



Partnering with Educational Institutions To Support Job Transitions

This knowledge document offers lessons on expanding employability programmes to support school-to-work transitions from universities and technical and vocational training centers (TVETs) in emerging economies. Partnerships are key to these successful and inclusive youth transitions to work. Cases and key lessons are shared to enhance employability support programs through educational institutional partnerships.

Introduction

The Next Economy (TNE) programme helped ambitious young people start registered businesses or get formal sector jobs. This resulted in the majority of the young people having graduated with a post secondary education. The project tested a new model for students within vocational and currently in university training programmes to see whether this approach could increase equity and support better school-to-work transitions.



Approach

TNE project teams in Nigeria, Somalia, and Mali were each asked to identify one educational institution to partner to deliver either the employability or entrepreneurship training and support approach. A budget was allocated to cover the cost of delivery for the selected partner organization as well as the support from the TNE teams. Project teams provided content, supported the educational institution in implementing the new approach, and facilitated access to supplementary project activities, such as internship placements and crowdfunding.

This Learning Document catalogs the process, challenges, and successes of integrating new content within partner educational institutions. It provides a series of small case studies for each partnership, provides a replicable description of the process that was undertaken, and offers key insights and lessons for other practitioners looking to implement a similar approach.



Scaling Employment Impacts Through Educational Partnership

Partnering with Universities and TVETs

Educational institutions prepare young people for work by imparting foundational knowledge and skills relevant to various industries. While they are effective at providing the technical skills required for work, they are often less effective at building confidence and providing adequate support for young people to find the right job or start a successful business. Educational institutions' partnerships with Non Government Organizations (NGOs) can help increase the quality of employability and entrepreneurship training as well as help incorporate new concepts like crowdfunding and access to internships into educational systems.

The initial three partnerships developed demonstrate the range of project activities that occurred as well as some of the challenges of these approaches.

MALI

Improving Entrepreneurship within University Education

L'université de Ségou in Mali worked to allow young people to have access to business creation opportunities. This partnership helped translate academic knowledge and experience into viable businesses. Specific emphasis was placed on opportunities in the agri-food sector, with increased support and competencies to create viable businesses. Success was derived from combining the ambitions of young entrepreneurs with the right combination of both academic and entrepreneurial expertise. While successful in building skills and connections, the partnership highlighted through its own research the need for additional technical and financial support to ensure that young entrepreneurs are better able to succeed.

Partnering on More Equitable Access

Working with Hayle Barise Technical Development Centre, SOS Somalia supported 150 young people to gain access to marketable technical skills with additional employability support provided in parallel. The institution aligned with the project's equity goal, partnering in the recruitment and selection of young people in need. Content development mixed new training skills with the need to maintain alignment with accredited programmes. The cost of vocational training was a challenge requiring the provision of scholarships to ensure that this target group was able to take advantage of this educational opportunity.

Gender Equity and Vocational Training

In Nigeria, the project partnered with the Augustinian Vocational Centre which supports skill development in the Jos region. The partnership was based on a mutual agreement to take ownership of key project material and incorporate it into broader training offerings. While the gender division of participants was not formally specified, the institution was able to reach over 80% female participants. This reflected particular expertise in recruiting young women, providing them the right skills, and creating a safe space for them to learn. Additional collaborations around equity focused on disability inclusion, with the Plateau State Disability Rights Commission (a State Government Agency), and the Joint National Association of Persons with Disabilities (an NGO).

These partnerships proved advantageous for all involved, leading to proposals for potential expansion of these education system partnerships. Young people received additional support, education institutions were exposed to updated curriculum and approaches, and the project found different ways of broadening its target population. Based on the success of these initial partnerships and the approach that was developed, additional partnerships with TVETs were formed in Ibadan, Nigeria and Buroa, Somaliland.

Process

The Educational Partnership Program was a ‘challenge fund’ for country teams to apply for and create complementary partnerships. Once selected, country teams engaged with their selected educational institutions and provided custom support and agreed engagement.



STEP 1

Team Challenge and Application

The national country teams were given an overview of the project aspirations and had to provide a simple application and budget to launch their own project. Key to the selection process was the alignment around the aspirations of both parties, the long term sustainability of the approach, and the agreement on the approach between both institutions.



STEP 2

Educational Institution Selection

The application process was challenging due to the requirement to find the right partner. Though there were many vocational training centers and universities, the national partners sought organizations with established track records, a shared belief about the partnership approach, and an aligned vision around supporting equitable opportunities. Selection was more challenging due to the need to identify the right partner while also following appropriate procurement processes.



STEP 3

Define Partnership and Capacity Strengthening Support

Partnerships with educational institutions varied based on the type of capacity strengthening that was deemed necessary. In all cases, educational instructors were provided an overview and training of curriculum materials. In one case, the vocational educational institution preferred a more equal relationship and sought joint activities. In other contexts, additional support and engagements were jointly agreed and supported by either programme staff or external consultants to further develop and refine the project delivery approach.

Process



STEP 4

Participant Selection

All partnerships had some level of agreement about how they were to identify and select the right groups of young people. In Somalia, where scholarships were provided, the project team worked with the Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutes in the recruitment and selection of candidates to be admitted. In Mali, where there was a greater distance between partners, this responsibility was allocated to the University to complete.



STEP 5

Linking to Participant Support Options

A key benefit for young people was access to both technical skills as well as additional employment or entrepreneurship support. This required engaging with the educational institutions and young people themselves in crowdfunding activities as well as in accessing internship opportunities via the TNE partner companies. This required working closely to integrate training and support functions across organizations.



STEP 6

Learn and Replicate

Partnerships are built on interpersonal relationships. To ensure that the project works, it is important to have clear communication that handles issues that emerge and celebrates key successes when they happen. Build off early success when scaling educational partnerships.

Learning insights and opportunities



Aligned Institutions, few but strong

Developing partnerships with educational institutions requires a strategic approach. This needs to be based on mutual understanding, shared goals, and effective communication. Additional emphasis needs to be placed on factors such as specialization and industry relevance. While educational institutions were plentiful, finding partners with the same values and a similar emphasis on quality was a challenge. Allocating additional time for partnership development is needed to get this right.

Need for resources and financial support to start partnerships

Educational institutions may have aligned values but need financial support to incorporate new concepts or ideas. Initial thinking assumed that these institutions would be able to mainstream project content into their existing activities. Instead, some partners preferred to run TNE activities in parallel to existing training and bring on board new students.

More support on content development and market engagement, rather than just core educational processes

Selecting high quality educational institutions meant that these institutions were already well equipped to run their own technical training programmes. Most value was generated by emphasizing transfer of knowledge on how to build young people's confidence and work readiness skills with instructors. Additionality was also achieved by introducing young people to either companies in the TNE network for jobs or providing opportunities for young people to crowdfund for start up capital.

Gender is a challenge for some, but not all

TVET institutions are often criticized for providing skills that cater to young men (i.e. electrical installation, welding, masonry, and tiling), leading to the exclusion of female participants. However, some TVETs were better equipped to support young women and were able to reach 90% female participation in their projects. By selecting educational partners who understand how to recruit and support young women, more equitable participation can be achieved.

There were benefits for students but hard to attribute between partners

Employability and entrepreneurship programmes are often assessed based on their job creation abilities. Working with educational institutions raises challenges as they are huge contributors to these outcomes. Measuring the impact of these initiatives requires greater emphasis on how to attribute the impact of project partnerships as compared to the results that would have been achieved without the project interventions and partnerships. Due to the brevity of partnerships, this is something that needs to be investigated.



INTERESTED IN SETTING UP PARTNERSHIPS WITH EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS FOR EMPLOYABILITY?

If you would like to learn more about our approach in partnering with educational institutions for employment, or have questions on some of the organizational and methodological details, feel free to reach out to us.

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The Next Economy supports young people in Mali, Somalia, Nigeria and Somaliland to find decent jobs and start businesses. It is implemented collaboratively by 20 civil society and entrepreneurship support organizations, and is funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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