

STRATEGIC RESEARCH INTO THE YOUTH EDUCATION PACK (YEP) MODEL

**PREPARED BY WOMEN'S REFUGEE COMMISSION
FOR THE NORWEGIAN REFUGEE COUNCIL**

NRC NORWEGIAN
REFUGEE COUNCIL



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SUMMARY

In 2014 the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) engaged the Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) to conduct an external review of the NRC Youth Education Pack (YEP) model, a well-regarded program that has been implemented in multiple post-crisis and fragile-state contexts since 2003. YEP offers a one-year, full-day intensive program adapted to each country context, which has evolved over time in response to lessons learned, though the core set of three main interventions remains: teaching of literacy and numeracy skills, training in livelihood skills toward (self-) employment, and sensitization in various life-skills including health and micro-business management. YEP also aims to build individual self-confidence and awareness of the roles youth can play in rebuilding their community and nation, and promote cooperation to help reduce the culture of violence.

This project was an opportunity to compare YEP programs across countries with a focus on three main research questions: 1. Can the YEP model be adapted, or the skill elements redefined, without a consequent reduction or compromise on effectiveness, and 2. Can adaptations to the YEP model increase the effectiveness of the program, through a greater scale of programming? 3. How do outcomes differ for male and female YEP learners? Guidance of future program development for youth and adolescents, including contributing to the global evidence base around education in emergencies were also goals of this project.

A desk review was conducted on 13 countries and 21 programs based on ~250 program documents supplied by NRC. In addition WRC made one two-week field mission to conduct focus group

discussions and interviews in YEP program sites in the refugee camp complex of Dadaab, Kenya, where NRC has been experimenting with a lower-cost, shorter-duration adapted YEP model. The final review was supplemented with interviews and questionnaires with a handful of NRC staff at HQ and field level.

In general, YEP programs are highly regarded by youth and host communities. Program documents across countries consistently reveal conscious efforts toward enabling a positive culture of learning and adaptation within NRC. Common implementation challenges across YEP countries include: delays in delivery and/or low quality of toolkits given to beneficiaries after completing the course; long distances of YEP centers from where beneficiaries reside; market saturation of newly-learned trades; lack of capable partners in government, civil society and the private sector; female learner dropout; limited capacity of teachers and trainers; limited availability of female teachers; disunity in graduates' business groups and cooperatives; and the inability of some beneficiaries to find (self-)employment even after graduation. NRC has made numerous investments and programmatic adaptations to address these challenges.

The review finds a lack of any common theory of change to underpin the YEP model and build an M&E system upon. A global ToC was apparently developed in 2012-2013 and a revised M&E system rollout began in 2014, but these were not in place in the country programs discussed in this report.

NRC also seems to struggle with a lack of clear goals for YEP with regard to the issue of



While WRC cannot adequately answer the main research questions in this paper, we do make recommendations for necessary steps to answer the research questions in the future, including establishing mechanisms for cross-country analysis and comparison. In the meantime we have developed a decision matrix of potential program adaptations that could allow NRC to lower costs and reach greater scale, which includes the potential negative and positive implications for each.

Based on the learning from the recommended research, NRC might consider delivering YEP not always as a 3-pillar package but as a package of one or more discrete modules depending on need/level of vulnerability, while continuing to prioritize investments in market assessment, teacher quality, and retention of female learners.

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PURPOSE

The purposes of this review were twofold: 1) Document impact and lessons learned needed to review the NRC YEP model on cost effectiveness and scalability; 2) guide future program development for youth and adolescents. This includes contributing to the global evidence base around education in emergencies.

The questions posed by this study are also raised in recent reports and research produced by the wider education sector. The UNESCO Global Monitoring Reports for Education for All (2011 and 2012) and the World Development Report 2012 highlight information gaps and the need for better evidence to improve youth employment and skills building programs in conflict settings. Likewise, a range of bilateral donors that prioritize youth programming – including DFID, GIZ, DANIDA, SIDA, NORAD, and USAID – note the need for improved documentation on what works in different settings and greater impact measurement for different interventions.

The findings and conclusions of this study could be shared with a wide range of actors, including:

- ➔ NRC Head Office and country programs: Study publication (print and online), email dissemination to target staff, feature of discussion at global conferences and workshops, presentation and discussion at head office.
- ➔ Education and youth program experts: Presentation at the annual Making Cents Global Youth Economic Opportunities Conference (Washington, DC); Youth and Adolescents in Emergencies (YEA) advocacy group; the INEE Youth and Adolescents Task Team, the Child Protection Working Group annual meeting; and guest lectures at leading universities.
- ➔ Humanitarian sector and policy makers: UNHCR NGO consultations, the annual InterAction Forum; briefings at UNHCR in Geneva and Office of the SG Envoy on Youth; and key partners in funding YEP and Youth programming (NMFA, NORAD, and SIDA).





3 METHODS

The study relied on a literature review of ~250 YEP-related documents supplied by NRC: internal and external program evaluations, program budgets, monitoring and evaluation reports, beneficiary case management lists, policy and guidance documents, fact sheets and staff assessment mission reports. Late in the project WRC agreed with NRC to supplement the review with a series of in-person and telephone interviews with NRC staff. Due to time constraints WRC was only able to interview a small handful of current and former staff, though three country offices did provide written answers to our questions. Staff interviewees were informed that their responses would be quoted anonymously. WRC also made a 2-week mission to conduct focus groups and

interviews with approximately 100 young women and young men, and NRC staff in Dadaab, Kenya, which took a case study approach using focus group discussions with female and male learners and YEP graduates and semi-structured interviews with staff. Budget data for five beneficiary countries were collected for the purpose of a common-size cost structure analysis and a compiled unweighted cost ranking. WRC also compiled a cost-per-learner database based on a small sample of YEP country documents. A draft of the evaluation report findings was shared with NRC for feedback and clarification, and amendments were made.



4 LIMITATIONS

A lack of information pertinent to the research questions in the evaluations provided, and the lack of per-pillar costing data are the main limitations of the study. The evaluations of YEP country programs have been of varying quality (see *Evaluation and Learning below*), and program recommendations within evaluation documents almost always imply spending more money, while the purpose of the present review is to find ways to reduce costs to enable scaling up. In the few cases where cost-cutting recommendations are included in external evaluations, the suggestions offered are generally weak, and would yield only marginal savings if followed. Perhaps the most important limitation for the purpose of making recommendations related to spending is the lack of per-pillar

cost and percentage weighting of costs of program staff, general overhead, and additional staff costs toward YEP. As such, WRC could glean little pertinent information on per-pillar costs, which would be crucial to answering the research questions.

In the case of the Dadaab mission, the primary limitation was the impossibility of making a valid comparison between the classic YEP model and the adapted short-course model now being implemented in that context. However the Dadaab mission was crucial as means to collect qualitative data and to interact with beneficiaries and staff on the ground.

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BACKGROUND

YEP aims at responding to the education and training needs of a conflict-affected children and youth aged 15 – 24, who due to displacement and lack of opportunities have missed out on schooling and skills development. YEP targets the most vulnerable, but who still have the possibility of spending a full time year in the program. Priority is given to young single mothers, youth heads of households and those with the poorest educational background. A limited number of local (host community) youth and young people previously associated with fighting forces might also be enrolled to support rehabilitation and re-integration in the community. In its “classic” form, YEP offers a one-year, full-day intensive program that helps learners:

- ➔ Reach a basic level of functional literacy and numeracy;
- ➔ Acquire practical livelihood skills that can provide future income-generation opportunities;
- ➔ Put new life-skills into practice, and through this gain individual self-confidence and awareness of the roles they can play in rebuilding their community and nation;
- ➔ Promote cooperation and re-integration among different groupings in the community to help reduce the culture of violence.

To accomplish the above goals, YEP has implemented an education plan comprised of 3 central components (henceforth referred to as pillars):

- ➊ **LITERACY AND NUMERACY SKILLS:** Programs that embed literacy and numeracy skills within the vocational and transferrable skill modules, or provide education on literacy and numeracy as a stand-alone class.
- ➋ **TRANSFERRABLE/LIFE SKILLS:** Programs define what is needed for transferrable skills based on the existing approach in a country, including business, health, IT skills, as well as art, drama, and sports.
- ➌ **VOCATIONAL SKILLS:** Programs that follow either an enterprise-based or an institution-based approach to Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) projects.

6 FINDINGS

THEORY OF CHANGE

In order to answer the core research questions in this study, it would be ideal to be able to compare the classic YEP model to a shorter, less expensive adapted model(s) in terms of how they succeed at reaching a common set of goals – goals developed based on a ‘theory of change’. This review finds little evidence that NRC has operationalized any coherent theory of change to underpin YEP. This may be understandable in the sense that YEP was developed in an era before the advent of the ToC as standard practice in the development/humanitarian sector. It is unclear that the program is grounded in any established set of outcomes, toward which all the activities should be geared, and upon which the program M&E system could be built.

Late in the review process NRC did supply to WRC what appears to be a global ToC model (undated, perhaps fairly new), though it is unclear as to whether this ToC is known to, or applied by, many country offices. There is good reason to doubt that it is widely known; one veteran NRC staff member told WRC that “NRC has no global Theory of Change for YEP.” This may point to a problem of awareness or dissemination within the organization. However NRC is working to replace its Core Activity Database (CAD), formerly the main project reporting mechanism, and country offices are currently creating Standard Operating Procedures for monitoring and evaluation following a training in 2014.

EVALUATION AND LEARNING

Nevertheless, NRC does demonstrate a commitment to program learning and adaptation of the YEP model based on lessons learned. This is shown throughout the history of the model, where recommendations from one country in earlier years are taken up in later iterations of YEP in other countries. (Infoscope Consulting 2013) NRC increasingly relies on external evaluators to inform its work, however the quality of the evaluation documents has varied widely. In the case of the external evaluations (as opposed to routine M&E) one might expect to find the evaluators to use a counterfactual (control group), but this has rarely been done. In most of the evaluations WRC has seen, the primary outcome of interest is Beneficiary Satisfaction, which is unreliable as a measure of impact, especially in contexts where few other services are available. YEP evaluations are also inconsistently gender analytical, which could be hindering efforts on improving program implementation for adolescent girls and female youth.

GENDER ISSUES IN DADAAB YEP

As noted above, one of the three main research questions related to how YEP outcomes differ for male and female YEP learners, and in Dadaab WRC had the opportunity to inquire directly to the learners. Roughly half of the ~100 YEP learners and graduates interviewed in focus groups were female, and in general, this unscientific sample of young women seemed to be doing better on average than the males in terms of their post-graduation self-employment outcomes. The all-female FGDs were also much more positive about the program and less apt to complain about YEP than the all-male FGDs. This could be due to any number of sampling biases, or it could be that the young women are for whatever reason less likely to report business failure or other constraints.

According to one NRC field staff YEP currently only has 33% female enrolment, “which has gotten better from beginning,” though according to another staff member this problem is location-specific, where “female enrolment is very low, almost non-existent in some areas [of the greater Dadaab camp complex].” In one group female respondents said, “Distance is the first challenge; we need to walk as far as IFO2 camp, which is a big [safety] problem. We are girls – we cannot walk a long distance.” YEP skills instructors blame the disparity in enrolment partly on the fact that Somali girls who wear the veil are not allowed to attend, while one male youth blamed the sex disparity on the fact that in his center, “Female teachers are very few; it makes girls not come because they shy [away] from male teachers.” Ideas from FGDs and interviews for increasing female participation included: more consistent availability of sanitary napkins; eliminating NRC’s restriction on full-face veil for those who wear it; reinstating or increasing availability of in-kind incentives such as sugar and solar lamps for female youth; and strengthening childcare provision for learners with young children including providing milk.

IMPACT

In general, according to external evaluations, YEP programs are highly regarded by youth and host communities. Many YEP programs are successful at empowering youth to find employment or self-employment, though results vary, and few evaluations have looked at (self-) employment outcomes over time.¹

SUSTAINABILITY

Many evaluators and NRC staff cite a lack of clear goals from NRC with regard to sustainability and exit strategy. Some project documents state clearly that sustainability is not a goal YEP, while others are less clear. Given the nature of the contexts in which YEP operates, sustainability might necessarily be a secondary concern; as the NRC Education Policy (2009) for staff states, “Sustainability is not always the ultimate goal of an emergency type education project.”

Nonetheless, sustainability is a major focus of nearly all of the external evaluations commissioned by NRC, many of which conclude that YEP is too expensive to hand over to the government or other agencies.

PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships with local or national government agencies have helped reduce some of the costs of YEP and improve program quality and sustainability. Partnering with national authorities in the Democratic Republic of Congo and other countries has helped NRC beneficiaries achieve government certification upon graduation. (Olsen, Report YEP Review – DR Congo 2006) In Georgia and other countries, NRC has partnered with local NGOs and training firms to implement educational activities and respond to the varied needs of its beneficiaries. (Andguladze 2011) However as discussed in *Common Implementation Challenges* below, in many countries NRC is constrained by a

¹ The Dadaab country program is currently conducting a tracer study of YEP graduates.

lack of capable partners in government, civil society and the private sector, which limits the potential for sustainability.

GENDER

The document review finds that issues of gender are increasingly incorporated into the program model. YEP has in some countries been successful in achieving gender equity in beneficiary enrollment, staffing, and diversification of vocations among female learners (Moberg and Johnson-Demen 2009) and in a few cases offering tailored community-based training for female beneficiaries. (NRC 2011) NRC is committed to parity of

enrollment by sex, in some cases overenrolling young women in anticipation of higher female dropout rates. NRC has also taken various steps over the years to strengthen female retention rates, including hiring of female teachers/trainers and providing daycare for young mothers, and sanitary supplies. M&E data is routinely disaggregated by sex, which should allow managers to track outcomes specifically for female youth and make adjustments to the program where disparities are discovered. However the review finds little mention of gender-based protection concerns, including those that might arise as a result of program participation.

SHORT COURSE MODEL IN DADAAB, KENYA

Dadaab, Kenya was chosen as field research site in part because this country program is experimenting with a fairly radical adaptation to the classic YEP model, targeting less vulnerable learners who have already achieved basic literacy and numeracy with a shorter (3-month) course that focuses solely on the vocational skills, with the idea that this could be a model for NRC country programs to scale up at lower cost. The short course focuses on skills that are teachable in a short period, such as barbering and tailoring. Most participants were graduates of primary or secondary school and at least conversant in English.²

In focus group discussions (FGDs), a few learners mentioned a preference for the short course, “because you can do it quickly and the longer program takes too much time.” However the majority of short course learners in FGDs asked for the program to be lengthened. Many respondents said things like, “We are missing the [life skills and literacy] in our program, and we wanted the short course to add these components.” In spite of these requests, according to YEP’s key donor in the Dadaab context, results show that the short course does respond to an identified need for less time-consuming training. Dadaab-based UNICEF staff told WRC, “[The short course] was a positive surprise because [NRC tells us that] most graduates are already self-employed.

And most of the time [NRC] has more dropouts, but this particular cohort [the first short course class] had a 100 percent graduation rate, and also demand for course was very high.” While WRC did not see any costing data, NRC field staff indicated that the short course is about half the cost of the long course. If these statements are true, it bodes well for the short-course model as a lower-cost alternative to YEP, with potential for scaling up.

NRC will have to choose whether to run the short course concurrently with the classic YEP, or to abandon the classic YEP altogether. This decision will depend on NRC’s willingness to abandon literacy and life skills, targeting more literate youth who are more likely to succeed, and leaving out the most marginalized who are likely disproportionately female. The short-course model also requires a shift into teaching only skills that are feasible to learn in a shorter time-frame. The pros and cons of these and many other potential adaptations are discussed in the *Options Matrix* below.

² For reasons unknown to WRC, a significant number of short-course learners in Dadaab stated that they had also graduated from the longer YEP course.



ADAPTATIONS TO YEP

While some NRC staff cite a lack of flexibility in the organization with regard to YEP programming, in reality, the model has taken many forms over the years depending on the country context, to the extent that it is difficult to speak of any single, standard YEP design. In the words of one headquarters staff member, “The Head Office is responsible to ensure consistency of the YEP brand and its features, avoiding that adaptations/customizations dilute the main core elements. However, HO has always been welcoming for local adaptations within certain parameters.” This section lists but a few examples of adaptations to the YEP model.

In several countries NRC has linked YEP to labor markets directly through establishing apprenticeship contracts with local businesses run by trained artisans. The program in Faryab, Afghanistan enrolled 180 beneficiaries in a semi-apprenticeship where most training was done on the job under the supervision of a vocational trainer. (NRC 2011) In Timor-Leste, NRC adapted its vocational training component by offering learners two vocational skills instead of one, to broaden their chances for employment. (NRC 2010) Increasingly over time, in some countries vocational skills

training has switched to focus less on trade skills (carpentry, plumbing, etc.) and more on agriculture and animal husbandry because of the lack of demand for skilled labor in rural areas. (Olsen, Report YEP Review – DR Congo 2006) (Uganda and Timor Leste) In some contexts YEP has gone the other way, expanding VT into areas such as computer literacy, satellite installation and secretarial courses for example (NRC Georgia 2009) (Dadaab WRC). Increasingly the life-skills component has been integrated into the curriculum of the literacy and numeracy classes. In another example of adaptation to context, YEP adapted its life skills component in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to include a strong Peace Education focus.

In at least two countries, NRC has delivered a shorter VT course alongside YEP, for learners who could not participate in YEP or for whom the literacy and life skills components were less relevant. The Income Generating Activities (IGA) program in Hirat, Afghanistan offered a program only for female learners with a reduced time-frame of 4 months with 4 hours of training per day to accommodate females’ other responsibilities. Unfortunately the quality of the evaluation of the IGA program is poor, but the report claims that 75% of IGA beneficiaries were employed using their newly-learned skills. (NRC 2011)



COMMON IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

While the present study is not primarily focused on the technical implementation of YEP programming, in order to provide context for the recommendations that follow, this section will briefly list the major implementation challenges that recur across program documents, and that surfaced in staff interviews and in WRC's Dadaab research mission. These challenges are similar to those faced by other NGOs implementing TVET and education programs around the world. While NRC has made great strides in addressing these, in many cases this has come at substantial financial cost.

➔ **PARTNERSHIPS:** In most cases, perhaps, NRC has struggled to find a willing or capable partner in the government or local NGOs to take responsibility for core YEP functions, to help NRC with staff recruitment, payroll, and other functions that would cut NRC costs significantly and help ensure sustainability. This is mostly due to the nature of the contexts YEP targets, including some war-affected countries, where governments and civil society are typically weak. However, as mentioned above, there are many exceptions where partnerships with government and civil

society have been advantageous to the YEP program. (Olsen, Report YEP Review – Sudan 2006)

➔ **ACCESSIBILITY:** long distances, security challenges and/or high transportation costs between the places where refugees reside and the training locations puts constraints on learners' ability to access YEP, and causes some participants to drop out (Winters, et al. 2013), especially female learners. (Moberg and Johnson-Demen 2009) (WRC Dadaab)

➔ **FEMALE STUDENT RETENTION:** In the early years of YEP, especially, centers experienced high dropout rates among female beneficiaries (Olsen, Report YEP Review – DR Congo 2006), though as discussed above, NRC has made numerous adaptations to improve the situation, including over-enrolling female youth in anticipation of dropout.

➔ **TEACHER AND TRAINER QUALITY:** In part due to the nature of the refugee context, quality of instruction is inconsistent and sometimes “very poor”. Where feasible, NRC has partnered with national teacher training institutions to build local teaching capacity, and sometimes YEP teachers are even supervised by the national Ministry of Education. NRC attempts to recruit skills trainers for YEP centers from the local communities, though this can delay the recruitment process and contribute to delays in skills training. (Olsen, Report YEP Review – Sudan 2006) Investment in teacher quality is cited in multiple YEP evaluations and interviews as a key to success across the three program pillars. NRC has taken these findings seriously, prioritizing teacher candidate selection and salary considerations more over time, again with major cost implications.

➔ **AVAILABILITY OF FEMALE TEACHERS:** Many reports lament the challenge of finding qualified female teachers, especially in rural areas, which may limit female youth participation.

➔ **STARTUP TOOLKITS:** NRC supplies different packages of materials to YEP graduates to start

a business using their new skills. The content of the “startup kit” varies depending on the trade, but could include for instance barbering supplies for barbers, computers and printers for secretarial, tools for mechanics, even construction supplies or rent assistance for businesses setting up a physical shop. Difficulties related to sourcing, procuring and maintaining startup toolkits have often been the bane of the YEP program. In the words of one Education Manager in the field, “My biggest daily challenge is that of the startup kit.” Meanwhile the availability and quality of the startup kit may be the main determinant of success for beneficiary businesses, according to beneficiary interviews in Dadaab (WRC). Managers have to find a delicate balance between quality and cost of the supplies, where higher quality toolkits result in less breakdown, but budgets may only allow procurement of lower-quality toolkits. In some cases NRC has partnered with local (even refugee) private sector partners to assist with the manufacture or procurement of toolkits, with mixed results. Limited budgets for startup kits have led some country programs to institute a group/collective approach, where several beneficiaries share the kit and run a business together, which has its own (often serious) challenges, as discussed below. Many youth in Dadaab reported sentiments along the lines of, “We worked with the skills that we were given but the kit we got was not sufficient to continue as a group.” Whether in groups or individually, according to learners and staff in Dadaab and evaluation reports, some learners chose to sell their startup kits for cash.

➔ **BUSINESS GROUPS AND COOPERATIVES:**

The group (and in some cases) cooperative structure provides protection, organization and solidarity to beneficiary youth upon graduation from YEP. NRC has also used the group model to build social capital between ethnic groups. Crucially, the group model allows NRC to save money on startup kits. But the group approach also has important weaknesses. The approach is more appropriate for some skills like carpentry and construction, for example, where working as a team is often

the norm, than others. YEP groups/cooperatives in Burundi (Ketel 2008), Dadaab (WRC) and other countries have experienced serious interpersonal and/or interethnic conflicts, leading to business failure.

➔ **(SELF-) EMPLOYMENT AFTER GRADUATION:**

A key challenge often cited to income generation and formal employment by recent YEP graduates, especially in rural areas, has been the low purchasing power in the villages, as “making money is not easy in a poor community.” (Moberg and Johnson-Demen 2009) Numerous adaptations have been made to overcome this problem, including wage subsidies, apprenticeships, and internships with local firms, again with mixed results. Managing relationships with local firms has proven challenging and time-consuming for NRC staff.

➔ **MARKET SATURATION:**

In many YEP countries, local markets became saturated with skills the YEP centers offered. (SIDA-NRC 2012) (Olsen, Report YEP Review – DR Congo 2006) (Ketel 2008) Managers struggle to stay within budget while offering enough different skill areas to avoid flooding the market with too many graduates in the same skill. Over time NRC has increasingly conducted market assessments to match training with demand for labor and help increase YEP learners’ prospects for a sustainable livelihood. In some cases this has meant shifting away from traditional vocational training toward agricultural skills, which are valuable as a fallback option or where purchasing power is low. In Dadaab and presumably in other contexts, NRC changes the training skills offered every year to help avoid the saturation problem.

7 BUDGET ANALYSIS

A common-size cost analysis was compiled from budget data for each 10 YEP programs in 5 countries (See Annex). Major costs include *salary of local staff*, with an average cost of 17.9 % of a given grant. In contexts with limited infrastructure, NRC has deemed it necessary to build or rehabilitate physical structures for program use, with major cost implications. In many cases, YEP has been delivered alongside incentives for participation (daily meals; food for families of the beneficiaries; etc.), and while these may be essential for creating demand and ensuring retention, they too are quite costly. Attempts to further unpack major expenditures were limited due to the lack of available budget data.

Cost-per-learner data on 16 YEP programs from 9 countries were compiled from program documents for the purpose of cross-program and -country comparison, but it was not possible to make valid comparisons between per-student costs in the absence of more information about the programs. Some budget years included the costs of classroom construction in the YEP budget, for example, and others did not, and this is not always known. Some budgets for YEP would include costs associated with other NRC programs implemented in the same country, outside of YEP. Also in some cases the duration of the budget period is not known.

REDUCING COSTS

In the absence of per-pillar costing data, WRC turned to NRC staff interviews for cost-cutting ideas. Among informants, ideas for reducing costs in any significant way were few, and staff are quick to defend the one-year three-pillar YEP model. One staff member who worked on YEP almost

from its inception said, “Yes, the program is expensive, but maybe necessarily so. All education programs involving TVET are more expensive than academic ones. Some of this cannot be helped.” The NRC’s *Youth Education Pack Resource Kit*, the main guidance document for implementing YEP, also defends the high cost-per-beneficiary ratio, arguing that the program “might mistakenly be labeled as insufficiently ‘cost effective’,” but that “its overall expenditure is along the lines of those of other vocational training programs.”

In particular, the idea of eliminating the life skills component was unpopular among staff, who cited the need for this component to maximize the impact of the vocational training component, as employers are known to value ‘soft skills’ more than anything else. According to one NRC HQ staff member, “Our program manager in [one country] went around to [interview local] companies and the companies said, ‘Just give us some [young people] that can get up in the morning, come to work on time and manage to stay at work all day, and we will give them the skills they need to do the job.’”

To the extent that this is true across YEP countries – and multiple international employer surveys have found that it is – this idea may itself present a cost-cutting strategy. NRC could experiment with a new focus more on employability and transferrable skills than on specific occupational skills. This and many other cost-cutting ideas are presented below, with their potential advantages, disadvantages, and other considerations.

OPTIONS MATRIX

This section presents a menu of options for potential adjustments to the YEP program with an eye toward cost savings and scaling up. Discussion of cost implications is not grounded in actual budget figures, but represents educated guesses based on limited available data.



ESTABLISH STRICTER CRITERIA FOR INTRODUCING YEP IN A GIVEN COUNTRY, SUCH AS EXISTENCE OF PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE, MOE AGREEMENT TO PAY TEACHER SALARIES, OPERATIONAL PARTNERS AVAILABLE, ETC.

- ➕ Major cost savings. Eliminates need for NRC to invest in infrastructure, cover teacher payroll, etc.
- ➕ Greater potential for sustainability in the form of handover to government and/or local partners

- ➖ NRC would no longer offer YEP in the most resource poor, fragile contexts

- ⚠ Availability of donor funding in these less fragile contexts
- ⚠ Donated infrastructure may require rehabilitation, with cost implications



SHORTEN THE LENGTH OF THE YEP PROGRAM CYCLE

- ➕ Major cost savings in many budget categories

- ➖ Positive impacts of all components may be reduced
- ➖ Literacy goals are especially difficult to achieve in a shorter program; may require NRC to discontinue the literacy component
- ➖ May eliminate the possibility of learners achieving government certification in their skill areas

- ⚠ A few country programs are experimenting with this approach
- ⚠ Requires offering training only in fields that are feasible to teach in a shorter duration
- ⚠ Evaluation research could determine the efficacy of this approach vs the classic YEP



CHANGE TARGETING CRITERIA TO SERVE ONLY THOSE LEARNERS MOST LIKELY TO SUCCEED IN YEP – THOSE WHO ARE ALREADY LITERATE, ENTREPRENEURIAL, ETC.

- + Moderate cost savings. Allows NRC to eliminate literacy component and some complimentary services.
- + Benefits are more likely to have a positive ripple effect on non-beneficiaries in target communities
- Will not reach the most vulnerable
- May reinforce structural inequality, exacerbate conflicts, undermine YEP goals (physical security)



BREAK YEP INTO STAND-ALONE MODULES (LITERACY/NUMERACY, LIFE SKILLS, TVET) AND OFFER THROUGH A GRADUATED APPROACH WITH STUDENTS STARTING BASED ON NEED

- + Moderate to major cost savings
- + Popular idea among the HQ staff interviewed
- Positive impacts of all components may be reduced



ELIMINATE LITERACY COMPONENT

- + Major cost savings: much reduced payroll
- Undermines the benefits of the TVET component
- Takes away the main platform for the Life Skills component
- ! Dadaab program eliminated literacy component for their short course model, accepting only students with prior literacy skills



ELIMINATE TVET COMPONENT

- + Major cost savings: fewer teachers needed, fewer supplies needed, no need for startup kits
- Likely reduces demand for the program as a whole



REPLACE TVET WITH APPRENTICESHIPS, INTERNSHIPS

- + Major cost savings: fewer teachers needed, fewer supplies needed, no need for startup kits
- Many YEP contexts are lacking enough firms that could absorb large numbers of learners, limiting scalability
- ! Some NRC country programs have experimented with this approach, with mixed results



REPLACE TVET WITH EMPLOYABILITY AND TRANSFERRABLE SKILLS TRAINING SUCH AS BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SKILLS/SERVICES AND COMPUTER LITERACY, WHERE RELEVANT

- + Major cost savings: fewer teachers needed, fewer supplies needed, no need for startup kits
- + Employer demand for employability skills is high across countries, perhaps higher even than the demand for technical skills
- Likely reduces demand for the program as a whole
- Employability training assumes the availability of wage jobs, which may be scarce depending on the context
- ! Basing the transferrable skills component on a demand survey in the country of return or resettlement can help ensure success



ELIMINATE LIFE SKILLS COMPONENT

- + Minor to moderate cost savings
- Employers highly value the “soft skills” imparted in this component
- Continued tensions in cooperatives, lack of self-efficacy and therefore potential lack of sustainability once the programme is no longer there to support
- ! Staff cited the need for this component to maximize the impact of VT. According to one NRC HQ staff member, “Our program manager in [one country] went around to [interview] companies and the companies said, ‘Give us some [young people] that can get up in the morning, come to work on time and manage to stay at work all day, and we will give them the skills they need to do the job.’”



CASH TRANSFER INSTEAD OF TOOLKITS

- + Moderate cost savings: lower procurement costs, less staff time
- + Eliminates the often problematic toolkit delivery process (slow procurement, beneficiary and instructor dissatisfaction)
- + Beneficiary satisfaction increased
- + Evaluation research shows youth may spend part of cash on further training/education
- Beneficiaries may choose to procure a lower-cost and lower-quality toolkit, leading to breakdown
- Some will be attracted to YEP mainly for the cash, just as now some are attracted mainly for the toolkit
- Other implementing NGOs in the same setting may object to NRC's use of cash
- ! Whether in groups or individually, many learners sell their startup kits for cash, effectively monetizing the kits
- ! NGOs are often reluctant to implement cash programming for fear of losing control, but research shows (adult) beneficiaries do not typically waste funds
- ! Conditional or unconditional? Cash could be conditional upon program completion, or some minimum level of achievement or attendance



CASH OR VOUCHERS WITHOUT TRAINING OR TOOLKITS

- + Major cost savings
- + Requires much fewer staff
- + Evaluation research shows youth spend part of cash on training/education
- Requires a reorientation of YEP mission and NRC culture
- Other implementing NGOs in the same setting may object to NRC's use of cash
- Would eliminate many teaching jobs that YEP creates, though these jobs may reappear in other firms/NGOs
- ! Conditional or unconditional? Could be a voucher for training to be redeemed at a variety of training firms/NGOs



TVET IS REPLACED WITH AGRICULTURAL AND AGRO-PROCESSING TRAINING IN RURAL AND PERI-URBAN AREAS

- + Moderate to major cost savings
- + National development strategies in many YEP countries prioritize agricultural development
- + Can help hedge against market saturation of a particular skill set
- + Veteran farmers are relatively easy to recruit as instructors
- + Training sessions can be mobilized where instructors visit villages or neighborhoods for short periods and return later for follow-up
- + Instruction can be tailored to improve a given production technology or the quality of a specific agricultural product
- Many youth are uninterested in agricultural careers
- Land access constraints make this approach unfeasible in some contexts
- ! Project documents from Uganda, DR Congo, and Timor Leste show NRC adding agriculture training upon the realization that it was sustaining the learners during and even after graduation, in contexts with few wage jobs
- ! NRC may need to negotiate with communities for access to land
- ! A new emphasis on agricultural and agro-processing would require assessment of and expertise in value chains



NRC REORIENTS ITSELF AWAY FROM SERVICE DELIVERY, TO PLAY MORE OF A CATALYST ROLE THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS AND CAPACITY BUILDING: SEEKING SYNERGIES WITH OTHER NGOS AND/OR CONTRACTING WITH PRIVATE SECTOR FIRMS OR LOCAL NGOS FOR SPECIFIC SERVICES IN A COMPETITIVE BIDDING PROCESS

- + Competitive tendering process may bend some costs downward
- + Shifts some HR and payroll functions and costs away from NRC
- + Infusion of funds to local groups
- + Could allow NRC to give advantage in bidding to refugee-run firms/NGOs, which builds their capacity and ability to hire staff

- ➖ Transition period may see worse outcomes for learners
- ➖ May be unfeasible in locations with few firms/ NGOs to partner with
- ❗ Some country programs have taken this approach already
- ❗ Could improve employment outcomes in that NRC could award contracts on the basis of how effective training partners are at connecting youth to (self) employment



SOURCE TOOLKIT SUPPLIES AND OTHER INPUTS FROM LOCAL (ESP. REFUGEE) SUPPLIERS

- ➕ Could reduce procurement costs
- ➕ Gives a boost to the local economy
- ➖ In many contexts the quality of locally-available goods is low, which could mean breakdown of toolkits, beneficiary dissatisfaction.
- ➖ In some contexts, local suppliers are scarce
- ❗ Some country programs have experimented with this approach already



ELIMINATE TOOLKITS

- ➕ Major cost savings
- ➕ Reduced staff time on procurement
- ➕ Reduced "dependency" on material goods
- ➖ Reduced completion rate, esp. in the short term
- ➖ Reduced efficacy in achieving program goals (on individual level), at least in the short term
- ➖ Harder to attract learners esp. in centers that have lower demand for YEP
- ❗ Will likely repel those learners who are attracted mainly for the promise of the startup kit, but could still attract others who are attracted to YEP more for the learning opportunity
- ❗ May lose learners to other NGOs still offering toolkits
- ❗ Some staff strongly favor eliminating toolkits, others very skeptical



PRIORITIZE TRANSITION TO EMPLOYING MAJORITY INCENTIVE TEACHERS, RATHER THAN NATIONAL TEACHERS

- ➕ Major payroll cost savings
- ➖ May not be feasible depending on the country. Could take years to build cadre of teachers
- ➖ Pushback from national staff, lower morale during transition
- ➖ Pushback from refugee population, as "Refugees don't seem to trust their own to teach them." (Dadaab Education Manager)
- ➖ Lower quality of instruction; harder to find qualified staff in some skill areas among the refugees
- ❗ Many country programs have experimented with this approach
- ❗ Incentive teachers' main grievance is their lower wages compared to national teachers
- ❗ Teacher quality is cited in multiple evaluation reports and by NRC staff as crucial to program success



WORK WITH MOE TO RECRUIT NOVICE NATIONAL TEACHERS AT REDUCED SALARY ("RESIDENCY"/WORK EXPERIENCE), HIRING FEWER EXPERIENCED NATIONAL TEACHERS

- ➕ Major cost savings
- ➕ Builds national capacity for teaching
- ➖ Pushback from teacher unions, lower teacher morale during transition
- ➖ Lower quality of instruction
- ➖ Requires advocacy and stronger partnership with government
- ❗ Teacher quality is seen in multiple YEP evaluation reports as key to program success

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

- ➔ Partner with external researchers to conduct a handful of rigorous impact evaluations, comparing outcomes from multiple arms of the intervention (Pillar 1, Pillar 2, etc.) with waitlisted control groups or matching. NRC may find that a one- or two-pillar approach has a similar impact on (self-) employment rates as the three-pillar approach. NRC could also conduct an impact evaluation comparing cash grants to toolkits, or to other program adaptations.
- ➔ Based on the above findings, NRC may opt to deliver YEP as a package of modules that can be offered either stand-alone or in combination, depending on the need and the available funding. In contexts with more educated populations NRC may choose to omit the literacy component, for example. With this modular approach NRC could identify different points of entry depending on the level of vulnerability, education level, etc., and tailor the program offerings accordingly.
- ➔ Prioritize evaluation and comparative costing of shorter adapted models such as those implemented in Afghanistan (“IGA” Program) and Dadaab, Kenya, with special attention to comparing (self-) employment outcomes between the full and the short course.
- ➔ Prioritize per-pupil and per-pillar costing from the program inception stage: what do the various programs and components actually cost?
- ➔ Conduct tracer studies of YEP and/or adapted short course model(s): did a less expensive, stripped-down model achieve anything like the full YEP outcomes?
- ➔ Such a tracer study is already underway in Dadaab.
- ➔ Reorient program M&E toward connecting young people to employment/self-employment, not just delivering training and education.
- ➔ Establish standardized guidelines for budget data collection across country programs.
- ➔ Establish a global theory of change to anchor the program in a concrete set of goals, identify mediating factors to address, monitor program progress, and facilitate evaluation efforts.
- ➔ Define a timeline and exit strategy for each mission determine what services to deliver and how, and what investment priorities should be. If the goal of each YEP program is to eventually divest and transfer the program to local entities after a set period of time, costs may need to be lowered on expenditures to ensure that the program can be properly run after NRC departs. One option may be NRC establishing an exit plan with national and local authorities along with members of the community well in advance of departure, outlining a gradual hand-over process. While adjustments can be made as needed, the long term goals of NRC in each country must be well articulated to all involved parties during the planning stages and pre-project design of each project to ensure adequate planning, appropriate spending, and exit strategies.

“There needs to be flexibility in adapting the global YEP model to fit into the different country contexts. Developing the global YEP into modules would help countries to pick and choose from what is available and further adapt it.”

(NRC field staff member, 2014)

“ Usually YEP beneficiaries are functionally adult in the sense that they need to work to earn a living. In [YEP] they don't get a per diem [to offset the opportunity cost of attending], which means the dropout rates are quite high in some countries. For these people, even 9 months is too long. We need real flexibility built into the program, [including] night classes, maybe take a modular approach that they can join and drop as needed, without being punished for it.”

(NRC HQ staff member, 2014)

- ➔ Engage young women in the program design to identify barriers to female participation and potential risks associated with participation, especially gender based violence (GBV) risk that can be exacerbated with any economic strengthening intervention. Young women should also be engaged in an ongoing feedback process specifically to ascertain that YEP is doing no harm to female beneficiaries.
- ➔ Regardless of what other adjustments are made to the model, continue to invest in a hot meal for learners, childcare services for learners who are parents, and sanitary supplies to maintain female participation.
- ➔ Bolster the transferability of skills taught with the addition business development skills/ services, and computer literacy for beneficiaries, where relevant.
- ➔ Explore the potential for agriculture and agro-processing as alternatives to TVET in rural and peri-urban contexts where land is available. Agricultural activities beyond just farming, including crop and animal science, spacing methods, beds and ridges construction; organic farming, composting and manure; and pest and disease control. Interventions to enhance profitability of enterprises or whole industries by studying the market system and creating linkages with actors along the value-chain, which may include negotiating with suppliers, buyers, or processors; establishing cooperatives; strengthening law and policy; improving firms' competitiveness; increasing exports.
- ➔ Experiment with cash as an alternative to training, as a complement to training, or as an alternative to toolkits.

8 CONCLUSION

The development of the YEP program has clearly been an iterative process, where NRC has shown a strong commitment to program learning and adaptation of the model based on lessons learned. Many recommendations from evaluations in earlier years are taken up in later iterations of YEP in other countries. In particular issues of gender are increasingly incorporated into the program model, showing a commitment to achieving parity of enrollment by sex and strengthening female retention rates, though given the considerable gendered constraints in YEP contexts, NRC is not always successful in these efforts.

As noted, due mostly to lack of data, WRC was unable in this study to definitively answer the questions of whether the YEP model can be made less expensive and reach greater scale without reducing its overall effectiveness. However the study should be valuable to NRC as a piece of *formative research*, providing a pathway through which the research questions could be answered, namely through continued experimentation with lower-cost program models such as those discussed in the above *Options Matrix*; investments in rigorous impact evaluation of these adapted program models; and a greater effort to standardize accounting and understand the costs of the various individual components of YEP.



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Written by Josh Chaffin,
Dale Buscher and Tommy Ng.
Budget and cost analysis
by Tommy Ng



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