Measuring Impact of Young People’s Empowerment in Yemen - Setting a Baseline

Abstract: In Yemen 22.19%\textsuperscript{1} of its 22,383,000\textsuperscript{2} population is between 15 and 24 years old. Unemployment rates among young people at present are high while young people are expected to support and contribute to household income, mostly of the extended family but also increasingly of nuclear families. The challenging socio-economic situation of Yemen puts young people in Yemen in an environment that provides limited opportunities and a bleak outlook for their futures as contributing adults of their society and that of their families. In 2009 Save the Children (SC) implemented an assessment study in 4 governorates of Yemen (Sanaa’, Aden, Abyan and Ibb) to understand better the status of young people in Yemen with specific reference to their empowerment to play a greater role in the development of their communities. Linking the findings to different aspects of young people’s empowerment, both as a perception of themselves as well as of their communities allowed informed programming by profiling the activities that would best contribute to the empowerment of youth in Yemen.

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\textsuperscript{1} Population by age, sex and urban/rural residence: latest available year, 1997 – 2006, \url{http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/dyb/dyb2006.htm}
\textsuperscript{2} World Development Indicators database, World Bank, revised 10 September 2008.
Challenges for Young People in Yemen

Yemen, despite enormous improvements in the last decades faces several challenges, especially in relation to its young people. Oil is the primary source of revenue for government, but thus far, the government has not invested oil revenues in sectors that have the potential to create more jobs for the country’s growing population. Due to lack of investment, the private sector has not grown significantly either in terms of goods and services produced or employment. Yemen has been identified as the world’s fastest growing economy for 2010\(^3\); this gives however a false impression, and is probably due to the flow of gas which started in 2009. There is only a minimal job creation rate of around 4 jobs per 100 for existing businesses and 2.5 jobs per 100 for new businesses and unemployment among young people is identified as 35 to 40%. Education in Yemen is another sector that has seen enormous gains in recent decades but continues to lack behind due to high population growth and lack of investment in education. This study shows that there is a serious disconnect between their needs and the education they receive. Curricula do not provide students with necessary skills and tools to prepare them for life. Students finish their studies memorizing theories and then discover these theories do not help them get jobs.

Background

Save the Children has been working in Yemen since 1963. Based on experiences working with young people in Yemen, the Arab World and beyond, Save the Children recognizes the tremendous opportunity of positively engaging youth in defining their futures and that of their communities and society at large. In addition to two existing regional youth programs, a new youth empowerment program or YEP was developed and obtained funding from USAID. YEP concentrates on four

\(^3\) World Bank (2009).
governorates for community-level initiatives; Sana’a (North), Ibb (Center), Aden and Abyan (South). This program overlaps with a grant awarded in 2007 from Dubai Cares for an education program, aiming to link education and youth empowerment. Both programs target young people from urban and semi urban areas in Yemen. The Youth Empowerment Program provided an opportunity to conduct primary research to better understand the status of positive assets of Yemeni youth and exploring the links between relevancy of education and livelihoods opportunities, building on research implemented through the education program. The impact areas show an enrolment of 89% and the main reason for dropping out of school was identified by young people as ‘their own decision’. To better understand this answer, YEP research provided more information on the motivation for attending school.

Key Research Questions

To better understand how school relates to young people’s livelihoods, the following questions were set;

− What are the current profiles of adolescents and youth livelihood trends?
− What are adolescents and youth assets?
− What activities can enhance youth livelihood opportunities?

Research Methods

To answer these questions, both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used. The quantitative approach was used to establish the status and prevalence of developmental assets and livelihood capacities among the general population of Yemeni youth. The quantitative approach involved a
random, 30 cluster household survey in which 600 youth 12 - 24 years of age were interview in the four urban and semi-urban cities in Yemen: Sanaa, Ibb, Aden and Abyan. The interviewed youth were administered the Youth Livelihoods Development Index (or YLDI). The YLDI is an overall assessment framework developed by Global Youth Livelihoods (GYL) with the support of Canada’s International Development Research Center (IDRC). The YLDI draws results from the application of three separate survey tools, and generates an aggregate score of an individual’s Human, Social, Financial and Physical Livelihood Capitals. The YLDI’s three component profile tools include: Search Institute’s well regarded Developmental Asset Profile (DAP); along with two new tools from Global Youth Livelihoods, the Livelihood Competencies Profile (LCP) and the Tangible Assets Profile (TAP). The DAP measures various external and internal assets that are needed by youth to succeed as adults. The LCP and TAP measure competencies, skills, such as budgeting and use of credit, and access to tangible assets, such as tools and land, that are necessary in a successful livelihood. The tools in the index were adapted and results show that they can be successfully used in a Yemeni context.

The qualitative approach was used in order to obtain more in-depth understanding of the quantitative findings and involved the use of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) using a variety of participatory tools, such as ranking and sorting of employment and livelihood strategies that have been developed and used successfully in other countries. Overall, this research engaged 46 focus group discussions with 441 participants of which 292 young people, 79 Parents, 41 business people and 39 community leaders. Most information from young people was by age group: 12-18 years and 19-24 years.

**Findings**
Of the urban and semi urban young people of 14 - 24 years of age that participated in the quantitative research 28% identified themselves as having work or employment of some type with 11% reporting that they were married. As for level of education, 12% of youth reported not attending school, with 13% reporting to be in grades 1-6, 44% in grades 7-12, and 31% in post secondary (higher) education. Enrolment of this group is higher than general enrolment as identified in the education research, but can be biased as the age has shifted and included young people of 14 till 24 years of age still at home, mostly unmarried. It is anticipated that this group is likely to be the better educated young people.

Despite that not many young people identified themselves as working; the results do show that young people play a role in their families’ economic wellbeing assisting their families in a variety of domains, along with their personal spending. The variety and range of jobs and economic activities mentioned was very diverse. The findings below combine findings of both the quantitative and qualitative studies.

1. Young people contribute to their families’ economic welfare: Adolescents and youth reported numerous activities they engage in to contribute to their families’ welfare. The most popular was the retail industry in the informal sector. Manual work, socially unacceptable jobs were also taken by adolescents and youth. Activities in the formal sector were limited to factory work, and there was not a huge emphasis on work within the governmental sector.

2. Youth and their families are able to identify livelihood skills: Young people of both age groups and their parents were able to identify the majority livelihood skills needed for success. They identified things like communication skills, listening skills, leadership, planning, self confidence, flexibility, work ethics, public speaking and innovation. Furthermore, they also identified some technical skills needed for success in livelihoods; financial literacy, public relations, customer service, and selling techniques.
3. **Young people and their families lack systematic identification of livelihood resources:** Young people rated their level of human and social capital higher than financial and physical capital. The factors that contributed to higher ratings for human capital included positive views of their level of education and health; however, the lowest human capital rating was for their level of work skills. The findings from the household survey contradicted this finding as individual young people did identify schooling as important; these two results can explain that the present schooling does not provide for support for a better future, while they believe that schooling, if appropriate and relevant can be.

4. **Young people and their families lack systematic livelihood planning skills and supports:** Results show that young people have the ability to identify the planning steps required to succeed; however, there is a lack of systematic planning for future livelihoods pursuits. Many participants talked about small business development, but focused on financial aspects and not other necessary aspects for success in a business activity or in acquiring a job.

5. **Young people are interested in self-employment opportunities:** Most participants talked about self-employment and the different steps for planning for small business, such as market research, feasibility studies, work ethics, time management, identifying the goals and challenges etc. On average, at least one step was identified by each group. It seems that the self-employment opportunities did not require high levels of education and education does not feature in the planning steps.

6. **Youth are working abroad and considering migration as a form of income:** Majority of groups mentioned working abroad, whether legally or illegally. Many youth, especially males of the age group 19-24 years (25%), talked about saving for plane tickets to get out of Yemen to work abroad. One reason for young people to do any kind of work is to be able to
buy a ticket to travel abroad and it appeared as a planning step to succeed in livelihoods, the youth’s contribution to their families’ economic wellbeing and as a spending source.

7. **Contribution to family well-being is the major expense for youth:** Results show various things that young people spend their money on – and in the majority of cases, support for family expenses was very important. This included paying for their own personal expenses so as not to burden their parents with these. Only 25% of groups identified resorting to parents for allowances, so that their spending using their own resources cuts back on what the family would have taken out of its budget in terms of allowance to finance those trends.

8. **Sports are of significance in the life of young people in Yemen:** It can not be ignored that sports was mentioned in almost all of the group discussion with both age groups, although mainly in reference to boys and younger girls. Furthermore, when identifying their skills/knowledge sport was mentioned again. In addition, when describing the resources in the communities they live in, some youth referred to play grounds and sports terrains as well.

**Characteristics of young people and youth livelihood development**

Age and location are the most statistically significant predictors of a youth’s perception of their level of Developmental Assets. As youth got older their perception of their overall level of developmental assets slowly decrease.

Gender, level of education, work experience, and location are the most statistically significant predictors of a young people’s perceptions of levels of Livelihood Competencies.

Gender and level of education are the most statistically significant predictors of a youth’s level of access to Tangible Assets. When considering access to tangible assets, education is of major importance. As young people’s access to tangible assets is largely dependent on others, it seems that education instills trust in those providing the access to tangible assets, as well age and being a boy.
To change this, a change of attitudes of those who provide access to tangible assets is needed. Furthermore, if education is more relevant, young people who are educated will show higher levels of development assets and livelihood skills.

**Discussion**

Taking into consideration that the findings of this research has a focus on the urban and semi urban youth of Yemen, young people are a key positive driver of national development when they are appropriately engaged and adequately prepared for roles in the worlds of work, family, and community life. Viable school-to-work pathways are an essential component of successful youth engagement strategies, as they provide young citizens with a positive channel for their energy and aspirations. Conversely, education programs that graduate young people who are ill-equipped to identify and access meaningful opportunities in employment and self-employment can increase drop out and affect national development negatively. The findings need to be further explored to provide any conclusions, but should be used to advocate for more serious thought on the purpose of education in Yemen. Content of programming should take into consideration the interest of young people for being involved in their own business. This needs to be done with a critical view of where this interest comes from; is this an interest that is based on a choice or is it as a result that there is nothing else available? Programming should aim at supporting youth in identifying different opportunities available by providing them the skills and attitudes needed, as well as a supporting environment that goes beyond the immediate family and includes the community.

The gap between education and the needs of young people in Yemeni society is wide and makes the smooth transition from school to employment extremely difficult. Major changes are needed in both education and the employment opportunities available, as well as that young people and their
communities have to start exploring for what purpose they attend school and how they can help school to become more relevant to them and their communities.

Recommendations

In order to support the transition of young people from school into the labour market and address child labour issues at the same time, it is essential that the findings of this research are taken into consideration for any program for young people in Yemen. Since the majority of activities highlighted by young people fall under the informal sector, it would be worthy to introduce young people to labor laws to get them exposed to their rights and duties to prevent exploitation and improve motivation and efficiency. Furthermore, introducing them to the workplace ethics and regulations might have an impact on their competitiveness in the labor market (better marketing themselves) and would increase work retention. In new economies such as in Yemen, consumerism has increased enormously which is also seen in the interest in small businesses. In the past selling and buying was more done through bartering, and was used as an additional income; on the one hand it is worrying to see that these forms of income has become main incomes for young people, but at the other hand this is often the first step towards setting up a small business, which is one of the few job opportunities that is available to young people in Yemen.

Building human and social capital in the informal sector:

Many young people are working in the informal sector, or have identified work activities in the informal sector. Within the informal economy in many countries, there is a lack of access to skills building opportunities for these workers to develop competencies and qualities that would support their transition to more productive livelihoods, even within the informal economy. Young people
are running informal livelihoods activities (selling homemade products) and can speak somewhat about skills needed to be successful in these activities. In addition, they have indicated a high interest in self-employment. Groups also spoke about savings, but lack of planning with savings. Providing access to opportunities for skills building through non-formal education or integration of practical and practice-based financial market literacy into the schools that builds on the existing knowledge of young people supports them not only in growing small business activities, but also in being able to identify market opportunities. These kinds of activities also support young people in being able to better systematically plan for their future livelihoods. These activities have to be well planned and thought through as young people rate themselves as having relatively good levels of external and internal developmental assets, as well as high levels of livelihood competencies. As access to tangible assets was identified as very low, those that can provide access to these need to be targeted.

In addition, Apprenticeship opportunities are also another opportunity for young people to build important practical technical skills, and if structured properly provide excellent mentorship opportunities - building social and human assets.

**Linking education to livelihoods outcomes:**

The gap between the education provided, the needs of the market in Yemen and the needs of young people in society needs to be addressed, especially in relation to girls and their role in the labour market. At present most emphasis for girls is on education makes her a better wife and mother. Older boys are also very negative about the usefulness of their schooling, which shows that they have been disappointed and do not see relevancy of school for their future. It is important that this is addressed before it can affect the younger boys as they are still mostly positive about school. School is very much a community institution and as community overall has been identified as less supportive towards young people than their families, there is an urgent need to mobilize
communities in support of young people and schools can be a good starting point through the established structures of parent and student councils. Community livelihood mapping can be a good tool to include those young people that do not attend school.

Very few of the livelihood opportunities identified by young people require higher levels of education; this shows that there is no stimulant for further education. There is also a lack of mentioning of skilled manual jobs such as carpentry, metal worker etc. Construction work was mentioned but seems to an unskilled job, for a short term income as especially boys from the younger age groups mentioned this job. Overall, lower skills and more short term employment opportunities are identified for the younger age group, while the older age group looks more for the higher skilled and longer term. This is an important finding as strategically it would be better that young people start from an early age to aim for serious long term employment rather than short term quick money. A better idea of long term employment opportunities may also increase motivation to complete education needed for that which the persons aspires to. Schools and communities play an important role in ensuring that young people are aware what the employment opportunities are and what is needed to have access to these opportunities, especially in relation to schooling. School to career counseling to support schools and youth centers in providing market relevant information for young people planning their futures is highly needed in Yemen.

Another important aspect that needs to be addressed is dialogue between young people and adults, especially those that are not direct family, including community leaders such as teachers. Results show that all adults, parents as well as business people, have the same opinions. This could show a lack of awareness of and interest in issues of young people. Adults may not be aware that life for young people, especially those in urban and semi urban areas are changing. That business/community leaders do not have different opinions from parents is also showing a non
interest/non awareness from their side. It may mean that they do not see young people as an important asset to their businesses or that they do not consider young people’s present employment as serious.

**Using sports as a tool for building leadership, employability skills and empowering young people:**

Youth programming in Yemen may consider incorporation of using sports, as well as other youth appropriate activities, as a way to engage youth in learning about employability skills. In a number of countries, sports are used to teach youth about things like teamwork, communication and negotiation. As many groups mentioned sports, this may be an entry point and way to positively engage young people in thinking about their futures. It is rare that girls engage in sports, other ways of creating opportunities where girls can meet up with peers and be engaged together in an activity is important to consider. At the same time, sports was not identified by the individual young person as an activity that they engaged in very often - this may be a gap between what the reality is and what they would like to see.