

Misean Cara Learning Brief No. 2021/03

# Supporting employment opportunities and income generation for youth in Southern Africa

Learning from an effectiveness review of projects supporting youth in South Africa and Zambia.



**misean cara**  
Mission Support from Ireland

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, governments in sub-Saharan Africa have been under pressure to create jobs for their growing populations. Africa's population is currently undergoing a 'youth bulge'; that and the associated demographic dividend are two key concepts in "a now dominant narrative that both justifies and orients policy around youth and employment"<sup>1</sup>.

As a result, many programmes have been implemented to bring young people into the labour market, increase their earnings, and/or help them set up a business. However, the majority of these programmes have not been properly evaluated and therefore there has been, to date, limited information available about the types of interventions that work and the reasons why.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Background

In June 2020, Misean Cara commissioned an effectiveness review of six projects supporting employment opportunities and income generation for youth, four in South Africa and two in Zambia. The review, carried out by M&ESURE Research and Evaluation, aimed to deliver a robust, evidence-based assessment of the effectiveness of the selected projects in terms of their design, planning and implementation, and present practical recommendations for improvement within each area.

## 3. Evaluation findings

Through in-depth discussions with each project team, interviews with project participants, and analysis of project documentation, the evaluators concluded that the majority of projects were performing effectively in the areas of project design, planning, and implementation. They highlighted four areas that were seen as contributing to the effectiveness of the projects' work:



Matinde Vehr making a storage box in his woodwork class (Cape Town, South Africa).

## Networking and Collaboration

The evaluators stressed that there is much benefit in establishing strategic partnerships with others researching and working to improve youth employment opportunities and highlighted in their findings that the selected projects had made significant progress in this area. The Assumption Development Centre (ADC) in Makhanda and the Salesian Youth institute Projects (SIYP) in Cape Town both have robust networking and partnerships in their projects' design and implementation. One significant learning arose from the benefit of strategic partnerships such as that of the ADC with Rhodes University and the SIYP with the University of Cape Town (UCT):

- The ADC partnered with the Rhodes Business School to provide on-going support and needs-based training. The ADC brokers opportunities for the enterprises it assists, in addition to assisting with regulatory compliance.
- The SIYP worked with the UCT Occupational Therapy (OT) faculty to enable students to be assessed by post-graduate OT students to identify strengths and weaknesses that will help them prepare for the workplace.

Another significant learning arose from the benefit to project participants from the additional service offerings that stem from robust networking, partnerships and referral systems:

- Acting on feedback from participants, SIYP established links to further education

<sup>1</sup> Mueller, V., Thurlow, J., Rosenbach, G., and Masias, I. 2019. *Africa's Rural Youth in the Global Context* in: *Youth and Jobs in Rural Africa*:

<sup>2</sup> Kluge, J. 2016. *Do youth employment programs improve labour market outcomes? A systematic review*. Ruhr Economic Papers, 648

bodies. This enabled participants to move seamlessly from the project into further education. Additionally, SIYP referral systems support services in identifying young people at risk or being affected by substance abuse (organisations such as the South African National Council on Alcoholism, the Cape Town Drug Counselling Centre and an organisation called Miracle Gugulethu). The project social worker refers students to additional support networks in their communities e.g., state social workers. Parents are referred to attend workshops on parenting skills.

- Arranging talks by organisations that deal with issues of concern to course participants proved extremely beneficial to them (for example partnering with organisations that specialise in addiction counselling). These strategic partnerships bolster the intervention by connecting to the wider support needed to address the multifaceted challenges that project participants can face.

***Youth face multifaceted challenges that impact on the efficacy of social change programmes – robust project partners are essential to provide holistic support and have strong referral systems.***

*Final Evaluation Report, M&ESURE*

## Savings and Credit Groups

Savings and credit groups are widely promoted in the developing world as a mechanism to instil the habit of saving and enable access to financial services such as credit. This is particularly useful for those who need capital to start their own businesses, e.g., students/course graduates that have acquired skills and need to buy their own tools/equipment in order to start generating an income. The consultants highlighted the importance of access to credit and savings as an important component in all projects tackling youth unemployment and allowing income generating activities to flourish. The following is but one example that the consultants highlighted in their findings.

### **Assumption Development Centre Savings and Credit Groups in Makhanda, South Africa**

The ADC launched the Grahamstown Financial Savings and Credit Groups Programme, a community-based savings initiative supplemented with financial education modules, in 2016. In the first year, 233 people participated in 17 savings groups. By the end of 2018, this had grown to 424 people in 33 groups. The Savings and Credit programme has been particularly successful as a number of project participants were able to start and sustain businesses with input and support from the ADC. During Covid-19, the Savings Groups experienced some challenges, particularly with those who lost their incomes after travel and other restrictions came into effect, though previous savings became a lifeline to households. As the ADC Centre Manager commented:

“The Savings Groups have been a huge change in people’s lives. If you save R1000<sup>3</sup> a year, you know you are guaranteed 30% [in interest] at the end of the year. I know a few stories: some people have managed to build a flat and some managed to buy a tombstone for parents, some saved school fees. There are some of the businesses that are part of the savings groups, so they have access to money for the business... We have had 40 groups (467 people) throughout the years. From 2016 until now [they have] saved about R2 million”.<sup>4</sup>

## **Agriculture as a viable business option for youth**

The consultants highlighted that although young people living in urbanised areas will continue to have access to youth centres and vocational educational facilities, their counterparts who live in rural areas will need alternative employment supports. Small-scale agriculture is one of the major potential sources of employment and vocational training has been identified as an effective tool for teaching agricultural skills and providing capacity-building to rural youth. However, these interventions do not always transmit the necessary skills, and so can result in

<sup>3</sup> South African Rand, equivalent to €60/\$70 US

<sup>4</sup> Equivalent to €119,000/ \$144,000 US

poor employment outcomes. Furthermore, most vocational training programmes do not focus enough on farming skills. Research undertaken in Tanzania (2011) showed that out of the 23 vocational centres in rural areas, only three offered training connected to the agricultural sector. According to one author, in Malawi, none of the vocational centres provide agricultural training.<sup>5</sup>

The evaluators highlighted how Misean Cara funded projects are focussed on this issue. In Zambia, the Valponasca Learning Farm project implemented by the Salesian Sisters is working with existing farmers and empowering them to be role models and mentors for young people that show an interest in farming as a career. A change of attitude from seeing farming merely as a subsistence activity is essential, and young people are realising that they can run a farm as a profitable business. In the rural projects evaluated, the consultants observed that youth were able to access information from existing farmers and become competent farmers themselves; they have been able to enlarge the size of cultivated land and improve their livelihoods.

Valponasca Learning Farm provides a practical example where students see the potential for agriculture-based livelihoods by learning on the farm and from a network of farmers.



**Agricultural training – blending theory and practice at Valponasca Learning Farm in Luwingu, Zambia.**

Stephen Simasiku (pictured) is a government official in the Ministry of Agriculture in Luwingu. He visits farmers and trains them in agricultural practices. It was during one of his institutional visits to the Valponasca Learning Farm (VLF) that he started imagining himself as a farmer, to supplement his salary. Returning to his almost abandoned family land, he decided to start with chicken farming and approached VLF for 20 chicks. Subsequently, Stephen expanded his business by acquiring a pair of goats from VLF. Before long, the goats were multiplying, and he employed young people to manage the increasing activities at his farm. He introduced them, and a young neighbour who is also a farmer, to VLF to expose them to broader farming practice.

VLF was his model, the source of his resources and the reference point for his training. He says it was a good experience: like a full agriculture course in small bite-size pieces of practical sharing. At this point, he could declare with full satisfaction: “My enterprises are growing because of [VLF]”. Now Simasiku runs a successful farm that is disseminating ideas, know-how, resources and is a model farm for many others. He is full of passion of his work and is able to share success stories to convince other farmers that agriculture can be much more than just a means of survival.



*A field visit to a farmers' group to observe the adaptation of improved farming methods (Luwingu, Zambia).*

<sup>5</sup> Girard, P. 2017. *How can agriculture contribute to youth employment? Insights for a strategy for Southern Africa*. Montpellier: CIRAD – GovInn.

## Dedicated staff supporting employment and entrepreneurship

A dedicated staff member who is liaising with industry to arrange job placements for students, and who acts as a line of feedback from industry, was noted by the evaluators as an essential mechanism to enhance effectiveness.

The benefits of employment placement include both access to work experience and subsequent employment of project participants, but also the development of feedback loops with the training institute where the institute can routinely evaluate the training provided in line with industry needs and increase the relevance of training and overall student outcomes. In four of the six projects evaluated, the inclusion of a work placement officer or additional support of this nature was highlighted as a key component in their success

The Don Bosco Delft Skills Training Centre in Cape Town has a placement officer who liaises with industry for placements of students in jobs. While a key requirement for employment is often that the applicant has prior work experience, this can be a barrier to youth employment. Close liaison with industry can address this barrier by lobbying on behalf of project participants and engaging the company in question as a partner to the project. A placement officer can provide feedback from companies on how the content of training courses can be better tailored to the skills required by in the workplace.



The Salesian Sisters Don Bosco Skills Training Centre is the only one of its kind in the Delft township (Cape Town)

In the Don Bosco Youth Reach Out project in Zambia, the role of the Job Services Officer (JSO) at each training centre is to place students in various companies for work placements. The intention is that the JSOs form a feedback link between the training centres and local businesses, as well as following up with graduates to determine whether they remain economically active post-training.

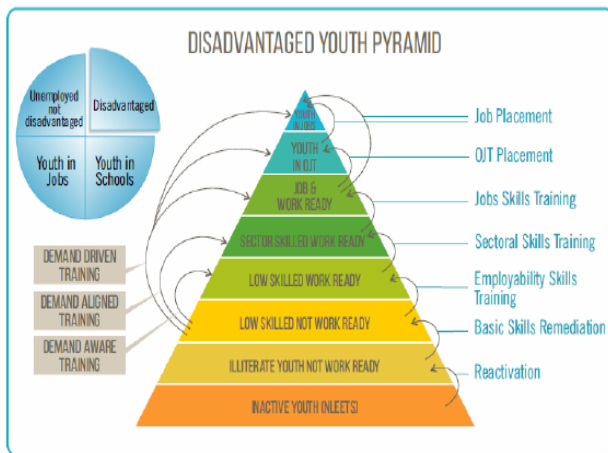
## 4. Recommendations

The evaluators set out project-level recommendations that were related to improving the effectiveness of project design, planning and delivery. Overall, the evaluation found that the majority of projects were performing at a high standard in the areas of project design, planning, and implementation. The evaluation concluded that the project teams were being effective in reaching targeted groups and in bringing significant positive change to the lives of project participants.

The tracking of graduates arose as a critical component in obtaining outcome-related data. It can provide valuable insight into the impact of the project, and in closing the feedback loop from graduates that can be used by training providers to improve their courses. It was recommended that the projects formalise their tracking of graduates (to tie in with the development of their M&E systems) in order to obtain stories of change to use in outcome reporting. These narratives would complement quantitative data and speak to the wider benefits to the project participants' families and communities.

## Linking project design to appropriate target groups

The evaluators proposed the use of a highly differentiated framework in the approach to project design, allowing for the different categories of young people seeking employment. This framework also shows a hierarchical understanding of which training programmes should be targeting which category (Not in Education, Employment or Training - NEETS, illiterate youth, low skilled, etc.). The types of training activities should be very clearly linked to these needs.



The Disadvantaged Youth Pyramid - Making Cents International. 2017. *Scaling demand-driven training programs: A framework*. New York: The Rockefeller Foundation.

All projects had a form of needs assessment but recommendations relating to updating these included:

- expanding the scope of the needs assessment in terms of matching project participant needs to data and interviews relating to local economic context (identifying possible pathways for employment/livelihoods);
- planning and implementing future needs assessments in terms of including more direct feedback from project participants particularly in terms of the challenges they face in accessing employment/income generation post-graduation.

Projects where and changing contexts (such as the impact of COVID-19) are not adequately taken into account, will result in undesirable outcomes, such as high drop-out rates or low recruitment rates. Therefore, it is critical that projects are clear during design and planning as to who should be targeted with what type of training programme and what the expected results of these programmes will be.

## Advocacy for changes that benefit youth employment and income generation

Across the six projects, limited advocacy-related activities were reported to be taking place. The evaluators advised that projects should focus on advocacy relating to employment opportunities and income generation for young people and are in

a unique position to do so as a result of their long term presence in the areas and good relationships within communities. The consultants provided examples of potential barriers to youth employment opportunities that project teams could help address by building advocacy into the project planning framework. For instance, in the areas of small business development and entrepreneurship, the regulatory environment may be very restrictive with long periods of time and careful discussions needed to establish a business. Organisations implementing similar projects can work together and lobby governments to make policy changes. Organisations can also advocate for governments to incentivise businesses (such as IT companies) to reduce the outsourcing of their services to overseas companies and to set up local infrastructure from which to service international clients (such as tax incentives or amendments to labour law requirements). This can result in a greater demand for local skills (ranging from entry-level to more advanced). In this way, the skills demand side is also being addressed (and not only the supply side). These should be targeted in parallel to ensure an equal balance between skills supply and demand.

## Project Design, Monitoring and Evaluation – Maximising Impact

The consultants made the following recommendations for consideration when planning any project focussing on youth employment opportunities. It is important to consider the entire project cycle early on (including activities after the conclusion of the project).

### 1. Project Design

#### Update the needs assessment

Projects should carry out an updated needs assessment in order to ensure that their training courses continue to best serve the needs of the youth (particularly as these needs may have changed in the context of COVID-19).

#### Build project participant tracking and feedback systems

Projects should, where relevant:

- formalise the tracking of graduates to ensure that evidence is collected on

outcome levels via a mechanism to obtain valuable feedback from graduates.

- Stories of Change should be collected as examples of how project participants have benefited from participation.

### **Formalise programme review and reflection**

Projects should set aside time for more formalised processes of project reflection and review, and document the lessons learnt for dissemination and use throughout the organisation. This is particularly important in adjusting subsequent project activities to take account of changing economic contexts affecting employment opportunities for young people (economic crises or public health emergencies for example).

## **2. Project Planning**

### **Set realistic/ feasible objectives**

Projects should re-assess aspects related to budget and timeframes to determine whether their objectives are realistic and feasible, based on identified challenges and risks and the existing knowledge and capacities of participants (low literacy rates for example).

### **Improved staff capacity**

Projects should be cognisant of the implications of project-related changes on their staff capacity. This relates to (amongst others):

- Undertaking assessments of workloads (of, for example, social workers) to identify whether additional support is required for staff to best support young people in gaining employment and income generation.
- Mapping referral pathways for young people and planning for any necessary staffing requirements (e.g. referring students to social workers for psycho-social support)
- providing sufficient opportunities for the strengthening of teams and key positions to continually engage in the areas of youth employment and income generation.

## **3. Project Delivery**

### **Enhance partnerships and collaborations**

Projects should continue to enhance their partnerships and networks with:

- relevant employment sectors, as these ensure that training is relevant to the needs of potential employers and enables employment possibilities and linkages for students.
- the relevant Sector Education Training Authorities and other partnerships that could allow access to existing accreditation without organisations having to go through the process themselves.

### **Refocus programming**

Projects should, where relevant:

- Ensure that their training capacity is adequate, and that training is provided to the optimal number of students. This includes ensuring that students are drawn from targeted communities.
- Investigate the possibility of new projects to increase success in project outcomes/focus areas (e.g. income generation, employment etc.)
- Ensure that the selection criteria for training participants are not too broad - to enable specific targeting of those most in need of support.

***“Enhancing partnerships and collaborations; increasing staff capacity; building project participant tracking systems; and updating the needs assessments should feature prominently to maximise impact and lead to long lasting change to project participants”***

*Final Evaluation Report, M&ESURE*

## Projects included in the review

Location	Project Title	Organisation
South Africa	Tsholofelo Skills Project, Rustenburg	De La Salle Brothers
South Africa	Integrated project for underqualified school-leavers	Missionary Sisters of the Assumption
South Africa	Life and Practical Skills training for unemployed youth	Salesians of Don Bosco
South Africa	Don Bosco DELFT Training Centre project	Salesian Sisters
Zambia	Improving access and quality of education for marginalised children, youth and women	Salesian Sisters
Zambia	Formation and certified seeds to improve agriculture and better living conditions of rural population	Salesians of Don Bosco

Table 1: List of projects reviewed

## About Misean Cara

Established in 2004, Misean Cara is an international and Irish faith-based missionary development organisation made up of 88 member organisations working with some of the most marginalised and vulnerable people in over 50 countries in the Global South. Adopting a human rights focus, we support communities addressing basic needs in the areas of education, health, and livelihoods, as well as advocating for economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights. At times of humanitarian crisis, the trusted and long-term presence of missionaries in affected communities allows for rapid, efficient and targeted responses.

Our Strategy 2017-2021 identifies five goals:

- Uphold the right to quality education
- Uphold the right to better health, clean water and sanitation
- Uphold the right to sustainable livelihoods
- Uphold and advocate for human rights
- Enhance and promote the missionary approach to development.

Further expressing our desire to reach the most vulnerable and marginalised, the Strategy sees Misean Cara bringing a particular focus to bear on targeting five groups: women, children, refugees, displaced people and people with disabilities.

Misean Cara gratefully acknowledges the funding support of Irish Aid.



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