



*Technical Brief:*

# YOUTH ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

**The International Youth Foundation (IYF) expands youth economic opportunities through access to market-responsive skills, services, and linkages.** We support young people so they can meet their basic needs and secure decent jobs or start their own businesses.

We do this through programming in Workforce Development and Employment, Entrepreneurship and Social Entrepreneurship, and Livelihoods and Financial Inclusion. These solutions allow us to meet youth where they are and address high-level goals related to employment and decent work, economic growth, and poverty alleviation.

**IYF stands by, for, and with young people.** We believe all young women and men possess the potential to control their economic futures. We also know that economic opportunities are not equitably distributed among young people. Not all youth have the same access to credit and savings, employment, or entrepreneurship opportunities. As a result, far too many young people, often for reasons beyond their control, cannot create the lives they desire for themselves and their families.

## THREE SOLUTIONS

IYF knows from 30+ years of experience that the key to expanding economic opportunities for young people requires an understanding of how market opportunities, financial systems, the private sector, youth partnerships, and education align with young people's preferences and aspirations. We expand youth economic opportunities through three solutions:



**1. Workforce development  
and employment**



**2. Entrepreneurship and  
social entrepreneurship**



**3. Livelihoods and  
financial inclusion**

IYF creates economic opportunities through social inclusion and gender equitable approaches, promotes youth agency and engagement, and works with system stakeholders to ensure that systems better meet the needs of young people. Underlying these solutions is the fact that young people know the challenges they face best and play an essential role in making those solutions work.





## 1. Workforce development and employment

**We equip young people with the knowledge and skills needed for employability and connect them with employment opportunities.**

We work with local partners, such as Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutes, to strengthen capacity through revised curricula, improved pedagogy, and training opportunities in life skills, technical skills, and employability skills.

Life skills help young people recognize and manage their emotions, establish positive relationships, make responsible decisions, solve challenges, and set and achieve goals. IYF's workforce development initiatives strengthen these skills through our signature Passport to Success® life skills curriculum.

IYF's systems change work focuses on creating an enabling environment to prepare youth for employment, helping them advance in their careers, and working with both youth and employers to create fulfilling employment opportunities. This involves improving hiring and recruitment practices, reducing context-specific barriers to employment, and creating equitable workplace policies.

### How We Do It

- » Labor Market Research
- » Life, Technical, Sector-Specific Skills
- » Career Guidance & Job Placement
- » Employer Engagement
- » Mentorships & Internships
- » TVET & Educational Institution Strengthening
- » Curriculum Development
- » Skills Mismatch Alignment

### RESULTS:

Increased employment & decent work



## 2. Entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship

**We enable the creation and growth of youth innovations, businesses, and enterprises.**

As the youth population continues to surpass job growth in many countries, expanding entrepreneurship opportunities for young people becomes more critical than ever before. Sometimes, this involves supporting young people to increase their incomes through self-employment or by starting their own businesses. Other times, we support young entrepreneurs to develop and run organizations that address a host of complex challenges, including climate change and health.

The young entrepreneurs we work with build skills in creative thinking, personal leadership, negotiation, risk-taking, and decision-making. IYF helps develop and cultivate networks of entrepreneurs as they grow their enterprises, seek funding, and consider mentoring others. We also support access to market opportunities by increasing market accessibility and assisting entrepreneurs to market their skills.

### How We Do It

- » Market Research
- » Social Entrepreneurship Bootcamps
- » Entrepreneurship & Leadership Skills
- » Partnership Development
- » Mentorships
- » Professional Networks
- » Access to Finance
- » Market Linkages

### RESULTS:

Enterprise development & growth



## 3. Livelihoods and financial inclusion

**We support youth in securing basic needs through income generation and access to credit and savings.**

We believe all pathways to economic growth start with financial education and access. We work with local partners to provide financial education and support access to savings, finance, and assets, including working through village savings and loan groups and micro-finance institutions. We increase the number of financially literate young people, creating new opportunities for both youth and their communities.

Our livelihoods programming assists youth to secure basic needs by generating income through agriculture and off-farm activities. For young people with limited access to education and resources, we offer context-specific market research and support for income-generating activities and/or micro-enterprise development and growth. To complement this work, we offer demand-driven life and entrepreneurial skills training. In addition, IYF partners with local organizations to ensure community-led, holistic approaches are taken to help youth become more resilient.

### How We Do It

- » Life and Technical Skills
- » Financial Education
- » Business Development Skills
- » Savings & Loans Groups
- » Support Networks
- » Industry Association Linkages
- » Market Linkages

### RESULTS:

Economic stability & resilient communities

*Our solutions, aligned with the Positive Youth Development Framework, ensure that youth play an active role in identifying their goals and determining how they can best be accomplished. We facilitate the strengthening of youth assets, competencies, and agency, and work with local partners and communities to support and sustain these changes. See our Youth Engagement Technical Brief for more information.*

## IYF'S APPROACH: PREPARING, CONNECTING, BUILDING & STRENGTHENING

To address the challenges youth face, IYF uses equitable and inclusive market-led approaches. We start by partnering with young people and with businesses to understand market demand and identify which skills young people must develop to secure the jobs they want.

We ensure these needs are effectively translated, communicated, and met—working with education and training providers, the private sector, and young people themselves to deliver in-demand skills and competencies. Together with young people, we assess what aspirations they have, what skills they need to reach their goals, and what barriers they face. At every step, we work with and through local partners who are best equipped to respond to unique local challenges. Simultaneously, we strengthen national workforce development systems and promote inclusive businesses so that young people can develop professionally within a sustainable and welcoming environment.

### *Case Study:*

#### **HIGH GEAR**

The National Association of Automotive Component and Allied Manufacturers (NAACAM) and the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) are the lead national partners of High Gear, an exciting initiative managed by IYF that is advancing South Africa's public TVET college system. High Gear draws on industry knowledge and skills imperatives—along with IYF curricula enhancement tools—to strengthen the market relevance of select public TVET college courses. The program was launched in 2019 and runs through 2024.

Ultimately, High Gear aims to demonstrate a model for greater industry involvement in TVET course design and delivery that generates enthusiasm from TVET educators and industry, while also generating positive returns for young people and employers.

The UK Government's Skills for Prosperity Programme is funding High Gear implementation in KwaZulu-Natal Province, and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation are funding implementation in Eastern Cape Province.



All three funding partners are supporting High Gear's national stakeholder engagement and learning efforts. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), with funding from the Government of Japan, have also co-funded High Gear's development of an online career experience platform called Yakh'iFuture (Build Your Future).

# IYF'S ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY TOOLKIT

IYF's record of success in promoting economic opportunity for youth includes tested, innovative solutions.

- » **Highly experiential life skills curricula** like [Passport to Success](#) (PTS)<sup>®</sup> and [PTS Traveler](#)—an online, game-based skills course—with units on Effective Work Habits, Entrepreneurship, and Financial Education, among others.
- » **Workforce readiness curricula and tools**, such as the *My Career, My Future* curriculum and our Job Placement toolkits.
- » **Social entrepreneurship curricula** including our YouthActionNet<sup>®</sup> curriculum and Social Innovation Bootcamp.
- » **Tools for addressing gender and social inclusion in curriculum design** to achieve equal access and equitable outcomes.
- » **Tools and models for strengthening organizational capacity** tailored for TVET institutes and other educational institutions.
- » **Tools and processes for engaging employers** to align skills to market demand and promote youth-friendly workplaces.
- » **Evidence-based measurement and learning systems** for program learning, evaluation, and adaptation.



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## IYF'S FOUNDING PRINCIPLES

Regardless of where or in which sector we are working, IYF's founding principles underpin everything we do to connect young people with opportunities to transform their lives:



**We engage young people as integral partners** in program design and implementation, incorporating their input and ideas from the outset. We support employees and employers to ensure the jobs young people secure are safe, productive, and pay a fair income.



**We partner for success at scale.** As an ecosystem connector and convener, IYF ensures the goals of corporations, foundations, multilateral organizations, local leaders, communities, and young people are aligned and that solutions address the real needs of youth.



**We work with and through local actors**, supporting on-the-ground partners who are uniquely equipped to respond to local challenges. We work with local partners to strengthen national workforce development systems.



**We advance Gender Equity and Social Inclusion.** IYF takes concrete measures to counteract youth marginalization. We promote personal agency and economic opportunity. We work to elevate the voices of all young people and ensure young people can be active, engaged members of society.



**We measure impact and share what we learn with organizations worldwide.** Our work is rooted in effective performance measurement, evaluation, research, and learning (MERL). We use data to assess progress, to inform course adjustments, and to maximize project impact.

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