Youth at Work Learning Series

Scaling Up Youth Workforce Development
Management Systems International, Rice University, the World Bank, World Learning, and Youth Power (an initiative of the US Agency for International Development) entered into a partnership to share promising practices for scaling up youth workforce development projects. The partners want to build a community of knowledge, share their expertise and goodwill, and highlight successes and failures as object lessons and motivation.

The partners held the half-day Youth at Work conference on late 2019, starting an 18-month initiative to share knowledge about scaling up youth workforce development programs. This document summarizes the discussions held at the conference. It is the first in a series of learning papers.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to the Youth at Work panelists for sharing their insight:

- Dr. Rabah Arezki, Chief Economist, Middle East and North Africa Region, World Bank
- Dr. Catherine Honeyman, Senior Youth Workforce Specialist, Global Programs, World Learning
- Dr. Fred Oswald, Director of the Organizational and Workforce Lab, Rice University
- Nancy Taggart, Senior Youth and Workforce Advisor, Office of Education, USAID

Annex A provides the complete list of participants at the October 2019 Youth at Work event.
INTRODUCTION

Throughout the world, but especially in developing countries, young people suffer from unemployment and underemployment and struggle to earn their livelihoods. Youth unemployment destabilizes communities, while local employment anchors young people in their communities and enables them to engage in public life. Despite the global nature of the youth unemployment problem, scalable solutions for youth workforce development remain elusive.

Even when workforce development programs show promising results, efforts to scale the programs up and sustain them have rarely met expectations. What makes youth workforce development particularly difficult to scale up? The partners hosting the Youth at Work conference convened a discussion of this topic because there is a dearth of potential solutions for this problem at the necessary scale.

Many—but not all—conference participants work in the international development industry. In this industry, pilot projects generally fail to achieve scale. This is a structural problem: there is no imperative to make a project scalable, because the logical reward for one project is another project. And over the past 20 years, development projects have shrunk in duration and funding, so implementers and funders remain focused on the next project rather than designing pilot projects with scale embedded in the design at early stage.

In any case, the most vexing obstacles for scaling up youth workforce interventions are outside the sphere of direct control of development projects. But government policies, including subsidies and regulations, are indispensable factors in the success or failure of scaling up virtually all youth workforce development interventions. To scale up, nongovernmental initiatives must advocate for policy change that can be a scaling multiplier. Not all initiatives are equipped to do so.

This may be because building on a short-term project requires clarifying the link between a project and changes made in a system by such a project. But is it clear how a project influences government policy, market behavior, or philanthropical contributions? And if not, how do we clarify a tenuous or invisible link? By at least trying to design projects with scaling up in mind—that is, already at the pilot design stage, thinking through the possibilities and providing for the collection of data that might clarify that link.

There is rarely a straight line or a short journey in scaling up a youth workforce intervention. Flexibility and adaptive management are essential for successful scaling up, but present particular challenges for external funders to implement. Indeed, the shorter duration of the average project has come about precisely because funders are attempting to remain flexible. And so the conundrum stumps us.

Youth at Work participants sat at four discussion tables, each assigned a different discussion topic: private sector, government, nongovernmental organizations (NGO), and data. As discussions unfolded, topics blend between the lines—the private sector table discussed government’s and NGOs’ roles; the government table highlighted how government must enable work that the private sector does; and the NGO table also discussed the government’s role in scaling up youth workforce development. This summary paper aims to capture this ebullient, collective brainstorm as conference participants discussed the challenges of scaling up youth workforce development interventions and the approaches that they believe show promise.
Defining scale within a certain context is the first challenge to address. In any youth workforce development, the question is: what is performance and what is success? How can data on performance and success be collected and used? Time spent trying to answer these questions is time well spent.

However scaling up of youth workforce development is defined, understanding how to do so will rely on evidence collected using sound measurement and statistical approaches. Determining potential scalability requires assessment of:

- The intervention—What are we scaling up specifically? Is it an organizational innovation, a technology, or a process or model that works in a specific context for specific groups?
- The originating organization and the adopting organization(s)—Who initiates the pilot and who will bring it to scale? Does the originating organization want to keep control over the scaling-up process or does it want to cede control to another implementer at scale?
- Context—Where did the initiative start, where it will be adopted and who are the target groups?
- Enabling environment—Do government policies enable or promote the scaling-up process? Are there empowered stakeholders to nurture it?

Big data, artificial intelligence, and machine learning are tools that hold promise. But the value of machine learning and artificial intelligence can be realized only through measurement of workforce development characteristics (of people, processes, and institutions), because scalability requires good data, not just big data.

Narratives and anecdotal evidence help make data reliable. Data on a range of workforce efforts collected systematically over time, accumulated into a single database, can provide valuable information that no single effort alone can provide. The central database approach provides research evidence and even practical advice, and its infrastructure contributes critically to sustainability and scalability of any workforce projects.

As for employers, their understanding of workforce development is not how to employ more people but how to find productive employees. Who is a viable job applicant worth interviewing and recruiting? Which skills matter, and how can an employer assess those skills reliably and fairly? Incidental data should help us understand the world, but how does that happen? For instance, how might facial expressions during a job interview relate to measurable success on the job? The answer is opaque at best and impossible to determine at worst.

Humans are good at identifying workforce characteristics to be measured, as well as developing the measures. And as the measures improve, the data get better, and algorithms then improve in weighting those characteristics. To understand algorithms, though, you need measures that are job-related, interpretable, and legally defensible. You cannot just trust algorithms, technology, or data, by themselves.

We have to be strategic in our measurements, using youth inputs to design what we measure and how. In designing data collection, we must create feedback mechanisms to inform adjustment and identify unidentified outcomes, successes, and challenges. Incentives for everyone vis-à-vis data collection must be present—for example, youth using data for the next step of employment—keeping in mind, however, that in a complex system,
incentives among participants might compete. And everyone has an incentive: Young people want quality work, employers want productive employees, and governments want functioning economies.

There is potential for using evidence for advocacy. The act of collecting data, including developing the tools and creating incentives for measurement, can be used to create ownership of workforce development programs. Existing big data systems can be put to use and expanded on.

A key factor in determining success in scaling up is ownership of changes: The actors in any system including youth themselves must own the changes. Who determines the appropriate scale? Outsiders must reflect on their own motives and shun the “God complex,” that is, the tendency to think that they know best. Instead, the actors in the system including youth must decide what needs to be scaled up, and when, and why. They have to do this for themselves. This is true even for—especially for?—dynamic, fragile and conflict-affected labor markets (such as South Sudan and Afghanistan).

A stronger youth workforce leads to less political instability. This is critical when considering the scalability of workforce development, and so is collaboration with those who work on international diplomacy and security. Scaling is a process, not only an outcome—a process requiring creativity and capitalizing on talent, where plans are modified in a strategic way. In the US Navy, billion-dollar ships are run by youth, where effective systems literally keep the ships afloat.

PRIVATE SECTOR

Considerations of return on investment, a lack of clear incentives and benefits, and a desire to avoid providing a free ride to competitors sometimes prevent private sector companies from committing to investing in workforce development. But training, standards, and certifications created by industry associations can mitigate the free-rider risk that businesses fear.

The private sector’s contribution to workforce development typically involves job training. A company conducts training at its worksite, or it pays the government or another company to provide the training (on site or off), or it provides an in-kind contribution to training provided by another party—such as curriculum, equipment, venue, or apprenticeship. In-kind contribution to training provided by third-party trainers has had success in scaling up.

In the international tourism industry, competitors came together to work for the best interests of the entire sector and succeeded in scaling up workforce development. They looked at the broad context and defined their needs. Then they created a certification program and funded 100,000 training slots in English for tourism. Regardless of whether one company loses a worker to another, the companies have calculated that they will have a net gain from improving the entire sector.

In another example from Latin America, where the workforce did not have the soft skills necessary—numeracy and literacy—large companies encouraged governments to extend mandatory schooling from fifth or sixth grade to ninth grade. Companies offered to pay for training in the specific hard skills that they needed if the government created a more capable workforce.
In another Latin American country, a business association offered skills-building training to anyone who paid to attend. It did so because it also provided a discount to trainees from its member companies. Not only did this improve the skills of workers throughout the industry, but it also provided an incentive that would increase its membership rolls. This is a financially sustainable model for the association to provide training, and it solves the problem of one company poaching another company’s trained workers.

In Iraq, where personal relationships have traditionally held primacy, an industry advisory board enables high-level relationships and collaboration among companies. The advisory board meetings give everyone a chance to speak and has allowed some to persuade others, over time, of the value of innovation. This is an example of private sector collaboration to achieve scale.

An individual corporation might participate in workforce development if it sees an incentive for doing so. Being an innovator might give a company the shine, or the reputation, it desires, and might make the company decide to contribute that will benefit the entire industry. Leading the way automatically gives a company an advantage. A company that is willing to develop an app that other companies can also use stands out among its competitors, creates multiple beneficiaries and has a long reach. The app might enable market linkages—bringing together supply and demand—whether the supply is a product, commodity, or human strength or talent.

In Guatemala, two larger companies worked together to raise the level of workers’ skills throughout the industry, with one company providing hard skills training and the other providing soft skills training. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) hired the trainees, considering the certificate of completion for the training a seal of approval and an indicator of employability.

The informal sector also responds to private sector incentives to scale. One large agricultural buyer invested in developing a mobile money app to eliminate the middleman and get money to farmers directly. It also was willing to invest in weekend training on the app for growers. After a month or two, young people were running demonstrations—trainees became trainers. Thus, the training created a multiplier effect. Access to finance provides an incentive, gets people using these tools, and shows impact on the bottom line.
If the government is not interested in scaling up youth workforce development or is unable to do so, and private sector companies are not willing to take the financial risk, who can step into the breach? In a nonhierarchical context lacking an umbrella authority, NGOs, local and international, may attempt to coordinate to achieve workforce development at scale.

Faith-based networks and community organizations using their own resources provide powerful and sustainable models. Positive youth development organizations like 4H, Junior Achievement, and Scouts recognize that youth need more than just a job, and so these organizations give youth holistic support.

People believe in this work because such organizations have positive roles in society and there is a strong emotional appeal linked to their families and communities. These organizations have successfully scaled up their youth development initiatives and provide one model worth emulating.

Intergenerational transfer offers another promising possibility for scaling up organically. Youth participants become leaders and mentors, replicating the model or innovating around it as they pass it on to others. The donor-funded Youth African Leaders Initiative is one such model.

NGOs can advocate for government policy and government action on scaling up youth workforce development and other aspects of workforce development. Indeed, NGOs must play a role, for example, in advocacy for safety in the workplace, and can put pressure on not only government but also the private sector to ensure safety at international standards.

In Bangladesh Save the Children has promoted conditions to make it easier for youth to pursue new opportunities, working with factories to improve facilities, training people in factory management—spread informally and even to government.

Effectuation—using what is already in hand to develop something new and creative—is another model for scaling up workforce development. In Algeria, with the 20th-highest youth unemployment rate in the world, World Learning tried to implement career centers at universities. Public universities were uninterested in creating career centers (in part because there was no hiring category for career counselor and universities did not see linking students to jobs after graduation as their job), and so World Learning decided to work with the private sector. On their own initiative, leaders of career centers founded a coalition—a workforce development federation of youth and directors of school institutes with involved staff. The projects used effectuation to catalyze creation of 14 career centers in private universities and technical and vocational institutes, reaching 26,000 youth in 10 provinces.
In Benin, NGOs work with the government to seek homegrown ideas rather than ideas imported from France. They engage with trusted partners for programs that otherwise would not be possible (e.g., a partnership with the RAND Corporation). These organizations are working with the government on moving innovation forward now and in the future by developing future generations.

In Ghana, the organization Global Communities helps with youth employment in the construction industry. It offers apprenticeships and enhances apprenticeship networks with training institutes. Its approach involves mentoring and capacity building and requires youth to get formal national certifications. It also helps individual youth and youth groups work with formal systems, institutions, and the government.

**GOVERNMENT**

What is the government’s role in youth workforce development?

Ensuring a match between the education and training that young people receive and the spheres in the economy that can absorb more workers is a major impediment to successful scaling up youth workforce development. Preparing young people for jobs that do not exist or may soon disappear is a waste of precious resources. It is incumbent on governments, working with the private sector and the academic and NGO communities, to assess market trends and implications for youth employment. Make sure youth workforce programs are demand driven.

Low-cost and potentially high-impact pilot projects are needed. Proposed projects must help advance strategic objectives endorsed by the government, and government workers’ incentives must be understood. A culture of learning and freedom to experiment at the government that disrupts the status quo is needed.

Collaboration among ministries is typically infrequent, and siloing is common. Incentives, such as cost sharing, can boost collaboration, which also requires sharing of information. How can ministries that may have different goals and objectives work together where interests overlap?

Consider the incentives that drive government to change behavior: public pressure, lobbying from the private sector, and performance-based budgeting. Additionally, governments need a strategic vision of where they want to go, which aids in constituency building. Coordination and alignment between policies and programs must be in place to facilitate youth workforce development. Others, including the private sector and nongovernmental actors, should consider what is the government’s capability and commitment at national and local levels.

Wealthy governments can have broad reach and impact, notwithstanding the far larger resources in the private sector, that can catalyze economic development. Governments may have the necessary infrastructure but not comparable agility, so collaboration with the private sectors and NGOs can help create more effective and sustainable workforce development initiatives.

Where are the champions in government who can take on the scaling up challenge? Championing a movement or an initiative requires leadership, political or technical. Technical leaders tend to be midlevel bureaucrats with a certain amount of staying power who can lend continuity to programs that they have invested in over time. But in general, champions in government come and go and are often stymied in their efforts to innovate or otherwise challenge the status quo. Younger would-be champions in middle management ranks may have even less room to push a new agenda, and they face more risk.
An educated citizenry is more likely to engage and press its government to make reforms.

In Angola, whose economy depends heavily on the maritime and petroleum sectors, an Angolization law requires foreign companies to train one Angolan for every foreign national that a company brings to work in Angola. In 10 years since the law was enforced, Angola has gone from zero ship-board officers to at least one ship-board officer on 80 percent of ships.

In Rwanda, one approach to workforce development, results-based financing, holds some promise despite its top-down nature. The Rwanda government instituted a performance-based budgeting process for employment targets at the district level. In response, mayors and other municipal leaders mobilized municipal service providers in the private sector to help them reach the youth employment targets that they had to report to the central level. EDC and USAID are tapping into this opportunity to improve youth employment outcomes by convening these stakeholders to mobilize their resources under youth development alliances.

But results-based financing can also create perverse incentives, and this has been the case in Morocco, where higher-education students tend to benefit from the results-based financing more than others.

Data is particularly important in promoting systems change, and especially in motivating government actors to adopt new behaviors and practices. Governments have to track young people involved in training programs to determine what works or does not work and why.

EDC has conducted youth tracer studies of new workforce development models that have been instructive. EDC has also trained private service providers to conduct their own tracer studies and employer satisfaction surveys. Communicating the impacts uncovered by these studies in objective terms has garnered the interest of government stakeholders. Donors with leverage for policy reform can play a role in establishing an ongoing tracer study system that could lead to meaningful youth workforce development.

In Rwanda, EDC found that scaling up youth outcomes requires (1) champions at the national level, (2) a clear, common vision with concrete goals aligned with economic priorities; and (3) policy reform, such as establishment of a national qualifications framework, a curriculum, and a technical and vocational education strategy.
CASE STUDY

Stimulating Youth Employment in Algeria
Catherine A. Honeyman and Andrew Farrand, World Learning

World Learning is a US-based nonprofit organization founded in 1932 and dedicated to creating a more peaceful and just world through education, sustainable development, and exchange. World Learning has worked in Algeria since 2005, including workforce development programming since 2010. Combined, our projects have worked in 12 of Algeria’s 48 governorates and have reached nearly 25,000 youth, providing soft skills training and career advice. A tracer study of 3,601 Youth Employment Program alumni documented a 20% unemployment rate among youth who sought work independently, compared with the 9 percentage points lower than country’s average youth unemployment rate of 29%.

World Learning’s core approach has been to work with public universities and private and technical and vocational institutes to establish or improve career centers. The centers provide a range of offerings: online and in-person career counseling, employability and soft skills training, job fairs and other networking events, guest speakers, worksite visits, demand-driven professional, technical, or vocational courses, and internship or job placement. World Learning’s projects have achieved an enduring impact, with many institutions continuing to serve thousands of youth after project close.

In addition to the large-scale career center projects, World Learning has also implemented other innovative models, with funding from the US State Department and Anadarko Petroleum, Dow Chemical, Boeing, and HSBC Bank. Some programs offer English for the workplace, STEM education, and career guidance for young women. Many rely on Algerian volunteers who serve as professional mentors, industry representatives, and youth mentors running STEM activities.

World Learning has drawn three core lessons from these experiences:

Skills matter: Young people need more opportunities to practice the specific employability and soft skills demanded in the Algerian context.

Flexibility works: Scaling up youth workforce development in Algeria relies on entrepreneurially creating opportunities and using what is available in an overall context of unpredictability.

Diffusion is possible: Especially at the local level, Algerians are eager to expand successful models—implementers should spread the inspiration, the tools, and the lived experience.

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World Learning’s experience in implementing soft skills programming in Algeria has highlighted the need to learn more about the skills required by Algeria’s labor market and to draw on recent advancements in research into teaching soft skills. In 2018, World Learning conducted research in Algeria on the contextual needs for soft skills to determine what our soft skills courses were achieving. We re-analyzed interview data with employers from nine earlier local labor market assessments and distributed new questionnaires and held focus group discussions with groups of 90 youth beneficiaries of the program—male and female, employed and unemployed—in six governorates.

Youth described personal weaknesses that had hindered them in their job search, as well as contextual obstacles they faced, and they shared their own theories about the differences between youth who had succeeded in finding employment and those who had not.

The research found 12 essential soft skills in three categories for Algerian youth to obtain employment:

- **Intrapersonal**: positive self-concept, self-motivation, perseverance, adaptability, managing emotions (particularly stress), goal orientation, conscientiousness or being hardworking
- **Interpersonal**: social skills (building relationships with others and managing conflict), communication skills (combining oral, written, nonverbal, listening), and professionalism (as defined by Algerian employers, including self-presentation, work ethic, and etiquette)
- **Cognitive**: problem-solving, planning and time management.

The importance of self-motivation, perseverance, adaptability, and managing emotions stood out among male and female, employed and unemployed youth. (The full research report is available online.)

In entrepreneurship theory, “effectuation” is a flexible logic that differs from causal step-by-step planning to reach a predetermined goal. To scale up workforce development in places like Algeria, which are unpredictable while also having entrenched bureaucracies, World Learning has found effectuation useful—it works with the resources at hand and adapts to government and educational institutions, private sector actors, funders, and youth themselves over time.

For example, World Learning, in attempting to establish career centers at public universities, learned that these institutions cannot easily reorient to focus on the employment of graduates. University administrators and faculty see their role as limited to academic learning and research. Simultaneously, institutional structures do not allow for job titles such as “career counselor.” World Learning adopted a new approach, forming partnerships with private training institutions, which had greater flexibility, a better understanding of employers’ needs, and the incentive to respond to those needs.

World Learning has also used large events and social media to spread skills related to career centers and career counseling, including fostering the relationships that must underly any genuine social movement. Through such efforts, the directors of several institutes decided to continue to work together to create Techghil, a national career center federation to promote career advising around the country. World Learning has supported this unplanned initiative as it gradually determines what its goals will be and how it will achieve them. Continued work in these directions, undertaken in an organic way, as “effectuation” thinking suggests, may eventually influence public sector universities and related institutions.

World Learning has made tools and resources available to a wide variety of stakeholders to diffuse the improvements in career services and workforce development that Algeria’s economy and society need. By hosting two Youth Employment summits, in which youth, education administrators, government representatives, and the media participated, we have shared toolkits for operating career centers and offered soft skills training. We have also used social media to share ideas and resources.

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3 See [www.effectuation.org](http://www.effectuation.org)
(The World Learning Algeria Facebook page has 40,000 followers.) Most important, we have ensured that people with experience implementing these models can share their enthusiasm with others. Student Youth Employment summit attendees have gone on to create informal career center clubs at some campuses, and at least one educational institution has created a career center using our materials. Several groups that participated in the inaugural summit went on to establish career centers that served as partner sites for workforce development programs, illustrating the positive compounding effect that sustained funding for this work can generate.

Another inspiring example of diffusion—and the power of individual initiative—comes from our STEM centers. In 2016 World Learning opened a STEM center with private funding in Algiers. Offering after-school workshops and camps in biology, coding, graphic design, gaming, and robotics, the center soon attracted a devoted youth following. Many went on to mentor other youth and to teach Algerian teachers how to implement these methods in their classrooms. The success of Algeria’s first team to enter an international robotics competition, a team nurtured by the Algiers STEM center, prompted many youth to seek to extend STEM center activities to other wilayas—so that future robotics teams could represent the whole country rather than just Algiers. World Learning now supports two STEM centers and seven STEM “corners” in geographically diverse governorates where youth share their skills and experience with their peers.

Overall, World Learning’s experience promoting youth employment in Algeria has shown that soft skills matter, that flexible “effectuation” thinking can help seize opportunities in a complex environment, and that spreading inspiration and lived experience can help to diffuse new and promising models around the country. We look forward to continuing our engagement in these areas in the coming years.

**AREAS FOR EXPLORATION**

The following questions were raised during the conference as warranting further exploration. We aim to do so during the 18-month span of the Youth at Work initiative.

**Overall**

Define scaling up youth workforce development: For example, does it mean making a project national? Does it mean a system is created? Does it mean the players and their roles are defined? How do we measure success in youth employment?

Do we already have successful scaling up but not the desired impact or effectiveness?

The rules and roles for nongovernmental organizations, the private sector and government must be defined for each local workforce system.

How can companies, NGOs and governments avoid creating perverse incentives?

In general, how would more effective private sector collaboration with the government look like?

Who scales up a successful intervention in a nonformal system?

Scale at the design stage—i.e., calculate what the unit cost of youth employment (e.g., financial and human resources) is from the beginning?

How might USAID’s emphasis on resilience contribute to scaling up youth workforce development?
Use of Evidence

What is the role of evidence in advocacy and policy change? How is evidence applied?

How do we work with the government or the private sector to develop strategic measurement?

Can we improve tools for capturing the complexity of workforce development and measuring factors for scaling up—such as creating a youth workforce readiness index built on an existing job index?

How tightly or loosely do we tie attribution for success (or failure)? If too loosely, how do we know what we’ve accomplished?

How do bottom-up actions and interventions get noted and integrated into systems?

What are the roles of different stakeholders in collecting the evidence base?

Role of Private Sector

What lessons can SMEs provide about what works in training and orienting youth to enter the workforce (job training, internships, apprenticeships)?

What incentives do SMEs have to invest in training youth for the workforce?

What entrepreneurial models, advocacy approaches, and financial literacy methods apply to youth workforce development scaling?

In the gig economy can technology that connects suppliers to demand and vice-versa improve scalability?

Role of Government

How did Trinidad and Tobago’s on-the-job training program end up having such a poor record of generating jobs after training was over? Were assumptions flawed? Did designers and implementers not understand the job market?

The Youth Systems Collaborative, a learning group of international implementers, is developing a framework for understanding youth systems transformation. It looks at the following factors to gauge a system’s ability to scale up youth workforce development: (1) vision, (2) leadership, (3) stakeholder roles, (4) coordination, (5) capacity building, (6) service delivery, (7) data, monitoring, evaluation, and learning, (8) formal policies, (9) informal rules and norms. How do these factors play out in different countries? Which offers the best leverage point for a donor-funded project to make a difference?

Role of NGOs

How to scale up successful models from national to international?

How to transfer a successful nongovernmental youth workforce project to the government?

How to measure the future impact of an initiative by an NGO?

Coordination in a nonhierarchical system for systems-level change—Does an NGO coordinate the scaling?
### Annex A:

**Scaling Up Youth Workforce Event**

List of Attendees

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