenfranchised.
Many young people who participate in the peer support system often become empowered to take ownership of their wellbeing and to take action to address the issues they are encountering, which may contribute to a sense of increased self-worth amongst young people.

The young model farmer (YMF) approach is thus an excellent opportunity for youth to learn from their peers in the agribusiness sector. SNV and its partners trained 33 YMFs as principle trainers to support the rural youth engaged in agriculture. Training covered land preparation, nursery bed preparation, planting and integrated pest and disease management and record keeping. In turn, the YMF were each assigned 29 youth to coach and mentor while the project officers continued to provide backstopping support to the YMFs. The young farmers selected different enterprises ranging from tomatoes, onions, Irish potatoes, cabbage and beans.

By the end of 2015, 1,000 youth farmers had taken up farming as a business and adopted good agronomic practices because of the peer to peer learning and support of their young model farmers.

Sam Amandeku is a young model farmer who lives in Paleure-Pamuru village in Moyo District. He was selected as a young model farmer (YMF) by peers who are involved in cabbage production under the YES project. One of the key roles of a YMF is to help young farmers learn through hands-on experience, rather than theory, the best agricultural practices for good yields and high profit.

"As a YMF, I underwent training in Arua and learnt how to better manage my horticulture business, relate with other community members and many other valuable skills. Various good farming practices, such as how to make and apply manure, proper nursery bed management practices, timely land opening and proper planting techniques were explained to me in a way that made me rethink how I worked. We chose to focus on growing cabbage (our village priority enterprise) and received high-quality cabbage seeds. For the first time I was able to grow 1.5 acres of cabbage in one season. I also invested 288,000 UGX (77 Euros) so I could hire labour and market my
product. My investment and hard work yielded 31.5 bags of cabbage that sold for 2,030,000 UGX (540 Euros).”

Sam bought two cows worth 1.1 million UGX (290 Euros), and two goats worth 120,000 UGX (32 Euros). He reinvested 300,000 UGX (80 Euros) to grow two acres of cabbage and about 70,000 (19 Euros) on materials for constructing a chicken house. From his earnings, he managed to save about 200,000 UGX (53 Euros) in his local savings and credit cooperative organisation) towards the purchase of a pick-up truck which he hopes to won one day.

“Seven of my peers involved in cabbage-growing earned a net income of 500,000 UGX (133 Euros) each in the first season of planting. By sharing our story, I hope that many youth will gain the courage to focus on farming as business.

Your passion determines your success

My name is Brenda Ezabuku and I work for Westnile online; Westnile online is an e-marketing and online advertising platform. This business idea was developed by my brother Caesar Enzama and I. We do business marketing, website design, and bulk SMS among others. Our rates range from a daily online advertising fee of Shs. 2,500 to a monthly rate of Shs. 45,000. Currently the business has daily, monthly and annual clients. In November 2014 we participated in the first Westnile youth business exhibition organised by SNV and our business has never been the same since. We got a lot of business for advertisements from fellow youth who participated in the exhibition and managed to establish a lot of connections. My main message to the youth is that, any business begins with a good idea and not necessarily capital as many youth often think.

Whatever your innovations, let passion drive you, because with passion you will reap Success!

Brenda Ezabuku from Westnile Online
I now farm with clear goals for myself and my business.

Ecima Saviour is a young farmer who lives in Paleure-Pamuru village in Moyo District. Ecima dropped out of school before completing his secondary education because he could not afford to pay school fees. He decided to venture into farming on a subsistence level, knowing that it would only take up about six hours of his time every day. He spent the remainder of his time at the nearby trading centre. “I used to grow traditional food crops along with vegetables on a small scale for cash, from which I would earn an average monthly income of 40,000 UGX (11 Euros). I would save an average of 5,000 UGX (1 Euros) at the end of the month. I spent more time chatting and playing cards with other youth than I did farming,” Ecima said. His total annual investments in all agricultural enterprises rarely exceeded 200,000 UGX (53 Euros) because he relied entirely on his family for labour.

In March 2015 the youth of Paleure-Pamuru were invited to attend a YES project mobilisation meeting at the local parish centre. Ecima decided to attend as well, and it changed his life. “I was convinced by the ideas discussed in the meeting regarding poverty reduction. I do not want to be poor, and I knew that vegetable production was profitable, but for a long time I had ignored this fact. That day this knowledge sunk in and I knew very clearly that I had to act on this opportunity and not let it slip away. I picked the interest expression forms, filled them out and submitted them right away. We chose cabbage for our village,” Ecima recalls.

With guidance from his young model farmer and peers involved in cabbage farming, Ecima gained valuable information and learnt important skills, including how to make manure and use it on his farm, the importance of planting the right crop variety, why timely weeding is critical, how to control soil erosion, proper water conservation techniques and effective pest and disease control practices. The results are visible on Ecima’s healthy and productive farm.

For a youth who admitted to having never set a single goal in his life, Ecima
now has big dreams. "I want to buy my own motorcycle next year so that I can stop borrowing other people’s motorcycles, but before that I want to invest in a spray pump," Ecima adds. To achieve his goal of buying a 3.2 million UGX (850 Euros) motorcycle, Ecima has managed to raise seedlings for planting 1.5 acres of cabbage, from which he is expecting to earn more than 2 million UGX (530 Euros) for the season. He intends to grow another crop for the second season once his first harvest has sold. Ecima has also hired the services of 10 other youths at a cost of 180,000 UGX (48 Euros) for 30 man-days.

"I thank the YES project for supporting us with knowledge, skills and high-quality Baraka F1 cabbage seeds for planting!" a jovial Ecima exclaimed.

Ecima’s impressive cabbage garden attracted the attention of Moyo District officials.

Promoting youth employability

Uganda’s National Development Plan identifies deficits in the supply of skilled labour as one of the most binding constraints to Uganda’s economic growth. The Peace, Recovery and Development Plan for Northern Uganda mid-term review highlighted youth unemployment as a continued driver of conflict, which, if not addressed, could weaken the long-term sustainability and recovery of the North.

The goal of the YES project is to improve access to employment and business opportunities for 5,000 rural and urban youth in West Nile, ages 15-30, who are in and out of school by 2017. This will be achieved by providing relevant business skills linked to technical training and connecting the youth to market opportunities for employment. The project is also bridging the gap between institutional and community based formal and non-formal skills training to enable a more focused and coordinated approach toward relevant skills training, by promoting local ownership and engaging BTVETs, non-state actors and local actors equally in service delivery, with special focus on growing their capacities to design and deliver programming for youth tied to market needs, opportunities and constraints. This will contribute to
the Peace, Recovery and Development Plan’s priority of “supporting provision, piloting and roll out of alternative education such as skills training” by:

- increasing the employability of youth through relevant market-based skills development
- matching skilled youth with market opportunities through employment linkages, on-the-job training and internships
- promoting employment creation through inclusive business development
- creating sustainable youth-led enterprises in relevant and emerging growth sectors by linking them to financial products and providing extended coaching and business development

The project team held four district level meetings between the BTVETs and private sector enterprises to orient and train them on youth mentorship and coaching prior to the launch of the internships programme. The baseline study conducted at the beginning of the project revealed that a number of the institutions were inadequately prepared to manage the internship programme and supervise the interns that were recruited. Subsequently, the project team developed a set of tools to support internships at the institutional level and assisted the instructors in supervising the students. As a result of this support, the principals and instructors at these institutions gained valuable insights regarding the mismatch between the skills offered by their institutions and labour market demands. The project is currently working with 14 BTVETs to carry out entrepreneurship and life skills training using the entrepreneurship and life skills training manual. 28 instructors from the BTVETs were trained to deliver the entrepreneurship and life skills training.
“Without practical knowledge generated through internships, we are simply raising half-baked students who are useless in the job market. Private sector enterprises help us to bridge this gap by offering internship placements for our students and, ultimately, contributing to the strategic plan of providing valuable skills to Ugandans.” Adubango Meck Jakech, Principal Moyo Technical Institute, Moyo District

By the end of 2015, 700 students had benefited from the internship programme and/or entrepreneurship and life skills trainings.

290 youth completed business plans that were developed as part of their training and entered a competition that awarded 100 youth with assorted non-cash prizes to expand their businesses.

Internship exposed me to different agronomic practices

Avako Lillian is a student who is pursuing a certificate in general agriculture from one of the vocational training institutes in Arua. She is one of the youth who participated in internship in 2015. Ayako was taken to NTC Muni Farm for her internship which lasted almost two months. National Teachers College (NTC) Muni Farm is a private owned farm that opened its doors to the YES project as a way of giving back to the community.

On arrival at the farm, the farm manager introduced Ayako to the poultry, piggery, crop and cattle sections within the farm. It soon dawned on her that this was not the theoretical lessons she was taking in her institute but intensive and diverse practical learnings. Furthermore, the farm manager was invested in her learning.

"When Ayako came to the farm, she only had general theoretical knowledge about agriculture which is good but needed to apply it to become a well-rounded agronomist. We kept rotating her from poultry to nursery, to piggery, cattle etc. so that she could build and

Ayako tends to chicken at Muni farm
deepen her knowledge through the practical work,” Acidri Richard Farm manager NTC Muni Farm.

After nearly two months of internship Ayako left the farm confident and better prepared for the job market. “I can now establish and manage a nursery bed, vaccinate poultry, mix feeds in the required ratio for poultry and pigs, and spray animals against tick. I even know how to maintain the required hygiene on a farm. All these lessons were not taught at school. I am grateful for the internship placement.” Avako said.

I made my first furniture during internship

Onzima Raymond is a carpentry student in his final year and one of the 500 final year students targeted under YES project for internship. Like many of his counterparts, Onzima’s capentry course has mostly consisted of theory with occasional practical sessions. “Most of the things we learnt were theoretical. We used to make furniture like stools, chairs only in groups and I did not have much opportunity to prove my own skills as an individual”, Onzima explained.

The YES project has been facilitating linkages between final year students like Onzima to get internship placement so that they get to practice their theoretical learnings. Onzima was linked to Yumbe United Amputees Timber & Furniture supplies for one month of internship. “When Onzima first came to the workshop, he could not read and interpret measurements very well on a tape measure and had never even made any furniture of his own. We taught him about measurements, angle cutting, planning, timber designing and how to making various types of furniture. Where he has reached now he can start his own carpentry workshop and start making money.” Onzima’s Mentor said.

By the time the internship period was over Onzima had made five beds, one table, two stools and one sideboard.
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