



Some Lessons Learnt from the implementation of Youth Urban agriculture programmes

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These lessons learnt reflect and expand on discussion with project partners and staff in the August 2011 project mid term review, which in turn builds on discussion with youth beneficiaries.

From the analyses of component implementation to date, the following lessons seem to emerge:

1. Communication between project team and youth is crucial.

Building trust between project team and youth beneficiaries is crucial. The process is likely to be enhanced through: open communication and clearly setting 'rules of engagement', respective responsibilities and timescale. The process will be compromised by: delays on the part of the project implementation team, perception among youth that what has been promised has not been fulfilled, unclear and changing process rules.

It is therefore crucial that the project team is absolutely clear from the onset and before youth engagement about the full process cycle, the specific approach of the intervention and all the do's and don't. It will help to have the main points of these rules written down and shared with the youth from the start. It is also crucial that the organisation implementing the intervention is able as a whole to timely fulfil its role including supporting frontline staff and procurement

2. Why should I engage and when will I get it? (Time is money)

Youth motivation may fade earlier than others' if there is no clarity about what exact benefits they will get from the process (ie how much income) and when, and if these benefits do not materialise within an expected short timeframe. Patience is very much a luxury commodity at a younger age and there is the urgent need to channel energy towards results in the short run.

Key implications for implementation are to:

- be clear from the beginning about what the expected benefits will be both for the group and for the individuals
- prioritise actions and interventions which may bring about benefits in the short run
- start small and expand on it, rather than embarking in projects with relatively large investments that may require long time to set up and bring back returns

3. Myth: youth are not interested in agriculture

Youth are interested in agriculture and food production, processing and marketing, as long as it produces income, relatively fast (see above).

4. Ensuring ownership

It is crucial that youth develop their businesses rather than businesses are developed (by project staff) for youth.

The process entails both ensuring that the business idea and plan is developed at each stage by the youth themselves and that it builds on something youth already do and in which they are investing. As one youth put it in one of the evaluation “if you come with a machine I will take it and when you leave probably sell it. If I understand I need a machine and I pay for it in whole or in part, I will guard it and take care of it as my source income”

5. Business sustainability

Supporting youth groups through revolving funds can be a good way to ensure sustainability if the rules of the revolving funds are clearly set up and communicated. Capital and materials should not be given ‘for free’ but there should be attention so that the capital or funds are actually revolved

There should be some testing of the products in the market and flexibility to change and adapt the products and prices so that they can stand competition. This will in turn allow youth creativity to come out. Flexibility is easier when businesses start small and expand rather than starting with bigger investments

6. Market focus

It is extremely important that youth are accompanied through simple market research in order to realise for themselves what is the best business ideas, what adjustments should be made and how to market their products or services.

Business ideas pushed through by project implementation team tend to be short lived after the end of the project.

Businesses should be supported when they work in the market, so once again, starting small and building up, being flexible and ensuring youth ownership is key to success.

It should also be clear what is the specific business focus (ie produce and sell yoghurt) and youth should be encouraged to engage with other individual and businesses like suppliers or sale agents without internalising all step of the value chain into one business if this helps focus and it is easier to manage.

7. Group businesses or individual businesses

Youth often aggregate in groups in order to pursue income-generating ventures. This partially reduces risks, partially brings other social benefits and partially is stimulated by the perceived prospect to be able to access funding from individuals or institutions.

Group businesses can be a powerful tool when working with youth. Some elements should however be considered carefully, in particular:

- issues of ownership – it should be clear who owns any asset and the business itself
- when the ownership is of ‘ the group ‘ it is key to establish who is a member of the group, how you become a member, how and when do individual benefit from the group effort, what are the individual responsibilities towards the group

- it is auspicious that even that even within group business individual incentives remain whereby individuals can earn more if they work more and better (ie if they produce more or if they sell more), linking in this way individual benefit to business growth.

8. Literacy and business literacy

It is important to tailor expectations and business planning to the level of literacy and business literacy of the youth engaged. Accompany the process with literacy and business literacy training which is specifically tailored on the youth business endeavour will bring added value. Attention should be paid however not to overload youth with too many tasks and considering the competing demands on their time

9. Life skills

Programs targeting out of school and out of jobs youth provide a great chance to reach out to them with life skills training (decision making, conflict management, communication, leadership), HIV and AIDS awareness raising and gender equity sensitisation.

Where possible project extension /outreach staff should have basic notions on these issues but specific training should be delivered by specialised organisation with the project acting as a bridge to extension services which would fail to reach those youth and as a referral to specialised services when needs are identified.

In turn, life skills training can play an enormous role in terms of youth motivation at individual and group level and this should be specifically leveraged towards realisation, self-reliance and business success.

10. Trust youth so they can trust themselves

Encouragement and trust towards youth ability to achieve objective is crucial to youth self motivation. This may take the form of trusting individual with small amount of group money for example, with engaging youth in procurement of project sponsored goods and with nominating youth on the project steering group, all initiatives which brought good results in past experiences.

11. Specific focus on young women

As programs are often designed by men they tend to focus on men dominated business opportunities. It is crucial to have a good gender balance in the project team and that all team has basic gender equity awareness in order to cater for young women's specific needs.

12. Vulnerable groups

Particularly vulnerable groups like youth with disabilities can be engaged largely with the same principles as other youth.

It will be important to specifically target those youth as they may be traditionally excluded from project beneficiaries selection.

Even more emphasis should be put on sustainability and self reliance when dealing with youth culturally used to hands outs. If given the right freedom, trust and support vulnerable youth will design a business around their best abilities.

13. Exit strategies

From the beginning of the intervention it should be recognised that once set up businesses will need certain services like access to finance, banking, possibly mentoring, technical support, continued literacy training, etc.

Suitable providers should be identified from the onset and engaged in the project ensuring that an exit strategy is in place for youth to access these services after the end of the project.

It is also suggested that when youth services exists these are engaged during the project and charged with monitoring and follow up after the end of the project.