



# **Youth and Sustainable Livelihoods: Linking Vocational Training Programs to Market Opportunities in Northern Uganda**

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Columbia University, New York, NY

July 2008

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## Abbreviations and Acronyms

BTVET	Business technical vocational education and training
GTZ	German Agency for Technical Cooperation
IDP	Internally displaced persons
ILO	International Labour Organization
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
NGO	Nongovernmental organization
PEAP	Poverty Eradication Action Plan
PEVOT	Promotion of Employment Oriented Vocational and Technical Training
PRDP	Peace Recovery and Development Plan
SWAY	Survey of War Affected Youth
UGAPRIVI	The Uganda Association of Private Vocational Institutions
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VT	Vocational training
WFP	World Food Program

## Glossary

**Acholiland:** Gulu, Kitgum and Pader districts of northern Uganda

**Apprenticeships:** Often referred to as “industrial training” in Uganda, a period of on-the-job training to learn a skill through practical experience

**Children:** People under 18 years of age.

**Core skill:** The primary vocational study offered to participants in vocational training programs

**Complementary skill:** Secondary non-vocational study offered in vocational training programs.

**Industrial training:** See *apprenticeships*

**Life skills:** The large group of psychosocial and interpersonal skills that can help youth make informed decisions, communicate effectively and develop coping and self-management skills that may help them lead a healthy and productive life; these skills can include communication and interpersonal skills, decision-making and critical thinking skills, and coping and self-management techniques.

**Livelihoods:** The means by which households obtain and maintain access to the resources necessary to ensure their immediate and long-term survival.

**Market analysis:** A systematic investigation of the factors, conditions and characteristics of a market; frequently used to determine trends in supply and demand that can inform product development, marketing strategy and economic intervention.

**Market assessment:** The data-gathering process of collecting information that will be used in a market analysis to determine the factors, conditions and characteristics of a market

**Microfinance:** Provision of savings, loans, remittances and other financial products to populations that are traditionally not served by the formal banking sector.

**Parish approach:** A modified service delivery method that seeks to minimize “pull factors” of camps and assist the transition to villages or parishes of origin by providing only maintenance-level services inside camps and “minimal basic services” to populations in transit.

**Psychosocial rehabilitation:** The process of facilitating an individual's restoration to an optimal level of independent functioning in the community. While the nature of the process and the methods used differ in different settings, psychosocial rehabilitation invariably encourages persons to participate actively with others in the attainment of mental health and social competence goals.

**Skills training:** See *vocational training*

**Value chain:** The full range of activities that are required to bring a product from its conception to its end use and beyond, including activities such as production, marketing, distribution and support to the final consumer. The activities that make up a value chain can be contained within a single business or divided among different businesses. Value chain activities can be contained within a single geographical location or spread over wider areas.

**Vocational training:** Practical and theoretical instruction to prepare an individual for a particular skilled labor; the extent of the preparation varies by service provider.

**Youth:** A person between the ages of 15 and 24 (up to 35 in northern Uganda).

## Acknowledgments

This report was written by Kelly Bidwell, Colleen Galbraith, Linda Haddad, Rachel Hermes, Sarah Kleiner, Zaki Raheem and Kenneth Scheffler, students at the School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University on behalf of the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children.

The Columbia University team extends a deep thank you to the numerous individuals and organizations that have supported this project.

In Kitgum: Jennifer Tracy Arach, Filder Aryemo, Ann Lorscheidter, Astrid van Rooij and the International Rescue Committee.

In Gulu: OCHA, Sister Rosemary of Saint Monica's.

In Kampala: Stephanie Schwarz of UNICEF, Kristen Knutsen of OCHA.

In New York: Mayada El-Zoghbi of Banyan Global, Ann Odelle and Peter Okello at Columbia University, Evelyn Stark of the Consultative Group to Assist the Poor, Lili Stern and Barri Shorey of the International Rescue Committee.

At Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs: Jackie Klopp, Leigh Linden and Eugenia McGill.

At the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children: Dale Buscher, Lauren Heller, Diana Quick and Jenny Perlman Robinson.

Finally, the team is indebted to the many youth in Gulu and Kitgum who shared with us their time, thoughts and aspirations.

## I. Executive Summary

For more than two decades, the conflict in northern Uganda has disrupted social structures and destroyed livelihoods and employment opportunities. A generation of youth has grown up in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps amidst poverty and insecurity and without access to reliable services. In addition to widespread exposure to violence, children and youth in the north have had limited access to primary education and almost no access to higher education. As youth look towards peace, recovery and return, the majority face the challenge of securing a livelihood with little or no formal education or training.

In May 2007, the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children (Women's Commission) published *Listening to Youth: The Experiences of Young People in Northern Uganda* ([www.womenscommission.org/pdf/ug\\_machel.pdf](http://www.womenscommission.org/pdf/ug_machel.pdf)), which identifies education and the opportunity to earn a safe and dignified income as a central priority of youth. This second report builds on these findings by looking at vocational training (VT) programs, which have the potential to meet youths' needs for education and sustainable livelihoods while also supporting a broader strategy of economic reconstruction and social restoration in northern Uganda.

To do this, the report:

- presents an analysis of VT programming and the actors involved in northern Uganda;
- offers VT providers concrete recommendations for programming at each stage in the VT cycle, including best practices and lessons learned;
- guides VT programs and youth participants through a market-assessment and self-assessment to integrate market information into program design and create links between VT and the private sector.

VT is uniquely positioned to meet the demands of youth and the broader goals of economic reconstruction. It is at the crossroads of economic recovery, education and rehabilitation and reintegration, and can be a key component of development, a method for upgrading the labor force and a factor in the holistic development of youth. Effective VT can provide skills for both agricultural and nonagricultural livelihoods, and for employment and self-employment.

Youth consistently expect that participation in VT will increase their capacity to find employment or self-employment opportunities and to achieve greater self-reliance. However, VT programs in northern Uganda state a variety of program objectives ranging from training youth to a master level of skill competency to protection and psychosocial rehabilitation. In practice, VT programs differ in length, comprehensiveness and quality of training, the complementary skill courses offered, funding sources and the populations they target. The disconnect between participant expectations and program objectives and level of comprehensiveness frequently lead to disappointment and frustration on the part of youth.

For programs across the spectrum, accurate information on market realities will improve the ability of VT graduates to access sustainable livelihood opportunities. Increased access to information will guide service providers in a demand-driven approach, matching youths' interests, skills and available resources to market opportunities for employment and self-employment. The report and the companion [Market Assessment Toolkit and Analysis Guide](#) (available in September 2008 at [www.womenscommission.org/pdf/ug\\_ysl\\_toolkit.pdf](http://www.womenscommission.org/pdf/ug_ysl_toolkit.pdf)) assist VT programs to gather information on market demand and translate that information into programming that is responsive to youths' needs and the demands of a dynamic business environment. The report and resources offer VT providers, youth participants and other local and international actors working to support VT programs a roadmap to increasing the number of VT graduates with sustainable livelihoods. Market information can be

incorporated into each stage of VT programming to improve design and, ultimately, increase employment and self-employment opportunities for youth graduates. For VT practitioners, accurate information about market realities will better inform course offerings, shape the complementary services offered during training and provide information on post-training linkages necessary to improve youths' prospects for a sustainable livelihood. For youth participants in VT programs, information about current and emerging market needs is essential to making more informed decisions about their futures.

The **Market Assessment Toolkit for Vocational Training Programs** provides an understanding of dynamic market conditions and the sources of potential employment within the community and surrounding areas. The **Analysis Guide**, which is included in the Toolkit, facilitates the translation of information gathered during the market assessment into more effective programming. Finally, the **Market Interaction Toolkit for Youth** guides youth through a self-assessment and encourages them to evaluate local market realities in order to make a skill and livelihood selection.

<b>Market Assessment Tool</b>	<b>Information Gathered</b>
Market Observation	Overview of Local Economic Activity
Consumers	Consumer Preferences and Needs
Government	National and Regional Development Priorities
Local Business	Labor Market Demand, Qualifications and Constraints; Employment Linkages
National Producer and Business Associations	Labor Market Demand, Qualifications and Constraints; Market Information, Product Information and Linkages
Youth Focus Group	Youth Preferences and Demands
VT Providers	Share Best Practices, Coordinate and Share Market Information
Microfinance Institutions	Market Information, Financing Options and Linkages
Donors	Future Priorities and Funding Trends
National and Multinational Companies	Present and Future Investment, Future Demand for Products, Services and Support

## II. Background

Map of Uganda



### A. Region and Conflict

For more than two decades the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the Government of Uganda's army, the Uganda People's Defense Force (UPDF), have fought a brutal war in northern Uganda. The northern Ugandan people have borne the brunt of this conflict, which has manifested itself in violence against civilians, including death and maiming, abduction and displacement.<sup>1</sup> An estimated 1.5-1.7 million people have fled their villages to avoid attack and abduction by the LRA and, since 1996, have been forced periodically by the Ugandan government to relocate to internally displaced person (IDP) camps the Government of Uganda calls "protected villages."<sup>2</sup>

The conflict in northern Uganda has disrupted social structures and destroyed livelihoods and employment opportunities. A generation of youth has grown up in IDP camps amidst poverty, insecurity and without access to reliable services. Many have also experienced abduction, recruitment into armed forces or the loss of family members to violence. While figures differ widely, over the course of the conflict between 24,000 and 66,000 youth are believed to have been abducted by the LRA; many of them were forced to commit violence, and serve as soldiers, sex slaves, porters or cooks.<sup>3</sup> In addition to widespread exposure to violence, children and youth in the north have had limited access to primary education and almost no access to higher education. While the Government of Uganda instituted a policy of Universal Primary Education in 1996, only 20 percent of northern Ugandans had completed primary school and only five percent had completed secondary school as of 2006. In 2007, the Government of Uganda instituted Universal Secondary Education; however, education at all levels remains elusive for many in the north. The costs of uniforms, supplies and exams are insurmountable for many youth. Due to a preference for educating boys, pregnancy, insufficient sanitation facilities, early marriage and the demands of household responsibilities, girls often encounter greater obstacles to accessing education than their male peers. As youth look towards peace, recovery and resettlement, the



majority face the challenge of securing a livelihood with little or no formal education or training.

## **B. Return, Resettlement and Reconstruction**

Since August 2006, peace talks between the Government of Uganda and LRA have shown slow but encouraging signs that northern Uganda is transitioning from a humanitarian emergency to a period of post-conflict recovery. Despite ongoing complications to the peace process, the relative peace and security have enabled the slow return of IDPs back to their home communities and resettlement to transit camps or larger urban centers in the north.<sup>4</sup>

In September 2007, the Government of Uganda issued a second draft of the Peace, Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP) for northern Uganda. The three-year plan focuses on four strategic objectives: consolidating state authority, rebuilding communities, revitalizing the economy and building peace through reconciliation efforts. Officially housed under the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), the PRDP lays out a 14-point strategy for recovery of the north. Point 11 calls for “vocational/skills training especially for young people.”<sup>5</sup> Although VT is included and is allocated more than 24 percent of the Education Services Budget within the PRDP framework, it does not fall neatly under any of the four strategic objectives and is not specifically addressed in the PRDP’s discussions of education, rehabilitation or economic recovery.<sup>6</sup>

Return, resettlement and rehabilitation of IDPs is one of the four main components of the May 2007 Agreement on Comprehensive Solutions between the Government of Uganda and the LRA. The agreement calls for voluntary, dignified and secure return and the allocation of Government of Uganda resources to facilitate progress in this area.<sup>7</sup> However, as of April 2008, only 9 percent of IDPs in Acholiland had returned to their village of origin. An estimated 59 percent of people remain in IDP camps while 32 percent have resettled to transit sites between the camps and home villages.<sup>8</sup> Communities express hope that increased stability will lead to heightened economic activity, which will in turn stimulate local businesses, raising incomes and bringing back self-sufficiency.

Resettlement and return necessitate that government, along with humanitarian and development actors, adapt service delivery to meet the changing needs of the population. The UN-created cluster approach is a strategy designed to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian response and recovery programming through greater coordination among Uganda’s humanitarian and development communities. The cross-cutting nature of VT programming incorporating education, economic recovery and development, agriculture and elements of protection and rehabilitation, means that it remains unclear where VT belongs and ultimately, where the responsibility and resources for coordination lie. The United Nations Development Program-led Government, Infrastructure and Livelihoods (GIL) cluster is one candidate for taking a lead role in VT coordination.

The Parish Approach is a transitional framework for aid distribution being used in northern Uganda that moves services out of the camps without fully decentralizing basic services, which would be both costly and logistically challenging. The strategy seeks to minimize “pull factors” of camps and assist the transition by providing only maintenance level services inside camps and “minimal basic services” at the Parish level. The transitional approach also demonstrates a shift in thinking from a short-term to a longer-term vision whereby delivery of both education and livelihoods support programming will be decentralized at the subcounty or parish level.<sup>9</sup> VT programming must also adopt a long-term view, adding to pull factors towards resettlement and return and preparing participants for life outside the camp framework.

### III. Objectives

In May 2007, the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children published *Listening to Youth: The Experiences of Young People in Northern Uganda*, which identifies education and the opportunity to earn a safe and dignified income as a central priority of youth. This second report builds on these findings by focusing on VT programs, which have potential to meet youths' needs for education and sustainable livelihoods while also supporting a broader strategy of economic reconstruction and social restoration in northern Uganda. The report and [Market Assessment Toolkit](#) for Vocational Training Programs, Analysis Guide and the Market Interaction Toolkit for Youth equip VT programs with the tools to incorporate market demand into programming. It offers VT programs, and other local and international actors working to support VT programs, a roadmap to increasing the number of VT graduates with sustainable livelihoods. To do this, the report:

- presents an analysis of VT programming and the actors involved in northern Uganda;
- offers VT providers concrete recommendations for programming at each stage in the VT cycle, including best practices and lessons learned;
- guides VT programs and youth participants through a market-assessment and self-assessment to integrate market information into program design and create links between VT and the private sector.

### IV. Methodology

Findings, tools and recommendations are informed by a combination of desk research in New York and field research in Kampala and Gulu and Kitgum districts, Uganda. Between January 1 and 21 and March 8 and 22, 2008, the research team conducted 137 structured and semi-structured interviews with the following stakeholder groups: youth (37), NGOs (international and local) and UN bodies (49), vocational training centers (13), places of employment (11), government officials (6), donor organizations (3), financial institutions (7), and others (4). Seven focus groups were conducted with youth, some of whom had graduated, some of whom had attended but not completed, and some of whom who had never attended VT programs. Program participants were selected with the help of key informants, including youth graduates of VT programs, camp leaders and NGOs working in IDP camps. Research was conducted in urban and rural settings, in and out of IDP camps. Independent translators and national NGO staff assisted with interviews in which respondents did not speak English.

In March, the team shared initial findings and gathered feedback on tools and preliminary recommendations with stakeholders at plenary sessions in Kampala, Gulu and Kitgum. In total, 103 individuals, representing 80 organizations, attended. Stakeholders in the field and global experts based in New York and Washington, D.C. also reviewed draft versions of the report and the [Market Assessment Toolkit](#). In the report, primary research is combined with information from a literature review, information from consultations with global experts and a synthesis of existing market analysis and assessment tools to ensure already documented best practices are highlighted and incorporated.

### V. Market Realities and Vocational Training in Northern Uganda

Conflict and displacement have resulted in widespread unemployment and disruption of livelihood opportunities. Little to no access to farmland, lack of infrastructure, landmines and ongoing insecurity have disrupted agricultural production and limited northern Uganda's economic capacity both in terms of market supply and demand. The average monthly per capita income in the north is less than \$10/month, resulting in low purchasing power among the population and decreased demand for goods

and services.<sup>10</sup> Youth face the dual challenges of a lack of employment opportunities and a lack of education. In response to these challenges, many humanitarian and development organizations have implemented VT programs both during the conflict and in the early recovery period.<sup>11</sup>

## **A. Economic Realities**

Interviews in northern Uganda reveal that youth engage in a spectrum of activities to earn income, few of which can be classified as formal employment. The Survey of War Affected Youth (SWAY), a 2008 study documenting realities and ways forward for women and girls in northern Uganda, reports that more than half of male and female youth interviewed work fewer than eight days per month and 21 percent of male and 14 percent of female youth work zero days per month.<sup>12</sup>

As the security situation continues to improve, it is widely believed that agriculture will lead the local economic recovery, whether through subsistence farming or labor on small and medium plantations.<sup>13</sup> Given the region's highly fertile land and its history as one of the country's main agricultural producers, many anticipate some degree of agricultural industrialization as the north moves towards a peace economy. The PRDP—under the strategic objective of revitalization of the economy—recognizes that effective economic development in the agricultural and industrial sectors will require significant investment in human capital.<sup>14</sup> VT is increasingly recognized as a key component of labor force upgrading.

While interviews with youth demonstrate a desire by many young people to return home, growing up in the camps means that youth have grown accustomed to more highly populated areas and are more familiar with employment or self-employment opportunities in nonagricultural sectors. In addition, towns and urban areas of the north have become important service hubs and sources of goods not available in the camps or villages. Given these factors the PRDP report predicts an “expected increase in the proportion of people living in urban and peri-urban areas and high unemployment rates.”<sup>15</sup> Young people's comfort with more urbanized areas is partly a result of longstanding limited access to land and reliance on external food aid, paired with disrupted social structures due to the death of or separation from family members. Youth face unique challenges to reclaiming ancestral lands, and in cases where older family members have died, to finding and delineating the boundaries of their land. Many youth, in particular, need training in more advanced farm skills that have not been widely used, or passed from one generation to the next, during the conflict. Effective VT can provide training for both agricultural and nonagricultural livelihoods and for employment and self-employment opportunities through entrepreneurship.

## **B. Vocational Training as a Targeted Intervention**

International support for VT programs has grown in recent years as the destabilizing effect of youth unemployment is increasingly recognized as a significant challenge to post-conflict reconstruction.<sup>16</sup> In regions where peace is tenuous, large populations of unemployed youth can contribute to continued instability and threaten the peace process. Thus, VT programs targeting young people in general, as well as specific sub-populations such as ex-combatants and the most vulnerable, have become increasingly common. In addition to protection and peacebuilding motivations for VT, youth consistently demand programs that provide tangible skills and improved livelihood opportunities.<sup>17</sup>

VT is uniquely positioned to meet the demands of youth and the broader goals of reconstruction. It is at the intersection of economic recovery, education and rehabilitation and reintegration. It can be a key component of development, a method for upgrading the work force and a factor in the holistic development of youth. Because many NGO-run VT programs were developed as quick-impact, humanitarian efforts, few organizations running VT programs in the north have completed market

assessments. Where market assessments have been done, often the data is not robust, not widely distributed or has not been effectively translated into changes at the programmatic level. Recognizing that market information is key for designing effective livelihood programming, VT programs can now adapt to the early recovery and development phase in northern Uganda by taking a market-driven approach to program planning.

The Cross-cutting Nature of VT Programming



### C. Key Actors in Vocational Training

Within the Government of Uganda, the Ministry of Education and Sports is the primary ministry responsible for VT. Many other ministries also play significant roles in VT policy and programming.<sup>18</sup> The Kampala-based Directorate of Industrial Training provides policy guidelines on Vocational Training to the Ministry of Education and Sports. The Promotion of Employment Oriented Vocational and Technical Training (PEVOT), funded by the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ), has served as the government's main VT technical advisor since 1999; PEVOT works to support all VT programs. International and local NGOs play a critical role in sponsoring students and in some cases, running VT programs. Additionally there are a number of privately run centers, many of which are associated through the Uganda Association of Private Vocational Institutions (UGAPRIVI), a national association of 450 members that aims to improve the quality and image of vocational training in Uganda.

A multitude of private and bilateral donors supplies funding and technical assistance for VT programs and direct sponsorship of program participants. The reliance of VT programs on such support creates a tenuous situation for participants, as external funding is subject to the changing mandates and timelines of donors. However, as the peace becomes established, many donors are allocating development aid to northern Uganda. Because development funding tends to operate on a longer funding cycle than humanitarian aid, VT programs stand to benefit from these improved funding streams, which may enable them to provide longer and more comprehensive programs.

<b>KEY ACTOR</b>	<b>ROLE</b>
<b>Youth participants</b>	Attend training programs Pay program fees Provide feedback to staff and instructors
<b>Vocational training staff and instructors</b>	Teach and mentor program participants Design curriculum
<b>International and local NGOs</b>	Run VT programs and institutes Sponsor participants Provide other complementary courses, instructor training and equipment
<b>Private and religious organizations</b>	Support VT programs and institutes
<b>Uganda Association of Private Vocational Institutions (UGAPRIVI)</b>	Promote collaboration between private VT programs Provide technical support to member organizations Lobby for policy reform
<b>District government</b>	Engage in coordination of VT programs Aid in selection of program participants
<b>Government ministries</b> Ministry of Education and Sports; Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industries and Fisheries; Ministry of Tourism, Trade and Industry; the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development; Ministry of Works; Ministry of Finance	Curriculum development Registration of VT programs Testing and certification of graduates Instructor training Education policy reform
<b>Donors and technical advisors</b>	Provide funding Provide technical assistance

## **D. Vocational Training Policy**

Current reforms seek to standardize training programs, making them more responsive to youths' needs and addressing the gap between VT programs and labor market demand. At the national level, there are a number of policy initiatives targeting the need for expanded and improved VT throughout the country, even as VT continues to receive comparatively little funding along the education spectrum.

The Business and Technical Vocational Education Training (BTJET) framework, passed in 1999, coordinates technical and vocational planning and training activities. According to Dr. Jane Egau Okou, "business" was added to the standard technical and vocational education training (TVET) because of the government's desire to emphasize the importance of entrepreneurship and business management skills to vocational education and its role in Uganda's economic development.<sup>19</sup>

The Uganda Vocational Qualifications Framework, passed in April 2008, is a modular training system that allows youth to complete a government-certified vocational training program through a series of short courses that individuals can finish over an extended time period. The Uganda Vocational Qualifications Framework is an effort to ensure that national certificates for VT graduates reflect a set of standards. It also helps to overcome the financial and logistical challenges that three-year certified training programs pose to many low-income and self-employed youth who cannot support themselves through an extended training program. Modular frameworks for several dozen vocations were developed in consultation with the business sector to ensure curriculum, equipment and training standards that will produce a productive and employable workforce able to respond to the demands of a dynamic business environment.

Most strategic plans for poverty reduction have begun to systematically incorporate provisions for VT. In the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) 2005-2007, the government set the goal of seeing 40 percent of secondary school graduates (S4) proceed to vocational education.<sup>20</sup> While VT is not an explicit focus for the joint Government of Uganda and World Bank Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF), in 2007, NUSAF disbursed funds to 16 VT providers under the strategic objective of “improving the quality and access to social services and community initiated infrastructure.” Additionally, out of 4,686 funded investments in the area of “support to vulnerable groups,” 181 were made in VT.<sup>21</sup> Yet, despite increasing funding and inclusion at the national policy level, a wide range of actors, as noted in the previous section, continue to engage in the VT sector.

## E. Spectrum of Vocational Training Program

VT programs differ in their objectives, length, quality and comprehensiveness of training, the complementary skills training offered, funding sources and the populations they target. At one end of the spectrum are one-week, informal, often NGO-run trainings that may teach participants a new income generating activity; at the other end are three-year programs, most often private or government-run centers at the end of which graduates are eligible to sit for the national examination.

### Program Objectives

Youth consistently expect that VT will increase their capacity to find employment or self-employment opportunities and achieve greater self-reliance. VT programs in northern Uganda state a variety of program objectives, ranging from protection and rehabilitation to a deliberate focus on training youth to a master level of competency in a vocational skill. The goals of “employment” and “rehabilitation,” are not mutually exclusive. However, when youth who have encountered frustrations in terms of their aspirations for education and a dignified livelihood participate in VT programming, it raises a fundamental expectation that they will gain a practical skill that will improve their ability to provide for themselves and their families. However, when VT programming does not lead to the expected outcome it can cause what one program manager in Gulu describes as the “double frustration.” As he explains, “When you go to the most vulnerable people and offer them a training, you are raising false expectations and false hope. When they finish and don’t use their skills [you think] maybe they shouldn’t go; maybe they should have been doing something else—their time has been wasted.” The program objective must be clearly established and communicated to potential participants before they begin the VT program.<sup>22</sup>

#### When asked what they expected from VT, youth in Gulu and Kitgum responded:

“I expect to get money and to be settled and be responsible in the future.”—*male, age 24*

“I expected to be better off than other youth and to acquire a sewing machine.”—*female, age 21*

“It came in my mind maybe with this program I could pay the school fees of my children and I didn’t want to stay home being redundant.”—*female, age 30*

“I could earn money so I could teach my family and my community, and to get some financial help, so that I could gain knowledge and be self-employed.”—*female, age 30*

“Actually to get money and also get the skill. The main goal was employment, self-employment...I thought I would make money out of the training and then go and help my children with school fees.”—*female, age 20*

“During the course of the training, we were told we could make money. So my thought was confirmed about making money. That maybe I would have start up tools or capital to continue the skill, but there was nothing.”—*male, age 23*

“The main purpose of the program was to get knowledge and then to make money, and then to reintegrate into society.”—*male, age 22*

When asked about program objectives youth clearly express their desire to earn income through employment or self-employment. VT program providers, on the other hand, seem to be less consistent in their responses. While some answered that the goal of a particular program is to give youth skills and link them to market opportunities, others said that the goal of providing training is ultimately to improve psychosocial well-being of participants through their involvement in economic activities. Another VT provider said, “For us the output isn’t necessarily that they end up in a job at the end.”

Ascertaining the effectiveness of different VT programs would be clearer with statistics on VT program participants’ money-making capabilities upon completion. Yet, even without this information, understanding the different permutations of competency levels, complementary course offerings and post-graduation benefits is helpful to illustrate the challenges to youth employment due to the spectrum of vocational training providers.

### ***Target Population***

For program implementers, a tension exists between targeting the most vulnerable in a post-conflict setting and targeting “early adapters” or risk-takers of a community who are best suited to compete in the market because of access to appropriate skills, capital and social networks. VT programs in northern Uganda target a range of different youth participants. At one end of the spectrum are those youth considered to be most vulnerable, primarily targeted by NGO-run and sponsored programs. For VT providers, government officials, program sponsors and youth participants, vulnerability can refer to a range of categories, experiences and characteristics, from gender-specific experiences and physical trauma to abduction and displacement, educational attainment, economic status, health status and nutrition. There is no clear consensus or uniform set of guidelines for defining vulnerability; however, UNICEF is leading an effort to harmonize approaches to vulnerability criteria and beneficiary selection.

At the other end of the spectrum are youth who have completed secondary school and are able to participate in full-time, three-year, fee-based programs. These youth can sit for the national certification exams upon program completion, and in some cases may move on to a higher level of education or more advanced trainings. There are many VT programs with a mix of participants ranging from those being sponsored by NGOs to those paying school fees themselves or whose family pays the cost of fees, uniforms and supplies. However, the two groups are rarely integrated in terms of coursework or curriculum offerings.

### ***Length and Comprehensiveness of Training***

To ensure VT graduates are employable in a given industry, program length must reflect the time needed for comprehensive training in the selected “core” skill. Some skills like hair braiding and bead making, may require shorter training periods; others, such as carpentry, joinery, bricklaying and concrete practice, may require longer training programs to make graduates more competitive in the job market. Complementary courses, mentorship, apprenticeship and other supplementary services also help give program participants the skills necessary to succeed. Programs that do not equip participants with the full set of skills leave their graduates at a distinct disadvantage when compared to graduates of longer, more comprehensive training programs. Market assessments and conversations with industry professionals can help to document the employer standards necessary for graduates to access employment or self-employment in a particular sector. This knowledge is essential to inform appropriate program length as VT programs plan and update skills offerings.

Despite variations in length, quality and comprehensiveness of programming, the majority of VT programs train youth in the same core skills. As a result, VT graduates with significantly different levels and qualities of training compete for similar employment opportunities. When programs are too short, graduates may have inadequate skills, preventing them from competing successfully in the labor market. However, due to family responsibilities and financial constraints, some youth are unable to attend or

complete the longer, more comprehensive trainings. The newly established Uganda Vocational Qualifications Framework modular training approach is one step towards balancing the need for comprehensive skills training with the reality of time and resource constraints that youth face. Although longer donor funding cycles are essential for developing more holistic and coordinated VT, the Uganda Vocational Qualifications Framework may also increase the viability of short-term donor funding, which could finance segments of training programs.

Short donor funding cycles are one reason that many NGO-run and sponsored programs are shorter and less comprehensive than more formal, government or privately run training programs. While there is a growing trend towards longer funding cycles in light of the region's transition to a development phase, some of the region's largest funders continue to operate on very short funding cycles. One donor noted "[I] recognize that three-year training cycles probably have a better impact in the long run; however, I am also a realist and know that the six-month programs will continue...we are constrained by our funding cycles."

### **Perceptions of VT**

Traditionally, many Ugandans have perceived VT to be a "last resort" when formal education is not an option. While such perceptions of VT do persist, people across Uganda, and in the north in particular, increasingly respect VT as an opportunity rather than a sign of failure. In 2007, the Government took part in a public relations campaign to improve the image of VT across the country. Advertisements, including comics, were placed in local newspapers. PEVOT supported the production of a soap opera entitled "Hand-in-Hand," aiming to erode stereotypes and demonstrate the benefits of vocational training. Furthermore, a radio program conducted interviews with key stakeholders and role models about the benefits of training.

In northern Uganda, VT is less stigmatized due to the relative dearth of education and employment opportunities in comparison to the south. One donor reinforced this idea, saying "people in the north have no alternative—so for them, it's not the last resort, any resort is a good resort—those not coming from a war area they will always go for academic education; upcountry you just have to earn your living because there is no formal employment—just employment at NGOs; the industry is in the east, oil is in Kampala...in terms of formal employment." Particularly for youth who are too old to re-enter the government education system, VT may be the only prospect for further education or economic self-sufficiency.

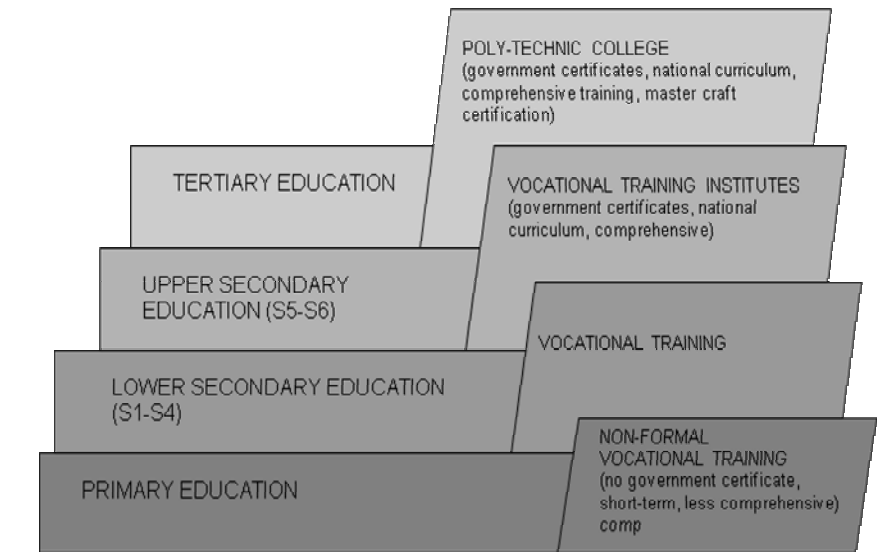
Our people used to think that technical school is for the failures. The district has not considered technical schools as important. And sometimes district people did not visit technical schools.....I don't know why. Because the chairs they are sitting on are made by us.

—VT Instructor, Gulu

A related disconnect appears in some youths' perspectives of "employment." When asked to describe their activities prior to training, many youth interviewees responded "nothing." Yet when further probed they often listed one or more income generating activities in which they were involved, including gathering wood, doing laundry, selling produce or charcoal, making local brew or peeling cassava. Often, youth do not label informal labor as work, noting a bias in perceptions in the community and among youth themselves in favor of formal vocations.



## The Correlation between VT and Formal Education



## VI. Key Steps in Market-driven Program Planning

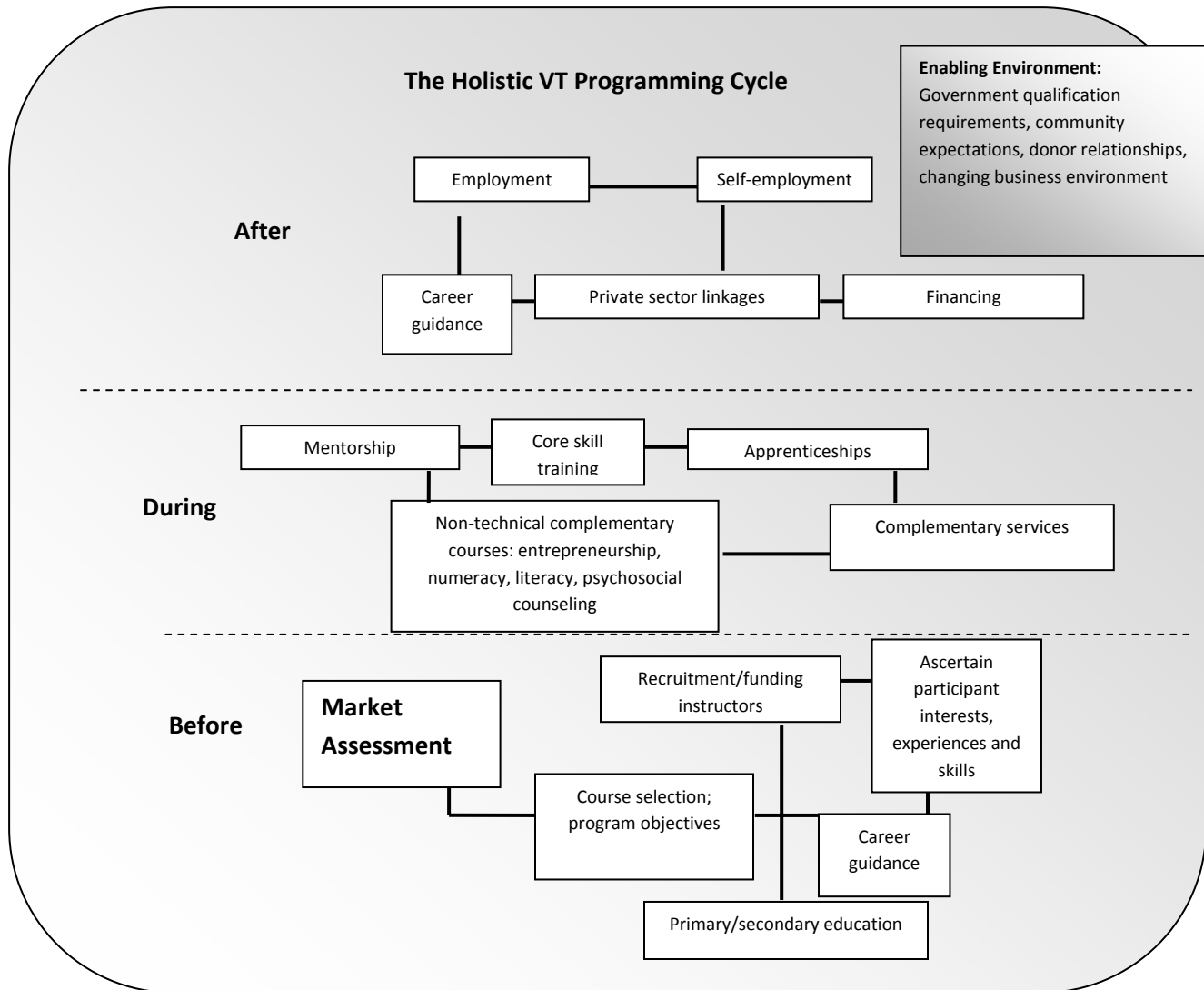
VT programs provide an opportunity to develop youth holistically by addressing their needs for sustainable livelihoods, basic literacy and numeracy, life skills and relationships in the community. For many youth in the north, VT may be one of the first exposures to education and to livelihood skills upgrading. Holistic programs ensure

It is important to bring up people. Even vocational training skills, whatever you take, it must have extra components when you talk of building a whole round person.

—VT Program Manager, Gulu

participants gain a marketable vocation, the “core skill”, supported by broader “complementary business skills” such as training in marketing, cash flow and entrepreneurship. Programming must match market realities and should also provide literacy, numeracy and basic English to empower youth to find gainful employment or enable them to return to formal education. Finally, holistic training most often includes a life skills component, which requires VT programs to think about what services and assistance youth need to ensure they are able to attend and complete VT, such as psychosocial programming, food and childcare. From program design to implementation to graduation and beyond, VT programs should think holistically about responding to the needs of both program participants and the market. The [Market Assessment Toolkit and Analysis Guide](#) provided as resources with this report assist VT practitioners to take a demand-driven approach, designing more effective programming and making key linkages to assist program participants access sustainable livelihoods opportunities.

## The Holistic VT Programming Cycle



### A. Program Decisions: Preparing and Implementing the VT Program

#### *Curriculum Development and Skills Selection*

**Diverse vocations, chosen through solid market assessments, should be taught as part of comprehensive, holistic VT programming to ensure youth are able to find jobs in today's dynamic market.**

VT program curriculums comprise a combination of training in a “core skill,” complementary business skills, life skills, agriculture and basic education. When developing the curriculum, programs face a complex set of considerations, including budget constraints, instructor availability, access to machinery and tools, beneficiary target numbers and donor mandates. All of these influence which vocations and complementary courses a program will teach. The “core skill,” which is the primary vocation that participants study during a VT program, sits at the center of the curriculum. The core skills that VT programs in Gulu and Kitgum teach routinely include tailoring, carpentry and joinery, brick-laying and

concrete practice, and catering. Other commonly taught skills include motor vehicle mechanics, bakery, hair braiding, bead making and driving. Most are part of the same group of vocations which the Government of Uganda has traditionally promoted across the country. These vocations are generally less capital intensive, requiring lower levels of financing and machinery and do not call for instructors trained in new skills.

A common critique of VT is that it tends not to be innovative in its core skills offering and as a result fails to respond to dynamic markets. Youth, program managers and donors all agree that continuing to teach the same few skills across the region is leading to labor supply saturation in some industries. As a result, youth are often unable to find jobs and the prices for goods and services decrease. When asked about the lack of diversification, answers ranged from lack of material, machinery and trained instructors to a lack of donor coordination, innovative thinking and market analysis. The result is that the decision about which skill to pursue is generally driven by the supply of inputs rather than the actual demand for goods and services in the market.

VT programs have underexplored the option of training students in traditional skills or of building on skills learned during combat or life in the bush. Commonly cited traditional vocations include birth attendants and people who repair boreholes. Ex-combatants learned job skills in the bush, including as mechanics, technicians, veterinary doctors, teachers and blacksmiths.<sup>23</sup> Looking for new potential markets is another way to diversify existing skills offerings. VT programs provide an opportunity to prepare students to respond to new demand created by return and resettlement and the expanding market in southern Sudan. When asked about how resettlement and return will affect the economy, one Gulu-based NGO officer responded that the act of moving “opens markets.”

In addition to exploring alternative skills, VT programs committed to a particular skills offering can look for creative ways to differentiate their graduates from others trained in the same core skill. A Gulu VT program manager notes that even in these more common vocations, there is potential for innovation “[You] always need to be able to diversify—dress making is useless when everyone is going to the market to buy secondhand clothes, but what about bags, earrings, beautiful dresses. You need to make something you can’t get secondhand.” With more information, VT programs will be able to adapt even the classic vocations to meet changing demand.

Curriculum planning will benefit from the incorporation of market information. Also, because VT programs are at the intersection of economic recovery, education and social reintegration, planning will benefit from bringing together diverse colleagues working in economic or private sector development, education, psychosocial care and even HIV/AIDS and gender-based violence (GBV) to discuss curriculum and goals for youth development. Considerations of the diverse challenges facing youth will make programming more holistic.

Offering complementary courses supplements the core skill and enables participants to actively engage in assessing their own capabilities and responding to the market. Business skills courses prepare youth to be responsive to the changing market and help support successful self-employment. They are repeatedly cited as the most useful part of VT programs outside of the core skill. When asked what advice they would offer other youth, VT graduates cited English as a key skill needed to find employment, particularly in professions that cater to a regional, national or international clientele, rather than just the local market. Here again, VT providers must look to the market to determine which other competencies youth need to be hired or establish opportunities for self-employment. Furthermore, many youth express a desire to return to formal education upon completion of VT programs. By teaching basic literacy, numeracy and English, VT can open the door for participants to both consider completing primary or secondary school and to be more competitive in the job market.

### **Case Study: A Market-driven Approach to Vocational Training**

Noting that the hotel services offered in southern Uganda were of a higher quality than those in the north, an NGO-run VT program in Gulu performed its own market assessment to determine demand for a particular skill. The program manager saw the opportunity to create value by training students in a sector with a labor scarcity: catering.

Prior to changing its programming, the organization performed an extensive analysis of the current state of the local hospitality industry. The NGO's program manager and other staff members conducted structured interviews consisting of about 15 questions with owners of hotels, hotel staff, and customers. The results indicated a market gap: customers were willing to pay more for high quality staff, yet owners were unable to find staff with sufficient training. Following this research, the program manager developed a curriculum that prepared youth for the potential labor market while adjusting for the current needs of the youth as the target population of this particular NGO is war-affected women. Because of the youths' need to earn a living and, in many cases, the need to care for their children, a two-year program was unrealistic. The optimal duration of training was determined to be six months: four months of intensive training followed by a two-month apprenticeship coordinated by the NGO.

The focus on the market did not stop in the program planning stage. The NGO invited owners of local hotels to a workshop in which it marketed its training in security, human resource management, customer care and food science. Today, the VT program supplies many of the employees of Gulu's hotels and is hoping to perform a similar market analysis in other sectors, after ensuring the catering course is sustainable.

When deciding what skills to offer, programs should also assess other VT programs in the area to understand what skills are already being offered by whom and to what target population. In order to minimize labor supply saturation caused by training students in the same limited number of core skills, all actors in the VT sector need to coordinate activities, share data and lessons learned. Coordination efforts by the UN, UGAPRIVI and various sector working groups around VT should be harmonized to establish clear protocols and regular forums where sector players can come together and discuss key developments in VT and develop a united platform for lobbying for further sector reform and improvement. Some innovative methods for facilitating greater information sharing in the industry are under development. For example, the German development bank KfW hopes to develop an Internet platform where institutions can put updatable statistics on program and service offerings. The service would be purely voluntary and coordinated through UGAPRIVI and PEVOT.

#### ***Recruiting qualified teachers and trainers***

**The scarcity of trained teachers is a resource constraint that vocational training stakeholders are addressing creatively and which requires a concerted government effort to improve.**

Whether at private, NGO or public VT programs, program managers expressed the view that the lack of properly trained instructors constrains the range of courses they are able to offer and the ability of instructors to provide individualized attention to participants. The shortage of instructors is a particular constraint for state-sponsored vocational training institutes (VTIs) whose hiring is restricted to instructors who have graduated from a university and received government certification. Government funding for training of instructors has been insufficient to meet VT needs, and donor support in this area is often on a relatively small scale. The Japan International Cooperation Agency has recently begun funding in-service training to upgrade skills of VT managers and instructors. However, demand for

instructors continues to outrun supply, creating considerable potential for the government and donors to scale up this activity.

The difficulty in finding and funding qualified instructors has led some programs to cut non-core courses, such as entrepreneurship and agriculture. Additionally, when instructors fall sick or relocate, often they are not replaced, causing courses to be cut or abandoned part way through. Because non-government VT programs are not required to hire government certified teachers, some have adopted creative approaches in response to this challenge. One NGO-run VT program allows students from Gulu University to “practice” their teaching in its classes. Another NGO in Gulu hires community members with expertise in a particular technical area and provides a three-week pedagogical course. Others have started trying to recruit foreign professional to teach short modular courses on their area of expertise. Many also recruit older, retired teachers to return to the classroom to teach.

Linkages with private business, corporations and associations may also open the door for assistance with instruction in specific skills. VT programs can reach out to these sectors to encourage partnerships through which industry experts supplement the curriculum with workshops or lectures. Apprenticeships provide another means of augmenting youths’ training in an area in spite of the lack of appropriate instructors.

### **Selection of Program Participants**

**Participants must be selected based on a program’s ability to meet the needs of a given population within the context of VT.**

Due in part to the growing awareness that current definitions and implementation of programming around traditional vulnerability criteria can be insufficient and, in fact, counterproductive for individuals, communities and the larger objective of economic development, organizations are increasingly opting for a more nuanced evaluation of individuals’ needs.<sup>24</sup> Serving vulnerable populations is necessary, but through an approach that considers functional aspects of vulnerability and the unintended consequences of targeting. A comprehensive approach is necessary to overcome limitations and integrate youth into productive capacities.<sup>25</sup>

Everyone here is vulnerable and has been traumatized, so when NGOs group people together and decide who is more vulnerable than the other, it inevitably leads to a supply-driven versus demand-driven problem.

—*Manager of a local NGO*

Often, private, government-run and NGO-run VT programs target different participants. Most private and government programs charge students tuition. While some of these programs and program sponsors often target “vulnerable youth,” certain vulnerable groups may benefit disproportionately from relief and development resources to the detriment of equally war affected groups that do not meet organizations’ selection criteria. Several recent studies have found that selection practices based on the traditional categories of vulnerability are often misplaced and can lead to exclusion or further stigmatization of program beneficiaries.<sup>26</sup> Balancing serving the “most vulnerable” with a demand driven approach requires programs to adapt the curriculum to participants’ needs. Often, non-tuition based programs select participants with the help of camp heads, government officials, other NGOs or UN agencies working in the camps. Interviews with camp residents reveal a sense that program selection is not always transparent. Making standards for participant selection clear from the outset will help to standardize selection processes and minimize unintended negative consequence.

Local labor market information is essential in determining the capacity of vulnerable youth to contribute meaningfully to the local market. For example, in Kitgum, with financial support from NGOs, a shoemaker with a physical disability trains disabled youth in leather working and shoe repair. Creative

solutions that identify marketable skills for vulnerable youth are a dynamic way to overcome challenges that this population faces.

## **B. During VT: the VT Experience for Participants**

### ***Ensuring Well-informed Core Skill Selection***

**Youth can be empowered to make informed decisions about the future by assessing which vocation will best match their capabilities, needs and resources.**

Youth need help understanding what vocation best matches their skills, aspirations and resources. Youth are often asked to make decisions or placed into a vocation without sufficient information about how training will translate into a post-training livelihood. While allowing youth to decide appears to be consistent with a rights-based approach, youth must also be given the resources and support needed to make an informed decision. Especially for youth with little exposure outside of the camps, making a choice about which vocation to pursue without attention to market realities can lead many to select skills they see others doing, hear are profitable or think are easy to operate. The result is that many youth enter the most saturated markets and often cannot find work upon graduation.

I don't think the [VT] schools really take the time to talk to the children and guide them. If they do, it must be really limited. Girls are always choosing tailoring."

—VT sponsor, Gulu

There is also gender self-selection into certain skills training, leading most male learners to select skills such as carpentry and joinery, brick-laying and concrete practice or motor vehicle mechanics, and female learners to select tailoring or catering. This is often the result of gender stereotypes in the community and serves to further entrench differential social status and income across gender lines. Males often receive training in professions that earn higher wages in the market while females select skills leading to lower-paying employment. Program implementers and donors need to actively conduct career guidance and develop programs that avoid reinforcing gender bias by focusing on the capabilities of each trainee as an individual.

Structured, market-based guidance for youth when they enter into a VT program will help them to make informed decisions about which core skill to learn and ensure they are aware of the complementary skills needed to enter their chosen industry. A solid understanding of demand for goods and services will allow VT programs to guide youth on which vocation to choose. The [Youth Toolkit](#), provided as a resource with this report, will help youth become active participants in determining which vocation best matches their skills and needs. PEVOT, in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender, has developed a comprehensive career counseling tool called JoBoYo, which is a computer program designed to match a person's skills and aptitudes to various employment options.<sup>27</sup> Programs will benefit from utilizing participatory tools such as JoBoYo and the [Youth Toolkit](#) that encourage youth to assess and match their own skills and resources to income-earning opportunities in the market.

### ***Integrating Agriculture***

**Integrating agricultural training into VT meets a practical need to increase household food security while supplying youth with a skill that has an assured long-term market.**

Agriculture and VT are complementary to helping youth achieve sustainable livelihoods. Land is widely recognized as northern Uganda's greatest natural asset, yet few VT programs in Kitgum or Gulu districts teach agriculture as a core vocational skill. More commonly, agriculture is built in to the curriculum as a supplementary course or is part of an income generating project for the school. Some programs have no agricultural component.

Focus groups with camp residents reveal that agriculture remains a critical household safety net even as many people express an interest in developing other productive skills. However, interviews with elders reveal a concern that youths' understanding of land value has decreased through prolonged camp living. Agricultural courses offered within the VT context can help to rebuild youths' recognition of the importance of land and agriculture in establishing sustainable livelihoods. VT programs can teach and aid youth participants to engage in agriculture skills upgrading for improved self-production to improve household income and to engage in commercial production to meet the growing demand for agricultural products in south Sudan and southern Uganda.

Though youth often have some exposure to agriculture, years of conflict have stalled the advancement of farming practices. One Kitgum VT instructor noted, "If you tell a youth to go for agriculture, he will say "I know how to dig" without considering there are technical things to learn so he can be a better farmer." VT programs can counter this perception by teaching youth modern agricultural practices and helping them to develop expertise on specific skills such as fertilizer use, pest control and planting and seasonality, as well as many others. Business skills courses can also develop youths' skills in agricultural business planning. To facilitate this type of skills upgrading and specialization, programs can visit agricultural stores, bring in agricultural extension officers to talk with students or set up mini trade fairs where farmers and sellers are invited to talk with youth about their production processes, equipment and marketing. Additionally, school gardens or communal fields under the supervision of agriculture trainers or agriculture extension workers can help participants to develop agricultural skills on a daily basis.

### **Complementary Business Skills Courses**

#### **Complementary business skills training helps youth develop as versatile workers able to respond to changing needs in the market.**

Increasingly, VT programs recognize the value of complementary business skills courses, which can include marketing, operations, cash flow management, self-help group formation, small business management and basic record keeping. These may be offered as part of the program's standard curriculum or as supplementary courses offered outside the VT program either by the same organization or a partner organization.

We have to give [youth] the capacity to make their own jobs...When I look at government side and NGOs it will be very difficult to find jobs. So when we build their capacity and with the skills they learn, they can find their own jobs.

—Government official, Kitgum

Many interviewees argue that these complementary courses offer students the best opportunity for long-term skill development and the capacity for self-employment. One government official at the Ministry of Education and Sports notes, "Formerly, people could train and they could all be employed but then we found that people need to be self-employed...the government has no jobs...Entrepreneurship is being added countrywide, even in the formal education, so that people have the skills of business ..." A large NGO in Kitgum notes that with "business training...graduates will gain something that they can use in the future." Youth often express a desire to create their own small enterprise. Additionally, businesses in Gulu and Kitgum frequently cite these complementary skills as highly desirable in their employees.

Business skills training also provides a means of supporting youth to develop a work ethic, a characteristic that many older northern Ugandans noted as lacking among the younger generation. A female district official explains, "The youth are impatient some of the youth employed by the district work for one to two years then start putting up their own house. [They] want to lead a high life, which

is beyond their resources. Youth need to be sensitized—that some of their parents worked for eight to ten years before starting to drive or before they could put up some kind of structure for themselves. If youth cannot prioritize, then they want to steal/cheat; maybe [this is] why some businesses do not have a lot of trust in employing youth.”

### ***Apprenticeships***

#### **Youth need help accessing hands-on practical skills training that link them to a successful business as part of VT.**

Apprenticeships, also known as industrial training, often play an important role in providing youth an entry point to the job market. It is an opportunity to work at an existing business and learn directly from an established craftsman or worker. Exposure to the workplace improves youths’ core skills as well as professionalism, work ethic and business skills. Apprenticeships may also present an opportunity for youth who perform well to be retained in a more permanent position. For youth without social networks, apprenticeships are key to building the social capital cited by many northern Ugandans as critical for finding employment.

Institutional links between programs and local business people through mentorships and apprenticeships can serve as a proxy for social capital, exposing youth to job opportunities that might not have otherwise been available. One VT program in Gulu noted that most of their graduates get employed because, “during the course of their training, [the program] contacts employers—we say we have this number of employees: can you absorb them?”

With few exceptions, organizations interviewed during this research believe that apprenticeships are a good idea and help youth to find jobs and many businesses agreed that youth with practical training make better employees. As apprenticeships become more widespread, this component may become an employer expectation for VT graduates.

VT programs can assist youth to access apprenticeship opportunities by making contact with businesses in town, or creating long-term partnerships in which a business takes on one or more students each year on a rotating basis.

VT programs also need to establish parameters and standards for apprenticeships to make the experience valuable for both program participants and businesses hosting youth. VT programs must ensure that working conditions are in line with existing labor laws, that youth workers are not exploited or mistreated, working conditions are safe, apprenticeships are time-bound, and female and male apprentices receive equal treatment and equal opportunities. For youth to gain a level of skill mastery from an apprenticeship, programs and participants must be ready to invest sufficient time and commitment to the experience. One Gulu business owner noted that VT programs often ask her to train their participants at her business for a two-week period. Despite being offered payment for training the youth, the owner has repeatedly declined, explaining that a two-week training is insufficient both for the student apprentice and her business needs.

In addition to forming linkages with the private sector for mentorship or apprenticeships, VT programs can consider hosting job fairs, bringing employers to VT programs to speak to participants or establishing linkages for direct jobs placement of VT graduates. Creating a database of graduates will help VT programs to increase their network of potential partners for apprenticeship and post-training employment opportunities.



### **Case Study: Increasing Exposure to the Workplace**

Apprenticeships or “industrial training” are one way for youth to gain practical experience, make connections with employers and learn interpersonal skills. Industrial training may also provide youth with access to up-to-date machinery and reduce the pressures caused by the deficit of trained teachers.

One public vocational training institute (VTI) in Kitgum has been able to maximize the impact of industrial training by sending its instructor to visit students at a different site each day. This practice serves two purposes: instructors refresh their technical knowledge while also monitoring the students to make sure that they are fulfilling their assignments.

The VTI has had no problem finding businesses willing to offer seven-week industrial training programs. Businesses usually provide apprentices with accommodation, meals and transportation. After working with VT participants, many businesses end up requesting more industrial training assignments the next year. The principal of the VTI believes that many youth end up finding permanent employment with the business in which they held apprenticeships.

As with most VTIs in Gulu and Kitgum, however, the post-training status of youth is unclear. This VTI has begun implementing a tracer study to try to determine where youth are one year after the program. In 2006, through an initiative by BTVET, the VTI began collecting information about what youth were doing to make money and where they were living. Participation was low—only 12.6 percent of the prior year’s graduating class responded to the radio announcements requesting their assistance.

This year, the VTI collected mobile phone numbers of graduates and expects its tracing participation rate will be much higher. The results can speak to the effectiveness of industrial training, as well as the overall success of the VTI in developing market-oriented programming.

### **Life Skills**

**To meet the holistic needs of youth, and reduce risks that threaten to limit learning opportunities, VT programs need to support youths’ ability to make informed decisions, communicate effectively, reintegrate into their communities and develop coping and self-management skills that may help them lead a healthy and productive life.<sup>28</sup>**

Life skills such as ethics, conflict resolution, health and hygiene address personal and professional demands on youth. Girls face a particular risk for having learning and livelihoods opportunities jeopardized by pregnancy, early marriage or stereotyping that limit their ability to make choices. Life skills courses, the creation of supportive environments and increased participation in the community may help ensure youths’ success with establishing sustainable livelihoods.

One support network that can be further utilized to improve participants’ life skills is mentorship. Mentors give youth an opportunity to form a one-on-one link with someone who has succeeded in the same or a related field. Youth, VT staff, donors, government officials and employers repeatedly express the importance of social networks for accessing employment opportunities in northern Uganda. Trust and reciprocity are fundamentally built into social networks, allowing youth with more social capital to access employment opportunities more easily. Vulnerable youth facing trauma and stigmatization often have weakened social networks. Mentorship is a means of providing a positive role model and helping youth to build social capital and establish social networks, giving youth an opportunity to form a

one-on-one link with someone who has succeeded in a similar vocation. Mentors might be VT graduates themselves, or other community members. For youth who have been trained in camps or outside of town, mentors can help advise how to market or add value to a product or service. Given the high vulnerability of many VT participants, VT programs can help rebuild social capital by providing assistance in establishing mentorships.

Psychosocial development and care is an important part of developing life skills and preparing youth to have sustainable livelihoods. This is particularly true for conflict-affected youth who have experienced prolonged trauma. VT is often used as a method of protection and rehabilitation in conflict, early recovery and post-conflict settings. It is also the final component of many disarmament, demobilization and rehabilitation (DDR) programs. Returning combatants often pass through reception centers that offer short-term training programs.

In northern Uganda, psychosocial care is another complement that VT programs provide along the spectrum. VT programs include psychosocial care to varying degrees, ranging from using livelihoods and vocational training as the primary vehicle for improving youths' psychosocial well-being, to those that do not engage with psychosocial care at all within the curriculum. One Kitgum INGO notes that their programs are all part of a psychosocial approach, "our goal is to improve on the psychosocial well-being of our clients and even the economic activities we do are for that gain."

Interviewees agreed there is widespread need for professional trauma counseling for many VT participants in northern Uganda, and many noted that a psychosocial dimension needs to be incorporated into all types of early recovery VT programming as it enables participants to make the most of other VT services. Nevertheless, there remains a pervasive sentiment that programs that have psychosocial rehabilitation as their *primary* goal should not be housed under the VT umbrella, as across the board, youth view VT programs primarily as means of improving their money-making potential.

### **Responsive Programming: Meeting Youth Needs**

**Given the vulnerability and low-income status of many northern Ugandan youth, flexibility is key to enabling access to and completion of training programs.**

Many VT participants have competing demands for their time, such as children, household food production, demands of a husband or other family members and household responsibilities. Flexible class schedules require consultation with program participants at the beginning of each term and will likely differ by program. Once consensus is reached for the term, participants should be held to the agreed-upon timetable. A similar type of negotiation can also take place around school dress code. Program participants can be helped to come to consensus about an appropriate and accessible dress code at the start of each term taking into consideration limited resources available to purchase uniforms.

Availability of childcare on the same premises as VT programs increases the likelihood that young women will be able to balance care of young children with the desire for education and training. Pregnancy and the need to take care of young children are frequently cited as reasons that young women are unable to complete VT programs. Additionally, having childcare available provides an opportunity to teach young mothers about how to care for their children and also reduces the risk of young children being left alone in camps or huts for long periods. For those working in the childcare centers, an employment opportunity is also generated. In order to ensure the quality of their childcare center, a privately run VT program in Gulu allows mothers to fire the care worker if they are unsatisfied with the service, which is consistent with a rights-based service approach.

## **C. Post-Program: Monitoring Youth and Making Self-Employment and Employment Linkages**

### ***VT Program Certification***

**The demand for government certification of VT service providers varies among VT providers and businesses.**

Many VT programs in northern Uganda have been developed without the long-term vision or resources to become government certified. As a result it is difficult for program graduates to earn a nationally recognized certificate upon completion of a program. As resettlement and return continue, programs can work with the government to standardize curricula so that participants leave programs with comparable and universally recognized capacities. The Department of Industrial Training (Directorate of Industrial Training), under the Ministry of Education and Sports, is responsible for certifying VT programs. To become government certified, VT programs must follow the guidelines set for BTVET institutions, including compliance with health and safety inspections. The guidelines also specify certain standards such as “trained instructors, library, books, equipment, land, and adequate financial resources to start an institution. There must be an established a governance system and evidence of instructor contracts.”<sup>29</sup>

### ***Certification for VT Graduates***

**Many youth want to have a document demonstrating their competency in a skill, and many businesses want or demand a certificate from employees.**

There is an ongoing complex debate on the value and necessity of certificates for VT graduates. Currently, participants in non-certified programs may not meet the requirements or have access to national trade tests and therefore have few options for proving their training to potential employers. Since many businesses expect some documentation from applicants showing a certain level of competency, NGOs have begun to work with local governments to establish district-level, as opposed to national-level, certification. In addition, there are a growing number of international and local NGOs engaging in sponsorship programs that place youth in government-certified VTIs instead of starting their own short-term, non-certified programs. As one program manager notes, “Part of the goal is to bring less formal education into the more formal sector... push for more certification so that “graduates” can use their certification to move forward.”

For larger businesses, especially those that target a wealthier or expatriate customer base, government certificates or diplomas may be mandatory for staff. Some also note that if the VT graduate does not have a government certificate, then having a certificate from an NGO program does not necessarily distinguish them from youth that had not attended a skills training program because it does not represent universal competencies. Ensuring that participants graduate with agreed-upon competencies and have transferable certificates that are recognized throughout the north will require a great deal more coordination among VT programs, the government and the private sector.

### ***In-kind and Financial Assistance upon Graduation***

**Achieving a sustainable livelihood upon graduation requires access to proper materials and capital; VT programs can facilitate this by giving tools or supporting youth to access financial services.**

Upon graduation, youth face many constraints when starting their own small business or joining existing businesses that expect workers to bring their own tools. To put their new skills to use, program graduates require assistance either in the form of tool kits, basic material or capital to help purchase necessary start-up supplies. Some youth are able to find employment in a business, where they are able to slowly save up enough money to start their own workshop. In addition, many youth expect to receive tools upon graduation, even when programs may or may not explicitly promise in-kind post-graduation support.

I was hoping to get tools so I can improve on the education I got from training but didn't get anything up to now. They did not give us anything. So now we are looking for money to set up businesses, but getting money is also difficult

— VT graduate, Labudje IDP Camp

Direct provision of tools to VT graduates is often not feasible due to the high cost of materials, particularly for trades such as carpentry or tailoring. The majority of the youth interviewed in the IDP camps and in Gulu and Kitgum towns stated the need for supplies upon graduation. As NGOs throughout the north continue to debate the cost and impact of providing tool kits for vocational training youth graduates, one VT sponsor notes that, “giving tools to graduates was in our project document but an assessment stated that the tools are really expensive and with 1000 students it becomes too tricky. Also, in others I hear they are given sewing machines and they (the graduates) just sell them.” Some program managers cite examples of trained youth who formed groups after graduation without start up kits and since performed better than some groups who were given materials. Likewise, a sense of self-reliance and ownership over tools purchased by the youth him or herself is likely to lead to better care and more effective use of those tools.

### ***Linking with Microfinance Institutions***

**VT programs can facilitate linkages between graduates and microfinance institutions such as Village Savings and Loans Associations and Savings and Credit Cooperatives as potential means of overcoming capital constraints and helping to promote access to sustainable livelihoods.**

As VT programs work to strengthen their linkages with the private sector and the tendency to fund tool kits decreases, more programs are experimenting with the possibility of linking with microfinance institutions. From the perspective of the microfinance practitioner, VT can be viewed as a pre-credit intervention, which improves the capacity of the borrower and has the potential to mitigate risk to credit providers and loan recipients in the longer term. From the perspective of VT program managers, post-training linkages can be viewed as an additional means of promoting economic success and sustainability of graduates.<sup>30</sup> In order to promote linkages between VT and microfinance in a manner that is compatible with best practices around sustainability and demand-driven approaches, it is important to make sure youth clientele are well informed about the difference between free services or grants and financial services that require repayment.<sup>31</sup>

Ultimately, because VT graduates offer a potential untapped clientele base for microfinance institutions, creating demand-driven linkages between trained youth and financial service providers can be mutually beneficial. Besides potential constraints on youths' access to microfinance services, the multiple economic strategies of youth, as well as their economic resiliency, can be viewed as potential assets of youth clients.<sup>32</sup> Savings services can be particularly valuable for youth, who often lack access to assets. Saving can assist youth to accumulate the collateral necessary to access a loan or make investments in future education or business endeavors.<sup>33</sup> Association with a VT program may also serve as a proxy for other forms of physical, financial or social collateral often required when applying for credit or joining a group lending or savings scheme.<sup>34</sup>

### **Case Study: Linking Village Savings and Loans Associations in IDP camps to Savings and Credit Cooperatives in Kitgum**

A partnership between an INGO and a Savings and Credit Cooperative Society (SACCO) or “Village Bank” in Kitgum provides an example of how a linkage can be developed between community members from an IDP camp and a microfinance institution. The partnership also illuminates best practices that should be observed if the model is applied to VT providers wishing to facilitate such a linkage between VT program participants and microfinance services.

An INGO in Kitgum has been working with IDPs who have had limited access to productive livelihoods opportunities. The INGO has partnered with the local Village Bank in an attempt to facilitate the transition from dependency to self-reliance by offering 1,000 participants (100 groups of 10 members each), most of whom are women, access to interest-free loans. After introducing the project to the community, the INGO transferred sufficient funds to the Village Bank to cover the group loans and also paid all administrative fees associated with maintaining the account. The loan amount is approximately US\$350 per group, or US\$35 per group member. The repayment period is set at three months. Every three-month cycle the money is disbursed, repaid in weekly increments, and then disbursed again. After one year of operation, the reported repayment rate is 100 percent.

By providing funds through a loan, even though interest free, the program seeks to transition participants from free service recipients to financial service clients. Though participants self-selected into groups, the INGO also monitored the process to ensure that lower-income community members were benefiting and that group members participated in diversified economic activities in order to lower risk for each group. This intervention is designed to introduce the community to the bank, provide training on financial literacy, improve economic self-sufficiency and, eventually, exit. Ultimately, the INGO will no longer provide the microcredit institution with money to cover the loans as the individuals will become clients of the microfinance bank directly. Currently, the INGO is thinking of phasing out the program by disbursing the final cycle as a cash grant. While it is not necessarily microfinance best practice to mix grants with loan activities, through participation in the Village Bank each group became a shareholder. Lowering the barrier to access finance could incentivize program participants to consider accessing interest-bearing loans in the future.

The partnership between the INGO and SACCO demonstrates that, to be successful, the intervention or subsidy must be time-bound. The program must also be designed in such a way that it raises awareness among the community and Village Bank staff, and promotes personal and economic security for program participants. A program targeting youth participants of VT programs should also consider youths’ existing assets, such as reputation, relationships in the community, education and skills as tools for creatively addressing some of the specific challenges faced by youth when accessing financial services. For group formation in particular, attention must be paid to age, gender and disability status to make groups inclusive. In addition, youth should form groups with others from the same parish so that activities are not disrupted as resettlement continues.

Because the program in Kitgum is ongoing, it not possible to say whether participants will continue to access interest-bearing loans directly from the Village Bank after the INGO phases out its involvement. However, the INGO and SACCO are optimistic. Many program participants have seen positive developments in their small enterprises and quality of life as a result of participation in the program and at least one has accessed a loan directly with the Village Bank in addition to his interest-free group loan.

The VSLA groups to scale up and access larger loans through a SACCO linkage. The groups are mixed, with younger and older members in the groups . There were no biases against young people joining, however the program was looking to target the active poor—which many VT youth are during and after graduation.

Many of the organizations sponsoring so many youth in VT could consider how their programs can be linked to microfinance. However, there continues to be fears in the community. When the community hears the “banks,” they immediately think there will be lots of requirements. Organizations with trained in youth can use the Oxfam model as an example of how to link with a SACCO.

## ***Learning from Agricultural Market Linkages***

**Analyzing some of the recent innovative private sector linkages in the agriculture markets illuminates ways that VT programs can strengthen their market linkages.**

In northern Uganda, a diverse array of initiatives is engaging with local actors in a way that moves beyond NGO service delivery and beneficiary dependency to build upon an existing and growing private sector in a sustainable way. Some of these include multi-stakeholder value chain trainings, the Acholi Private Sector Development Company's business development services, International Labour Organization's (ILO) value chain radio programming, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and Dunavant partnership, and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization-supported Business Information Center. Additionally, there has been a significant move to strengthen local business associations within each industry. In agriculture, these networks link farmers to information about new markets and commodity price updates, as well as regional and international trade standards in a cost-effective and demand-driven manner. Players all along a particular value chain (growers, input sellers, seed distributors, traders, processors, buyers and policy-makers) are brought together at trainings and trade fairs to ensure that knowledge is shared and that smallhold farmers get a fair market price for their products.

Recognizing that agriculture will be the major engine of economic growth in the north, it follows that the most innovative market linkages have been made in this sector. VT programs can learn from demand-led innovation in the agricultural sector, which creates a direct link between the service demanders and the buyer or service provider. One example is agricultural extension workers who offer courses to farmers. The NGO role also changes from that of service provider to facilitator. VT providers can adapt this model to address their particular needs, bringing in trainers, service providers or business people from nonagricultural sectors to interact with and possibly develop linkages with VT participants.

### ***Monitoring and Follow-up***

**Monitoring and follow-up of VT graduates is the final phase in supporting participants to enter the labor market; thus, monitoring should be built into the program cycle.**

Monitoring of VT graduates is a key part of the program cycle. It allows programs to understand whether graduates are getting jobs in the skills in which they were trained, gives programs the opportunity to support struggling graduates, increases social ties between present students and former students, and helps programs to improve their curriculum to ensure that future graduates have better opportunities for employment.

To understand market trends, quality of training and whether training leads to better livelihoods for graduates, more frequent, continuous and long term monitoring must be put in place. At present, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems are weak or non-existent among most VT providers in northern Uganda. Yet without a system of assessing youth graduates' post-program experiences, it is difficult for VT program managers to measure the impact of their training. If youth with particular skills are not being employed, then the program should modify its curriculum either through diversifying into more marketable vocations, upgrading skills training to target the specific labor needs of specific industries, improving the quality of instructors or providing/strengthening non-technical skills to make graduates more

They [the staff of the VT program] did not follow up. They did not link us with any other institute. They did not come back to check in on how we were doing or how they could help.

—*Vocational training youth graduate, Labudje IDP camp*

competitive, such as English language training, literacy, numeracy, life skills and business management skills. Though many organizations look for “success stories” to share with donors and prospective students, organizations must move beyond isolated success stories and implement a thorough and rigorous M&E system to properly measure impact.

Investing in a tracking system for VT graduates requires organizations and donors to make a conscious decision to allocate resources to post-programming activities. Follow-up is often difficult to fund because it increases cost per student rather than the number of beneficiaries served. An M&E system can allow a VT program to facilitate linkages between current program participants and former students through apprenticeship, mentoring and potential future employment. By tracking youth graduates and building an “alumni database,” VT providers not only expand social networks of participants, but may increase employment rates, which leads to improved social performance and more attractive results for donors. The long-term payoff of post-program support may mean the difference between youth putting their new vocation to work and reverting to past income generating activities.

## VII. Action Items for Key Actors

### **Government of Uganda**

The Government of Uganda, both at the district and national level, should take actions that encourage VT training programs to match market demands. **The Government of Uganda** should:

- Provide adequate resources for programs, including funding for instructor needs, supplies, equipment, facilities and infrastructure;
- Advocate change of VT perceptions through awareness raising and sensitization campaigns;
- Develop an adequate and flexible curriculum that encourages the integration of market knowledge and includes entrepreneurship training in VT programming;
- Increase instructor availability and quality by training a greater number of instructors in more diverse disciplines including core vocations and complementary capabilities, including career advisement;
- Participate in VT program coordination efforts through attendance of meetings and assistance sharing and disseminating information;
- Coordinate market assessments and distribute data through information management centers or coordination meetings.

### **The business community**

As the engine of growth and employment creation in the region, the business community must work with public, private and civil society actors to ensure VT youth graduates can play a role in the economic development of northern Uganda. **The business community** should:

- Strengthen partnerships with VT programs to offer information, inputs, industrial training and direct job placement to graduates;
- Enhance efforts to procure materials and hire locally;
- Properly publicize demand for goods and services in local districts;
- Coordinate with government and VT providers to ensure that the labor force is trained in the proper skills demanded by businesses from various sectors;
- Recognize the ability of both women and men to participate in employment opportunities that have generally been targeted by only one gender;

- Recognize the potential of youth from diverse education and training backgrounds to contribute to the reconstruction and development of northern Uganda's economy.

### **Youth of northern Uganda**

Youth should incorporate market knowledge and self-reflection into livelihood decisions. The **youth** of northern Uganda should:

- Observe and interact with the local market, ask questions about local supply and demand;
- Be innovative, think about untapped markets and unmet local demand;
- Think about the long term when selecting a vocation, considering sustainability and potential market changes during resettlement;
- Consider carefully which VT program and vocation will best help in making money;
- Take full advantage of the range of programming, apprenticeship opportunities and support services;
- Think broadly about non-traditional livelihoods opportunities and not limit themselves based on gender.

### **Vocational training providers and sponsors**

Vocational training providers and sponsors must strive to create a holistic program responsive to youth needs and market demands. **Vocational training providers and sponsors** should:

- Design and offer courses that correspond to existing market labor force needs;
- Establish and communicate program objectives to potential participants before they begin the VT program;
- Ensure that comprehensiveness of training matches both the requirements of the vocational skill and the needs of the VT participant;
- Ensure that participants graduate with agreed-upon competencies and have transferable certificates that are recognized throughout the north;
- Coordinate activities, share information and lessons learned with other VT providers in order to prevent labor supply saturation and to develop a united platform for lobbying for further sector reform and improvement ;
- Actively conduct career guidance and develop programs that avoid reinforcing gender bias by focusing on the capabilities of each trainee as an individual;
- When possible, make direct employment linkages for VT participants with local businesses and contracting companies;
- Make provisions to ensure that VT graduates placed in apprenticeships and jobs are not exploited;
- Facilitate linkages to financing and financial literacy for VT;
- Trace VT graduates after they complete the program and revise the program based on findings.

*NGO-run VT programs in should:*

- Measure success of VT program by numbers of (self-) employed VT graduates not number of trained VT participants;
- Recognize that VT is a long-term strategy for development and that short term programs tend to have lower rates of success.

### **Donors**

As a major contributor to VT funding and program development, **donors** should:

- Create new incentives that encourage programs to employ market assessment;



- Make the performance of market analyses or the commitment to perform market assessment a high priority in determining which VT programs to fund;
- Provide seed capital and technical support to organizations interested in either initiating market assessments or upgrading current assessment efforts;
- Establish predictable funding cycles that recognize the long term planning needed to develop programs' responsive to current market conditions;
- Maximize impact by using funds to fill identified gaps in service provision.

### **UN agencies**

As a major contributor to early recovery and reconstruction efforts in northern Uganda, **UN agencies** should:

- Ensure that the cluster system adequately addresses VT programs and treats VT as a crosscutting intervention that requires the participation of economic development, livelihoods, education and protection actors.

## VIII. Description of Market Assessment Toolkit for Vocational Training Programs

### The **Market Assessment Toolkit for Vocational Training Programs**

([www.womenscommission.org/pdf/ug\\_ysl\\_toolkit.pdf](http://www.womenscommission.org/pdf/ug_ysl_toolkit.pdf)) provides an understanding of dynamic market conditions and the sources of potential employment growth within the community and surrounding areas. The **Analysis Guide**, which is included in the Toolkit, facilitates the translation of information gathered during the market assessment into more effective programming. The Market Assessment Toolkit and Analysis Guide are composed of a Reference Chart, ten individual tools and their respective Summary Charts and five Decision Charts. Use of the Toolkit will allow practitioners to gather accurate information about market realities, develop stronger curricula and course offerings, determine which complementary services are most appropriate to offer, and provide information on the post-training linkages necessary to improve youths' prospects for a sustainable livelihood. Finally, the **Market Interaction Toolkit for Youth** guides youth through a self-assessment and encourages youth to assess local market realities and to think more critically about skill and livelihood selection.

The **Reference Chart** lays out five overarching VT program planning questions. These key questions are:

- In what vocations should the program train youth?
- What complementary courses should the program offer youth?
- What businesses can the program link with to provide industrial training or career guidance?
- What national producer and business associations can the program link with to provide industrial training or career guidance?
- What financial service providers can the program link with to help VT graduates engage in employment or self-employment?

By using different components of the Market Assessment Toolkit and the associated Summary and Decision Charts, VT practitioners will be able to answer these questions and many others.

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### ***I. Market Assessment Toolkit for Vocational Training Programs***

The **Market Analysis Toolkit** can be adapted to fit an organization's needs, resources and existing knowledge. It is a dynamic instrument and can be used at any point to re-assess market conditions. This tool helps organizations to engage with actors in the following sectors:

#### **Markets**

Observation of the local market provides an overview of the economic activities in the region. An understanding of which sectors are successful and which are less successful will be informative about where VT participants might find employment or self-employment opportunities upon graduation.

#### **Consumers**

Interviewing local consumers helps planners understand consumer preferences and which sectors in the local economy may be potential areas for growth and employment creation. In addition, brief interviews with consumers can assist in better understanding business practices and characteristics that local consumers value most.

#### **Local Government**

Engagement with the local government provides insight into national and regional development priorities; plans for economic recovery; existing VT frameworks; and information about upcoming contracts that could provide short- and long-term employment opportunities for VT

graduates.

### **Local Business**

Interviews with local businesses provide information about labor market demand, qualifications and constraints to enter into a given industry, potential industrial training placement and where VT participants might find employment or self-employment opportunities upon graduation.

### **National Producer and Business Associations**

Meeting with national associations provides up-to-date market information and information about production costs, quality standards, end market buyers and the potential for youth to access employment or self-employment opportunities in a specific sector.

### **Youth Focus Groups**

The Youth Focus Group Instrument allows practitioners to meet with small groups of youth participants and non-participants separately, to analyze which courses, services and other features of a VT program most effectively prepare participants for employment or self-employment.

### **VT Providers**

Increased engagement among VT providers enables planners to share best practices and market data. Improved coordination helps to identify key elements of each program and exposes local trends in VT programming.

### **Microfinance Institutions (MFIs)**

Interviews with local microfinance institutions allow organizations to learn about potential post-training financing options for VT graduates and reveal the types of enterprises viewed as creditworthy.

### **Donors**

Conversations with donors provide a sense of future programming priorities and anticipated funding trends. They prepare VT programs to anticipate future labor needs that may be generated through donor investment.

### **National and Multinational Companies**

Discussions with national and multinational actors yield information on present and future inflows of investment to the area providing insight into future demand for products, services and support.

**Key Components of Each Tool:** Each of the 10 tools has its own cover page, which includes the specific purpose, research question, timeframe, instructions and in some cases resources that will assist the practitioner to gather the relevant information. The **purpose** sketches out the main objective and key uses for the tool. The **research question** sums up the central question that each question in the tool seeks to answer. The research question can also be modified or adapted for program-specific needs. Most tools can be used continuously throughout the program cycle. Instructions specific to each tool are included to give additional guidance to the practitioner or facilitator and, where applicable, a list of resources is provided to help the practitioner gather the relevant information.

**Reflection Boxes:** Many subsections of the tools include key questions to facilitate analysis of market realities immediately after collecting information. These questions are in highlighted boxes, titled Reflection Boxes, and are for consideration while completing the tool and more fully when the tool has

been completed. If information is gathered using an interview, the practitioner should not read the content of the Reflection Boxes aloud. Rather, they are meant to help the practitioner reflect personally on the information collected in real time and support in the decision-making process.

## **2. Analysis Guide**

Recognizing a gap often exists between market assessment and program implementation, the following description of key components of the tools and analysis guide demonstrates how practitioners can consolidate information gathered and use that to make decisions based on market realities.

**Summary Charts:** At the conclusion of each tool individual Summary Charts help practitioners to process information from all interviews within that tool. The Summary Charts contain key themes and tool specific questions. Practitioners should complete each tool's Summary Chart once they have gathered enough evidence to make informed assessments and reflect on key themes.

After using all necessary tools, practitioners will make a decision with regard to one of the five Vocational Training Planning Questions, taking into account all the information gathered by the relevant tools. **The Decision Charts** ask practitioners to consider the program's particular capacities and constraints while providing a framework for making key specific programming decisions.

In addition to the comprehensive Decision Charts, the business, business association and microfinance tools have intermediary decision charts to help make decisions about specific linkages in that sector. When possible, even when considering a specific linkage, the practitioner should gather information from multiple potential partners and reflect on the strengths of each. To answer larger questions related to core skill selection and complementary course offerings practitioners must utilize and cross-reference information from a number of tools and then complete the separate Decision Chart.

## **3. Market Interaction Toolkit for Youth**

This toolkit contains three tools to educate and engage youth in the process of selecting a vocational track. Used properly, the toolkit can provide useful data and information and serve as a basis for vocational decision-making. It will also give programs important information about youths' backgrounds and experience when considering complementary courses.

The Youth Self Assessment and Youth Market Assessment will encourage VT program participants to think about their own abilities and interests as well as the realities of the local economy prior to selecting the core vocational skill they will study as part of a VT program. These tools will likely be used by the VT program participants *after* they have enrolled in the program. Thus, the participants will likely select their core vocational skill from among those offered in the particular VT program. After selecting a skill, the youth will use the Sector Specific Interview Guide to better understand the realities of the vocation they have chosen to study.

Each tool is followed by an analysis guide, which helps youth to reflect on what they learned and thought about during assessment exercise. The analysis guides should be conducted one-on-one between assessment facilitators and program participants. Some youth will find the assessments difficult; careful guidance will help ensure that all youth who complete the toolkit increase their market knowledge and sense of their own skills and capabilities.

### **Step 1: Youth Self-Assessment Tool and Analysis Guide**

This tool helps youth take an active role in determining which vocation they will pursue. It is designed for VT program participants. By using this tool, participants will think about and articulate information regarding their educational level, natural abilities, work history, background, health and plans for the short-term future. After completing this tool and talking with instructors, mentors and/or career

counselors, participants should be able to select a vocation which fits with their interests, skills, abilities and needs.

### **Step 2: Youth Market Assessment Tool and Analysis Guide**

The Youth Market Assessment tool allows youth to observe the market first hand and record information about local business and employment trends through a series of guided, small-group activities.

### **Step 3: Sector Specific Interview Tool and Analysis Guide**

After using Tool 1 and Tool 2 to aid youth with skill selection, the **Sector Specific Interview** gives youth an opportunity to talk with people employed in their vocation of interest. Youth will talk directly with those active their proposed vocation to gain a better understanding of the requirements, expectations, challenges and benefits of the sector.

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The Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children works to improve the lives and defend the rights of refugee and internally displaced women and children.  
The Women's Commission is legally part of the International Rescue Committee (IRC), a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization. It receives no direct financial support from the IRC.

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