Across the globe from developed to developing contexts alike, young men and women are often unaware of local labor market realities and thus have unrealistic, often inaccurate expectations about opportunities for income generation, employment, and self-employment. This technical guidance note is primarily written for project staff working on USAID/Food for Peace (FFP)-funded activities with a heavy focus on understanding and strengthening economic opportunities (on-farm, off-farm, and non-farm) for youth populations. It outlines distinct advantages, unique challenges, and key resources for facilitating youth-led market assessments.

The SCALE Award is a USAID/Food for Peace (FFP)-funded capacity strengthening, applied research and knowledge sharing initiative. Implemented by Mercy Corps in collaboration with Save the Children, SCALE works to strengthen the impact, sustainability and scalability of FFP-funded agriculture, natural resource management, and off-farm livelihood activities in both emergency and development contexts.
Why youth-led market assessments?

Lack of information and awareness of potential earning opportunities can hinder youth as they work towards economic independence. Such misperceptions can increase the frustrations of young job seekers and employers, deepening the existing gaps between supply and demand that are often found within weak labor markets. Inaccurate knowledge on local economic activity can also cause individuals and development programs to invest scarce resources in skills building and non-formal education that are not demand-driven and thus fail to increase income.

In many USAID FFP program contexts, young people constitute a large majority of the population. For example, in Niger, the median age is just 14.9 years. In Uganda, 75% of the population is under the age of 30. While agriculture in these contexts may present abundant opportunities for income, many young people also engage in off-farm and non-farm livelihoods driven by both financial necessity and opportunity. Due to personal aspirations, work preferences, unexpected shocks, and the seasonality of labor, among other factors, many young people around the world currently operate a “portfolio of work” and engage in mixed livelihoods. This means they are earning income from multiple, diversified sources that could include agriculture, off-farm, and/or non-farm formal and informal work.

To ensure youth-focused livelihoods activities are market-driven and responsive to local economic needs, many FFP programs now undertake youth-led and youth-inclusive market assessments. Often considered a best practice, these assessments help to root interventions in real labor market needs, while building young people’s understanding of their local economy and the workforce they participate in. Youth-led market assessments also promote a market systems development approach in several ways by: 1) enabling young people to better comprehend the economic systems they participate in, including the roles of market actors, institutions, and formal/informal rules governing a labor market; 2) employing a facilitative role whereby young people lead the efforts; and 3) fostering a sustainable approach through which youth gain critical market research knowledge and transferrable skills. When a fully youth-led assessment (where young people lead all aspects of the assessment—from tool design to data collection to drafting of recommendations) is not possible due to safety, capacity, or other issues, a youth-inclusive process (where young people are engaged in appropriate aspects of the assessment) ensures that the voice and perceptions of youth are still captured.
Youth-led market assessments can:

• Identify gender- and age-appropriate entry points for male and female youth along agricultural market systems and in non-farm sectors
• Uncover potential strategies for livelihoods diversification and opportunities to build portfolios of work
• Identify technical and transferable skills in demand by the labor market and potential employers
• Determine high potential growth sectors (off-farm and non-farm) which may provide opportunities for entrepreneurs and new businesses
• Identify opportunities where there is a present or anticipated demand for labor including sectors and specific businesses
• Understand mismatches and gaps (including in perceptions and expectations) between youth, the private sector, and other market actors
• Identify constraints and opportunities in the wider market system, such as access to financial services for young people
• Examine the influence that informal and cultural norms (such as attitudes towards gender, perceptions around age, etc.) can have on livelihood opportunities
• Determine the supporting services or functions (such as access to market information, market-driven vocational training, etc.) that may enable young people to secure steady work
• Facilitate critical relationships between young people and market actors
• Build young people’s critical technical skills in market research and tool development
• Strengthen youth transferable skills such as effective communication, presentation skills, liaising with the private sector and potential employers, and teamwork

Youth-led market assessment information is frequently used to:

• Design and influence livelihoods, employment, employability, and entrepreneurship activities, such as identifying technical training courses that provide youth with in-demand skills being sought by local employers or enable youth to strengthen existing forms of income generation
• Enable programs to ensure young people are linked to safe, decent, and equitable income opportunities
• Provide program staff and partners with concrete information about market opportunities
• Enable critical stakeholders, such as local governments and NGO communities, to coordinate efforts in addressing constraints in the local economy
• Through the mapping of local food systems, understand social disparities in access to nutritious food and identify potential livelihood opportunities

**Ensuring Safe, Decent, and Equitable Work for Youth**

Youth-led market assessments should identify age- and gender-appropriate income opportunities for youth, ensuring that potential work is:

1. **Safe**: non-hazardous, provides suitable working conditions;
2. **Decent**: not exploitative or illegal; and
3. **Equitable**: salary and wages are based on responsibilities and performance, regardless of gender, age, and ethnic background
Advantages, challenges, and frequently used tools

There are myriad advantages to participatory market assessments; however, these activities are not without challenges. The experiences of FFP partners in facilitating these assessments in diverse contexts have provided a wealth of knowledge on what works and what can be improved. Understanding the highlighted advantages and challenges of youth-led and youth-inclusive market assessments enables the development community to strengthen the approach and its results.

ADVANTAGES OF A YOUTH-LED PROCESS

Building firsthand knowledge of the breadth of local labor market realities

For many programs utilizing a youth-focused approach to market analysis, the process is often more important than the final report or product. Quite often, marginalized young men and women have little to no knowledge of local labor market realities and current flows of supply and demand. Youth may only be aware of employment and self-employment sectors to which they have already been exposed, such as agriculture or catering, and may not know of the full scope of economic opportunities available in their community. Rural youth, in particular, often do not possess full knowledge of local labor market breadth.

Youth-led and participatory market assessments enable young people to gain firsthand knowledge about local employment opportunities, hiring trends, and skills in demand, as well as a deeper understanding of youth-specific constraints to entering the labor market. For example, by interviewing local employers, youth are able to hear firsthand the most desired skills for a specific job, the educational requirements for the role and the previous experience needed. This process of gathering market information can build youth’s knowledge of the economy, while also building their skills in effective communication, teamwork, and market research. In Liberia, a youth-inclusive assessment revealed that many young people had very positive associations with work in agriculture and perceived these livelihoods as a ‘way to get rich’ after exposure to successful farmers and agribusinesses.5

Identifying concrete, immediate economic opportunities

One of the main goals of any market assessment is to identify immediate income generation, employment, and self-employment opportunities in the local economy. Markets are dynamic – they are always changing – and typical livelihoods programs are short-lived (2-3 years). Therefore, it is advantageous to use the information gathered in a market assessment immediately. Often, the data can be turned into a work plan with quick action points. For example, in Liberia, an assessment identified that some employers in urban Monrovia were currently looking for employees and/or were open to immediately taking on an intern or apprentice. Within one month of the assessment’s completion, the program team followed up with these particular businesses to match apprentices with their opportunities and needs.6 A market assessment in Kenya revealed that the dairy and livestock sector had ample opportunities for youth of all educational backgrounds, not simply those with advanced, technical degrees. For example, the assessment identified opportunities in the tannery, abattoir, and processing stages for leather for youth with less than secondary degrees.7
Putting Youth in the Lead

Facilitating relationships and exposure to the private sector/potential employers

Poor, rural, and marginalized communities often have the most limited options for economic opportunity. Particularly in the case of young people, professional interactions with potential employers and other private sector actors are often infrequent and further complicated by deep-rooted stereotypes and discrimination. Participatory market assessments facilitate a platform for positive, professional interactions between these diverse market actors. The strengthening of these relationships, as well as the building of social capital and professional networks, are a critical part of the process. For example, a youth-led assessment in Lebanon revealed that 85.6% of interviewed employers typically hired new employees through relatives or friend connections only. The process of young people engaging with private sector actors to collect data for the assessment created a platform for these job seekers to create new connections with potential employers outside of their limited networks. As part of the market assessment process, young people should be encouraged to approach all interactions with the private sector with the same level of professionalism as they would approach an actual job interview.

Putting youth in the lead

Government and international development rhetoric often refers to young people as the leaders of today and tomorrow, and the generation that has the ability to lift their countries out of poverty. However, outdated development practices tend to follow a heavy-handed approach whereby program staff take on roles that could be performed by local stakeholders, including youth. Youth-led market assessments present the opportunity for young people to intentionally play a significant role in shaping the design of livelihoods and employment activities. Food security initiatives should do more than simply note the importance of youth leadership; they should design and program for meaningful youth engagement, including participatory assessments, when possible.

Recognizing youth participation is vital for effective programs

“Given the opportunity and preparation, youth are valuable partners who can offer insight, guidance, innovative thinking and solutions. They know how to reach other youth in ways that can improve knowledge, shift attitudes, and ultimately change behaviors. By strengthening their social and leadership skills, youth participation not only reduces passivity and apathy among youth but also promotes a positive view of young people in the wider adult community.”

Youth in Development Policy, USAID 2012.
CHALLENGES AND RISKS OF A YOUTH-LED PROCESS

Capacity issues

The capacity of youth assessors is often weaker than typical labor market consultants and program staff, as the market analysis process is likely a new frontier. Additionally, youth may have varying education and literacy levels. The process of training enumerators may therefore require extra detail and time, as well as experiential learning approaches, (such as role playing), and significant testing of the tools. Furthermore, the assessment leads may need to spend extra time in developing an appropriate Scope of Work (SOW) for the enumerators, outlining specific age, language and literacy requirements, as well as a thorough interview and vetting process.

Time

Due to the likely capacity factors above, the assessment process may require a longer timeframe than a typical market assessment. Developing and adapting the tools with the community, identifying qualified and appropriate youth enumerators, and training youth assessors will likely add extra time to the process, sometimes even a few additional weeks. Therefore, work plans and timelines should be developed accordingly and should be sensitive to these issues. Additionally, all trainers should have experience in engaging and working with youth. Ideally, assessment trainers should come from (or be very familiar with) the community from which youth are being engaged, and the daily experiences of youth in that community.

Rigor

The vast majority of youth-led market assessments are not studies of extreme academic or scientific rigor. Rather, they are exercises to 1) gain immediate information about the labor market and local economy; and 2) engage young people in understanding their economic opportunities and challenges firsthand. For these types of assessments, the engagement and process is often as big of a focus as the final report. Additionally, most of these assessments are tailored to specific programs, geographic areas, and populations and are not comprehensive, macroeconomic overviews of labor markets. Institutions such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the World Bank often conduct large-scale studies on labor markets and economies, and these documents should be examined and utilized during the initial research process. Youth-inclusive market assessments should always be completed alongside a more rigorous analysis of the local economy and paired with other studies, such as a food security analysis, private sector mapping, value chain analysis or political economy analysis.

Protection concerns

When designing a youth-inclusive market assessment, any and all safety and protection issues must be thoroughly examined and addressed, and should be revisited throughout the duration of the exercise. If youth, particularly young women, are spending any unchaperoned time in the communities while interviewing employers and other market actors, program staff should determine if there are any safety concerns. Additionally, assessment training and data collection schedules should be flexible to young people’s education commitments, existing work and domestic responsibilities.

EXAMPLES OF YOUTH-INCLUSIVE AND YOUTH-LED MARKET ASSESSMENTS

FREQUENTLY USED TOOLS
Youth-led market assessments often use a similar suite of tools, including those below. However, all assessment methodologies and tools must be adapted to the local context through participatory workshops with youth and the community. Samples of these tools and additional methodologies are included in the “Resources” section at the end of this document.

EMPLOYER/BUSINESS SURVEY
This tool examines the labor market from the view of the private sector and the potential employers. It gathers information including hiring practices, constraints in business growth and expansion, perceptions of young people as employees, challenges to self-employment and entrepreneurship, and existing and future opportunities for short- and long-term employment.

YOUTH FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE OR YOUTH SURVEY
These tools interpret the labor market from the supply side. They illuminate young people’s perspectives on issues such as their economic status, challenges to securing on-farm/off-farm/non-farm income, perceived economic opportunities and constraints, income aspirations, current skills and educational status.

VALUE CHAIN FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE
This tool enables youth to understand appropriate, potential entry points within agricultural market systems, as well as constraints to current agricultural-based activities. This tool can assist young people to understand the full scope and breadth of off-farm economic opportunities (processing, transport, storage, etc.) within any given agricultural market system.
**KEY RESOURCES**

FHI360. (2018). *Workforce Connections: Key Approaches to Labor Market Assessment.* USAID’s Workforce Connections gathered and reviewed existing labor market assessment approaches and related tools from across the workforce and youth landscapes to develop a core suite of tools that can be used to conduct a labor market assessment. The framework consists of six modules (Economic Context, Demand for Skills, Supply of Skills, Systems and Stakeholders, Policy, and Alignment) drawing from a range of fields, including economics, education, training, psychology, and business.


This publication provides advice to countries on how to analyze available information about the labor market and draw policy conclusions and recommendations. Section 1 offers guidance on the collection and analysis of information on recent economic and social trends, with a view to providing context to the youth labor market analysis. Section 2 is aimed at helping a country to review available labor market data and identify the most pressing youth employment challenges. Section 3 concludes and provides the analytical framework to assess the policies and programs that affect youth employment at country level. This resource provides guidance for more heavy and rigorous labor market analysis, including tips on studying macroeconomic trends.


This resource highlights labor market assessment tools adapted for a specific context (Syria) and provides samples tools including Youth Focus Group Discussion Guide and Key Informant Interview Guide.


*Volume I: Project Design* is intended to support Feed the Future staff to design youth-inclusive programs based on the USAID project design cycle. Volume I includes critical topics such as Why Engage Youth and Youth Engagement in Activity Design.

*Volume II: Implementation* offers implementation guidance for activity-level interventions, intended for USAID staff and implementers who may ultimately be managing activities and/or who wish to know more about youth-inclusive approaches to implementation in Feed the Future activities.

*Short versions of each guide, including Youth Analysis, are also available at www.youthpower.org.*

**ENDNOTES**

1 FFP adopts USAID’s Youth in Development Policy definition of youth as those 10-29 years old, unless otherwise defined by the government of the country in which a program is implemented.


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