



Senegal YMCA

Employment and Vocational Training

Introduction

Young people in Senegal have an abundance of energy and creativity, yet they still face many obstacles in finding employment. Among the greatest challenges for youth are lack of work experience and lack of skills training. This challenging scenario requires the sustained and concerted efforts of many stakeholders to strengthen the capacity of young people to obtain pertinent job skills and placement.

In 2002, the Senegal YMCA created its Youth Entrepreneurship and Employment program with the objectives of developing youth business acumen and assisting young people in entering the labor market. The YMCA's program complements the efforts of the government, which, in 2001, set up a national agency for youth employment. Through YMCA World Service, YMCA of the USA provided the seed money to help launch the program.

Plan and methodology

The Youth Entrepreneurship and Employment program targets young job seekers between the ages of 15 and 35. The program's two areas of focus, entrepreneurship and employment, aim to provide participants with business acumen and assistance in negotiating favorable job contracts.

In the entrepreneurship program, the YMCA selects promising young entrepreneurs (many from vulnerable groups such as the disabled) who participate in a six-week course on business management training. Participants create detailed and realistic business plans for their projects. The YMCA also assists the young entrepreneurs with market analysis and researching finance options. Once the young entrepreneurs have gotten their businesses off the ground, the YMCA conducts project evaluations as well as follow-up workshops to reinforce their skills.

In the employment area, the YMCA assists young women (most are new residents to Dakar and illiterate) in obtaining jobs and negotiating fair work agreements. While housecleaning is the most common job for many of these young women, the YMCA surveys the local job market to uncover other employers and work options. The YMCA also advocates youth employment by promoting work for juvenile offenders released from jail and by organizing regional conferences and employment strategy meetings.



These young peanut farmers completed the Senegal YMCA's Young Entrepreneurs program.

Challenges and keys to success

Among the program's initial challenges were the lack of access to training curricula and the availability of personnel for follow-up and project management. To solve this problem, the Senegal YMCA managed to provide training courses with the assistance of expert local partners. However, the ability to provide adequate employment support to former young offenders and comprehensive follow-up with the young entrepreneurs, continue to be challenges.

Perhaps the greatest obstacle to continued success is the availability of a revolving fund to provide the young entrepreneurs with seed money. Once they've completed the program, young Senegalese have difficulty obtaining lines of credit from traditional banks. Short-term loans, therefore, are nearly impossible. The program managers would like to create a credit union that would provide the young entrepreneurs with access to credit in order to get more businesses started. The Senegal YMCA will continue to address these and other challenges with the support and assistance of key local partners.

Achievements to date

The Youth Entrepreneurship and Employment program began in 2002 with 25 participants trained. By 2005, the program had trained a total of 285 youth. In 2005, there were 22 small businesses in progress, up from 10 businesses in 2003. Today, the program hosts more women than men, many of whom are from disadvantaged backgrounds.

YMCA program leaders have observed many positive changes in the attitudes of those who have benefited from the YMCA's training. Program beneficiaries are a lot more enthusiastic about their future job prospects and are more aggressive about seeking out opportunities. The new-found passion exhibited by the program participants also can be felt at the community level. Young women, for example, are confidently undertaking more leadership positions that place them at the decision-making table with their male counterparts.

Future plans

Following skill-demand trends in the job market, the Senegal YMCA will continue to expand and improve this program. The plans for enlarging the program include 1.) developing a business skills training center for youth with special needs, 2.) creating and funding a credit union and 3.) identifying and securing additional resources to make these plans a reality. YMCA of the USA provides technical and financial resources to support

testimonial

"The YMCA's training really gave me the confidence to move forward with making a business out of what I was already skilled at doing; farming. I hope to some day donate some of my profits to the YMCA so that it can continue to train more young people."

– Prosper Gandoul, small-scale farmer

