



# INFLUENCE OF COMMUNITY ON **YOUTH TRANSFERABLE SKILLS** IN LIVELIHOOD DEVELOPMENT<sup>1</sup>

## **YOUTH IN ACTION-MALAWI & UGANDA**

### **Study Brief-2015**

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**Save University Partnership for Education Research (SUPER) Study Brief**

## Introduction

Youth in Action (YiA) is a six-year learning and livelihood program. In partnership with The MasterCard Foundation, YiA aims to improve the socio-economic status of 40,000 out-of-school young people, both girls and boys, in rural Burkina Faso, Egypt, Ethiopia, Malawi and Uganda. Through the development of youth's foundational, life and transferable skills, youth are empowered to make informed pathway choices for the future. This is achieved through a learning phase where youth build on and enhance their literacy, numeracy, financial literacy and entrepreneurship skills. At the end of the learning phase, youth move to the action phase where they apply their learning in an income generating livelihood initiative that they choose themselves from: Entrepreneurship, Vocational Training/Apprenticeship or Education/Employment. The program also supports them with small start-up funds, mentorship, networking and peer-to-peer support.

Youth in Action is generating a robust learning and research opportunities that will serve the youth economic development sector by creating an evidence base of effective program interventions from its tested approaches. As part of the efforts to document and advance these learnings, Save the Children works with Academic research fellows through the Save-University Partnership for Education Research (SUPER) fellowship that was formed to help measure, document, and analyze the mechanisms affecting the program's impact.

In 2015, Malawi and Uganda's YiA country teams decided to document the ***Influence of Community on Youth Transferable Skills in Livelihood Development*** in two Super Studies that were conducted in cooperation with the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the University of Massachusetts-Amherst.

## Objective

This study brief presents a summary of findings from the two SUPER fellowship studies in Malawi and Uganda. The purpose of these studies was to contextualize the developmental assets survey by understanding the following: how do community members support or hinder the development and use of transferable skills in youth livelihood development?

## Methodology

The research was conducted in eight communities of two districts—Rumphi (north) and Ntchisi (central)—in Malawi and five communities of two districts in western Uganda—Kasese and Ntoroko.

We maximized variation among participants by sampling participants of both genders, different ages, and different scores on the DAP+ field test. We used thematic analysis to understand the most prominent and often recurring themes, triangulating themes across respondents and types of data.

Participant	Method	MA	UG
YiA youth	Interview	24	52
	Focus Group Interview	36	48
Non-YiA youth	Interview	20	18
	Focus Group Interview	24	18
YiA facilitators	Interview	8	0
	Focus Group Interview	0	17
Parents	Interview	20	15
Employers	Interview	16	13
<b>Total</b>		<b>148</b>	<b>115</b>

## Findings

The *organizing principle* that was uncovered in this research was that *community members are the gatekeepers* for youth livelihood development in the sample communities. Community members are the employers that youth contact when they need a job, and they are the support that youth draw on before starting a business.

However, a persistent discourse among community members was that youth are lazy and unreliable. Community members wanted youth to prove themselves in the community before they offered livelihood support. In other words, a majority of community members looked for transferable skills — which they defined as reputation — in youth before they hired them or supported youth businesses.

There were three related ways in which youth negotiated this *reputation as being hard working and responsible*. These sub-themes were signals to community members that the youth would make a good employee or that support for a youth business would pay off. In other words, in these communities it was the perspective that certain skills could be transferred from the youths' community life to their work life that was an important precursor to community members supporting youth. These transferable skills could mediate the relationship between youth gaining skills through programs like YiA and being successful in the local labour market.

### Finding 1: Appropriate Use of Time

In both countries, there were specific ways in which boys and girls were expected to use their work and free time. Boys were expected to demonstrate hard work outside the home while girls were expected to take care of household chores: “...girls tend to be restricted on where they are and what they do. Usually, they are restricted to household/kitchen chores including looking after young relatives, taking care of the sick, and fetching water.” (Parent, Malawi). Girls who were seen loitering around the community were considered shirkers of household responsibilities.

There was also more flexibility with how boys were expected to spend free time compared to girls: “...moving around freely and meeting up with boys in the village, people could perceive us as whores. A better place to meet in our free time is in church youth groups or choirs.” (Youth, Malawi)

## **Finding 2: Participating in Training Programs**

Work-specific training was seen as opportunity for youth to build knowledge, demonstrate a dedication to a specific livelihood, and create a reputation that is different from their peers:

“...my neighbour’s daughter, she messed around with some boda boda [motorcycle taxi] man and she got pregnant...I was actually very sad when she got pregnant. She is a good girl, and her poor mother relied on her for help with her siblings. At least now when you see her going to [YiA], you know that maybe she can do something for her family.” (Parent Uganda)

## **Finding 3: Independence and Perseverance**

Youth were expected to demonstrate that they could wean themselves from dependence on external programs and family networks for livelihood development. One community member from Malawi described the following: “some youth “get too comfortable to move on once they have gained experience and expertise from their friends or parents. Unfortunately, they begin to realize that the time to start their own business has passed.”

On a related note, youth were also expected to demonstrate perseverance through challenging times. “To me, I think dropping out of YiA shows lack of experience in real life struggles. I know the challenges I have gone through and no one knows the feeling of those challenges, except me. I have persevered. I want to continue persevering until things get better.” (YiA Youth, Malawi)

## **Recommendations**

- Ensure that youth have more program-supported interactions with community members to demonstrate what they are learning in YiA and how they intend to use their experience.
- In future iterations of the program, adopt a more holistic ecological approach to addressing the livelihood needs of youth by engaging community members more fully in all levels of the program.

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