



Youth Employment Network
West Africa



Youth Employment Initiatives in West Africa

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An Overview of Survey Results

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INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

“How have we let what should be our greatest asset, youth, become a threat to our security?” (UN, 2004)¹ The condition of youth in West Africa is a growing concern. Youth unemployment levels in the sub-region are amongst the world’s highest, standing at 18.1% in 2005. These high unemployment figures reveal only part of the challenge, as youth in the sub-region face high rates of inactivity, underemployment and poor working conditions with long working hours and low pay. At the root of the problem are numerous factors, including skills mismatch, a growing supply of labour unmet by aggregate demand, political instability and difficult economic environments. In light of this, the link between development and security is propelling a range of stakeholders to consider youth employment key to stability and long term economic development. Consequently, a range of activities and initiatives are being implemented to enhance the prospects of young people in West Africa, and allow them to secure their right to education, economic means, security, and well-being.

ABOUT YEN

As a partnership among the United Nations, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the World Bank, the Youth Employment Network (YEN) is committed to bringing together policy-makers, employers’ and workers’ organizations, young people and other stakeholders to address the youth employment challenge. Based in Dakar, the Youth Employment Network office for West Africa (YEN-WA) strives to raise awareness and to mainstream youth employment as a socio-economic, political and security issue. The objectives of YEN-WA include identifying ongoing activities in the sub-region in order to create synergies, build linkages, and share experiences between different actors. The office also serves to facilitate capacity-building both at the national and regional level and engage with the private sector in finding ways to increase their involvement in initiatives to create employment opportunities for young people in West Africa.

SURVEY OF YOUTH EMPLOYMENT INITIATIVES IN WEST AFRICA

In order to achieve the above mentioned objectives, YEN-WA has undertaken a survey which identified youth² employment initiatives in West Africa. The aim of the survey was to improve the knowledge base and facilitate coordination and networking between youth employment partners. To this end the following key outputs have been produced;

- *Survey Report*: The present report offers an overview of the survey results. It provides information on the types of organizations tackling youth employment in West Africa, an insight into the kinds of projects they are implementing, and an analysis of their accomplishments and the challenges they face.
- *Online database*: The database of youth employment initiatives provides the complete survey results. The database is a valuable resource to a wide range of stakeholders which will play a key role in facilitating information sharing and networking amongst youth employment stakeholders.

¹ *A more secure world: Our shared responsibility*, United Nations, 2004

² In this study youth was defined as people aged 15-30 years

METHODOLOGY

The online survey was sent to youth organizations in all 16 West African countries³. The contact details of organizations working on youth employment were established on a country by country basis through desk based research. An email with links to the online survey was sent to each of these organizations. The survey was available in English, French and Portuguese. The online survey asked respondents questions related to the following four areas:

- *Contact details*: Organization contact information and contact persons.
- *Organization information*: General details on the type of organization, its mission, funding sources and gender considerations.
- *Youth employment projects*: Information on the youth employment projects being implemented by the organization including their area of intervention, countries of operation, target groups and the proportion of youth beneficiaries.
- *Accomplishment and Challenges*: Details on the key successes and problems encountered by the organization.

Survey recipients were allowed between four and six weeks to complete the survey during which follow-up emails and phone calls were made. Twenty percent of organizations responded to our survey, yielding 320 organization profiles and 435 projects that these organizations are implementing between them. The survey responses were transferred to an excel sheet and analyzed for the purposes of the report. This report is based solely on the responses that respondents gave to the survey questions and no additional research was carried out to verify the accuracy of the answers provided. The final stage of this process was the creation of the online database with multi-criteria search facilities. This database will be periodically updated.

LIMITATIONS

While creating an online survey was the most efficient way to collect and organize a large amount of data from a wide range of organizations and countries given resource constraints, this approach also had its limitations. Countries in the sub-region are faced with limited internet access. This is largely due to high internet costs, slow internet connection and frequent power shortages. In addition a substantial number of email addresses encountered delivery failures. Not all organizations successfully completed the survey; this was in part due to respondent's time and staffing constraints. Therefore the results presented in this report do not provide a comprehensive picture, but rather a solid starting point for understanding organizations working on youth employment in West Africa, the challenges they are encountering as well as their successes. It is a knowledge base that will continue to be expanded.

³ The following are the 16 West African countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Cape Verde, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo

RESULTS

1. ABOUT THE ORGANIZATIONS SURVEYED

1.1. Type of Organization

Survey responses were received from a wide range of organizations; from national and international NGOs, to youth associations, private sector institutions, partnerships, bilateral organizations and governmental bodies. Of these, national NGOs made up just over half of all survey respondents, while youth associations and international NGOs each accounted for slightly over one tenth of total respondents. As shown in Figure 1, private sector institutions, bilateral organizations and UN organizations have smaller response shares. The number of responses from government bodies was relatively low. However, their low response rate of 3% reflects a difficulty in contacting government representatives in local offices and ministries through the internet and identifying youth employment focal points, than a lack of government initiatives.

FIGURE 1: TYPE OF ORGANIZATION

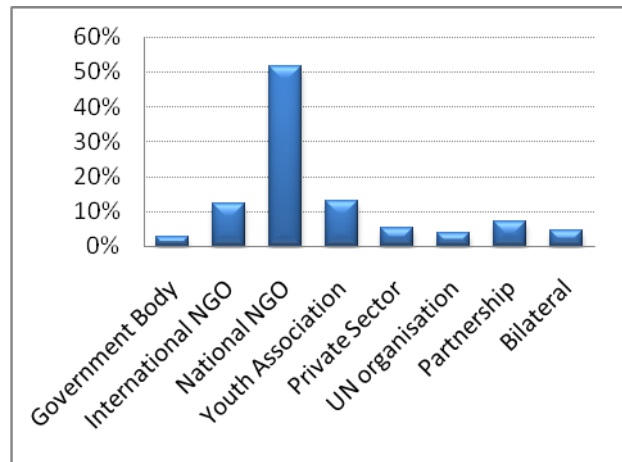
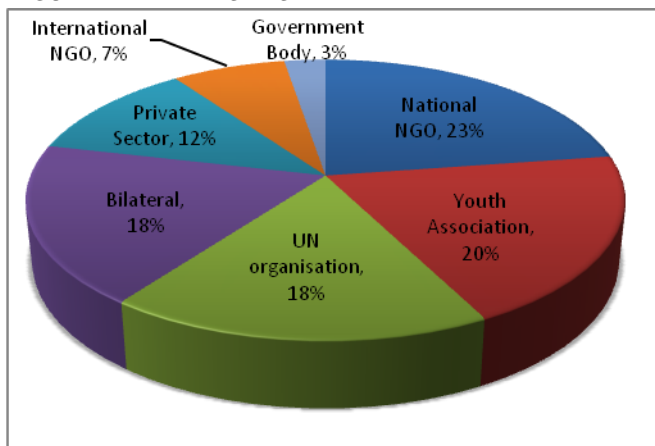


FIGURE 2: PARTNERSHIPS



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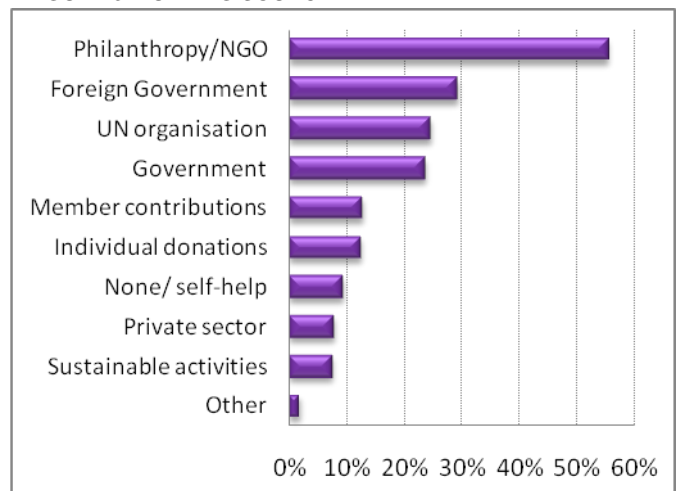
Seven percent of organizations identified themselves as partnerships. Figure 2 shows the different types of organizations that make up these partnerships. Forty-three percent of all partnerships included two key local actors; national NGOs and youth associations. Over one

in ten of the partnerships surveyed included a private sector actor.

1.2. Funding Sources

Figure 3 shows the various donors of the surveyed organizations. The largest donor is philanthropic organizations and NGOs, with over half of all respondent organizations receiving their funding from this source. Like foreign governments, UN organizations are also key donors, providing funding for approximately one in four organizations surveyed. As shown in the graph, national governments also appear as an important donor providing funding to almost as

FIGURE 3: FUNDING SOURCE



many organizations as UN agencies⁴. Despite its potential as a key source of funding, only 8% of organizations surveyed were funded through their own sustainable activities.

1.3. Gender Considerations

Concerning equal opportunities, respondents were asked to identify which of the four options shown in Figure 4 best described their organization’s approach to tackling gender issues. The results suggest that the vast majority of organizations surveyed are gender conscious to some extent, with only 11% stating they did not take gender into consideration at all. Just over half of the surveyed organizations identified gender as a concern that is mainstreamed or partly considered within the organization.

FIGURE 4 : GENDER CONSIDERATIONS



One in three stated that young women are a target group of the organization, while less than one tenth of organizations surveyed stated that young women were indirectly impacted by ongoing projects.

2. ABOUT THE YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PROJECTS SURVEYED

The survey asked respondents to provide information on up to five youth employment projects they are implementing. A total of 435 projects descriptions were submitted. This section provides a summary of these project specific results.

2.1. Areas of Intervention

The areas of intervention were divided into the strategic themes of Employability, Equal opportunities, Employment creation, and Entrepreneurship. Respondents were asked to select the areas of intervention of their youth employment projects. Figure 5 illustrates the proportion of projects being implemented in each of these areas of intervention. The vast majority of projects, 89%, focus on employability as an area of intervention. Equal opportunities and entrepreneurship are also popular areas of intervention for most surveyed projects, while creating employment is the focus of less than half of total projects.

FIGURE 5: AREAS OF INTERVENTION

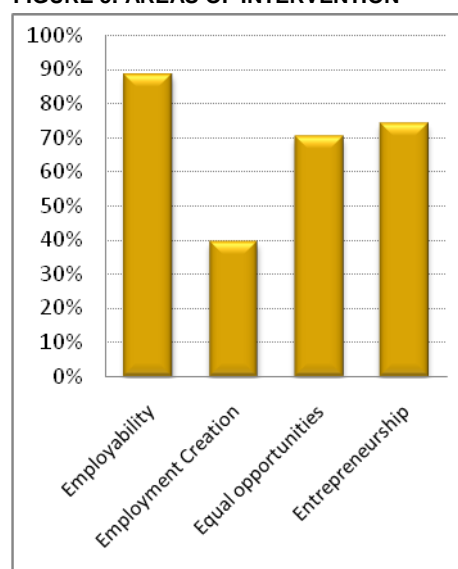
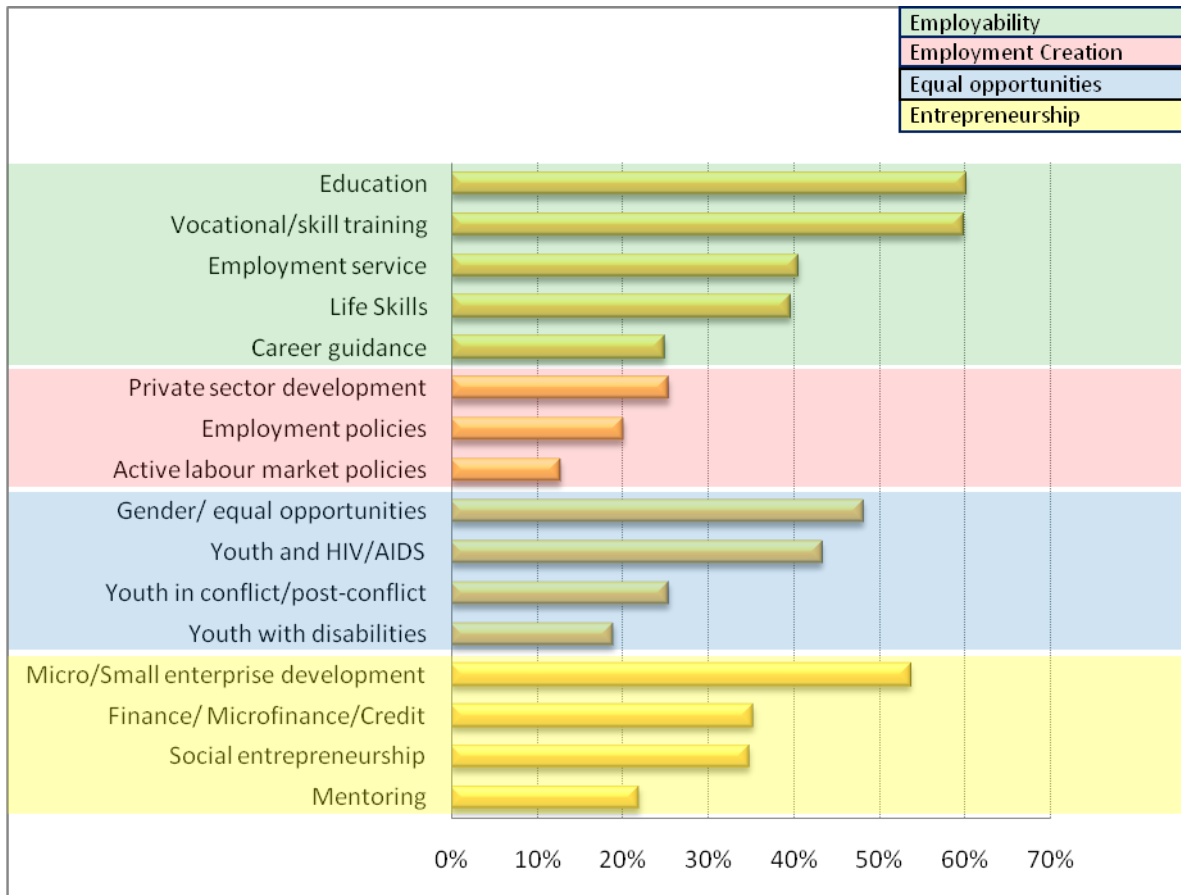


Figure 6 provides a further breakdown of the four areas of

⁴ Figure 3 is based on the number of surveyed organizations a donor gave funding to and not the amount of funding they gave to organizations. The amount of funding organisations received is not available.

intervention illustrated in Figure 5. Within the area of employability, education and vocational training were the most common activities. Another popular approach to tackling youth employment was entrepreneurship, particularly through micro and small enterprise development. Figure 6 also shows that just under half of all projects focus on promoting equal employment opportunities. Within the employment creation intervention area the most common focus of the projects surveyed was private sector development with one in four of all projects working on the sub-area.

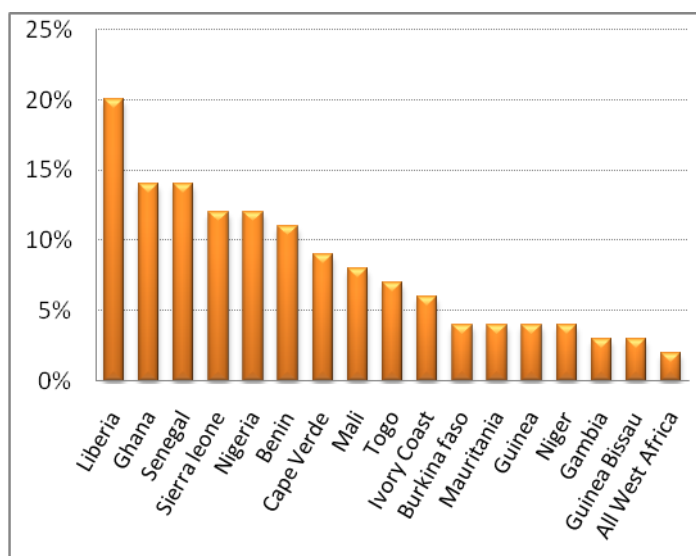
FIGURE 6: BREAKDOWN OF AREAS OF INTERVENTION



2.2. Countries of Operation

Figure 7 shows the countries in which the surveyed projects are being implemented. One in five projects surveyed are being carried out in Liberia. A substantial proportion of projects surveyed, over one in ten, are being carried out in Ghana, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Nigeria and Benin. Response levels were generally varied across countries in the sub-region. In some cases this was expected due to geographic size, for example Gambia, while in other countries such as Guinea-Bissau and Niger,

FIGURE 7: COUNTRIES OF OPERATION

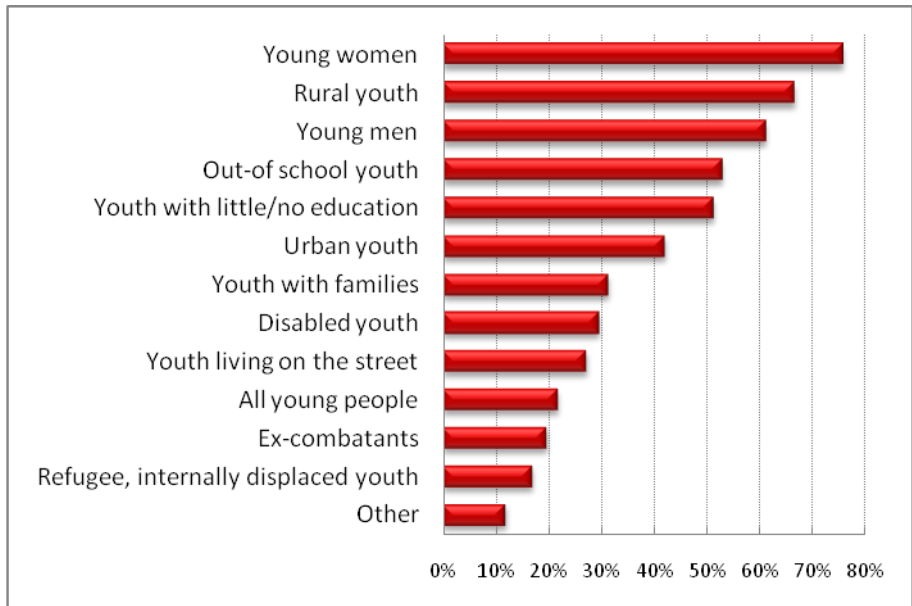


fewer projects were the result of limited internet access in the country.

2.3. Target Groups

Within the general target area of youth, respondents were asked to specify what groups of young people each of their projects target. Young women are the most popular youth target group with three-quarters of all projects aimed at this demographic set. As shown in Figure 8 rural youth and young men are also key target groups with over 60% of projects aimed at each. A majority of youth projects

FIGURE 8 : TARGET GROUPS

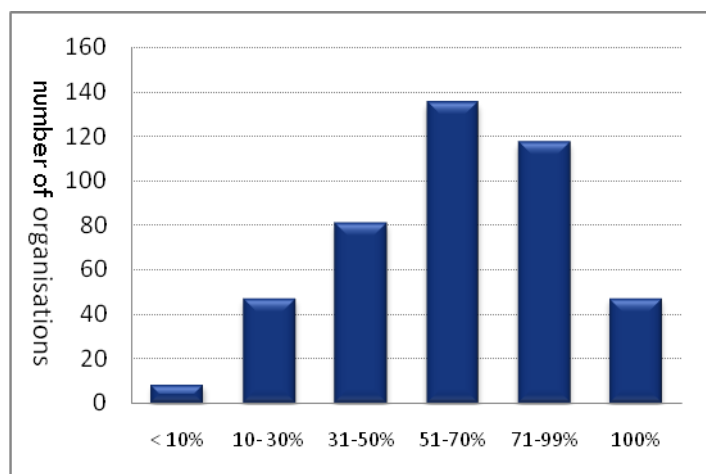


also focus on youth with low levels of education. Youth with families, disabled youth and youth living on the street were less likely to be included specifically in the projects. While only 20% of all projects surveyed across West Africa target ex-combatants and 17% target refugees or internally displaced youth, this percentage is much higher in post-conflict countries. In Liberia, for example, over half of all projects surveyed target ex-combatants and one in three projects target refugees or internally displaced youth.

2.4. Beneficiaries

The 435 projects surveyed were not exclusively targeted at young people. Figure 9 illustrates the proportion of youth that are beneficiaries of the projects surveyed. The results show that close to 300 projects of the total have a majority of young people making up their beneficiaries population. More than one in ten projects exclusively target young people.

FIGURE 9 : PROPORTION OF YOUTH BENEFICIARIES



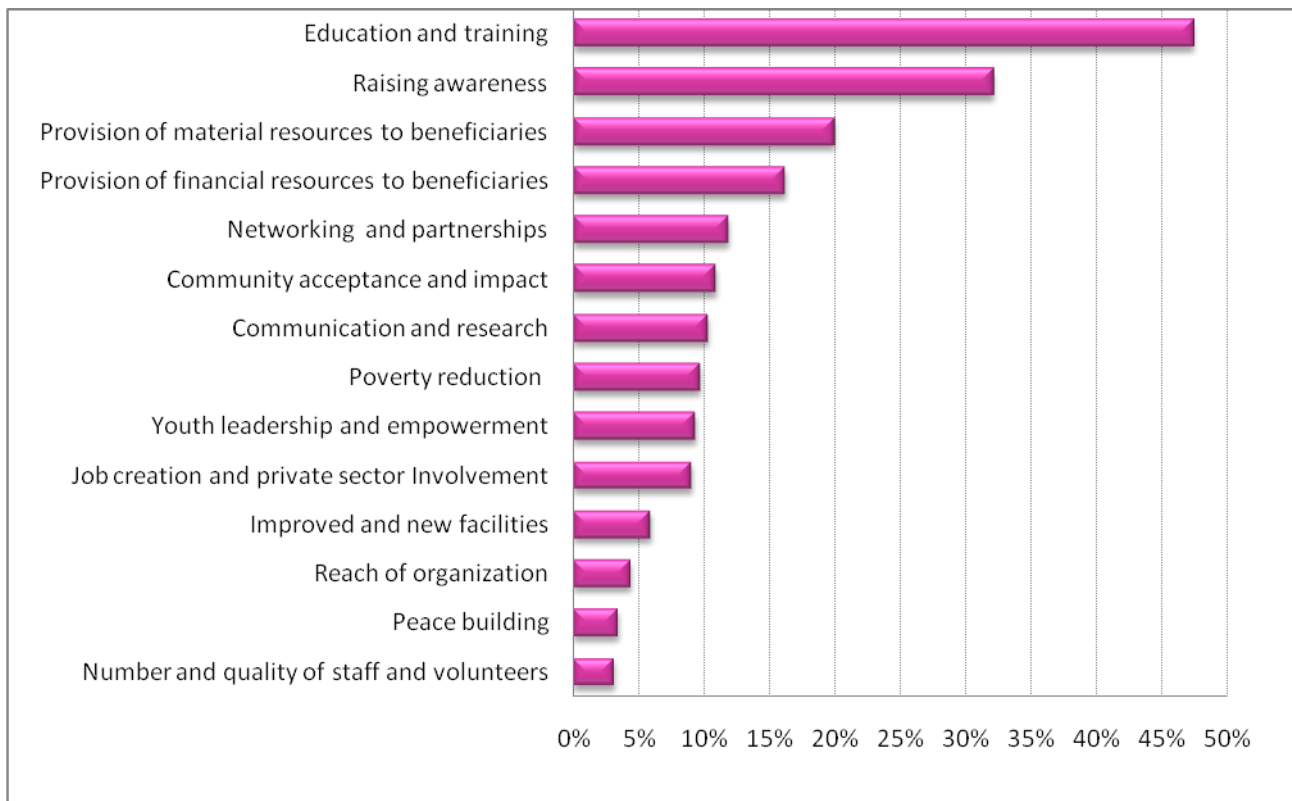
ASSESSING PROGRESS MADE

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

When asked to specify their accomplishments, almost half of all organizations surveyed identified the provision of education and training as an area of success. This includes accomplishments such as an increased number of beneficiaries who completed training programs, received basic education or access to higher education and career guidance. As Figure 10 illustrates, 32% of organizations surveyed identified raising awareness as a key accomplishment. Respondents noted raising awareness on topics such as equal opportunities for women and men, health and HIV/AIDS, the environment and sustainable development, as well as human rights concern, as key accomplishments.

Slightly more than one in ten respondents stated community acceptance and impact as an important accomplishment. Within this category, respondents identified success factors such as increasing community service and collaboration of youth, promoting self-initiated projects in partner communities and being better known within the community.

FIGURE 10: ACCOMPLISHMENTS

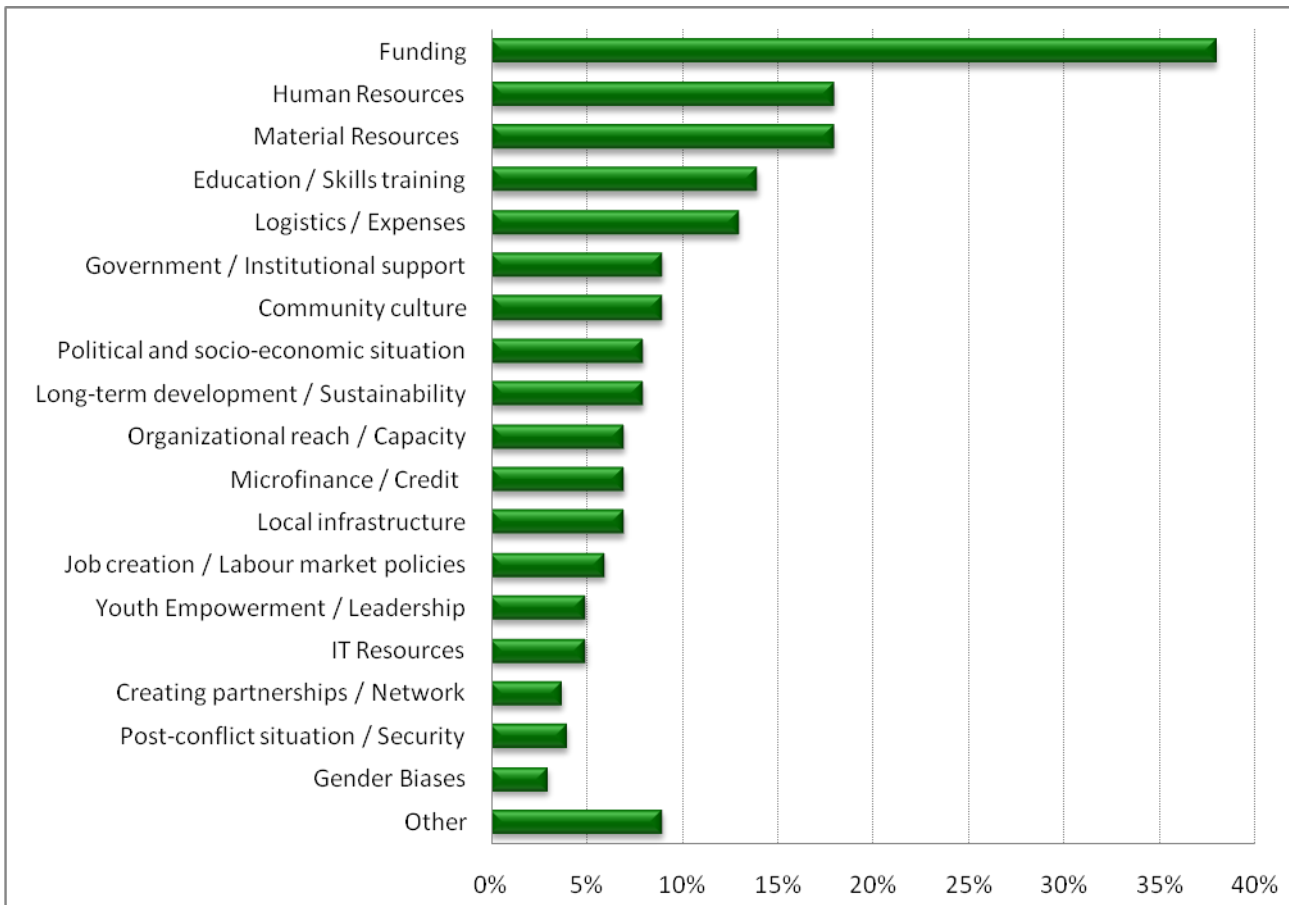


CHALLENGES

The survey asked organizations to identify their key challenges. Despite specifically requesting respondents not to include financial constraints, a significant number of respondents still stated funding as one of their primary challenges, as shown in Figure 11. Human and material resources were also important challenges, each of which was identified by 18% of respondents. Material resources included elements such as office equipment and facilities. When specifying human resources as a challenge, most organizations highlighted impediments related to the poor training and capacity of staff, as well as to the lack of commitment by those working within the organization either as staff or volunteers. Fourteen percent of respondents are facing challenges related to the low education and poor skills training of beneficiaries. These include a high level of illiteracy, lack of skills, as well as the problem of losing track of beneficiaries and not being able to monitor their progress once they complete training.

Approximately one in ten identified the lack of government involvement and institutional support as a key challenge. A similar proportion of organizations surveyed reported community culture, that is, the attitudes and beliefs held by some community members, as a key obstacle. This includes problems such as a lacking sense of participation and cooperation of the youth and or the community as well as biases against certain groups of youth or differing views on their role in the community. Another key challenge raised by surveyed organizations was related to the long-term development of projects and the sustainability of the organization. Concerns include ensuring the impact of projects on the community, making organizations less reliable on external funding and extending the time frame of funding in order to develop a long-term vision and implementation strategy.

FIGURE 11: CHALLENGES



SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The following paragraphs highlight some of the key results that have emerged from the survey exercise.

Sixty five percent of the respondents were local actors, national NGOs and youth associations, implementing youth employment projects. UN agencies and bilateral organizations are also key actors particularly when their role as organizations carrying out youth employment programmes is combined with their role as donors for youth employment organizations.

Related to funding, the results highlight this factor as being crucial for a vast majority of surveyed organizations. The results also show that there is room for organizations to further engage in sustainable activities as an alternative to seeking external funding.

Less than one tenth of organizations surveyed are partnerships and only 12% of organizations believed successful networking was one of their key accomplishments therefore while some organizations are engaging in partnerships this appears to be at a limited level.

Concerning equal opportunities, there is evidence from the survey that a significant number of projects are taking gender considerations into account in their implementation.

While a substantial number of projects are focused on the employability of youth, particularly in the area of vocational training and education there are significantly fewer projects being carried out with a focus on the demand side; that is job creation.

Apart from funding, the second most frequently stated challenge faced by youth employment organizations in the sub-region is a lack of human resource and material resources.

CONCLUSION

This report is the first of two key outputs of the survey exercise. It offers stakeholders an insight into the work of organizations tackling youth employment across West Africa by providing details on these organizations, the types of projects they are implementing and the challenges and accomplishments they face. Below are some of the key conclusions that can be drawn from the survey results laid out in this report.

- Youth Employment initiatives have recorded success in preparing young people for work (employability), paying attention to gender differences (equal opportunities) and in inspiring and exploiting entrepreneurialism in West Africa. This work however, is often limited by insufficient human and/or material resources.
- Greater focus must be placed on assisting organizations to become more sustainable through income generating activities and targeted strategic funding with a longer term vision.
- Employment creation is the least represented of the responding organization. This may be due to the fact that the survey targeted NGOs. However, the survey indicates that demand oriented youth employment initiatives require greater attention from policy makers and from funders to ensure the development of a dynamic private sector that is accessible to younger people.
- There is strong evidence that organizations are gender conscious, although further analysis is required to assess the extent to which gender considerations are impacting young women's employment.
- The impact of youth employment initiatives continues to depend on access to and understanding of present and future demands of the various labour markets of West Africa.
- Future targeting of youth employment initiatives will benefit from further research especially in countries where this survey had lower participation.
- Greater support in finding synergies and creating partnerships is likely to increase organizations' efficiency and reach by allowing them to reap the benefits of specialisation and positive knowledge spillovers.

LOOKING AHEAD

The report has, in addition, provided an overview of the information available in YEN-WA's online database, the second key output of the survey exercise. This database is a valuable resource that offers a wealth of information in a user-friendly, searchable and up-to-date format. As a web resource it is offering youth organizations an online presence that greatly enhances their networking opportunities. As the database provides an idea of the activities already being implemented and the challenges being faced, it is a useful starting point for stakeholders looking to design or support youth employment projects. Finally, YEN-WA will be looking to build on this knowledge and explore untapped opportunities for creating synergies and bringing complementary stakeholders together. Within the broad range of possible partnerships, linking donors or private sector partners to youth employment activities in the sub-region are just a few examples of potential partnership work. The database is available on the YEN website, www.ilo.org/yen.