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Scaling Youth Workforce Development Outcomes by Transforming Local Systems: A RWANDA CASE STUDY

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Over the past decade, there has been growing evidence around “what works” to improve youth skills, employment, and livelihoods. Governments, donors, researchers, and service providers know more than ever before which interventions contribute to positive youth workforce development outcomes. Yet over the years, few low- and middle-income countries have been able to make positive impacts *at scale*, that is, beyond select sectors, outside discrete geographic (predominantly urban) pockets, or among a broader number of youth cohorts of different asset levels.

EDC is committed to deepening its understanding of how youth skills development outcomes can be sustained and scaled at a meaningful magnitude and across different contexts. To help us answer this question, EDC launched a research initiative to learn how youth outcomes have scaled in Rwanda over a ten-year period. Rwanda is a country where EDC has been deeply involved in workforce development, with support from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Mastercard Foundation, and where significant changes to the workforce development system have occurred. EDC has conducted this research to understand how these shifts have happened and what role, if any, EDC’s programming played in that change process. We also apply what we know globally to understand what this evidence tells us about the role of donor-funded programs in workforce development systems change.

Summary of Key Takeaways

This case study illustrates the key factors contributing to workforce systems change over a decade-long period in Rwanda (roughly 2008–2019). Rather than attempting to present an exhaustive picture of the Rwandan workforce system, we offer a snapshot of what we have learned about the system and how it has changed. Although we do so from the vantage point of an international implementing organization, we hope this case study informs a range of system stakeholders—including governments, donors, and international organizations—about how they can work together to improve youth skills development and employment outcomes.

The key lessons from this case study are the following:

- Improvements to youth skills development outcomes are meaningful when experienced by a large number of young people across diverse socioeconomic contexts, including marginalized youth segments. This reach can only occur when a broad set of system actors are working together to achieve these outcomes in an inclusive manner—for both in-school and out-of-school youth, urban and rural, male and female, and including marginalized groups.

- A national vision can be a powerful mobilizer of stakeholders around a common agenda. Consistent leadership and ongoing coordination between system actors is equally important and must extend to the operational level to avoid duplication, fragmentation, and competitive rent-seeking among stakeholders. Mechanisms of mutual learning at national and subnational levels and between groups of committed stakeholders are also critical for capacity building.
- International development programs that establish demonstration models of workforce development service delivery are sustained and scaled when they work within and reflect the changing dynamics of the existing system. In EDC's case, early and visible results established its credibility within the system, attracted the attention of the government and the private sector, and was a catalyst for shifting norms and mindsets. These changes were sustained through an environment of learning and collaboration between a network of community-based organizations working alongside donors, the government, and the private sector. Notably, this change process took time, beyond a typical five-year project span.
- Policy reforms, such as the development of the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Policy, a national qualifications framework, and competency-based curriculum reform—combined with bottom-up innovations that put those policies into practice—provided an important foundation for the change process in Rwanda's workforce development system. Decentralization efforts may also contribute to holding local actors accountable to achieving youth workforce development outcomes at the subnational level.
- The establishment of locally driven, subnational Youth Development Alliances have been effective mechanisms for aligning relevant policies, programs, and practices at a local level. Coordinated local mapping processes and district-level labor market assessments have created efficiencies and encouraged an expanded network of stakeholders to contribute toward youth development.
- Youth are important contributors to improved and expanded public and private service delivery. Activating peer-based accompaniment (peer mentoring and networks as well as savings and lending groups) are promising models for extending the reach of affordable, ongoing employment and business supports to youth. More research is needed on the effectiveness and sustainability of these peer-based support mechanisms.
- Common performance metrics among service providers have elevated their standards of skills development programs. When communicated in user-friendly ways, their measurable and visible improvements have influenced the uptake of service innovations across the system as a whole. For international donors, monitoring, evaluation, and learning should include not only project-level indicators but also systems benchmarks as gauges for sustainability and scale.
- Secondary schools and TVETs are essential vehicles for scaling youth skills and employment outcomes; however, teacher training remains a persistent challenge due to a lack of learner-centered approaches, a lack of technical knowledge in demand

sectors, the high cost of teacher training, and teacher turnover. EDC has and continues to experiment with teacher communities of practice and capacity building for school administrators and quality assurance bodies to address these challenges.

- The private sector plays a crucial role in providing labor market information, informing curriculum, offering work-based learning opportunities, and in some cases, directly delivering on-site, demand-driven skills development. Expanding this level of engagement at scale proves to be a challenge, and it will likely work best through localized partnerships between individual firms and service providers at the community level. Similarly, partnerships with financial service providers, through youth-friendly financial services to youth enterprises and cooperatives, can make a significant contribution to youth self-employment outcomes.

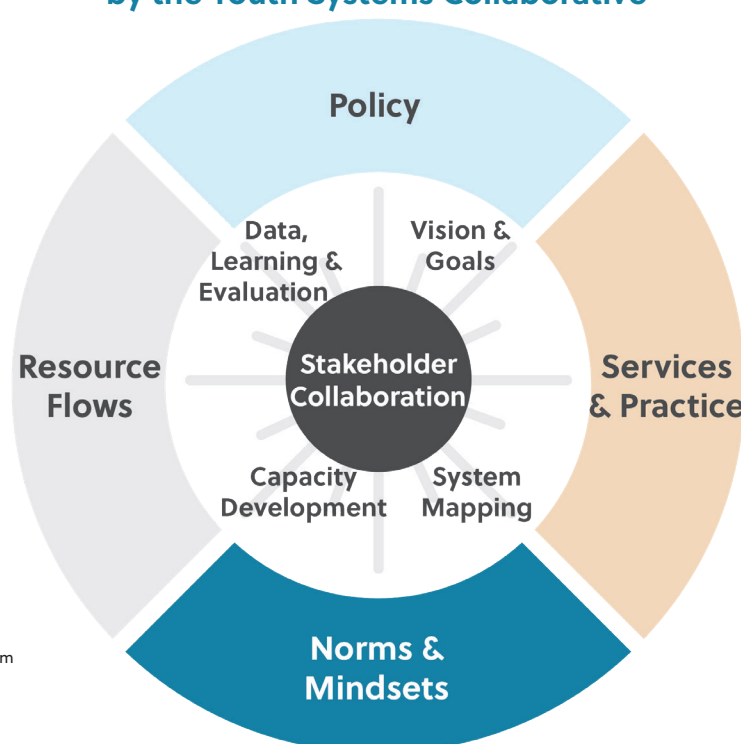
Methodology

Our research applies a systems-thinking lens. We believe that improvements to youth skills development outcomes are meaningful when experienced by a large number of young people across diverse socioeconomic contexts, including marginalized youth segments. This reach can only occur when a broad set of system actors are working together to achieve these outcomes, and when they are able to collectively acknowledge and respond to changing dynamics. As such, we have framed our research around the **Youth Systems Framework**, developed by the Youth Systems CollaborativeSM, a network of international organizations seeking to promote learning about international youth systems change efforts. The Youth Systems Framework offers nine domains and enablers for investigating youth systems change efforts in low- and middle-income countries (Figure 1).¹

At the heart of systems change is Stakeholder Collaboration:

- Who are the critical stakeholders and leaders driving youth skills development outcomes?
- What incentives and power dynamics drive their decisions and behaviors?
- What characterizes and shapes the nature of their relationships?
- How do those relationships impact youth outcomes?

Figure 1. Youth Systems Framework by the Youth Systems Collaborative



Graphic source: Ignatowski, C., Blum, R., Campbell, P., & Perez-Pineda, R. (in press). Building youth infrastructure: Early lessons from the youth systems collaborative. [Journal for Youth Development]



The four major *enablers* of systems change are the actions that these stakeholders take to improve youth outcomes:

1. **Vision and goals:** What is the highest-level vision and measurable goal around which the local system is defined? To what extent is this vision held by different actors in the system?
2. **Systems mapping:** In what ways have stakeholders engaged in participatory systems mapping to better understand how their system works as a whole?
3. **Capacity development:** What kinds of systemwide capacity building is critical for achieving youth outcomes at scale?
4. **Data, learning, and evaluation:** To what extent are stakeholders using data, learning, and evaluation to inform their decision-making, and is this manifested by continual improvements and better youth outcomes?

We then see these stakeholders taking these actions across the following four *domains*:

5. **Services and practice:** What services, programs, and other youth supports are deemed critical for the achievement of the vision, and why?
6. **Policy:** What formal policies, rules, regulations, and standards influence system performance in a way that benefits or impedes youth outcomes?
7. **Resource flows:** How does resource allocation, both public and private as well as cash and in-kind, impact the ability of the system to achieve better outcomes for youth?
8. **Norms and mindsets:** In what ways do the “unwritten” rules—social and cultural attitudes and expectations—positively or negatively affect young people’s ability to achieve their potential?

EDC’s research included a desk review of 167 documents on the Rwandan workforce development system since 2007, including qualitative and quantitative research conducted under the learning agendas of the EDC projects (Box 1), as well as literature on systems approaches in international development and project experiences in the scaling of workforce development outcomes. This study also was informed by interviews with 33 national stakeholders in the Rwandan workforce system and EDC project staff.²

Throughout this research process, EDC engaged in collective learning with other development partners and donors to shape our thinking around youth systems. Notably, EDC has been an active member of The Youth Systems Collaborative, whose members over the past two years have shared their experiences, observations, and learning around international youth systems change. Much of the collective learning by The Youth Systems Collaborative has helped to shape the analysis presented in this document.³

Background: EDC Programming in Rwanda

Since 2009, EDC has led a youth skills development, employment, and entrepreneurship program for vulnerable youth across Rwanda. Encompassed in a portfolio of programs implemented through Rwandan service providers (Box 1), young men and women have developed their work readiness skills and employment opportunities through a number of services and supports, including soft skills and work readiness training delivered through practical, demand-led, hands-on experiential learning approaches; work-based learning opportunities and internships; youth leadership and peer accompaniment; access to finance (informal savings and lending as well as formal youth-inclusive finance through banks); entrepreneurship training and on-site business coaching; and the facilitation of market linkages. Collectively these programs have achieved a noteworthy level of scale, including over 91,000 direct participants in private and public skills development programs, plus an additional 275,000 students per year through the upper secondary and TVET schools. Randomized control trials and other evaluations show measurable increases in participants' soft skills and employment compared to non-participants.⁴

Box 1. Snapshot of EDC in Rwanda

INITIATIVES

Akazi Kanoze [2009–2016]

Akazi Kanoze II [2014–2017]

Huguka Dukore Akazi Kanoze (HDAK) [2017–2021]

TOTAL FUNDING

USD 40.4 million, supported by USAID and the Mastercard Foundation

LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS

Network of 65+ youth-serving organizations (including 12 core private service providers and Akazi Kanoze Access); Ministry of Education; Ministry of Youth, Workforce Development Authority; Rwanda Polytechnic; National Employment Program; Private Sector Federation; 2,500 businesses; Goshen Finance, RIM Ltd., and Umutanguha Finance; mayors offices in 25 districts; 700+ youth savings groups; and 1,500 youth leaders

EVIDENCE OF IMPROVED YOUTH OUTCOMES AT SCALE

- 91,058 youth directly participating in improved work readiness training and supports, with measurable skills gains
- 65% new or better employment among workforce development program graduates
- An additional 275,000 students per year in the upper secondary education and TVET schools learning soft skills and gaining work readiness skills and experience
- Teachers in 438 upper secondary schools applying learner-centered pedagogical approaches
- At least 2,500 employers actively engaging in curriculum development, labor market information, and work-based learning, with an 85% employer satisfaction rate

This series of programs has evolved over the years (Figure 2), reflecting the changing relationships and collaboration between EDC and system actors and among the system actors themselves. In the first phase, the USAID-funded Akazi Kanoze activity worked through a network of private service providers who partnered with the private sector to develop and test high-quality, demand-informed skills development services. Within just a couple of years, the activity saw positive results in terms of youth's attainment of skills and their ability to obtain new and better employment; these positive results generated an increased level of interest and engagement by youth job-seekers, the private sector, and the government. From 2014 to 2017, EDC began to focus on adapting and scaling these models through the formal education system, and it implemented the Akazi Kanoze II project, with support by the Mastercard Foundation. These experiences then informed the implementation of the USAID-funded Huguka Dukore Akazi Kanoze (HDAK) activity, which included an explicit objective to support a "higher quality, more coordinated workforce development service delivery system." As such, HDAK placed a heavier emphasis on supporting the Government of Rwanda, in building the capacity of its implementing partners, in strengthening private sector engagement, and in engaging youth as more active participants in the system.

Figure 2. Evolution of EDC Workforce Development Programming in Rwanda

Demonstrating Impact	Expanding Partnerships	Expanding Research	Facilitating Systems Change
			• Technical assistance to the Government of Rwanda • District-level youth systems support • Mechanisms for greater youth engagement • Expansion of the role of the private sector
• Service delivery through a network of private providers • Private sector engagement	• Rigorous evaluation • Continuous iteration & learning • Testing of new public models	• Adaption & scaling of services through public systems • Cost analysis • Scaling and sustainability • Learning & adaption	
2009–2012	2012–2014	2014–2017	2017–present

Evidence of Change in Rwanda's Workforce System

We selected Rwanda as a case study because of the noticeable changes within its workforce development system since 2008. For one, Rwanda has seen an **increase in the number of young people enrolled in technical and vocational education and training (TVET)**, which has more than doubled in the 10-year period (from 50,000 in 2009 to over 100,000 in 2018). This change has been especially important in a country where a large majority of people have not completed primary school and where TVET offers the most viable near-term option for the upskilling of the country's labor force.



In this context, a significant development has been the **establishment of formal learning pathways for youth** to move in and out of education and employment. In 2008, a young person who had dropped out of primary school had no option for reentering the education system, nor were they able to obtain certification for short courses. Today, however, there is a recognized Rwandan TVET Qualifications Framework (RTQF), which has established a structure for mobility in skills development at all levels: technical and vocational education, general education, higher education, and adult education. The recent COVID-19 pandemic, and the subsequent increase in school drop-out rates, only underscores the importance of these flexible learning pathways in creating a resilient education system.

In terms of changes to the quality of education, incremental improvements have been taking place. For instance, while in 2008 there was widespread reports of poor quality of TVET service delivery, today there are a number of bright spots—private providers and public TVET institutions that are regularly using competency-based curriculum, engaging employers, and integrating job intermediation services. High levels of performance are not widespread across every TVET, or even a majority of TVETs, but there are nevertheless noticeable improvements occurring in select institutions.⁵ Notably, the general education system has made efforts to align itself more with the demands of the market and the skills and expectations of young learners. With EDC support, the Ministry of Education has integrated soft skills curriculum, including learner-centered approaches and work-based learning, into the national upper secondary school curriculum (S4, S5, and S6), and at least 450 secondary schools are now using this curriculum as part of their entrepreneurship coursework, reaching an average of 250,000 students per year. This shift is significant given that the concepts of soft skills and work-based learning were not familiar within the Rwanda context as little as 10 years ago.⁶ Today the private sector is embracing this work readiness movement, and the ministry plans to roll out the curriculum to all schools nationwide outside of donor funding. While in past years soft skills were integrated into high schools and in TVET schools at Level 3, more recently the Rwanda Polytechnic instituted plans to integrate soft skills and work-based learning across all levels of the TVET system.

In terms of overall youth employment and learning outcomes, Rwanda is seeing incremental improvements. Poverty and extreme poverty fell from 46 percent in 2010 to 38 percent in 2016.⁷ The country is close to meeting its goals for off-farm jobs: the annual number of off-farm jobs have increased from 1.7 million in 2016 to 2 million in 2019 (15% increase).⁸ Today high levels of underemployment remain, but it appears to be improving: in 2007 underemployment was estimated at 77%,⁹ while today labor underutilization figures hover around 55%.¹⁰ Recent data suggests visible improvements to secondary and TVET institutions.¹¹ However, it cannot go unnoticed that the pipeline of learners remains a problem: 68% of Rwandan youth have attained only a primary education or lower.¹² In spite of ongoing challenges, Rwanda has experienced palpable gains for secondary students and out-of-school youth, for the formal and nonformal instructors who serve them, as well as for employers.

What We've Learned about Workforce Development Systems Changes in Rwanda

Service Delivery

High-quality service delivery—when flexible and affordable, offered by multiple delivery channels, and backed by tangible evidence—can be a powerful attractor¹³ for other stakeholders to innovate and improve at scale. In 2008 when the USAID/EDC Akazi Kanoze program first started, it initially worked through a large network of private service providersⁱ to offer high-quality, learner-centered work readiness services to youth. Service packages were flexible and modular to meet the diverse needs of youth participants from different backgrounds and to fit the relative capacities of the organizations themselves. Partners had the space to iterate with and learn from one another, continually experimenting with different service delivery models to see what worked in different contexts. Meanwhile, EDC introduced innovations in curriculum and took on a quality assurance role (through training, technical assistance, and ongoing coaching) that guaranteed local organizations would deliver a high-quality product.

Since that time, over 65 local service providers in 25 of Rwanda's 30 districts have improved and expanded their service delivery, resulting in 65% of workforce participants having new or better employment, as well as tangible gains in skills, including self-confidence and financial behaviors. After only 12–18 months into the program, the program's visible results had established EDC's credibility in the system and, in fact, prompted the Rwandan Ministry of Education to seek EDC's support in integrating soft skills curriculum into the public secondary school system. Based on that success, the government later requested EDC to help develop five soft skills modules within the Level 3 (L3) TVET curriculum. Today, Akazi Kanoze is a nationally recognized brand for workforce readiness services, with a direct reach of over 91,000 participants overall plus an additional 275,000 participants per year in the general secondary education and TVET systems.¹⁴

Youth and communities are essential contributors to improved and expanded public and private service delivery. Over the past two decades, the Rwandan government and NGOs, including EDC and its partners, have struggled with the high costs of tailored and ongoing supports that help youth transition to employment. Known as *accompaniment*, these services include job matching, internships, career guidance, entrepreneurship coaching, and market facilitation. Collectively the existing public and private programs that offer these services have been unable to reach a substantive number of marginalized young people, especially those residing outside of the capital city.¹⁵ However, over time, as youth-led solutions, such as youth associations and savings groups, have spread throughout the country,¹⁶ private service providers have begun to apply this same peer-based approach to accompaniment.

i Most private service providers have been Rwandan youth-led and youth-serving organizations offering training, job intermediation, and/or entrepreneurship supports.



Under Huguka Dukore Akazi Kanoze (HDAK), service providers have encouraged youth participants in each training cohort to elect leaders. These youth leaders receive extra training and resource support (such as a mobile phone and data packet) to take on an expanded role of gathering peers to exchange employment and entrepreneurship advice. Together each training cohort designs and executes a youth-designed civic engagement project for their community as a way of solidifying their bonds, so that the support network continues after training through meetings and WhatsApp chat groups. Within the first six months of trying this approach, 1,000 youth were offering each other peer-based mentoring, including business and employment support, under the guidance of 75 youth leaders.

In-school students have applied a peer-based approach as well: NGO partners iterated with teachers and communities to find multiple ways for students to progressively connect with the workplace, both in the classroom and through structured after-school clubs. Teachers learned to teach and empower young people to make their own connections with the private sector. Youth club facilitators learned to develop continuous relationship-building with prospective local employers. Both public and private models are now being adapted by additional service providers outside of the project, who are learning how to facilitate peer-based accompaniment.¹⁷

Data, Evaluation, and Learning

In Rwanda, the use of data and evidence-based decision-making has elevated the standards of skills development programs, and has compelled other stakeholders to change their attitudes and behaviors about the efficacy of skills training. Today a large network of local service providers has learned how to collect and analyze data on youth employment and skills attainment using common metrics that were not originally in place in 2008. These common performance metrics, supplemented with training and coaching in data quality assurance, have created a level of transparency and elevated the standards of service delivery. Service providers have shifted their reliance on enrollment data only, as they are now triangulating their data from a variety of system stakeholders. For example, partners have used an employer satisfaction survey in collaboration with the Rwanda Development Board (RDB)¹⁸ to collect formal data on employer expectations and perceptions of participants' performance on the job. These data have been supplemented with standard protocols and coaching for service providers to regularly check in on employer partners and participants who have been placed in jobs or internships. Meanwhile, youth listening sessions and tracer studies have generated data from the youth participant perspective. A series of randomized control trials (RCTs)¹⁹ has further validated the efficacy of interventions and revealed where interventions are having the greatest impact. EDC has compiled this data to communicate to national policymakers about what is working and what is not. User-friendly communications materials in easy-to-read formats—slide decks, personal testimonies, and simple data visualization techniques such as infographics and dashboards—have been important tools for legitimizing the new innovations introduced by Akazi Kanoze and HDAK and thereby influencing widespread practices across the system.

Capacity Building

Learning together is a key ingredient to building the capacity of the system as a whole. Rwanda's workforce development actors have been building their capacity through a collective, continuous learning process. At the national level, EDC's research found that government agencies and development partners have valued the sharing of information and learning from one another through formal channels, such as the TVET Sub-Sector Working Group, as well as through the day-to-day meetings with one another. Within the EDC project portfolio, managers, staff, and local partners alike cited that same culture of mutual learning as an important feature of capacity building. Service providers have valued the annual reflection and planning meetings, as well as the more regular monthly and quarterly meetings that



As a learning organization, we see this annual planning meeting as a golden opportunity to learn from our sister organizations, and from the advanced ones like AKA (Akazi Kanoze Access) and EDC. By learning from our peers, we also identify information which helps us to avoid duplication of efforts, especially in our common areas of intervention."

Program Manager, Rwandan Service Provider, HDAK Implementing Partner

the program organizes, which offer safe spaces for partners to discuss the challenges they have been facing, the success they've had, and the areas in which they can improve. Furthermore, this space has allowed in-country partners to learn from one another as they improve their internal organizations capacities (e.g., monitoring and evaluation, financial management) and has strengthened their coordination with employers and local governments at the district level. Many of the 22 current partners report that their improved practices in service delivery have led to expansion in their funding sources, such as the national government, international organizations, and employers who seek to pay for services. EDC's own role in capacity building has evolved over time: initially, it focused on supporting Rwandan private service providers, but over time, it has expanded its role to offer technical assistance upon request to the national government and other system actors, such as other training providers, employers, and local government.

With no existing Rwandan organization providing systemwide capacity building, the project established a legacy organization, Akazi Kanoze Access, to fulfill this function. Many international development partners, including EDC, have played the role of "technical expert" in the Rwandan workforce systemⁱⁱ—a role that some may argue removes the responsibility of local systems to develop internal expertise. Others have seen USAID's and

ii Compared to EDC's role as external technical experts, some donors such as KOICA and GIZ have housed their technical expertise within government agencies in support of the national reform process.



EDC's roles as instrumental to ensuring equity for out-of-school youth in Rwandan workforce policies, curriculum, service delivery, and evaluation. That is not to say that USAID and EDC have not made efforts to encourage Rwandan actors to play a “backbone”²⁰ role. Early on in the Akazi Kanoze activity, USAID and EDC had identified a potential local partner organization to play a leadership role on the project and coordinate national stakeholders; unfortunately, this organization experienced significant leadership challenges that undermined its credibility as a leading partner in the system. Later, in 2014, USAID commissioned a study to identify in-country options for providing continuous, locally led expertise; however, this study found no clear Rwandan organization to fulfill this technical assistance function. It also found a very limited demand for privately funded skills development.^{21, 22} Around this time, several Rwandan leaders from the Akazi Kanoze project established a local spin-off organization, Akazi Kanoze Access (AKA), to assume the role as a local resource for technical assistance, capacity development, and coordination in workforce development. Today AKA provides much of the teacher training and quality assurance services to the Government of Rwanda. AKA has also been able to generate income from funding sources outside of EDC's program—mostly from other donors and international organizations. That being said, after only five years, the organization's financial sustainability is still in development. HDAK continues to offer technical assistance as needed, and today still retains a significant role within Rwanda's workforce development system.

Teacher training remains an ongoing workforce systems capacity pain point. Although new curriculum and service delivery models have been put in place, and the Ministry of Education and Rwanda Polytechnic are committed to rolling out these improved services nationwide, teacher training remains a persistent systemic challenge to maintaining a sufficient level of quality needed to sustain and scale youth outcomes. One problem is the low levels of education and literacy that continue in Rwanda, compounded by a culture that is unfamiliar with learner-centered approaches. Moreover, teachers and instructors lack the experience and up-to-date knowledge in the technical fields that are in growing demand by the global markets. The costs of ongoing in-service teacher training, in addition to pre-service teacher training, also limits the ability to reach a national scale in a meaningful way. Finally, high turnover among teachers increases the costs associated with teacher training and threatens the quality of services. EDC is currently testing different local solutions to these persistent challenges, such as establishing teacher communities of practice as well as capacity building for school administrators and quality assurance bodies.

Norms and Mindsets

Visible evidence of “what can be” is a powerful catalyst for shifting norms and mindsets, including those of the private sector. For example, EDC's 2008 initial program design assessment in Rwanda noted a relative skepticism by employers of the quality of graduates coming out of the TVET system, and even more were skeptical of hiring out-of-school youth without a secondary or university education. As such, employers were by and large disengaged from the TVET system, preferring to hire entry-level staff through personal



At the highest levels [of government] there is an understanding of TVET as 'the last resort'... it is an unconscious bias that is much harder to change. [...] The real change will come when people can earn a good living from those skills."

International Development Partner

connections. This dynamic has significantly shifted since 2008, with a dramatic uptick in companies participating in training and employment programs. Just among the Akazi Kanoze portfolio, an estimated 2,500 Rwandan small- and medium-sized enterprises have contributed to skills development for the first time, namely by sponsoring work-based learning and internships, placing young people in jobs, and informing curriculum development. Several companies are subsidizing or paying for these services outside of USAID/EDC support. According to EDC surveys, the palpable difference in Akazi Kanoze graduates compared to their other traditional hires elevated their interest in hiring out-of-school youth from the program. One key informant noted, "Before, [employers would tell us that] the youth come and they serve tea, maybe they get some tasks, but that is rare. HDAK helped the private sector put more structure to that, and understand what youth are capable of doing."

Government attitudes and approaches also shift when they see concrete examples of what works. As noted above, EDC's efforts to capture tangible evidence through monitoring and evaluation were instrumental to gaining credibility with government actors. This evidence has encouraged different government ministries and agencies to coordinate around common standards, such as in the harmonization of work-based learning practices and the development of employer-based training. According to EDC's research, several key informants outside the project indicated that EDC played a direct role in shifting norms and attitudes around soft skills—a concept that was virtually nonexistent in Rwanda in 2008 but now has been folded into the formal education system and is also a common term used by employers and youth alike.²³ Beyond the role of evidence in shifting attitudes, one international development partner noted the strong culture of learning in Rwanda, where "people are more flexible [than in other countries]; they are more open to learning, they value new ideas."

Young people can quickly shift their perceptions of what kind of education is valuable to them and what kinds of skills are important for the workplace. As young people have witnessed TVET and Akazi Kanoze participants obtain work opportunities, youth's attitudes toward a TVET education have also improved. While in 2008, the term *TVET* carried a certain stigma, that is much less the case today. As one informant noted, "When I say youth are moving from formal education to TVET, I've personally seen examples. Youth now think, 'If I study math or chemistry, then what? But if I study plumbing, then I have the skills to become a plumber.' Compared to five years ago, there's a huge shift."

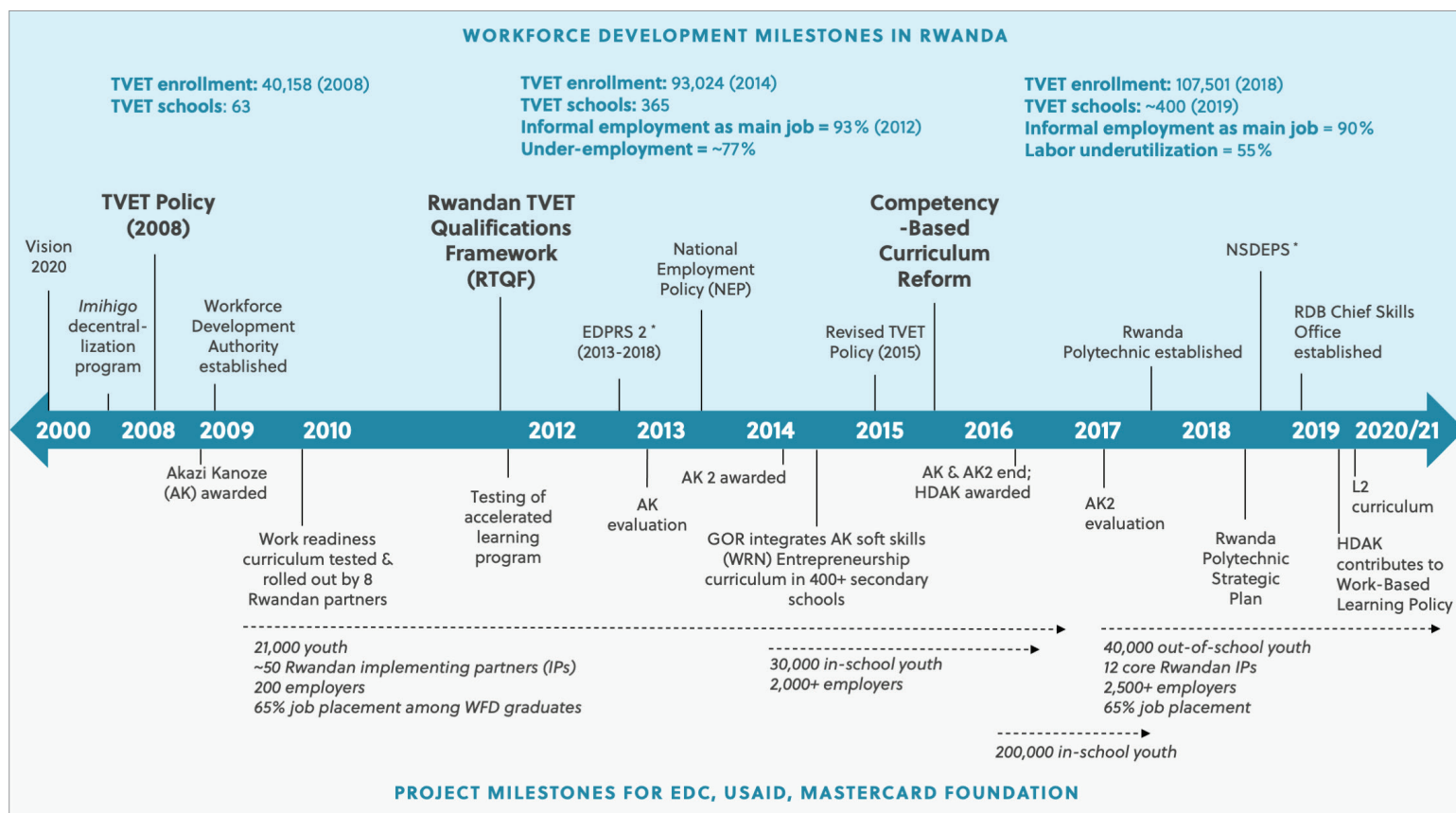


With [the HDAK work readiness] training program, I was enabled to demystify what the society stereotypes as a male profession. Today I am a proud mason and I feel contented.” Young Female HDAK Participant

Policy

Key policy reforms often put in place the necessary structures for positive change to occur. When asked about the factors that have enabled progress in skills development in Rwanda, key informants consistently pointed to the decade-long educational and TVET reform process that continues today. (Refer to Figure 3.) The three most cited policy reforms were (1) the introduction of a TVET policy first introduced in 2008 and an updated policy in 2015, (2) competency-based curriculum reform, and (3) the development of the RTQF. Among their many contributions, these policies helped enable the formal learning pathways for youth to move in and out of education and employment. Some also noted the importance of Rwanda’s decentralization process, namely the *Imihigo* performance contracts and evaluation system,²⁴ which tied district-level annual budget allocations to the ability of each district to establish and reach certain development outcomes, including those related to youth education and employment.

Figure 3. Policy Milestones in Rwanda’s Skills Development Journey, Mapped Against EDC Project Milestones



* EDPRS 2 = Second Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (first EDPRS released in 2008); NSDEPS = National Skills Development and Employment Promotion Strategy

Bottom-up innovations have mutually reinforced the policy reform process. Since 2008, both the Government of Rwanda and development partners have invested in curriculum development and in testing new approaches toward the implementation of the TVET strategy and the RTQF. USAID, EDC, and the network of service delivery partners played a prominent role in advocating for the pathways for out-of-school youth and in developing the necessary curriculum and teacher training processes for lower-level learners to take advantage of this opportunity.²⁵ For example, EDC's partners were the first to introduce an accelerated learning program for out-of-school youth and pilot it in select TVETs, starting in 2012.²⁶ Today, as the government is developing its implementation guidelines for the qualifications framework, EDC has provided technical assistance in developing the new curriculum and training materials for lower levels of TVET (L2), including basic education, soft skills, and agriculture technical skills, which has enabled the implementation of the framework.

Vision

A vision that is mandated from the top-down can be a powerful mobilizer of national stakeholders around a common agenda; however, effective execution of the vision requires consistent leadership at the operational level and ongoing coordination between system actors. EDC's research confirmed a very clear national vision and a tangible goal of creating about 200,000 off-farm jobs per year.²⁷ This vision was also buttressed by a goal of increasing the number of O-level students (lower secondary school) entering TVET from 21% to 60%. Indeed, Rwanda's national strategies and subsequent reform efforts²⁸ have mobilized at least four ministries, local government leaders, and at least seven major development partners around a common agenda. But in the absence of clear and consistent leadership at the operational level, this numerical job-creation target has in some cases created perverse incentives. National stakeholders have often duplicated efforts or inadvertently competed against one another (e.g., when seeking partnerships with large employers), and sometimes they have undermined one another (e.g., some internship programs pay stipends to youth interns while others have not). Skills development actors rely on internships and job placement of graduates as ill-suited proxies for measuring job creation.²⁹



"You can't talk about employment unless you talk about private sector growth. There is a need to align the donors. [Moreover,] it's not clear who is responsible for self-employment... there is a disconnect."

Donor Organization Investing in Skills Development in Rwanda

There are several explanations for this misalignment. Key informants noted that in seeking skills development strategies for job creation, education actors still are not sufficiently connected to the market demand side of the equation.³⁰ Moreover, some cited diffuse and ever-changing leadership structures, with no single entity taking responsibility to bring

stakeholders together. Consequently, national system actors have relied heavily on their own ongoing relationships and coordination (such as the TVET Sub-Sector Working Group)ⁱⁱⁱ to make the vision work.

Stakeholder Incentives and Collaboration

Indeed, at the national level, stakeholders overwhelmingly emphasized the importance of—and challenges associated with—coordination. Many national stakeholders cited the TVET Sub-Sector Working Groupⁱⁱⁱ as an effective national forum for aligning their investments and developing complementary approaches in areas such as private sector engagement, school-to-work transition, and TVET financing. But many also noted that national actors need to engage in more substantive ways and be committed to a more coordinated implementation strategy in practice. It appears there may be a window of opportunity for enhancing the level of coordination occurring within this group.

Subnational coordination bodies, usually led by local governments and involving diverse stakeholders, have shown to be effective mechanisms for garnering and aligning resources around youth development. Mayors have expressed frustration that youth programming is duplicative in some geographic sectors and absent in others. Rwanda's recent decentralization effort, cited above, has incentivized district leaders to engage community-based organizations for the first time in developing and meeting annual development targets. In 2019, HDAK began to support district leaders to form locally driven, subnational Youth Development Alliances (YDAs). Led by the district mayor's office, and consisting also of line ministries and other government agencies, the private sector, youth leaders, service providers, and community organizations, YDAs are a locally coordinated response to improving youth program service delivery. Through the YDAs, these stakeholders develop a shared goal for youth development, identify their role in achieving that goal, develop annual targets for the *Imihigo* action plan, and contribute resources toward reaching those targets. Even in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, most of the emerging YDAs have continued in their formation and planning processes and are starting to collect information to coordinate short-term humanitarian support and engage youth in their pandemic response. Similar local alliance models have found success in other countries, such as in the Philippines, where YDAs have improved youth employment outcomes in 10 cities and municipalities,³¹ and in Kenya, where nine counties established County Youth Employment Compacts to align youth skills training and workforce development with county economic growth strategies.³²

Systems Mapping

Local (micro) mapping processes create operational efficiencies and encourage an expanded network of stakeholders to contribute their resources toward youth development. While several national-level workforce actors have invested in improving labor market information systems at a macro level,³³ an ongoing challenge has been in

ⁱⁱⁱ The TVET Sub-Sector Working Group is a group of government, donors, and international organizations dedicated to aligning stakeholder investments around the TVET sector. See: USAID (2019). *USAID/Rwanda Youth Assessment*.



the collection of localized and up-to-date labor market data at the district level. During a recent HDAK annual feedback forum, service providers discovered that in any given district up to five different organizations were gathering labor market information independently, duplicating their efforts by going to the same sources for the same data. This discovery led to the development of a “One Voice” approach under HDAK, in which different service providers working in the same area now collaborate on district-level labor market assessments. These organizations first collectively map the resources in their area and then assign one organization to collect, analyze, and share data on employment demand. The HDAK project team provided training and coaching to harmonize the assessment approach and to solidify the working relationships between organizations working in the same districts. The One Voice approach has been successful on a few different levels. First, it has increased the regularity of data collection and improved the responsiveness of service providers to the most current and highly localized market trends. Second, it has minimized the duplicative efforts of the service providers, thus reducing the potential of these actors to flood the market with youth trained in the same skill sets. Assigning a lead data collector has also eased the burden on local government and employers to take part in the process. And third, it has strengthened the relationships, trust, and learning among service providers themselves.

At the national level, the introduction of explicit participatory systems mapping processes may help unlock pervasive barriers or blind spots in the system. Rwanda has been the subject of a plethora of strategic plans, studies, and analyses of skills development. While many workforce development actors were able to intuit a picture of the system, its stakeholders, and how they work together, it appears that they have never collectively identified and articulated the range of factors contributing to (and inhibiting) their stated skills development goals. An explicit participatory mapping and analysis process could bring in diverse perspectives that reveal possible lapses in perspective and open up new ways of approaching the development challenge.³⁴ International donors may offer value in contributing resources and/or facilitating a collaborative process toward this end.

Resources

An analysis of different cost scenarios allows government stakeholders to make informed decisions about adopting and expanding new services. Across Sub-Saharan Africa, the evidence suggests that three elements are critical to scaling youth skills development outcomes: (1) system actors analyze low-cost solutions to service delivery, (2) they then adapt services to make them more affordable, and (3) the resource burden is reallocated across different stakeholders.³⁵ In Rwanda, the Ministry of Education participated with EDC in cost analysis exercises to determine the additional incremental costs associated with offering life skills and work readiness for secondary school students. Ministry officials welcomed the exercise, noting that this was their first experience with this kind of strategic analysis. The resulting scenario analyses showed that additional costs could be as little as five USD per student spread over a three-year curriculum when modifications were made for students/families to bring their own supplemental materials.³⁶ The COVID-19 pandemic has only increased the demand for low-cost remote solutions. Service providers have even further

adapted the curriculum to enable interactive radio instruction for the large numbers of youth who do not have access to mobile technologies. Lessons are now delivered through WhatsApp chat groups and facilitated by existing peer leaders, all of which are contributing to the increased scaling potential in service delivery.

Employers' ability and willingness to contribute to youth employment outcomes are shaped by their bottom line. With the relatively small size of the Rwandan economy, to date there have been limits to private sector contributions to skills development. Indeed, in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, fewer employers have been able to participate in work-based learning and internships as their attention has shifted to the survival of their businesses. That being said, one cannot ignore the increased engagement in workforce development by the Rwandan private sector. In 2008, many companies reported being disconnected from skills training and dissatisfied with existing internship programs; moreover, they had difficulty recruiting qualified talent, and so their primary means of recruitment was through personal connections.³⁷ Comparatively, today hundreds of employers are involved in curriculum development, sponsor internship programs, and host or take part in work-based learning. Moreover, 10 years ago employers preferred to hire candidates with formal high school degrees,³⁸ while today Rwandan employers more readily hire graduates coming out of skills training and short-term certification programs, even without formal degrees. This change was a direct result of service providers being able to deliver a more skilled pool of youth graduates.

One of the most promising forms of private contributions to youth employment outcomes has been in the financial services that support youth livelihoods. Since 2008, Rwanda has seen an explosion in savings and internal lending cooperatives, known as SILC groups, which have offered an important first step in a young person's journey to financial independence. As an Akazi Kanoze and HDAK partner, Catholic Relief Services made considerable investments in innovating and establishing youth-friendly SILC groups. Evidence suggests that SILC groups, which mobilize the resources of youth and their peers, have been instrumental in helping youth start micro-enterprises and build resilience.³⁹ In fact, during the 2020 pandemic, youth have been relying on these savings to meet their basic needs.⁴⁰

Yet savings mobilization has its limitations, particularly for older youth who require larger amounts of capital to grow their business. A recent USAID youth assessment noted that access



The demand for money from youth has increased. Five years ago compared to now, there's more appetite for youth to start businesses, and they're chasing around for financing. But the financial institutions haven't adjusted to meet that demand. We need to create that appetite in financial services. We need to develop youth businesses so well that they look like 'fat meat'."

Representative of the Business Development Fund (BDF)

to youth-friendly finance was “the most commonly cited need by youth as necessary for self-employment.”⁴¹ Many youth in this assessment pointed to the government-backed Business Development Fund, Ltd. (BDF), which has issued a series of funds—grants and loans alike—to extend financial services to young people. But even BDF staff themselves acknowledge that for youth “BDF is a drop in the ocean.” Meanwhile, HDAK has engaged Connexus, an international partner, to offer its expertise in youth-friendly financial services. Connexus has been working with three financial institutions across Rwanda—Goshen Finance, RIM Ltd., and Umutanguha Finance—to adapt and expand their products to meet youth’s needs. To date, these institutions have rolled out youth-friendly loan products and linked them to over 5,500 young clients. As youth-owned businesses and cooperatives demonstrate their creditworthiness, the hope is that more financial institutions will offer or expand youth financial services.

When governments with limited resources shift the burden to the international community to fulfill certain functions in youth development, donors must commit to strategies that ultimately shift the burden back. For instance, key informants noted the prominent role that USAID and EDC have taken in amplifying the agenda for out-of-school youth. Several development partners noted the government’s tendency to focus on higher-level learners at the expense of out-of-school youth. While on the one hand, USAID’s



The USAID/EDC program has been reaching youth with the lowest assets, and that was a key niche that needed to be addressed.”

Independent Consultant for USAID/Rwanda

investment in out-of-school youth may be seen as enabling donor dependence, it has also resulted in significant improvements in the learning pathways and services for out-of-school youth in a relatively short time frame. Recently USAID and EDC have attempted to shift the burden back by transitioning the HDAK program’s role from subsidizing service delivery for out-of-school youth to providing technical assistance to the government and other system actors. For example, the HDAK team recently worked with the newly established Rwanda Polytechnic government agency to produce their five-year strategic plan, which incorporated explicit resource considerations and performance targets for out-of-school youth, young women, and persons with disability.⁴² Whether the government institutions ultimately execute these inclusive practices remains a question.

Lessons Learned

Scalable workforce solutions only come from widespread system change, which requires the active participation of and partnerships between: the government (including general secondary and TVET education systems, ministries involved in economic development and youth development, and local government units); public and private service providers;



the private sector (employers, industry associations, chambers of commerce, etc.); and youth and their communities. Informed by the Rwanda experience, Table 1 offers a set of considerations for youth workforce development system actors—elements that contribute to improved workforce development outcomes. Moving forward, a multi-stakeholder mapping process can allow stakeholders to identify their priorities along this framework; they then can determine which actors take the lead on each of these elements, which actors are involved, and which are informed of these benchmarks.

EDC's experiences in Rwanda also highlights lessons for international organizations and donors who seek to contribute to workforce development outcomes at scale in low- and middle-income countries.

Improving the quality and reach of services on the ground creates quick wins and establishes credibility of an international actor; however, sustaining and scaling those services requires investments across other domains of the system, such as enhancing data and learning, facilitating policy reforms, changing norms and mindsets, and strengthening stakeholder collaboration. For EDC, focusing on curriculum reform and innovations in service delivery was a quick and effective entry point to improve workforce outcomes in the short term, but it was not the end point. Initially, EDC found that ambitious but right-sized targets in service delivery, supported by relatively larger levels of funding, provided the right incentives for structuring interventions for scale. Generally speaking, the targets of 10,000 to 30,000 participants within the first five-years provided the right incentives for scaling up to 100,000 students and beyond, while it also revealed the systemic barriers that hindered scale-up.

EDC cast a wide net with multiple and diverse partners so that services could be adapted and expanded to a wide range of youth cohorts across different types of education and training providers. An important element to scaling service delivery across the formal system was the cost analysis process that aligned the project budget to the ministry budget and adapting services accordingly, which demonstrated how scaling across the formal system was within the government's reach. But once these service innovations were introduced and adopted, an additional five years investment was needed to solidify and expand the broader system changes, including the crowding in⁴³ of other actors such as local governments, the private sector, and young people. Over time, EDC applied parallel strategies that introduced service delivery innovations (i.e., the product) while also investing in system capacity (i.e., the process). EDC's donors allowed for this opportunistic sequencing, whereby the project could change direction when things were not working as expected or take advantage of promising new developments.

International actors can strengthen the resilience of the workforce system over time by inspiring a culture of innovation, iteration, and learning across the system, namely through an adaptive and facilitative approach. Private service providers in Rwanda built their capacity most effectively through a collective approach to implementation research, where they had the financial, technical, and moral support to innovate, experiment, adapt,

Table 1. Considerations for Youth Workforce Development System Actors

STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION		• Workforce development outcomes begin to improve, and are more inclusive, when all major actors collaborate in intentional ways toward a common vision and set of goals; this collaboration benefits greatly from multistakeholder coordination structures at the national and subnational levels. • Clear, consistent leadership at the operational level enables multiple stakeholders to work mutually together in a more coordinated fashion. This leadership can come from a government and/or from a nongovernmental backbone organization.
ENABLERS for Systems Change	Vision	• There is great value in a commonly held vision for youth skills and employment at the national and subnational levels, alongside tangible goal(s) for stakeholders to aspire to and keep one another accountable. • Young people need to be a part of the visioning and goal-setting process.
	Mapping	• Participatory, multi-stakeholder systems mapping at the national level allow stakeholders to identify unseen opportunities and bottlenecks and to determine a way forward. • Similarly, local governments, community-based organizations, young people, and the private sector are able to maximize their resources for youth outcomes when they collectively map their local system, including joint implementation of local labor market assessments.
	Capacity Development	• Capacity building based in action research, experiential learning, and a culture of “learning together” (e.g., through communities of practice among service providers) fosters continuous innovation and elevates the standards of service delivery.
	Data, Learning, and Evaluation	• Common performance metrics for service delivery, including feedback data from youth and the private sector, are important for establishing mutual accountability. • Governments and donors should channel funds toward a variety of monitoring, evaluation, research, and learning tools and approaches to capture systems changes, such as RCTs, tracer studies, employer satisfaction surveys, and youth listening sessions. The resulting evidence helps drive systems change. • Locally driven learning agendas and action research, including that driven by and for young people, help improve the quality of service delivery.
DOMAINS for Systems Change	Services and Practice	• Encourage a network of private and public service providers to offer low-cost, flexible service delivery packages with a modular curriculum that can be tailored to diverse youth cohorts and different learning environments. • Invest in young people as leaders and solution providers, such as in the development of peer-based business and employment support networks. • Test and iterate scalable solutions for engaging the private sector in work-based learning. • Explore mechanisms for sustained, high-quality in-service teacher training.
	Policy	• Certain policies may offer an important foundation for systems change. In Rwanda, the key policy improvements were the development of a TVET strategy, a qualifications framework, and curriculum reform. • Rwanda’s decentralization efforts to establish performance-based contracts also helped incentivize change at the local level. • More comparative research is needed in this area, drawing on the existing research base in workforce policy.
	Resource Flows	• Cost analyses of service delivery options allow education ministries to adopt and scale evidence-based practices. • Financial service providers (informal and formal) are important stakeholders in youth employment outcomes. • Governments and donors should engage experts early on to expand the financial pathways for self-employed youth.
	Norms and Mindsets	• Visible evidence of the positive results from skills development initiatives can help shift mindsets around TVET. • Such evidence can also quickly shift employer perceptions of the employability potential of “vulnerable” and out-of-school youth. • Practitioners should listen for and respond to the “silent barriers” to youth education and employment, such as gender norms, gender-based violence, mental health, and substance abuse.



and learn from one another. This kind of learning requires time, resources, and a safe space for making mistakes—things that may not be readily evident within a local system but that an international actor can encourage. Research suggests that the national government plays an important role in creating this “education innovation ecosystem,”⁴⁴ and donors should encourage this process. EDC and its donors allowed for flexible contractual arrangements and budgeting so that partners could quickly re-program funding as new evidence or opportunities arose. Contracts were mutually developed over a series of site visits, ideation, and negotiations, and they were structured annually and adjusted based on performance. Moving forward, these local partners have expressed that they want to take their learning to others—to influence champions within the system, including the government who makes policy decisions, as well as the employers and donors that finance them.

International investments in locally generated data and evidence directly boost the system’s performance.

USAID, the Mastercard Foundation, and EDC invested a sizable proportion of its project resources in monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL), which helped generate the evidence needed to influence other system actors toward positive change. Over time, EDC found it especially important to building the MEL capacity of local service providers. The program has increasingly worked with local actors to improve their ability to track data, make evidence-based decisions, and use data to influence others. In retrospect, EDC realizes it should have shifted its MEL efforts much sooner from a “project” perspective (i.e., measuring project performance for the project’s sake) and more toward a “systems” perspective (i.e., helping stakeholders across the system to track their own individual and collective performance). While this case study attempts to capture systems changes retrospectively, in hindsight the project(s) should have designed its MEL systems early on to capture the “resilience” of the youth employment ecosystem over time.⁴⁵ Moreover, EDC and its partners have learned to be more attuned to measuring data that may not be part of standard indicator reporting: for example, recent data indicate a rise in reported gender-based violence (including in the workplace) and substance abuse among young people,⁴⁶ which has prompted EDC and its partners to pay greater attention to these cross-sectoral issues. It is also important to elevate the voice of the system actors in project reporting and communications—not simply describing the inputs of “EDC” or the “project” but rather communicating the changes that different local actors are precipitating.

While it is tempting to rely on training and education providers, national government agencies, and the private sector as the main vehicles for scaling workforce development outcomes, more needs to be done to integrate and elevate the role of youth and local communities across the workforce system.

In the early days of Akazi Kanoze, young people were initially engaged as recipients of services, as informants about the nature and quality of services, and as monitors and evaluators of the activity. Youth-led organizations were important partners in service delivery. These efforts represented discrete attempts to engage young people, but the project staff had much to learn about how youth could be integrated across the entire system and at scale. After several years, with the blossoming of the international positive youth development field, EDC and its partners have



been learning about and iterating different approaches that enable young people to exert their rightful role as active stakeholders and solution providers. Moreover, the elevated role of local government in youth development alliances has shown us the importance of taking national strategies to the subnational level. Similarly, local businesses have proved to be the backbone for localized employment strategies, and EDC is paying greater attention to solutions that integrate local small- and medium-enterprises at scale.

International actors should be intentional about their respective roles in the system.

International organizations and donors make the greatest contributions to a workforce system when they take time to understand the system in which they operate and coordinate with national bodies, other donors, and international actors. International organizations should play a facilitative role in the system and have a strategy for supporting local backbone organizations to drive systems change. To this end, donors should magnify their investments in coordination bodies at the national and subnational levels, while not driving the agenda within these structures. Moreover, within their own organizations, they should invest in recruiting and developing staff capacity in systems thinking and facilitation. EDC/Rwanda's own experience has been an evolutionary, 10-year process. Moving forward, EDC aims to elevate the role of local partners and Akazi Kanoze Access in driving positive change into the future.

Endnotes

- 1 Additional detail on the Youth Systems Framework by the Youth Systems Collaborative is provided in: Ignatowski, C., Blum, R., Campbell, P., & Perez-Pineda, R. (in press). Building youth infrastructure: Early lessons from the youth systems collaborative. [Journal for Youth Development]
- 2 To date, this research has conducted key informant interviews and focus groups with Government of Rwandan representatives across several ministries, major development partners, HDAK staff, and partners. The views of local officials, youth, families, TVET institutions, a broader set of private sector stakeholders, and other local stakeholders have been extracted from secondary documents, including youth assessments, employer surveys, and project reports.
- 3 See also: Ignatowski et al., Building youth infrastructure.
- 4 For example, see: Alcid, A. (2014). *A randomized controlled trial of Akazi Kanoze youth in rural Rwanda*. <https://www.edc.org/randomized-controlled-trial-akazi-kanoze-youth-rural-rwanda>; Education Development Center. (2017). *Akazi Kanoze 2: A randomized controlled trial of secondary students in Rwanda*. <https://www.edc.org/akazi-kanoze-2-randomized-controlled-trial-secondary-students-rwanda-executive-summary>
- 5 A recent TVET Quality Audit Report (2018) indicated an average score of 61.4 (on a scale of 0 to 100), with a little more than a quarter of the TVET institutions rating either as “Good” or “Excellent.” Some of the particular challenges included infrastructure, equipment, and teacher quality. There are no comparable baseline data with which to compare these findings over time. There are also mixed results in employer satisfaction. While anecdotal evidence suggests noteworthy levels of employer dissatisfaction in the formal TVET system, the most recent national tracer study indicated 78% employer satisfaction. HDAK has partnered with over 2,500 employers on work-based learning and job matching programs, and its employer surveys reveal comparably high levels (84%) of employer satisfaction. (Source: Workforce Development Authority. (2019). *TVET quality audit report 2018*.)
- 6 Education Development Center. (2009). *Rwanda youth employment assessment report*. [https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/8054391/rwanda-youth-employment-assessment-report-equip-education-;](https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/8054391/rwanda-youth-employment-assessment-report-equip-education-) Education Development Center. (2008). *Key observations and recommendations from the Rwanda youth employment assessment report* [Supplemental internal document, not for distribution].
- 7 The World Bank. (2020). Bolstering Poverty Reduction in Rwanda – A Poverty Assessment.
- 8 National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda. (2019). *Labour force survey annual report 2019*. <http://statistics.gov.rw/publication/labour-force-survey-annual-report-2019>
- 9 Republic of Rwanda. (2014). *Design of five-year National Employment Programme (NEP) for Rwanda final*.
- 10 National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (2019), *Labour force survey annual report 2019*; National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda. (2018). *Labour force survey annual report 2018*.
- 11 A recent TVET Quality Audit Report (2018) indicated an average score of 61.4 (on a scale of 0 to 100), with a little more than a quarter of the TVET institutions rating as either “Good” or “Excellent.” Some of the particular challenges included infrastructure, equipment, and teacher quality. Other than anecdotal reports, there are no similar baseline data with which to compare these findings over time. (Source: Workforce Development Authority. (2019). *TVET quality audit report 2018*.) Moreover, the Government of Rwanda recently conducted a recent national tracer survey to assess the employability and skills of its TVET and higher education graduates; consistent longitudinal data in the future will help reveal improvements over time. (Source: Republic of Rwanda Ministry of Education (March 2019). “National Tracer Survey for TVET and Higher Education Graduates and Employer Satisfaction.
- 12 National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, *Labour force survey annual report 2019*.

- 13 The term *attractor* was developed by social scientists and has been used in systems thinking literature to describe the role that individuals, events, or projects can play in mobilizing a system. It's when a powerful idea "resonates deeply within a system and shifts its trajectory toward new possibilities" (Seelos, & Mair). This is a shift from the concept of a pilot project, which is a demonstration to see if something can work; an attractor approach is an intentional effort to influence behaviors that are eventually embraced—in part or in whole—by different actors. (Source: Seelos, C., & Mair, J. (2018, Fall). Mastering system change. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. https://ssir.org/articles/entry/mastering_system_change)
- 14 The material in this paragraph originally appeared in: Ignatowski et al., Building youth infrastructure.
- 15 "The greatest current gap appears to be in helping to prepare youth in existing groups, (such as savings and loan groups or technical, vocational, or employment programs) to develop the skills needed to prepare to access finance and the subsequent coaching and support as they start income-earning endeavours, (financial literacy, savings and loans, and business development services)." (Source: USAID. (2019). *USAID-Rwanda youth assessment*. <https://www.youthpower.org/resources/usaids-rwanda-youth-assessment>)
- 16 USAID, *Youth Assessment*, 19.
- 17 Other similar youth peer support models include IMIHANGO, developed out of the University of Rwanda's Center for Innovation, which mobilizes youth groups to save and invest in government bonds while also working together to develop a business plan and apply for credit. (Source: USAID, *Youth Assessment*, 17.)
- 18 A 2015 study found that 70 percent of employers rated the Akazi Kanoze graduates to be better employees than their work counterparts. (Source: Education Development Center. (2015). *A study of the WRN! Credential test's relationship to youth jobs and employer satisfaction*. <https://www.edc.org/study-wrn-credential%E2%80%99s-relationship-youth-jobs-and-employer-satisfaction>)
- 19 See, for example, Alcid, *A randomized controlled trial*; Education Development Center, *Akazi Kanoze 2*; McIntosh, C., & Zeitlin, A. (2020). *Using household grants to benchmark the cost effectiveness of a USAID workforce readiness program*. <https://arxiv.org/pdf/2009.01749.pdf>
- 20 For more on the role of backbone organizations, refer to: (1) Kania, J., & Kramer, M. (2011, Winter). Collective impact. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. (2) Turner, S., Merchant, K., Kania, J., & Martin, E. (2012, July). Understanding the value of backbone organizations in collective impact. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*.
- 21 KPMG Rwanda. (2014). *Market assessment survey report* [Unpublished document for internal use only by USAID/Rwanda].
- 22 One development partner described a common "fixes that fail" systems phenomenon: "The problem with donors is that all these workshops are for free. [...] Donors want to do everything themselves... (they) need results in a short timeframe. Instead they should take time to scan the market, and invest in private TVET providers. Right now it's sabotaging the private training market." Anonymous key informant, personal communications with author, August 19, 2019. (Names of key informants withheld to protect their privacy.)
- 23 In a 2019 youth assessment conducted on behalf of USAID, an independent researcher noted that "EDC, through HDAK, has successfully integrated its array of work readiness interventions (financial fitness, personal development, work habits, and introduction to entrepreneurship) into the 'youth employment ecosystem' in Rwanda and is a known resource that is filling a critical niche (supporting out-of-school youth with low assets)." (USAID, *Youth Assessment*, 18.)
- 24 The World Bank. (2018). *Improving public sector performance through innovation and inter-agency coordination: Fusing tradition with modernity: Imihigo performance contracts in Rwanda*. http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/833041539871513644/122290272_201811348045807/additional/131020-WP-P163620-WorldBankGlobalReport-PUBLIC.pdf
- 25 This was confirmed by several key informants in EDC's research and is also a finding in: USAID, *Youth Assessment*, p. 18.

- 26 Education Development Center. (2015). *Akazi Kanoze Accelerated Learning Program retrospective study: Kigali, Rwanda*. USAID. https://www.edc.org/sites/default/files/uploads/AK%20ALP%20Follow%20up%20Study_Final_07102015.pdf
- 27 This major policy shift started with the five-year National Employment Program, established in 2014, which set a goal to create 200,000 off-farm jobs per year. That goal continues today under the National Strategy for Transformation (NST1), 2017-2024, which aims to create 1,500,000 decent and productive jobs by 2024—or 214,000 jobs annually. (Source: The Republic of Rwanda. (n.d.). *7 Years Government Programme: National Strategy for Transformation (NST 1) 2017–2024: Final*. http://www.minecofin.gov.rw/fileadmin/user_upload/NST1_7YGP_Final.pdf) Notably, this vision also aligns with youth aspirations, as confirmed by a recent youth assessment that found young people “envision self-sufficiency achieved through economic independence,” particularly through self-employment. (Source: USAID, *Youth Assessment*, p. 13.)
- 28 Mandated by the president in the early 2000s, Vision 2020 created a national vision to propel Rwanda into middle-income status, and was the impetus for launching a series of education and workforce development reforms which continue today. This policy emphasis on created 200,000 jobs started with the five-year National Employment Program, established in 2014, which set a goal to create 200,000 off-farm jobs per year, and continues today under the National Strategy for Transformation (NST1), 2017-2024, which aims to create 1,500,000 decent and productive jobs by 2024—or 214,000 jobs annually. (Republic of Rwanda, 7 Years Government.)
- 29 Eroding goals, or seeking the wrong goals, is a common pattern of behavior in systems thinking, known as a *systems archetype*.
- 30 Several well-known successful skills development efforts in other countries, such as Singapore, Malaysia, Korea, and Ireland, have been driven by a concerted national effort in which the government works together with leaders of industry.
- 31 Education Development Center. (n.d.). *Private sector partnership and out-of-school youth development: The MYDev experience*. https://www.edc.org/sites/default/files/uploads/MYDEV_Publication.pdf
- 32 USAID. (n.d.). *A review of USAID YouthPower activities* [Manuscript submitted for publication].
- 33 For example, the National Institute of Statistics conducts an annual Labour Force Survey; the Workforce Development Authority has a TVET management information system; Rwanda Polytechnic has its own management information system; and MINEDUC has an Education Management System.
- 34 See, for example, Stroh, D. P. (2015). *Systems thinking for social change: A practical guide to solving complex problems, Avoiding unintended consequences, and achieving lasting results*. Chelsea Green Publishing.
- 35 For instance, refer to the Tanzania case presented in: Perlman Robinson, J., Curtiss, M., & Hannahan, P. (2020). *Millions learning real-time scaling labs – Emerging findings and key insights* (p. 10). Center for Universal Education at Brookings. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/millions-learning-real-time-scaling-labs-emerging-findings-and-key-insights/>
- 36 Cyr, H. (2017). *Akazi Kanoze 2: Cost analysis report*. <https://www.edc.org/akazi-kanoze-2-cost-analysis-report>
- 37 Education Development Center, *Youth employment assessment report*.; Education Development Center, *Key observations and recommendations*.
- 38 Cyr, *Cost Analysis Report*.
- 39 “One of the most significant differences between Akazi Kanoze youth and the control group was the increase in frequency of saving; this difference is significant at the $p<.001$ level. . . . At baseline 84.6% of treatment group youth and 70.6% of control group youth reported that they put aside money for savings at least once a year. Between baseline and endline, 59% of Akazi Kanoze youth increased their frequency of saving, whereas only 44% of the control group youth did so.” (Source: Alcid, *A randomized controlled trial*.)

- 40 Education Development Center. (2020). *Rapid information gathering on the effects of COVID-19 outbreak on Huguka Dukore Akazi Kanoze youth employment and self-employment* [Unpublished manuscript].
- 41 USAID, *Youth Assessment*, p. 15.
- 42 Refer to: Rwanda Polytechnic. (2019, September 27.) *Rwanda Polytechnic strategic plan (2019–2024)*. https://www.rp.ac.rw/fileadmin/user_upload/Rwanda_Polytechnic_Strategic_Plan_2019-2024_.pdf
- 43 The term *crowding in* as used here has been taken from the market systems development world, where the term is used to describe a phenomenon in which system actors begin to copy the behaviors of select actors who have been targeted by a development program, or who “change their behaviour as a result of improved incentives or environment created (at least partly) by the programme.” (Source: Beam Exchange. (n.d.)). Crowding in. In Beam Exchange glossary. <https://beamexchange.org/market-systems/glossary/>
- 44 Mastercard Foundation. (2020). *Secondary education in Africa: Preparing youth for the future of work* (p. 211). <https://mastercardfdn.org/research/secondary-education-in-africa/>
- 45 In the context of international market development, *systems resilience* refers to “the capacity of a market system to absorb, adapt, or transform in the face of shocks and stresses.” (Source: USAID. (2019). Market systems resilience: A framework for measurement. <https://www.usaid.gov/documents/1866/market-systems-resilience-framework-measurement>)
- 46 USAID, *Youth Assessment*, pp. 2, 22, 24, 27, 40, 41.



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