



Evaluation Summary



International
Labour
Office

Evaluation Unit

Support to the youth employment network secretariat 2010-2012 - Mid Term Evaluation

Quick Facts

Countries: *Inter-regional*

Mid-Term: *May 2012*

Mode of Evaluation: *independent*

Technical Area: *Employment Policy*

Evaluation Management: *EMP/POL*

Evaluation Team: *Ella Haruna, Ellie Curtain and Carlos Gonzalez*

Project Code: *GLO/10/02/SID*

Donor: *Sweden -*

Keywords: *Youth Employment, employment creation*

Background & Context

The Youth Employment Network is a partnership of United Nations, International Labour Organisation, and World Bank, created in 2001 as a global platform to prioritise youth employment on the development agendas and to exchange on policies and programmes to improve employment opportunities for youth. The mandate of YEN derives from the Millennium Summit Meeting at the UN in September 2000, where heads of state committed “to develop and implement strategies that give young people everywhere a real chance to find decent and productive work”.

The Network includes development agencies, governments, the private sector, youth groups and other NGOs and is managed by a permanent Secretariat hosted by ILO in Geneva. Additionally, the Secretariat has a regional office for West Africa based in Dakar, Senegal¹. The Secretariat presently comprises six staff members and is supervised by a steering committee consisting of the three senior management representatives of YEN’s core agency partners (WB, ILO and UNDESA).

In its first seven years, YEN focused on awareness rising, advocacy and capacity building for youth organisations. It laid the groundwork for increased inter-governmental recognition that youth employment is essential for reaching the Millennium Development Goals. Since 2008, partners have increasingly asking for technical guidance on how to monitor and evaluate their youth employment initiatives, leading to a revised network focus.

Present Situation of Project

At present, YEN’s key areas of focus are: policy advice; evaluation; innovation; and partnerships, implemented through the following services:

- Advising governments and other relevant stakeholders on designing, implementing and monitoring youth employment policies and programmes.

¹ Although the closure of this office is presently under consideration.

- Implementing pilot projects on youth employment and sharing lessons learned with the network.
- Facilitating cooperation among partners from the network and sharing good practices among countries.
- Sharing knowledge on youth employment issues.
- Building capacity of youth organisations as advocates and implementing agencies.
- Mobilising resources for youth employment activities.

YEN's present deliverables include **The Lead Country Network and Benchmarking Exercise** (a 19 country network supporting data collection on youth employment for policy advice); **YEN Evaluation Clinics** (eight held since 2008 building M&E capacity in youth-serving organisations); Laboratory for Innovation and Youth Participation, also called the **Youth to Youth Fund** (currently funding seven youth-led projects in Sierra Leone and sixteen in Guinea); and the **YEN Marketplace** website (targeting youth employment practitioners and young entrepreneurs).

Purpose, Scope and Clients of the Evaluation

The purpose of this midterm evaluation is to establish the progress that the Sida/YEN project has made in the first half of its third phase, to identify what has worked well and where there is scope for improvement, and to derive success factors and lessons learned that can be applied looking forward.

The evaluation covers the period from April 2010 to December 2011 and is limited to the Sida supported YEN project in this phase only. The primary audience for this report is the YEN Secretariat, the core partners and Sida, although the wider audience includes other donors providing support to YEN in other areas, such as DANIDA.

The evaluation focuses on activities on youth employment undertaken by a wide-range of partners that are funded by Sida/YEN, as follows:

- The **Lead Country Network** and the work under the **Benchmarking Exercise**, including review of

YEN's support to three Lead Countries (Syria, Jamaica and Ghana).

- The work of YEN under the **Youth to Youth Fund** in Guinea and Sierra Leone, including the YEN West Africa Office.
- The YEN **Evaluation Clinics** from the perspective of selected participants and resource people.
- Review of the YEN **Marketplace** website focused on partners and potential users.

In addition, this evaluation also focused on YEN's resource mobilisation efforts and assessed the performance of the Secretariat itself.

Methodology of Evaluation

To effectively inform future strategy, particularly with the assessment regarding YEN's future, the evaluation team sought to be systematic and objective. To assess progress and results of the Sida/YEN project, pinpoint its strengths and identify areas for further improvement, the evaluation addressed the following criteria: relevance and strategic fit; project design; project progress; efficiency of resource use; project management; impact and sustainability.

The criteria informed the development of an analytical evaluation framework and additional questions, which guided the evaluation process. As a forward-looking evaluation, the team sought to evaluate not just the performance of the Secretariat but identify recommendations for the future of YEN.

This desk-based evaluation was conducted using the following methods:

- **Stakeholder Interviews:** 11 face to face interviews were undertaken with the YEN Secretariat and ILO Geneva staff during the initial briefing visit, followed by a total of 35 telephone/Skype interviews with YEN field staff, YEN core partners, selected direct beneficiaries and donors.
- **Document Review:** The evaluation team reviewed a total of 34 documents, these included: YEN project documents submitted and approved by Sida; deliverable-specific documents and publications; quarterly and annual reports to the YEN Steering Committee.

- **Review of Beneficiary Tracer Survey Analysis:** The team reviewed the summarised findings of the Beneficiary Tracer Survey², distributed to and completed by 420 selected beneficiaries of YEN's Lead Country Network, Youth to Youth Fund and Evaluation Clinics (28% response rate).

Without the benefit of field visits to triangulate findings, the evaluation was dependent upon the availability of key documents and access to key stakeholders who were also willing and available to take part.

Main Findings & Conclusions

Relevance and Strategic Fit: YEN's primary contribution to the global crisis of youth unemployment has been towards a knowledge base on what works, and more importantly what does not. By scaling back on their original range of activities, the Secretariat has in recent years identified well-defined, tangible products which feed the knowledge base. YEN has successfully brought together relevant actors, and directly involved youth in their activities. Since the conception of the partnership in 2001, interest and investment in youth employment has increased exponentially. Due to issues of scale the Secretariat's catalytic effect on the YE agenda may have diminished. However YEN is still distinctive in combining a YE focus and practitioner-led approach and the coordinating role of the Secretariat is valued given the abundance of actors working on the issue.

Project Progress: The Lead Country Network (LCN) is YEN's most long-standing output, with a streamlined process and recommitment by member countries in 2009. The LCN appears to have decreased in relevance since its inception and needs to evolve in order to increase its impact. The network is somewhat stagnant and motivation wanes after events, with sporadic participation in both the Benchmarking Exercise and the meetings.

The **YEN Evaluation Clinics** have had some 300 participants from MENA and Sub-Saharan Africa

² To note: the survey covered both activities and timeframes beyond the scope of this evaluation.

regions, and receive positive feedback. The web-based tool that complements the Clinics is useful; a competitive seed funding component incentivises organisations and drives results. The Clinics product has fine-tuned its services over time and is the product that Core Partners consider most significant.

The evaluation period of April 2010 to December 2011 corresponds with the outreach, selection and initial implementation of the **Youth to Youth Fund (Y2YF)** rounds in Guinea and Sierra Leone. As early as the midterm evaluation of the Guinea Projects (July 2011), many projects were showing excellent progress and generating concrete improvements to the lives of the beneficiaries. A robust M&E system is one of the Y2YF's most celebrated achievements; however this is also linked to questions as to the feasibility of scaling up the Y2YF.

The **YEN Marketplace** represents a good effort to respond to demand³ and create a gateway between different organisations, experts and youth. With design complete, next steps will include driving traffic to the site in substantial numbers, moderating into a lively, engaging resource and trouble-shooting of inevitable teething problems. The YEN logframe gives an indicator for this output of "four new partnerships per year"⁴ but this is unlikely to be achieved within the remaining months of Sida support.

Resource Mobilisation: For a decade YEN was fortunate to secure core funding for the Secretariat from Sida, despite Sida's reservations that fixed costs should be covered by the Core Partners themselves. To date no external donor has been identified to replace Sida and a lack of donor interest has limited the progression of some products such as the LCN. In contrast a strong pool of donors has been established to support the Y2YF and the Evaluation Clinics. The Secretariat has submitted proposals or held informal talks with 21 potential donors during the evaluation period with a good success rate (one third of submissions).

³ From organisations, young entrepreneurs and other actors for access to information, funding and support.

⁴ Between donors, NGOs, private companies and youth organisations.

Project Management: The Secretariat is commended for having shrunk alongside their funding constraints in order to devote more resources to outputs, rather than maintenance of staff costs. The performance of the manager is critical to the success of YEN; both the current and former manager – whilst offering different management styles and abilities – are considered to be of high quality. The Secretariat’s shift uniting them behind four key marketable products, with an emphasis on delivering results to clients, enabling it to operate like a non-profit consultancy company. Some respondents found this a smart strategy for sustainability, enabling the Secretariat to be flexible and responsive. Others found the Secretariat’s status as an autonomous ‘NGO’ residing within a UN agency problematic.

Partnership is central to the existence and delivery channels of YEN. Whilst Core Partner views on performance are overwhelmingly positive, there is some concern on the *relevance* of the Secretariat going forward. YEN is said to have shifted course in a way that fits well with Bank priorities, and as a grantee of its Global Partnership for Youth Employment (GPYE) it is seen as a good catalyst. ILO has perhaps the closest but most complex relationship with YEN, whilst UNDESA works less closely with the YEN Secretariat than the other partners, and describes its contribution as ‘minimal’. Widening of the core tri-partite partnership could revitalise the agency partnership function of YEN.

In terms of **Sustainability** the pressing issue raised by respondents was the future of the Secretariat itself. The 2010 Sida proposal stated that the YEN Secretariat is a temporary structure that will work as long as it 1) has a mandate from its core agency partners; 2) there is demand for its services; and 3) external funding is available. There are therefore two issues to be addressed: Financial Sustainability of the YEN Secretariat and Strategic Relevance of YEN/the YEN Secretariat.

2. The YEN Secretariat should continue to promote the Clinics, enhance the service and adapt them to regional needs.
3. The YEN’s Marketplace has been carefully designed and rigorously tested but intensive maintenance and moderation by assigned staff is still needed.
4. Regarding the Y2YF, nine months is considered too short a time period for implementation.
5. In the remaining project period the YEN Secretariat should continue its efforts to replace the Sida funding through: securing replacement funds from an external source (i.e. a bi-lateral donor); obtaining buy-in from the Core Partners to cover staff costs⁵; recruiting a new Core Partner willing to fund Secretariat core costs; Winning two or more large projects with management time built in.
6. The financial survival of YEN Secretariat – a tiny team working extremely hard to deliver on existing commitments – would be enhanced by greater engagement by the Core Partners in fundraising approaches by the Secretariat⁶.
7. In addition to the questions of financial viability, the YEN Steering Committee will need to evaluate the strategic relevance of the partnership and renew the YEN Secretariat mandate for a further time period⁷. A Retreat should be held to set the vision for the way forward from 2012 in order to refine the YEN (Secretariat’s) ‘theory of change’ and streamline the YEN logical framework for a new project period.
8. The niche of the YEN Secretariat is to continue to pilot, incubate and graduate YEN products with an emphasis on testing and documenting what works in youth employment.

Recommendations & Lessons Learned

1. The LCN should be strengthened, evolved or wound down – in its current form it is not fulfilling its capacity as a vibrant network and peer learning mechanism.

⁵ At a figure of approximately US\$500,000 per annum.

⁶ Specifically the less formal networking type approach rather than proposals submitted through formal channels.

⁷ Or request the Secretariat to embark on an exit/transition plan to wind down the partnership and/or the Secretariat.