

## **Investing in Youth through TVET: An Alternative Solution to Child Trafficking and Pro-Growth Strategies in Uganda**

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### **Abstract**

*Youth unemployment remains a serious policy challenge in many sub-Saharan African countries, including Uganda. In 2013, youth aged 15 to 24 in Sub-Sahara Africa were twice likely to be unemployed compared to any other age cohort. For Uganda, in 2012, the Uganda bureau of statistics revealed that the share of unemployed youth (national definition, 18-30 years) among the total unemployed persons in the country was 64 percent. Causes of youth unemployment are believed to be multifaceted, ranging from an inadequate investment/supply side of jobs, insufficient employable skills and high rates of labor force growth at 4.7% per annum. It is estimated that around 18,000 girls/young women are forced into commercial sex work in Kampala's slums as result of increasing youth unemployment in the country. These girls/young women are found to be trafficked into the practice especially those under 18 years, or forced to join the trade because they cannot earn a living. This has resulted into many negative consequences, including high rates of HIV/AIDS at amongst commercial sex workers, backstreet abortions and mental health disorders. This paper examines the causes of exploitation and high rates of youth unemployment, and successes made by Plan international Uganda in partnership with Uganda Youth Development Link (UYDEL) in providing alternative sustainable livelihoods to exploited girls and young women through promotion of TVET programs in slums of Kampala. This study employed longitudinal methodology and using vocational and apprenticeship model, Plan Uganda in partnership with Uganda Youth Development Link (UYDEL) identified sexually exploited girls and women, between the ages of 13 and 24, enrolled them into the project and attend vocational and apprenticeship training in alternative income generating skills. The girls and young women are recruited through collaborating with community leaders, moon light outreach, bar and hotel owners field visit to sex workers' spots and peer educators. The results from the longitudinal evaluation indicated that girls and young women who acquired vocational and apprenticeship skills have experienced tremendous changes in their lives; 43.5% girls/women reported having completely abandoned sex work, out of 232 who were followed up and 62% indicated having gained confidence to speak up about their rights to practice safer sex especially with their partners among others.*

**Key words:** *Alternative livelihood, empowerment, holistic TVET approach*

## **Introduction**

Child trafficking in this study will be limited to the definition given by United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime under Article 3, paragraph (a) of the protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking that defines trafficking as “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of a male or female child, for the purpose of exploitation where exploitation includes at minimum, prostitution, and other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor, slavery and / or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.

World over, it is estimated that 21 million people are victims of forced labor/ and or trapped in jobs which they were coerced or deceived into and which they cannot leave. Out of these, 4.5 million (22%) are victims of forced sexual exploitation, and 14.2 million (68%) are victims of forced labour exploitation in economic activities, such as agriculture, construction, domestic work or manufacturing. The figure means that, around three out of every 1,000 persons worldwide are in forced labor at any given point in time (ILO, 2012). United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes global report, (2014) articulated that the crime of trafficking in persons is carried out by different types of traffickers, ranging from individuals exploiting their partner to organized criminal groups operating across national borders. The US report 2005 revealed that trafficking in persons is one of the most lucrative and fastest growing transnational crime that generates about USD \$10 billion per year worldwide. In Uganda, there are no clear statistics on the total number of boys and girls trafficked within and outside borders. However, UYDEL, (2009) revealed that some survivors of child trafficking; 2.7 million are victims of child labor, 18,000 are trapped in commercial sex, 10,000 are street children, between 25,000 and 30,000 are abducted for armed conflict while over 20,000 are living in the slums of Kampala Capital City.

## **Literature Review**

According to Ahaibwe and Mbowa (2014), youth unemployment remains a serious policy challenge in many sub-Saharan African countries, including Uganda. In 2013, youth (aged 15 to 24) in sub-Saharan Africa were twice likely to be unemployed compared to any other age cohort. According to Uganda National Youth Manifesto (2011/16) defined unemployment as a situation where a person is not engaged in gainful employment and accordingly urban unemployment rate in Uganda stood at 12%, about seven times the rural rate of 1.7%. In Kampala, youth unemployment rate was reported to be 32.2%, while for those who have university degrees was estimated at 36% that is to mean almost 400,000 students graduate from different tertiary institutions every year only to compete for 18,000 government jobs created in the same period. Kampala Capital City Authority (2015) revealed that unemployed young people are forced to find alternatives to generate income, including activities in the survival-type informal sector and, in extreme cases criminal activity. The youth leaders have also not been effective in delivering the youth agenda in the city due to issues of capacity and political differences. A study done by UYDEL (2011) estimated that around 18,000 girls/young women are forced into commercial sex work in Kampala’s slums as

result of increasing youth unemployment in country. Plan International, (2014) further revealed that these girls/young women were found to be trafficked into the practice especially those under 18 years, or forced to join the trade because they couldn't earn a living and this resulted into many negative consequences, including high rates of HIV/AIDS at 37% amongst commercial sex workers, backstreet abortions and mental health disorders. Sarimah and Dahiru (2014) revealed that in the 21st century, employability skills are the most required skills besides technical knowledge in an attempt to compete for employment and sustain job at the industrial global market. However, in Uganda, graduates are not equipped (half-baked) with the employability skills needed by the industries and as a result, they are not ready to enter into workforce compared to their counterparts in region (Nganga, 2014).

### **The Need for Employability Skills**

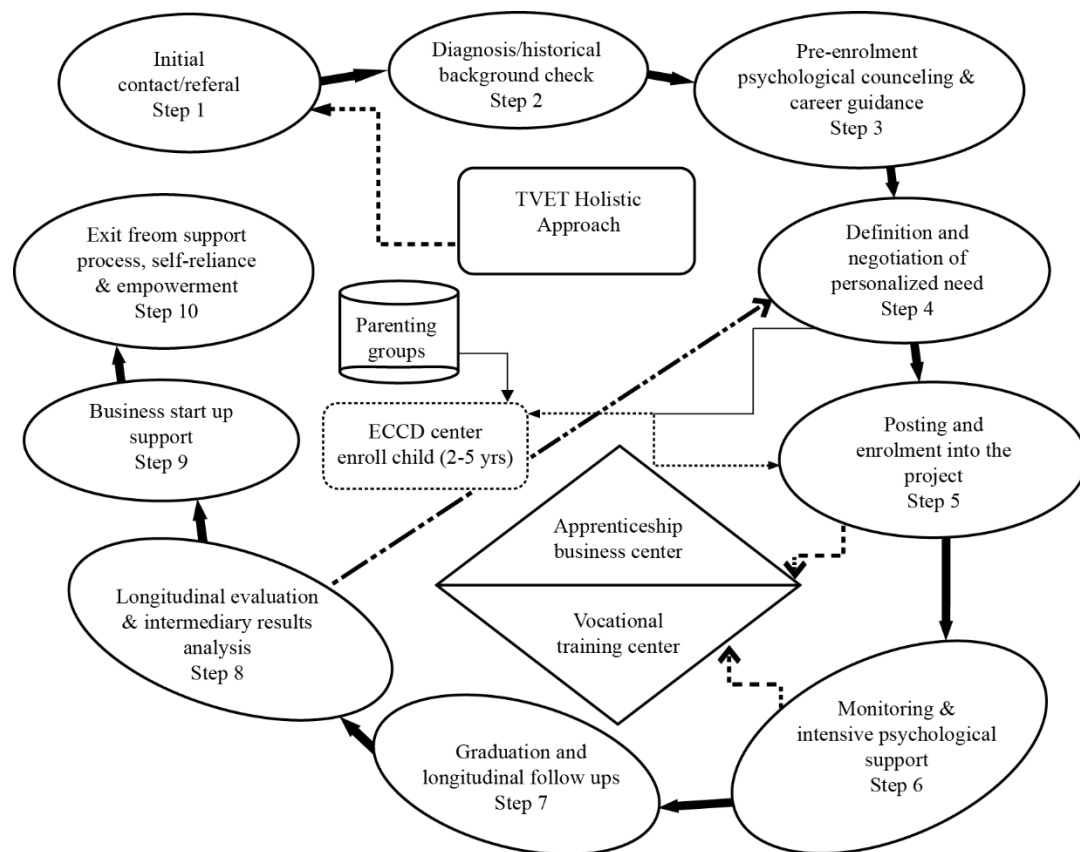
In 2014, Plan International Uganda received a 3 year grant from Comic Relief to implement a Partnership for Empowerment of Vulnerable Girls and Women in Urban Slums of Kampala City (PEVUS) project. The project's theory of change is built on the fact that if these girls access education that equips them with technical skills to find alternative employment or start their own business, supported with business management, confidence building and behavior change initiatives, then they will be able to find alternative decent work and be productive hence reduced exposure to Sexual Reproductive Health (SRH) risks and violence. The TVET approach, therefore, was thought of as a means to achieve project's objectives through which it addresses the intermediate causes of the problem and some of the root causes. The intermediate needs include earning a sustainable living in a safe way, and to do this, young women and girls need to gain technical and business skills. Other needs included addressing the consequences of commercial sex work (CSW), including unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV/AIDS, which is achieved through provision of condoms and awareness raising on the risks for all vulnerable groups. These also include duty bearers and sex workers' clients and establishing referral mechanism to existing youth-friendly health services, gender sensitive SRH service providers. It is also believed that, this approach is addressing some of the root causes, which include GBV stemming from a lack of awareness of women's and children's rights. It addresses information gaps that exist in communities through advocacy on girls' and women's rights, in which the girls/ young women participate and working with duty bearers so that they understand the importance of protecting rights, and to gain the tools to do this in their work. OECD, (2009) asserts that promoting pro-poor growth is about increasing the contribution of economic growth to poverty reduction therefore this is pursued through policies that enable a pace and pattern of growth that enhances the ability of poor women and men find decent work and be productive to participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth. The project baseline information provided the benchmark upon which the planning for the community interventions was conceived while using TVET Holistic Approach as underlying principle of vocational pedagogy as a scientific discipline, of vocational curricula (KMK, 2014), and of training regulations.

## **Background to the Holistic TVET Approach**

Plan International's conception of vocational and apprenticeship model is in line with African Union, (2007) strategy paper that places TVET model as critical driver for any nation wishing to develop and get out of poverty brackets. It is believed that, TVET orientation allows trainees acquire employable skills for the 21st century and can be delivered at different levels of sophistication and can respond to the different training needs of learners from different socio-economic and academic backgrounds, and prepares them for gainful employment and sustainable livelihoods (Aihabwe & Mbowa , 2014). Plan International Uganda envisaged that identifying and providing vocational skills to these sexually exploited girls/young women will enable them find alternative sources of income. However, vocational training alone would not be enough without other supporting mechanisms targeting behavioral change given the volatility of labor market which would make girls/young women backslide into sex work in case they fail to find jobs. Therefore, this holistic approach involves; tackling sex work drivers (such as lack of skills for employment), economic burden, and socials interaction (nonfunctional community & government systems, violence and attitudes).

As illustrated in TVET personalized Social Support Model below, initial contact with sex workers is done through either identification during hot spot visits, moon light outreaches and referrals by community members. After initial contact, assessment is done focusing on family background information, personal training needs and provision of guidance and counseling services by social workers in step 2 and 3 respectively. During step 4 and 5, social workers negotiate and agree with sex workers on which training option is best suitable and once an agreement is reached, the sex worker is either posted into vocational center or apprenticeship business center. Sex workers with children are given an opportunity to enroll their children into established Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) centers to undergo early childhood education which is supported with meals and provided by trained caregivers hired and paid by Plan Uganda. This is to enable their parents to concentrate at their vocational training centers. Additionally, parents with children at ECCD centers form parenting groups to include other parents from community with objectives to interact/share best practices of parenting children. Sex workers posted in vocation training center, their training sessions are conducted in groups by a hired trainer whereas those posted in apprenticeship business center, their training is conducted individually on job where their learning is through continuous interaction with trainer and daily business customers. In both training models, training duration last for 6 months and during this training, psychosocial support is given to promote effective behavior change, impart problem-solving skills, as strategies to increase safer sexual behaviors. In step 6 and 7, sex workers are continuously and intensively monitored with provision of psychosocial counseling focusing on SRH risks and drop out before they are graduated. After the completion of their 6 months training, they continue with follow ups for up to three months to establish changing dynamics that they face. This helps the team to understand most significant change stories or challenges which may require redefining their personalized need identified in definition stage. After redefining or

acceptance of the personalized need, the sex workers are given business startup kits based on their training/choice to become self-reliant and empowered as indicated in step 9 and 10 respectively. Using below approach, sex workers are identified and trained in skills related to hair dressing, tailoring, catering, plumbing, carpentry, electronics, shoe making, dreadlocks and shampoo making. At the end of training, Plan Uganda supports them with business startup kits as a foundation capital.



**Figure 1:** TVET Personalized Social Support Model for Sex Workers. Source: Researcher, 2016.

## Longitudinal Research Methodology

Plan international used longitudinal evaluation for two years to keep in contact with sex workers from the time they enrolled till they were given business startup kit as foundation capital to make them self-reliant. During this period, study involved use of mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative) collection of primary data using individual interviews and secondary data through reviewing project reports. This approach intended to collect information from the respondents as defined by Knowledge, Attitude and Practices (Médicins, 2011).

## **Sample Size and Design**

A combination of both purposive and convenience sampling was applied in order to gather as much qualitative and quantitative data as necessary. The reason for such study design was chosen because the challenges of re-location of sex workers and unavailability of their contact telephones numbers. Convenience sampling involved selection of the most accessible sample subjects and it was considered important because the low-cost relative to time, effort and money given the dynamics of sex workers, but also ensured balance between girls aged category of 13-17 and 18-24 years. The study targeted 232 girls who completed vocational and apprenticeship training and had been in field for a period of more than six months before plan gave them business startup kits.

## **Findings**

### **Analysis and Presentation of Results**

The research analysis focused on behavior change, economic empowerment and living conditions taking into considerations the demographic characteristics of the communities such as perceptions and experiences of parents, learners, trainers and stakeholders; and capacity for and sustainability of results of program. Some of the findings of the research are highlighted in table 1 below.

**Table 1: Employment Status of Sex Workers as Result of Acquiring TVET Skills**

Vocational Skills	Employment Status	Own Business	No Job	Total
Catering	8	2	3	34
Electronics	4	0	5	9
Hairdressing	4	2	65	132
Plumbing	0	0	3	3
Shoe Making	0	0	13	13
Tailoring	1	2	26	41
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>232</b>

The analysis indicated that girls and young women who acquired vocational and apprenticeship skills had experienced tremendous changes in their lives. For instance, 65 (28%) of these girls reached were employed while 22.4% had started their own businesses. The analysis also revealed that 101(43.5%) girls/young women completely abandoned sex work and this was attributed to accessing an alternative source of income which is less risky compared to their previous sex occupation. In addition, 144 (62%) indicated having gained confidence to speak up about their rights to practice safer sex especially with their partners.

## Community Perceptions towards Vocational Training

The study showed that parents, learners, teachers and government leaders value the contribution of vocational training and expressed urgent need for continuation of program in order to solve the rampant social problem that affects community. Qualitative analysis revealed that majority of sex workers, about 181 (78%) wanted this vocational training to continue as a mechanism for their peers to leave sex work occupation. However, there was a concern that since prostitution is regarded as illegal in the country, sex workers would fear to come out and take advantage of this training opportunity due to social stigma. However, if this program continued, its benefits will override the social stigma hence sex workers will come out and realize the benefits. Additionally, 169 (72.8%) of girls and young women reported feeling confident and empowered enough to make appropriate decisions which include; choices concerning their lives are more especially in negotiating for safer sex with their sexual partners, a fair price and use of condom. One respondent had this to say:

“...At the age of 16 years, while doing prostitution, a man used me sexually and he ended up beating me for asking money that I had worked for. When I went to the police, I was not helped because they asked for money to go and arrest the man but I never had the money and I let it go...” (*19 year Sex worker, Kasubi – Rubaga Division*)

On the other hand, another respondent expressed her confidence as summarized in comment:

“...I used to go to bars and dance karaoke, take drugs like marijuana and sleep with more than 5 men without using condoms in one night after shows to get money. I also used to watch pornography on my phone plus masturbating every time I needed a man. But since I joined this TVET program and received counseling, I got to know the risks involved in having more than one sexual partner, drug taking and sleeping with men without using condoms. I decided to change by concentrating on learning vocational skills which I hoped will facilitate me in finding another alternative source of income. After graduation in hair dressing, I sought a job in a neighborhood saloon and I got it and from there I never found time to go back to the streets for sex, I request for use of condom without fear with the one partner I decided to stay with since I am not ready to give birth...” (*20-year-old Sex worker, Nakulabye – Rubaga Division*)

PEVUS Baseline report, (2014) revealed that duty bearers especially police used the clause of the Penal Code Act to charge these sex workers with idle and disorderly or indecent behaviour in any public place as an offence and they would be forwarded to courts of law. As expressed by one of local leaders in one of key informant interview:

“...The main problem facing the sex workers is the frequent unwarranted arrests. The police arrest them mainly to extort money

from them. Often they arrest them in the morning and quickly forward them to court. Then the police officers claim the court officials are demanding for bribes. As LCs we often plead for sex workers because we know them and what they do, but the police do not listen to us, because their aim is to get money from the sex workers. Some sex workers are arrested over and over again, and have become hardened. Once arrested, the police officers fabricate all sorts of crimes to pin on them. It's those with no money that will end up in court, otherwise they usually pay their way out of the police station..." (*LC leader in Bwaise II*)

However, this analysis reveals that, working relationship between sex workers and the police improved tremendously as a result of continuous engagement made between communities and duty bearers towards upholding the rights of girls especially sexually exploited. About 153 (66%) of sex workers reported willingness to report their sexually abuse cases to police and or seek support from any duty bearer especially local council which was not the case in the past as illustrated in below comment.

"...If you report violence to the police, e.g. when you are raped, the policemen ask, "gwe olin'embuzi?" [Are you a virgin anyway?] to dismiss your case. When a policeman wants to have sex with you (sex worker) and you refuse, that police officer continuously arrest you..." (*Sex workers FGD, Jambula Zone, Bwaise III*)

The analysis further revealed that police had referred 35 sex workers to UYDEL's training centers to acquire vocational trainings rather than prosecuting them for engaging in illegal sex work.

### **TVET and Community Empowerment**

**Sexual Reproductive Health.** The analysis has revealed that access to SRH information and HIV services for slum dwellers improved ever since the project started. The integration of SRH component into TVET was based on information collected during baseline survey which indicated that sex workers had high HIV/AIDS risks such as abnormal vaginal discharge - 53%, pain during urination -51%, itching in the genital area -56.3% and sores in the genital parts - 39.8%. Therefore, training sex workers with high STIs cases would instead increase on dropout rates. While conducting the evaluation, 82% of respondents revealed that they have ever suffered from STI and sought medication from the health centers where health supplies were provided by Plan Uganda. Among these, 76% reported to have cured/ reduced incidences of STI. The analysis further revealed that Bar and lodge owners developed a Code of Conduct that restricted them from employing workers below the age of 18 years.

**Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD).** The analysis showed that there has been an increase in male involvement in ECCD due to different engagements like awareness sessions and dialogues on good parenting. The study



revealed that fathers meet regularly in their clubs to share experiences on parenting and learn from one another. About 56% of respondents reported that fathers have taken on more responsibilities over their children, for instance, ensuring their children are safe as they travel to school, that they are healthy and their basic needs are met.

## **Conclusions**

The results revealed that using vocational model offered better chance of acquiring behavioral change since sex workers interacted more regularly with trained social workers compared to apprenticeship model where only sex workers deal with profit minded business owner. It further indicated that the apprenticeship model provides a true sense of the business environment and offers lessons in service pricing, customer care and service negotiation. Therefore, behavioral change can be a slow process, thus the need to be patient in relation to expectations for seeing significant changes in the short-term. In addition, there has been more positive behavioral change for the girls that have been enrolled as peer educators (former Sex workers) and those that closely interact with them than other targeted sex workers and slum dwellers, because of the continuous exposure and support that the peer educators get from their monthly peer led SRH/HIV sessions.

## **Recommendations**

During the evaluation, it was pointed out that the project targeted only girls involved in sex work to access vocational and apprenticeship training opportunities. However, the results indicated that boys too are at risk of sexual exploitation and need such services. This evaluation, therefore, recommends that in subsequent funding or interventions, boys should to be assisted because they too have high vulnerability compared to their counterparts.

Further analysis revealed that, there were many relevant policies in place, including the Trafficking in Persons Act (2009) and Sexual Offences Bill (2010) to protect young girls but were generally not well enforced, therefore, this research recommends that there is a need to recognize their existence by enacting and enforcing favorable laws that prevents exploitation and domestic violence which contribute to the girls' exploitation.

In addition, career guidance should be provided to learners from primary to university level to change negative attitude of community perception of TVET as that for the failures that didn't make it to the university. This has perception has resulted in girls failing to take up the alternative pathways hence making them susceptible to exploitation. It would be ideal to establish Uganda Technical and Vocational University which will make communities believe in TVET education system.

Furthermore, integration of TVET and psychosocial support to the sex workers have resulted into positive results and therefore, government and other partners need to get more involved and encouraged to come up with interventions that will

target sex workers across the urban centers in country where there is high risk of new HIV infections among the youth.

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