Economic Opportunities for Youth: Building Skills for the 21st Century

With nearly 30% of its population aged 12 to 24 years old, sub-Saharan Africa is the most youthful region in the world.

African youth require and want skills that will enable them to support themselves and their families in a rapidly changing economy, but many face daunting obstacles that prevent them from achieving their goals. For youth living in high HIV prevalence countries, obstacles to gainful employment are exacerbated by the challenges of HIV, poverty, high rates of abuse and exploitation, high school drop-out rates, and for girls, pregnancy and early marriage. Many lack access to formal education and market-linked vocational skills training or to other critical wrap around services like health care, child protection, legal and psychosocial support that they need to help them stay on track and fulfill their aspirations. Furthermore, weak linkages between social service providers, government and the private sector compromise efforts to leverage the resources, talent, and support needed to turn labor market demands into real economic opportunities for youth.

In 2006, World Education launched the Bantwana Initiative to address the comprehensive needs of youth and families made vulnerable by HIV and poverty. Underpinning all of Bantwana’s integrated initiatives is a focus on expanding sustainable economic opportunities for highly vulnerable youth.

Bantwana fosters and expands innovations in both the formal and informal economic sectors by:

1. working with business, government and communities to identify market-linked economic opportunities for youth
2. improving existing curricula and programming by matching skills-training to labor market demands
3. leveraging private sector talent and resources while addressing critical workforce needs through apprenticeship, work readiness, internship, entrepreneurship, and micro franchising programs in partnership with local companies; and,
4. helping youth access the critical wrap around services they need to sustain their livelihoods and achieve their aspirations and goals.

1 YOUTHMAP Uganda, International Youth Foundation, 2011.

“We look for young people that can work with others, can manage their time, are self-confident, are critical thinkers and are adaptable. We are thrilled with the young people we are supporting through partnership with the Bantwana Initiative. They are motivated, creative and want to learn” — Manager, Royal Foods Supermarket, Harare, Zimbabwe
“I grew up as an orphan and I understand how difficult it is today for these young people to find real opportunities. So many youth have had to drop out of school. I did not want education to be a hurdle for our internship program with Bantwana. We pay our interns for the work they do so they can afford more extensive training and accreditation as true artisans. I am delighted to see how motivated these young people are and how much they appreciate the opportunity.” — Owner, Puregree Panel Beaters (car repair), Zimbabwe

ENTREPRENEURSHIP, LIFE SKILLS AND WORK READINESS THROUGH PRIVATE SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS IN ZIMBABWE

In Zimbabwe, HIV prevalence among 16 to 35 year olds is 15.6% and unemployment of youth in the formal labor force is approximately 68%\(^2\), higher than any other age demographic. Despite these challenges, youth in Zimbabwe are optimistic about their future and crave opportunities that can help them realize their aspirations. In partnership with nearly a dozen companies, Bantwana helps vulnerable youth access vocational, technical, life-skills, entrepreneurship training and job-placement services and provides financial support for job creation through start-up youth-led enterprises. Bantwana’s Entrepreneurship, Lifeskills and Work Readiness programs combine income-generating skills training with “business coaching” and mentorship from successful professionals. Youth learn budgeting and family financial management skills, and how to access consumer credit. Bantwana also places youth in internships and apprenticeships with local businesses who can provide hands on training and essential workplace skills. Youth with lower literacy and numeracy skills can enter the labor force as paid community-based caseworkers, early childhood development facilitators, paralegals or facilitators in “Second Chance” education bridging programs that equip out-of-school youth with the literacy and numeracy skills they need to either re-enter formal school or vocational training. Young people needing other critical wrap around services related to HIV, reproductive and primary healthcare, legal, or psychosocial support are referred to these services by caseworkers that also provide ongoing support.

BUSINESS SKILLS PREPARE SWAZI YOUTH FOR THE FUTURE

At 26%, Swaziland is home to the highest HIV prevalence in the world. One (1) in 3 Swazi children in the country are considered orphaned or vulnerable (OVC) largely as a result of the impacts of HIV and AIDS\(^3\). Many youth live with overstretched relatives who struggle to support them and increasing numbers of youth act as heads of households. High rates of abuse, violence and poverty further compromise young people’s efforts to stay in school or develop the skills they need to support themselves over time — especially girls. Since 2008, the Bantwana Initiative has worked through schools to deliver critical health, education, livelihoods, and psychosocial support to more than 14,000 youth. Bantwana builds students’ business skills in managing permaculture gardens in schools and produce generated from gardens bolsters nutrition in school lunches and gives students’ practical skills that they can use to build gardens at home. Jointly managed by students, teachers, and school committee members, the school gardens also provide space for trusted adults to mentor youth, providing guidance and support that helps them stay in school and address issues they face at home. Bantwana works with the most vulnerable youth to set up permaculture gardens at their homesteads, provides follow up support to ensure gardens are adequately maintained, and links Bantwana-trained community volunteers to refer and follow up children in need of critical wrap around support.

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2  www.mydec.gov.zw
Bantwana also helps youth develop school-based small business enterprises. Profits from the businesses are used to cover school-related costs like school uniforms and scholastic materials, critical to enabling the most vulnerable youth to stay in school. Bantwana equips teachers, school committee members and youth with skills to jointly conduct local market research; manage initial seed funding for start-up materials, and track their businesses. Enterprises include brick making, poultry raising, goat raising, school-based grocery shops, manufacturing of soap, floor polish, or sanitary pads and waste recycling. Grocery shops also sell produce grown in school gardens. 30% of profits cover operational costs and 70% are used to cover OVC-related school costs.

STAYING LOCAL: BUILDING ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH IN RURAL UGANDA

In Western Uganda, high HIV prevalence (8.2%), high school drop-out, high rates of abuse, neglect and exploitation seriously constrain the abilities of youth to acquire the education, skills, and supports they need to take advantage of and sustain productive livelihoods. More than 70% of Ugandans rely on the informal sector for their livelihoods. This is particularly true in the West where expansion along informal sector value chains is opening up economic opportunities for youth.

Since 2008, Bantwana has supported more than 5,000 vulnerable children and families in Western Uganda with a comprehensive livelihoods, child protection and psychosocial support (PSS) package to address the key community-identified issues facing vulnerable youth and families. Underpinning Bantwana’s integrated model are efforts to help out-of-school youth gain the basic literacy, numeracy and financial

“I lost both of my parents to HIV and now I live with my two brothers and sister in a neighbor’s home.

I had no way to pay my school fees until I became involved in the poultry program at my high school. Proceeds from sales have helped me pay for my school uniform and perform better in school now that I don’t live with so much stress.

I now feel that I have some skills I can take with me to generate income after I graduate.”

— Tsopho, 18-years-old, Bantwana Schools Integrated Program (BSIP), Swaziland
management skills they need to start and sustain market-linked small businesses. Youth are drawn from Bantwana-supported Child Protection Clubs where they learn about their rights and responsibilities, how to identify and report abuse, and take leadership in their communities to address school drop-out, early marriage and other hurdles children face in fulfilling their aspirations and goals. Bantwana capitalizes on established savings and loan groups by matching these youth with adult savings members who support them throughout the process of identifying, launching, and, managing their businesses. Local business owners also serve as informal mentors and guest speakers in skills training classes. Youth receive start-up kits that include basic business management, book keeping, financial literacy skills training, and seed funding to purchase materials. With support from adult savings group members, youth conduct basic market analyses to identify small business opportunities that can be locally supported and sustained in areas including animal husbandry, vegetable gardening, and, local crafts. To help youth stay on track and access necessary wrap around services, young people and their families are linked to Bantwana-trained community volunteers who support them through regular home visits, basic counseling, and referrals, when needed.