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YOUNG PEOPLE CO-DESIGN REGIONAL FRAMEWORK

Developing a Regional Framework on Youth Employment in West Africa

‘Change is a matter of generations; experience and innovation are its drivers. So to succeed in your actions, consider us (young people) as full partners.’ Ousmane, workshop participant from Mali

[The Regional Framework on Youth Employment](#) was co-designed with young people from Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal during a co-creation workshop that took place from 3–9 April 2016 in Cotonou, Benin. The workshop brought together 46 people to support the development of programming on the strategic issue of youth employment, including 22 youth representatives and Oxfam staff from five affiliates (from country, regional and head offices).

The regional workshop was conducted in a participatory, creative and energising spirit and every effort made to ensure gender balance. Young people were actively and meaningfully involved at all stages of the process, working as equals with Oxfam staff on three specific objectives, namely to:

- Validate and add to the findings of the participatory regional research;
- Develop a regional framework and a roadmap;
- Strengthen and develop new partnerships with youth organisations and networks.

Youth participation approaches

Participatory research: The first step of the process was to conduct participatory [Research on Youth Employment in West Africa](#) to develop a comprehensive and holistic framework, based on three critical pillars that are necessary for meaningful and sustainable change on youth employment. These are: *Agency, Capacities and Skills; Economic Opportunities; and an Enabling Environment.*

Framework co-creation workshop: During the workshop, the participants debated the preliminary findings of the research within each of the three pillars, and decided to add an additional pillar: *Peer Learning and Synergy.* This pillar aimed to boost regional interaction between the key players of each country implementing youth employment



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programmes in West Africa. Based on the findings of the participatory research, participants developed a regional framework by working on different 'building blocks' and identifying key elements of change. These elements included: target groups, communication channels and stakeholders, as well as specific objectives, key strategies (including gender justice) and activities. Participants identified vulnerable young people (as determined by poverty, education, gender, exclusion and discrimination) as the ultimate target group. They then explored the main attributes (such as age, gender, family, marital status, education or job) and lifestyle/daily routines of vulnerable youth to gain a better understanding of the best online and offline channels to reach them.

Participants concluded that it was also necessary to work directly with educated youth as both leaders and influencers, as they would be of assistance in reaching more vulnerable youth – especially young women – while working to mobilise other young people to influence policy. Key stakeholders around the target groups were also considered, ranging from vulnerable young people's family to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), to assess their influence on youth employment.

Subsequently, the participants developed their proposition for supporting youth active citizenship and employment in West Africa. Within each of the three pillars, they identified six specific objectives. These objectives were then ranked based on their relevance from different perspectives: Oxfam's strategic position and track record; their potential impact on vulnerable youth; and the interests of the private sector, government and donors. The participatory and engaging methodology used to construct the framework was much like assembling a puzzle. Each step was well defined and clearly explained at the outset, with supporting examples, to ensure all participants had a full understanding. Youth were involved in the daily planning and facilitation of the activities, which helped to build their ownership of the process.

Youth approach to stakeholder engagement:

Following the workshop, youth representatives from each participating country presented the regional framework to donors and allies in a very dynamic way (for example, in the style of a talk show). This included presentations to the Canadian Cooperation, the European Union, the Embassy of the Netherlands in Benin, the UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), Orabank and the Ministry of Employment of Benin. The donors and allies provided the young participants with positive insights to improve the regional framework. This exercise helped to create opportunities for further collaboration; it also provided a great opportunity to build young people's capacities on partnership development and resource mobilisation, which is often a weakness or a skill lacking among youth-led organisations.

Key youth participation successes

Youth-led framework embedded into Oxfam regional plan:

The Regional Framework on Youth Employment has been integrated into Oxfam's West Africa regional workplan. It has served as a basis for project and programme development, donor engagement (in the region and in some Oxfam affiliate countries such as Canada and the Netherlands), and for some influencing activities such as joint campaigns and advocacy. The framework's strength lies in its relevance and legitimacy as the result of a robust co-creation process involving Oxfam staff and youth representatives. The framework also presents different entry points from which projects and initiatives can be developed.

Involving young people from diverse backgrounds:

When using the term 'youth', it is recognised that young women and men are not a homogeneous group – they experience different levels of privilege and marginalisation, which need to be considered. An effort was therefore made to ensure that the process involved a gender-balanced group of participants with representation of young people from a diversity of backgrounds, including more marginalised youth. Involving vulnerable youth increased the impact of the framework's content, by boosting the accuracy of its baseline data and contextual analysis.

A bilingual environment:

The West Africa region, like the rest of the continent, presents important disparities between French- and English-speaking countries. Hosting a bilingual workshop opened a space for young people from parallel worlds to meet, learn from each other, create real synergies and build a common regional vision. Bilingualism has tremendous benefits but it also comes with considerable financial costs, for example due to the



need to create and print tools and resources in both languages. Furthermore, co-creating in two languages requires a team of hands-on translators in each sub-group, as well as bilingual staff. Asking young people to translate for their peers should only be used a last resort since it prevents them fully contributing to the discussions.

Lessons for others

Engage rural youth: Even though the participants came from diverse backgrounds, urban youth were disproportionately represented. A higher participation of young 'agripreneurs' and youth members of rural or farmer's associations would have been helpful to ensure a better balance in the group. Rural youth primarily spend their time on income-generating activities and they have fewer opportunities to become engaged as active citizens. Mobilising the necessary resources to reach and ensure the availability of rural youth leaders would have brought more depth to the process. Meaningfully engaging and involving this group requires having the necessary means to facilitate their mobility and that of local staff.

Ensure follow-up: During the workshop, the participants developed a roadmap outlining what would happen next and how Oxfam and its partners

and allies would coordinate their actions and generate synergies. While various actions have been implemented with youth participants at the country and regional levels, in some countries their engagement proved difficult to sustain due to a lack of resources to co-create proposals based on the opportunities presented. Providing resources to country teams such as seed funding for programme development with youth partners, may have helped to mitigate this.

This case study forms part of a series of case studies exploring how to go from programmes developed *for* young people, to working *with* them and on projects led *by* them.

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