

Implementing an Impact Evaluation: Best Practices and Lessons Learned from a Youth Livelihood Program in Kenya

Written by the International Youth Foundation



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WHY EVALUATE?

Particularly in today's resource-constrained environment, it is essential to measure the effectiveness and efficiency of youth development programs. Such impact evaluations also generate the knowledge we need to better manage projects and identify successful models for replication. Unfortunately, many such initiatives, including those promoting youth livelihood opportunities, remain poorly documented, and few have been rigorously evaluated, especially in developing countries.

Moreover, over the past five years, the *Global Partnership for Youth Employment* (GPYE) has focused on building and

disseminating evidence on youth employment outcomes and effective programs to help address the challenges facing young people transitioning to work. One such initiative was the Ninaweza program in Kenya, launched in 2011 with support from the World Bank and Microsoft. A comprehensive youth employability training program, the Ninaweza program targeted young women, ages 18 to 35, from the informal settlements around Nairobi. At its conclusion, the program had reached 530 young women with skills training in Information and Communications Technology (ICT), on-the-job training through internships, and job placement support. A randomized

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The concept of impact evaluations is new to youth and needs to be clearly explained to potential participants before they apply so they understand there is only a 50/50 chance of participating in the program.

— ACWICT
Program Officer

Established in 2001, the African Centre for Women, Information and Communications Technology (ACWICT) promotes women's access to and knowledge of ICT as tools for social, economic, and political advancement. Since 2007, ACWICT, in partnership with IYF, has been implementing a number of youth empowerment programs in Kenya that are aimed at improving the employment prospects of young women living in the informal settlements of Nairobi.



Partnering with an external evaluation firm allows the implementing organization to concentrate on executing a quality program.

— ACWICT
Executive Director,
Constantine Obuya

controlled trial was conducted in which half of the program participants received training in life skills in addition to the interventions previously mentioned. The evaluation was designed to test the impact of this comprehensive program model on the employability and income-generation of youth. A third group of participants who received no intervention served as the comparison group.

Impact evaluations of youth employment programs can be challenging for implementing organizations. For example, how can organizations balance adherence to strict protocols for impact evaluations while continuing to implement a quality program? Featured here are the experiences and learnings gained by the International Youth Foundation (IYF) and its implementing partner organization, the African Centre for Women, Information and Communications Technology (ACWICT) in Kenya, while conducting the impact evaluation of the Ninaweza program. This *Best Practice Note* offers the following key recommendations for how youth-serving organizations can effectively plan and implement such evaluations.

EVALUATION DESIGN & METHODOLOGY

The essence of an impact evaluation is the ability to attribute cause and effect between a set of activities and some outcome(s). In the case of Ninaweza, the impact of ACWICT/IYF's training intervention on the employment outcomes of young, Kenyan women was being evaluated. Demonstrating this causal relationship requires two central pieces:

1. Creating the counterfactual: While we can know and measure the outcomes for the treatment population, it is also necessary to do the same for the non-treatment population. Creating this comparison group allows us to answer the counterfactual question of "what would have happened to beneficiaries in the absence of the intervention?" With this

answered, we can estimate the impact of the intervention by comparing the outcomes of the counterfactual (control) group to that of the intervention (treatment) group.

2. Random assignment: Randomly assigning participants into control and treatment groups is crucial to obtaining statistically rigorous outcomes. There are a variety of approaches to random assignment, although each strives to create two groups, control and treatment, that have been selected without bias and do not differ systematically from each other. Conducted this way, the evaluators can measure the effect of an intervention regardless of other factors that might have made some person or groups more likely to participate in the intervention, therefore creating a bias. In most cases, these methodological choices, as well as subsequent data analyses, are best performed by a third-party research team. Although an implementing organization may have the capacity to implement an intervention, they may not have the technical expertise or human resources necessary to carry out a rigorous evaluation or the objectivity to ensure reliable results. With this in mind, partnering with an external evaluation team to design the evaluation, oversee data collection and perform analysis is always preferable.

For the Ninaweza program, IYF partnered with School to School International (STS) as lead evaluator, with ACWICT playing a central role in managing the selection of participants, mobilizing participants for administering surveys, and ensuring consistency of training and provision of services across all cohorts. ACWICT and IYF worked collaboratively with STS to design the evaluation, assisting with overall site selection, review of tools and final review of results.

Key Recommendations:

- Ensure that the intervention is suited to an impact evaluation
- Recruit a third-party research team to assist with the design of the evaluation and to conduct data collection and analysis.

Outreach and selection of participants: To ensure sufficient enrollment in the study, outreach to potential participants should focus on those who have high interest in and availability for participating in the program. IYF employed community mobilizers to raise awareness of the program and collect applications from potential participants. Potential applicants were informed about the program and the expected level of commitment, to ensure only youth serious about participation would apply. It is important to clearly communicate the study's objectives to potential participants, as well as the theory behind the randomized controlled study method, in order to prevent negative reactions in the target community for including only a portion of participants in the treatment. Letting the participants know whether they were assigned to the intervention or the control group should be done separately and after the baseline survey has been administered.

Key Recommendations:

- Raise awareness of the program and build community buy-in
- Mitigate attrition (e.g., raise awareness within study groups; oversample by 10%, provide incentives for retention in study groups)
- Collect informed consent of participants
- Be aware of and prepare for negative ramifications caused by denial of treatment

Enrollment and retention of participants:

Determining whether a program has been effective relies on keeping the sample size high enough to achieve statistical predictive power. It

is important to understand potential obstacles that may prevent target program participants from enrolling and completing the program. Often the time commitment and costs of attending a multi-week training program or unpaid internship can inhibit young people from full take-up and participation. Support services such as child care and travel stipends can be vital to youth participation, especially if the young people are from disadvantaged backgrounds. With this in mind, IYF provided stipends to the neediest participants (those residing furthest from the training center) to cover transportation costs to the training center as well as to their place of internship. IYF also worked with ACWICT to provide training in morning and afternoon shifts, allowing program participants to attend to other commitments during the day.

Key Recommendations:

- Study potential local obstacles to attendance/enrollment
- Provide transportation stipends for highest need program participants
- Offer flexible training times i.e. afternoon and morning sessions

Motivation of control participants: As with retention of program participants, it is equally essential to keep a sufficient sample size for the control participants. This can be particularly challenging because control participants do not participate in the intervention and therefore often gain minimal benefit from their participation and have less incentive to adhere to the program. The need to follow study participants over a prolonged time period (from baseline to endline) adds to this difficulty.

Having a high dropout rate will jeopardize the ability of the entire study to measure an impact and therefore additional investments to incentivize participants are often justified. For Ninaweza participants assigned to the control group, IYF

Why and When to Use an Impact Evaluation

While regular and systematic evaluation of development interventions should be part of the standard operating procedures for any implementer, the choice of evaluation methodology requires careful consideration. As noted, impact evaluations, specifically randomized controlled trials, are expensive, labor intensive, and often disruptive to programs. While they provide the highest degree of empirical rigor, they also require the greatest investment of resources (e.g., time, labor, money).

Three key questions to ask when considering an impact evaluation:

Is the intervention strategically relevant or potentially influential? Do the implications of the intervention have far-reaching implications for practice?

Is the intervention using an innovative or untested approach? Is there something novel about the intervention?

Is the intervention replicable? Could the lessons learned through the impact evaluation be applied widely to other programs beyond the immediate context?

If the answer to any of these questions is "yes", then an impact evaluation should be considered.

Additional Resources

Following are organizations, articles, and online resources that may be helpful as you consider implementing an impact evaluation.

Measuring the Success of Youth Livelihood Interventions

www.gpye.org/measuring-success-youth-livelihood-interventions

Youth Employment Network

www.ilo.org/yen

Global Partnership for Youth Employment

www.gpye.org

Kenya Impact report

library.iyfnet.org/library/testing-what-works-youth-employment-evaluating-kenya-s-ninaweza-program

provided a transportation stipend to cover the participants' costs to the location where surveys were administered. In addition, these data collection points were organized at convenient times and locations for the participants.

Key Recommendations:

- Account for attrition by increasing baseline sample size
- Provide participants stipends and other incentives (phone cards, t-shirts, etc)
- Assemble convenient data collection points and offer flexible times
- Consider offering delayed training opportunities and services through a phased-in treatment approach

Training & Program Implementation:

Randomized control trials often require large sample size (on average a minimum of 30), yet maintaining a small class size for training is also fundamental. Many training providers do not have the facilities to train a large number of youth at the same time. This was the case with ACWICT who did not have sufficient classroom space and computers to train all 700 treatment participants at once. As a solution, IYF divided the treatment participants into multiple cohorts and instituted morning and afternoon shifts, which halved the time necessary to complete the training.

Key Recommendations:

- Maintain the same quality of training and service provision among cohorts
- Avoid compromising the quality of the program in order to meet evaluation targets (i.e. large class size)

CONCLUSION

Through the Ninaweza program, ACWICT not only supported over 500 youth to gain valuable employability skills, including hands-on experience through internships and jobs, but also strengthened its own capacity to produce evidence-based results through an impact evaluation. This issue of *Best Practice Notes* shares these learnings and key recommendations in the belief that they can facilitate implementation of similar impact evaluations of youth livelihoods programs in other settings.

In 2008, with support from the World Bank Development Grant Facility, the International Youth Foundation, the Youth Employment Network, the Arab Urban Development Institute, and the Understanding Children's Work Project joined together to form the Global Partnership for Youth Employment (GPYE). Its goal: to build and disseminate evidence on youth employment outcomes and effective programs to help address the challenges facing young people in their transition to work. The GPYE leverages the technical and regional experience of the five partner organizations in youth employment research, programming, evaluation, and policy dialogue. The partnership's work focuses on Africa and the Middle East, regions in need of better evidence on effective approaches to promote youth employment.

This Best Practice Note is one in a series of assessments, research studies, technical guides, and learning papers produced by the GPYE to build the evidence base for improving policies, program design, and practices related to youth employability in the region. These resources can be accessed at www.gpye.org.

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