

Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship

► Building skills and opportunities ►

Employment is a critical issue for youth. While young people have energy, creativity and relevant skills, many cannot find jobs. Youth unemployment is over 50% in most countries. Opportunities for productive, stable and rewarding work have grown increasingly limited for many young people.

YMCAs pursue comprehensive solutions to address youth unemployment. YMCA programs help ensure that young people find and seize opportunities for positive and productive work, and lead lives in which creativity, initiative, and hard work are rewarded.

“We must develop strategies that give young people everywhere a real chance to find decent and productive work that will allow them to become independent and responsible global citizens.”

Kofi Annan, UN Secretary-General
International Youth Day, August 2003

► From textbook to practice to innovation ►

Helping young people develop the knowledge and skills needed for employment is one element of the YMCAs' work. Shaping markets that have the capacity to productively engage young skilled workers is another necessary complement.

YMCAs involve multiple stakeholders, integrate youth employment and entrepreneurship efforts into all areas of youth development programming, and pursue four linked sub-strategies to strengthen youth employment and entrepreneurship. Skills development, job placement, job creation and support to young entrepreneurs are all critical elements of the comprehensive YMCA approach.



Vocational training for hearing impaired youth - YMCA Sri Lanka

The YMCA needs to keep on training more young people to enter the job market. It is a real need and can help alleviate youth unemployment and desperation.

Prospère (Senegal)

YMCA training and educational programs are often followed by job placement opportunities, which assist young people in breaking through the “no experience” barrier. Ongoing technical and financial support is also provided to graduates of entrepreneurial programs. YMCAs nurture private sector relationships with experienced entrepreneurs, employer associations, and financial agents in order to sustain placement opportunities, provide access to financing and introduce trainees to important networks and role models.

YMCAs help strengthen markets in multiple ways in order to build stronger and more competitive local industries. This includes specialized training for mid-career professionals, technology upgrades for businesses and skill training for entry-level workers. By supporting entrepreneurship and micro-enterprise development, YMCAs also empower young people to drive market growth. In today's global and dynamic economy, small businesses are now responsible for a significant proportion of the market's new job creation.

► Connecting youth development strategies for maximum outreach and impact ►

Creating links between technology and employment is a strategic priority of the YMCA movement. Competency in computer and information technology is essential in today's market, especially for young entrepreneurs. Programs that emphasize information technology and electronic networking provide opportunities for advertising skills, partnerships and networking. Ultimately, these programs also stimulate innovation.

The YMCA youth enterprise and capacity building training program helped me make my dreams become a reality.

Antoine—Youth entrepreneur,
hair salon owner and manager

The YMCA of **Senegal** is successfully integrating employment efforts into other youth development programs. Young women participating in a service-learning initiative provide employment training and advice to female prisoners, and prepare them for their release. Equipped to find legal—and rewarding—forms of work, released prisoners are able to break the cycle of poverty, prostitution and incarceration.

The Youth Enterprise and Capacity Building Program

▼ A best practice example from the YMCA of Senegal ▼

In the Youth Enterprise and Capacity Building Program, participants learn to combine entrepreneurial skills with fundraising and business planning efforts during a three-week intensive course. Participants conduct market and field research, study the feasibility of their ideas and develop a detailed business plan. The last step for certification requires participants to develop and present a project proposal seeking start-up funds to support their initiative.

The YMCA of Senegal provides limited seed funds to promising proposals and explores means to consolidate long-term support to a growing number of participants through a deposit scheme or rotating loan fund.

In addition to training, technical and financial support, the YMCA nurtures mentoring and networking opportunities for young entrepreneurs by involving representatives of the private sector in every step of the program.

In response to participant demand (from young female and rural entrepreneurs in particular), the YMCA is starting to make training available in Wolof, the most commonly used language in Senegal.

▶▶ Stimulating youth entrepreneurship and vital markets ▶▶



*East Jerusalem YMCA auto-shop
Youth Employment Program*

The **East Jerusalem YMCA** programs continue to grow in quality and quantity, despite operating in an extremely challenging environment where employment, educational and economic development opportunities are severely restricted. In addition, youth unemployment in the region exceeds 70% in many communities. Throughout the West Bank and Gaza, the YMCA is working with thousands of young people to promote healthy, decent and sustainable livelihoods.

The YMCA Extension Services Unit was established in 1992 with support from the U.S. Agency for International Development West Bank and Gaza Mission and the YMCA of the USA. Focusing on initiatives that stimulate jobs and micro-enterprise development in the vocational and industrial sectors, the Extension Service Unit supports the establishment of new businesses and works to strengthen existing ones so young workers and graduate trainees can find employment.

Over the past decade, the YMCA has helped more than 10,000 youths find permanent jobs. The YMCA has also assisted over 3,000 local businesses throughout the West Bank and Gaza. The program and revolving loan fund is now sustained without external assistance.

The East Jerusalem YMCA follows a comprehensive strategy for youth employment. Training, job placement, job creation and support are given to entrepreneurs. The YMCA organizes placements, ranging from 3-6 months, in the private sector for graduates of industrial schools, vocational training centers and polytechnic institutions. They provide the necessary first-experience, as well as the professional connections for young people looking to secure long-term jobs.

The YMCA also plays a critical role in providing management training and start-up financial support for new entrepreneurs and existing small business owners, both of whom often have few resources. In collaboration with the Arab Bank, loans of up to \$15,000 are available to entrepreneurs with solid business plans and management skills. Partnering with a local financial institution has decreased the costs of administering the program and has established many first-time relationships between borrowers and the bank.

The YMCA monitors funds closely and provides on-demand business consulting services to entrepreneurs. Borrowers maintain complete control over spending decisions.

YMCA programs are a crucial source of support, training and hope for many young people in the West Bank and Gaza. Youth demand for participation in YMCA employment and entrepreneurship initiatives continues to rise and outpace program capacity.

Ask us about...

- The YMCA YETME Employment Program of Nagpur, India
- The YMCA of Honduras youth-led micro-credit cooperative

Atayeb Al Rif

▼ A best practice example from the YMCA of Lebanon ▼

The YMCA of Lebanon empowers rural women to take control of their livelihoods and lead economic revitalization in their communities. With strong support from the U.S. Agency for International Development, complemented by resources from the local communities, this YMCA pilot project has catalyzed rural social change and brought about thriving businesses.

Atayeb Al Rif, meaning "rural delights," is a line of naturally-processed food products that is produced, managed, marketed and owned by rural women. The project trains participants in food processing and preservation techniques, and offers business training in marketing, management, accounting and the legal aspects of the market.

Participants and graduates take part in each component of the business. They create the product and manage its production process, marketing it locally, regionally and internationally. As equal owners, they share the profits of their hard work. The local production centers, where agricultural products are processed, are linked to the national level Atayeb Al Rif cooperative – a 1,500 member group that is rapidly growing.

The Atayeb Al Rif project is tackling a number of challenges with impressive results. By empowering women to run profitable cooperative businesses, the YMCA initiative is achieving:

- Job creation in rural areas
- Income generation for women, including young women
- Increased participation of women in the market as business leaders
- Increased decision-making power of women over their own incomes, both within their households and communities
- Stable demand and fair prices for farmers' produce
- Increased demand and support for sustainable agricultural practices



For many participants, it is the first time they have worked outside of the home or been compensated for their work. The project addresses women's high unemployment rates and poverty levels, unequal wages between the sexes and women's limited participation in economic decision-making processes. With an independent income, and the autonomy that it brings, women are now making investment and budget decisions.

In addition to operating and managing a growing business, graduates are also lobbying their local governments and communities for new resources to expand the initiative.



►► Responding to the global market ►►

YMCAs around the world are pursuing employment strategies in response to the changing local and global economies. Through these comprehensive and integrated programs, YMCAs assist young people in finding decent, productive and stimulating work.

To achieve our common goals in youth employment and entrepreneurship, the YMCA of the USA partners with national YMCA movements in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Middle East. YMCAs everywhere work jointly with local communities, local and national governments, faith-based organizations and NGOs, the private sector and the international donor community.

YMCAs have collaborated with:

The Arab Bank • United States Agency for International Development