

INTRODUCTION

Programs to actively support young people's employment prospects have existed for decades in industrialized countries; however, they are relatively new in developing nations. In a broad sense, youth livelihood interventions support young people's means to earn a living, and include training, public service, youth entrepreneurship, and financial services. More narrowly, many practitioners define youth livelihood programs as activities targeting particularly vulnerable and marginalized groups in the informal economy, with a specific focus on self-employment. This guide adopts the broader definition and includes workforce development for the formal sector.

As a relatively new and innovative sector, few interventions have been rigorously evaluated. In fact, most practitioners could cite only a handful of examples. But what does *rigorous* really mean? Which methods are rigorous enough, and which ones are not? To practitioners, it may often seem obvious that our intervention is yielding the desired results. Why spend our limited resources on an expensive evaluation if we could instead use the money to provide services to more young people?

For those not directly involved in the intervention, its effectiveness is not always obvious. Policymakers and donors want credible, transparent results that satisfy some minimum standards of reliability. They are often looking for evaluations that use established social science research methods, which can provide robust estimates on how an intervention affected the typical program participant. Practitioners, in turn, though concerned with providing quality information about their programs, may feel that rigorous evaluations, with their complexity, potential costs, and other resource requirements, are often unrealistic and out of reach.

Audience

This is an introductory guide written for practitioners with no—or very limited—knowledge about impact evaluation or quantitative research methods, but who nonetheless care about demonstrating the true results of their work. It speaks to program managers and local monitoring and evaluation (M&E) officers across all types of organizations active in the youth livelihood field: local and international NGOs, local and national government officials, and bilateral and multilateral donors.

Given the diversity of backgrounds and experiences among practitioners, it is impossible to tailor this guide to everyone equally well. However, we have tried to provide a comprehensive discussion of evaluation methods for youth livelihood interventions so that readers can identify the sections most relevant to their own interests and needs.

Objective

With this guide, we aim to equip readers with the basic set of concepts and tools needed to make informed decisions about how to best evaluate their programs. We seek to provide a clear understanding of the variety of evaluation options available and the

Areas of intervention for youth livelihood development programs

- *Training and skills development*
- *Subsidized employment, including wage subsidies, public works and public service programs*
- *Employment services, including job search assistance and placement support*
- *Youth enterprise and entrepreneurship*
- *Youth-inclusive financial services*
- *Non-traditional programs for excluded groups*
- *Labor market regulation affecting young people*

Sources: [Betcherman et al. \(2007\)](#); [Cunningham, Sanchez-Puerta, and Wuermler \(2010\)](#); [DFID \(1999\)](#).

considerations that will allow practitioners to choose the most appropriate one based on learning objectives and operational context. Moreover, we describe how to manage an impact evaluation if it is the assessment method of choice.

Our overarching goal is to strengthen the foundation of sound programming and policymaking by increasing the number of quality evaluations in the youth livelihood field, thereby facilitating the scale-up and replication of successful interventions.

Focus of the Guide

The guide addresses the monitoring and evaluation of youth livelihood interventions, with a specific focus on impact evaluation. The terms *monitoring* and *evaluation* are often used jointly. However, they refer to activities that are quite different.

Monitoring tracks the implementation and progress of an intervention in order to support program administration. Monitoring

- involves the collection of data on specific implementation and results indicators.
- assesses compliance with work plans and budgets.
- uses information for project management and decision making.
- is ongoing.
- answers the question, “Are we doing the project right?”

Evaluation assesses the design, implementation, or results of an intervention in order to support new planning. Evaluation

- involves the collection of data on the design, implementation, and results of a project.
- looks at a project’s relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability.
- generates useful information about the impact of the intervention.
- is periodic; usually conducted annually at completion of a project, and includes follow up.
- answers the question, “Are we doing the right project?”

Ideally, both monitoring and evaluation should be integral parts of any program and should be planned at the program design stage. In fact, accurately assessing the success of an intervention may not be possible if the evaluation remains an afterthought that is given little priority until the program ends.

An *impact evaluation* is a type of evaluation that measures changes in the well-being of individuals, families, or communities attributable to a particular intervention. An impact evaluation answers the question: What would have happened to the beneficiaries if the program had not been undertaken? For example, if a recent graduate of a skills-training program finds a job, is it a direct result of the program, or would that individual have found work anyway? Comparing the outcomes experienced by participants with those experienced by a well-selected comparison group of nonparticipants makes it possible to establish causality. In other words, impact evaluations allow us to attribute any observed changes in the well-being of program beneficiaries to the effectiveness of our intervention.

Impact evaluation is one type of evaluation among several available, with its advantages and limitations. We believe that not every intervention requires an impact

[Definition]

Monitoring: A continuous process of collecting and analyzing information to see how well a project, program, or policy is being executed and performing against expected results.

Evaluation: A systematic, objective assessment of an ongoing or completed project design, implementation, and result to determine its relevance and the fulfillment of objectives, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability.

Impact Evaluation: A special type of evaluation that assesses the changes in the wellbeing of individuals, households, or communities that can be attributed to a particular intervention.

Sources: Adapted from [Gertler et al. \(2011\)](#); [Kusek and Rist \(2004\)](#); [OECD \(1991\)](#).

evaluation and that evaluation should support programming, not the other way round. Any evaluation needs to fit the operational characteristics and context of the respective intervention, while being integrated in a larger framework that builds on an established monitoring system. That said, we also believe that much could be learned from using impact evaluation methodologies more frequently.

This guide differs from existing works in three major ways:

- First, we directly apply the concepts of M&E—and of impact evaluation in particular—to the youth livelihood sector. The book presents real-life examples, testimonies, indicators, and practical challenges as they relate to evaluating youth livelihood interventions.
- Second, we seek a balance between the practical toolkits that emphasize general monitoring and evaluation (e.g., [Gosparini et al. 2004](#); [Kellogg 1998](#); [Kellogg 2004](#)) and other publications that focus specifically on impact evaluation (e.g., [Baker 2000](#); [Duflo, Glennerster, and Kremer 2006](#); [Gertler et al. 2011](#); [Khandker, Koolwal, and Samad 2010](#); [Ravallion 2008](#)).
- Third, we explicitly target practitioners in the youth livelihoods field who do not have prior knowledge in research methods and evaluation and who demand a succinct, yet comprehensive, illustration of M&E and how it applies to their everyday work. Thus, in contrast to the publications above, this manual is designed to give a more concise and youth-specific presentation of the respective contents. For a more comprehensive introduction to the specific topic of impact evaluation and its practice in development, we encourage the reader to consult *Impact Evaluation in Practice* by Gertler and colleagues (2011).

Case Studies

Throughout the guide, we use the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF) project to illustrate the main points in each note. We selected NUSAF for this guide because it encapsulates many facets of a standard youth livelihood program and because its impact evaluation had to grapple with many challenges. Admittedly, NUSAF is relatively large compared with many other youth livelihood projects. But as we will see, impact evaluations are also possible for smaller programs. We hope that readers will find aspects of the case study sufficiently close to their own situation.

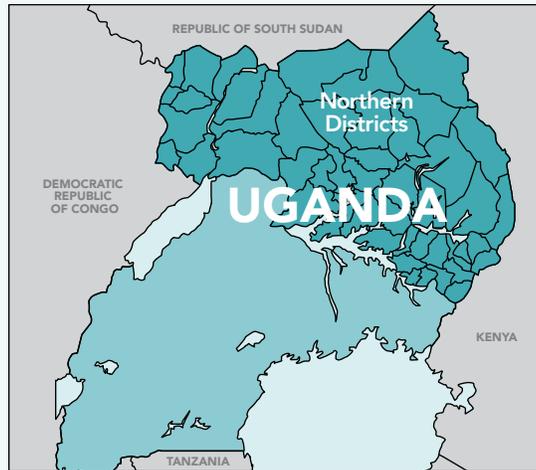
NUSAF Case Study: Background

General Information

Name of the project:	NUSAF Youth Opportunities Program
Target group:	Poor youth aged 15–35, in a postconflict region of northern Uganda
Number of beneficiaries:	8,000+
Budget:	US\$1.6 million

(continued)

NUSAF Case Study: Background (cont'd)



Project Context

For two decades, most of Uganda experienced economic growth, physical security, and political stability, along with rising levels of education and health. The northern districts, however, lagged behind the rest of the country on all counts. Commercial activity has historically been located in southwestern and central Uganda due to patterns of pre-colonial and colonial development, proximity to trading partners, and availability of infrastructure.

Moreover, two decades of civil war and insecurity in the north (and in neighboring nations) destabilized the region's economy and society. Nearly all areas in the north have experienced some form of physical insecurity—armed insurgency, internal displacement, cattle rustling, and so forth. In particular, a civil war in the ethnically Acholi districts, which displaced the entire rural population of nearly two million people, has only recently concluded. As the humanitarian emergency waned, humanitarian aid phased out and national and international development assistance increased dramatically.

The Government of Uganda's Peace, Recovery, and Development Plan aspired to consolidate state authority, rebuild communities, promote peace and reconciliation, and revitalize the economy through a package of several programs. NUSAF was one of those programs.

Project Activities

The Youth Opportunities Program component of NUSAF targeted youth aged 15–35 who lived in conditions of poverty and were unemployed or underemployed. Small groups of youth self-organized, identified a vocational skill of interest and a vocational training institute, and applied to the NUSAF district technical offices for funding.

The Youth Opportunities Program had two main components.

Component 1 provided a cash transfer of up to \$7,000 to local youth groups. The youth groups would use these funds to enroll in the vocational training institute, purchase training materials, and pay start-up costs for practicing the trade after graduation.

Component 2 built capacity of NGOs, community-based organizations, and vocational training institutes to respond to the needs of youth. (The length and intensity of the conflict left much of the infrastructure destroyed in northern Uganda, especially teaching institutions. By investing in these institutions, future capacity could be increased.)

Source: [Blattman, Fiala, and Martinez \(2011\)](#).

Overview of the Guide and How to Use It

The guide is presented as a series of short notes grouped in two major parts. The first part is about understanding the reasons for and preparing for an evaluation. The second part is about setting up an impact evaluation. Although it is important to be familiar with all parts of the process, it is not necessary to read the guide from beginning to end. Instead, each note is conceived as a self-standing chapter that can be read independently of the others, according to each reader's needs. For readers who would like to learn more about planning M&E in general, we recommend starting with part 1. Readers already familiar with M&E who would like to learn more about impact evaluation will find part 2 most relevant. The following reader's guide indicates which notes are most relevant to different types of readers.

Reader's Guide

PART I: Setting the Basis for an Evaluation The four notes in this section describe how to prepare for an evaluation.						
Note	Description	Policy-makers	Program Managers	M&E Officers	Research and Policy Staff	Impact Evaluation Experts
1	Discusses why evaluation is important and how it supports programming and organizational goals.	✓	✓			
2	Reviews some crucial questions about program design that should be answered before moving to monitoring and evaluation.		✓			
3	Presents the main steps in developing a monitoring system, which is a necessary foundation for any evaluation.		✓	✓		
4	Asks which type of evaluation best suits an individual program. The answer depends on learning objectives, the context and characteristics of the project, and available resources.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
PART II: Enhancing Program Learning through Impact Evaluation The notes in this section introduce impact evaluation and provide concrete guidance on its implementation in the context of youth livelihood programming.						
Note	Description	Policy-makers	Program Managers	M&E Officers	Research and Policy Staff	Impact Evaluation Experts
5	Presents the main features of an impact evaluation and explains why some commonly used evaluation methods do not fulfill the same quality criteria.	✓	✓	✓	✓	
6	Reviews tools and methods for conducting an impact evaluation and explains how they work and what they require. Also provides a decision tree to help readers reflect on which method may be best suited for their own situations.		✓	✓	✓	
7	Moves from the conceptual to the practical level, describing the major steps involved in carrying out an impact evaluation and providing practical resources. These steps cover the entire process, from initial preparations to the dissemination of results.		✓	✓	✓	✓
8	Presents tools to increase the relevance of impact evaluations. Includes an overview of the variety of impact evaluation questions, the use of mixed methods, as well as cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit analyses.				✓	✓