



How youth-led research surfaces gaps and influences policy in local youth workforce development systems

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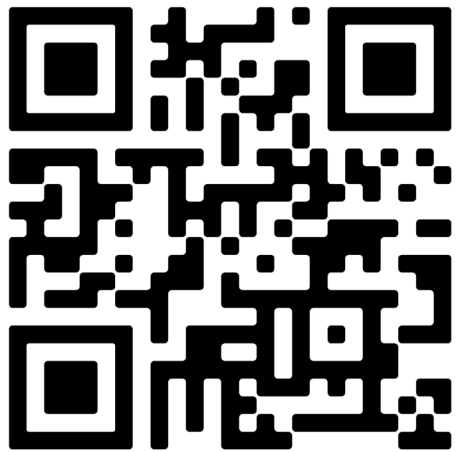
Christopher Johnstone, University of Minnesota

Evan Bloom, Root Change



Agenda

Click on the QR code
for our full session
abstracts



- **Framing** the topic
- **Paper #1:** Designing employment solutions that meet youth needs
- **Paper #2:** Inclusion and exclusion in youth economic opportunities
- **Discussant pause**
- **Paper #3:** How youth-led data leads to system strengthening
- **Paper #4:** Measuring mutual accountability to enhance youth leadership
- **Discussant** facilitated questions



Have you ever implemented a program meant to strengthen youth workforce development....

But found that it wasn't going as planned?

What happened?



The problem: Barriers that youth face in influencing workforce development systems with data....

1. **Insufficient research and evidence** for youth programming.
2. **Lack of youth capacity** for credible and rigorous research and for strengthening PYD programs.
3. Adult-led systems that **reinforce power differentials** and stifle youth voice and contribution.
4. **Barriers to channeling resources** to youth-led and youth-serving organizations and groups.

- Broadly, youth lack access to economic opportunities and knowledge resources.
- Development systems and persisting power asymmetries exclude youth.

**USAID & Consortium member
input, Co-creation Session**
June 3, 2020



What is Youth-Inclusive Implementation Research?

- ❑ It champions the leadership of implementers in research for real-time use.
- ❑ It explores how and why programs work under **real-world conditions**.
- ❑ It is participatory, iterative, and inclusive.
- ❑ It helps organizations gather data, take what they learn, and turn it into what they do, **in real-time**.





Learning to Earning *Youth Program Implications*

Center for Applied Learning and Impact
Tsega Belachew (consultant)



From Learning to Earning:

A new guide to design
employment solutions that
respond to youth needs





Why this is urgent now

Nearly 40% of youth do not find stable employment even once they are older.



Youth transitions into work have a defining and outsized impact on lifelong employability, wellbeing, economic and social contribution.

The share of people with an advanced educational level is higher among the unemployed than among the employed



International
Labour
Organization



International
Labour
Organization



Researchers on transitions to work & supports

(from Desk Study)



International
Labour
Organization



UNITED NATIONS





Researchers on transitions to work & supports

(from Desk Study)



International
Labour
Organization

"Traditionally, only one trajectory supported; potentially hindering impact. The reality for most of the global youth population is an **enormous heterogeneity and array of school-to-work trajectories**"

"Multiple transitions can be supported through integrated multi-intervention coordination and lifetime coaching" - ***currently limited***

Local relevance means program effectiveness



UNITED NATIONS

Support for those in the informal economy needed (UN) - ***currently limited***



Dominant Voices

- Macroeconomic quantitative studies
- Global North Researchers and Decision-makers studying "employment" based on their own lived experience and definitions



Missing Voices

- Youth voices: youth researchers, youth leadership in decision-making
- Contextualized understanding of intersectional identity barriers
- Stories of young people's day-to-day lived realities during the transition (qualitative data)



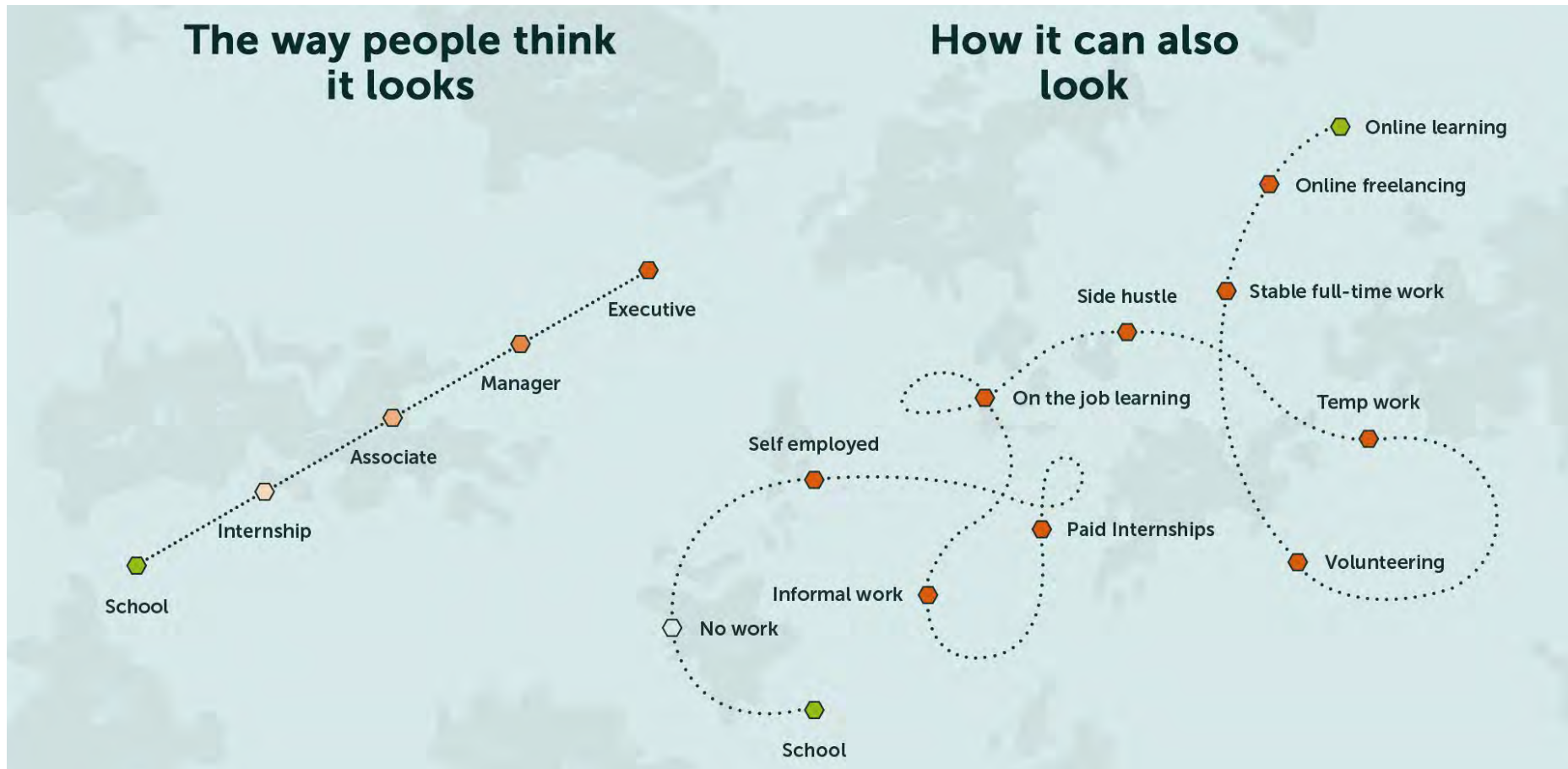


Why a learning agenda

Many experts studied the school-to-work journey focusing on an ideal

New research shows the reality = **diversified array of fluid, complex, difficult journeys** (on avg 11.6 months)

i.e. there are missing stories from missing voices we need to understand.





This suggests: decisions need to better center youth lived experiences and voices



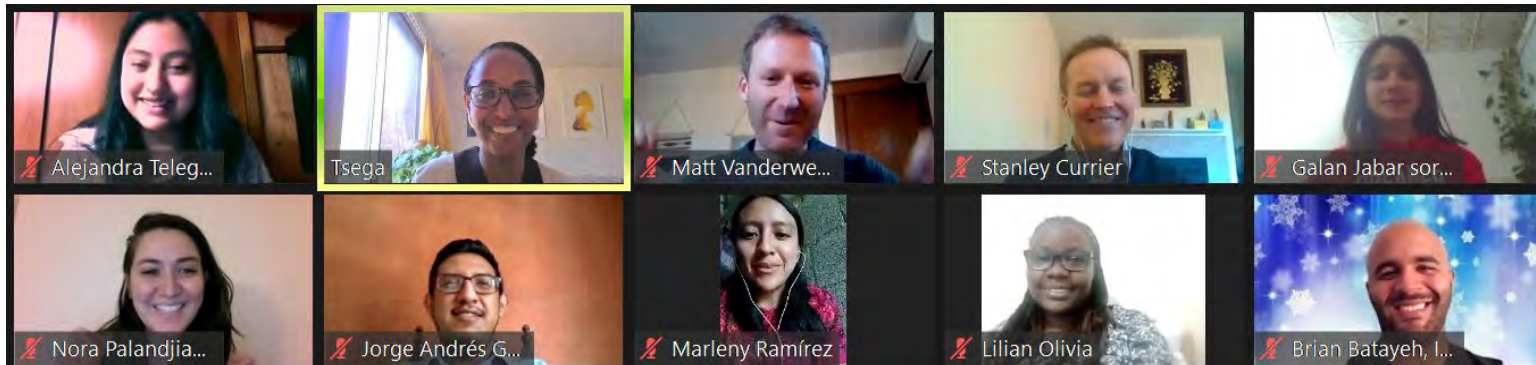
Three Country Scans:

Youth-led community-based participatory research

What **really** happens during the 11.6 months? And what supports are needed?

1078 youth surveyed; 106 youth interviewed.
Co-led by 17 youth researchers and IREX.

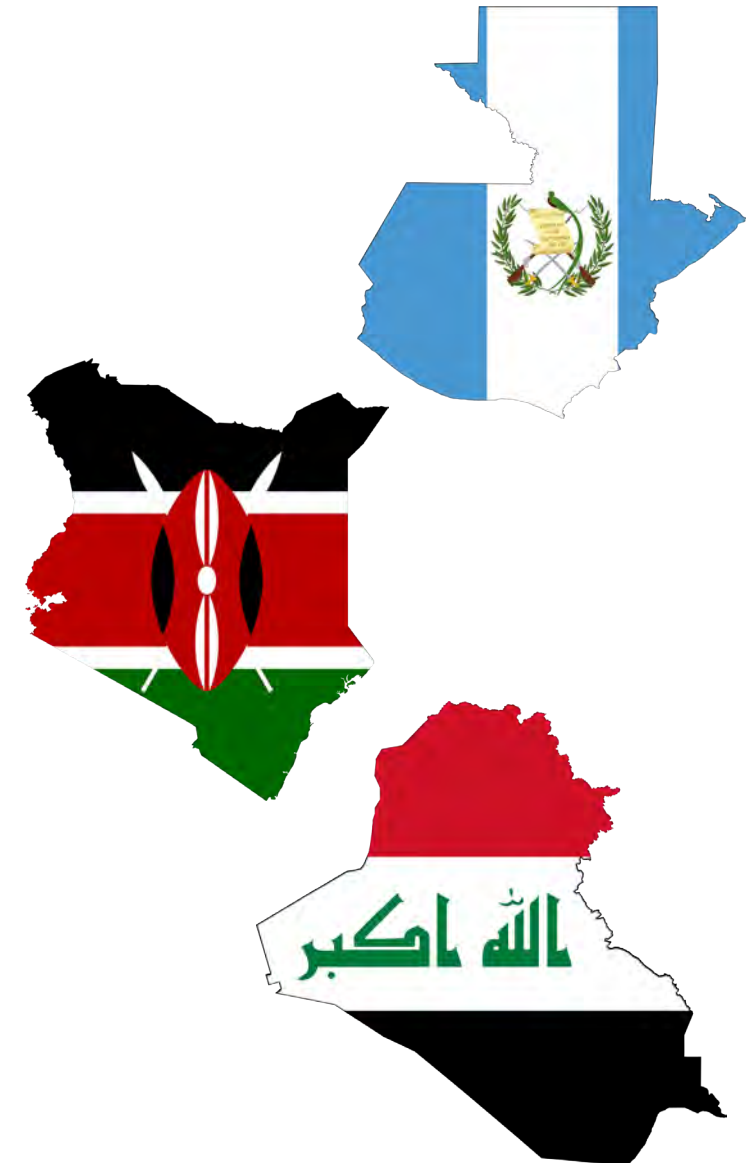
Focus: diverse tertiary education graduates.



Product #1: Desk Study

Product #2: Persona-based program design guide

Field Study Locations:
Guatemala, Kenya, and Iraq



Data-driven personas to center youth voices

- Help solution designers **empathize** with youth
- Deeply understand youth realities, **passions, feelings, frustrations, joys, motivations, desires, and challenges**

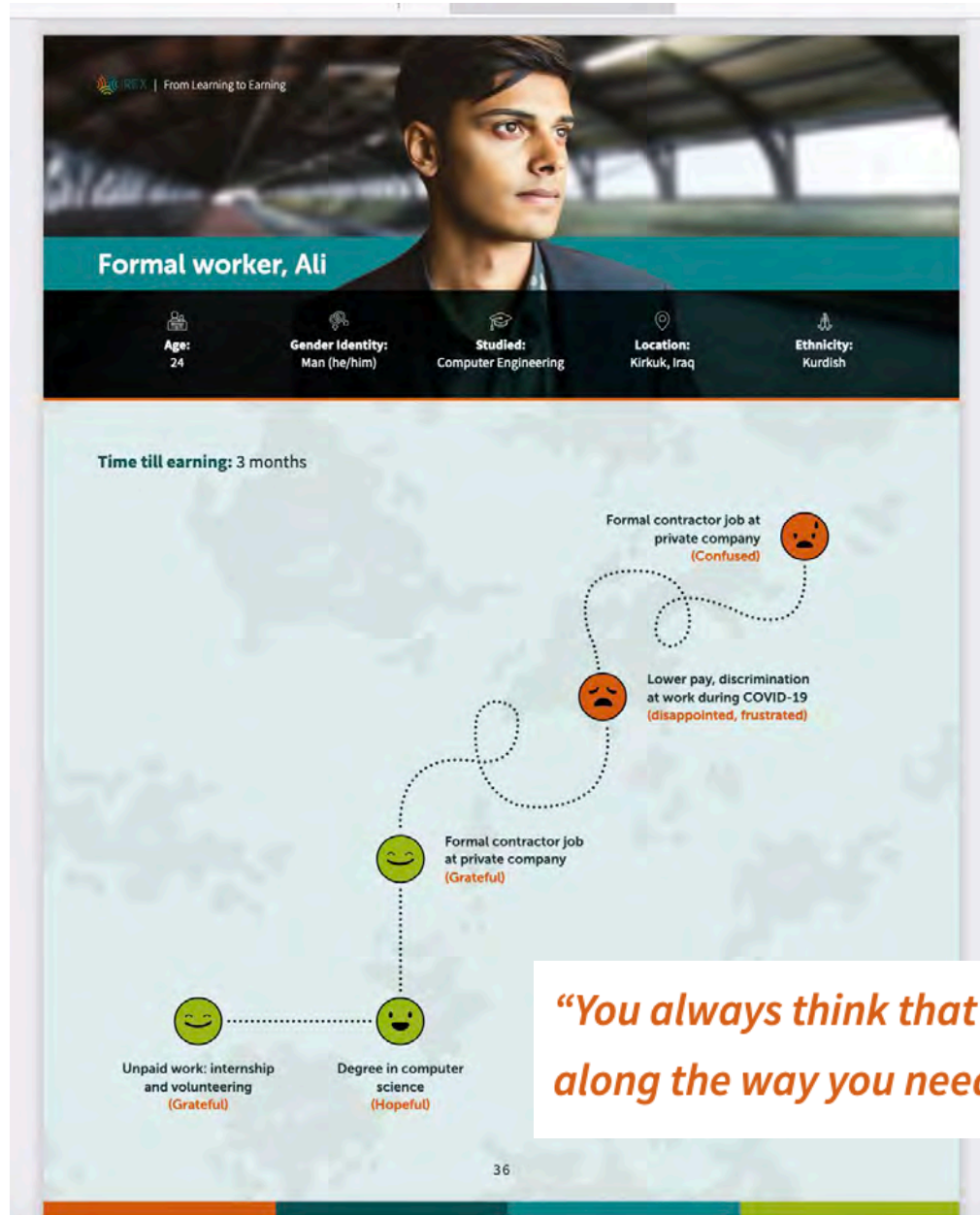


“All the women in my family and women who belong to the same feminist and activist groups as I do serve as motivation and support.”

“I thank YouTube for helping me with a lot of information in fixing electronics which is a service that I now get paid money for! “Social media for me nowadays is everything.”



Data-driven personas to center youth voices



How this persona is based on our research: \$

We selected this persona because 13% of men surveyed in Iraq (15% of respondents overall) described earning an income from formal work in their field of study. This is an uncommon path, but it is a very **expected path** by an overwhelmingly large majority of youth. On a scale of 1-10, on average those surveyed ranked the importance of doing formal work in their field of study as 8.2/10.

“You always think that you are going to work in what you studied, but it is not always like that, and along the way you need to look for income, so you have to look for any opportunity.”

Data-driven personas to center youth voices

Step 2: GENERATE IDEAS:

See examples *(in italics)* to spark your creativity, then consider the persona and recommended support to brainstorm solutions relevant for youth in your community.

- Co-creation sessions
- Youth in the room
- Tailoring for community



Dispel the myth of a seamless, singular path into work. Celebrate and support more common winding career paths:

- *For young people in schools, storytelling through videos or workshops that highlight people who took non-conventional paths to work. This can include people who pivoted from their field of study, entrepreneurs, self-employed individuals, or informal workers. Such exposure might have helped Mercy try a new path earlier.*
- *Increase storytelling, preparation, and training related to self-employment, including infusing technical self-employment, business, and financial skills into the education system to mainstream support for youth.*

What can you do to help youth in your community get exposed to stories about self-employment before their search for work?



6 things you should know:



The myth of a seamless, singular path into work can create unrealistic expectations.

#1 Redefine success for the 21st century to help young people achieve it.



Youth emotional wellbeing is directly linked to the outcomes of a young person's transition into work.

#2 Mental health likely affects young people's career success and more support is needed.



Work is not just a full-time formal job. Many youth engage in non-traditional work, informal work, self-employment, and entrepreneurship, based on exposure or necessity when their first plan, to do full-time formal work, does not yield results. Youth are interested in and would like more support to succeed in non-traditional work.

#3 Many young people are doing informal work, self-employment, and entrepreneurship but few have relevant support for it.

6 things you should know:



Informal family and friend networks, the internet, and social media facilitate youth transitions into work. Access to actionable, relevant, and timely information facilitates transitions into work.

#4 Leverage intergenerational, network, community and peer-to-peer support models.



Practical work experience can make the difference between employment and unemployment.

#5 Ensure every young person gets and can market their existing transferrable practical work skills and experiences.

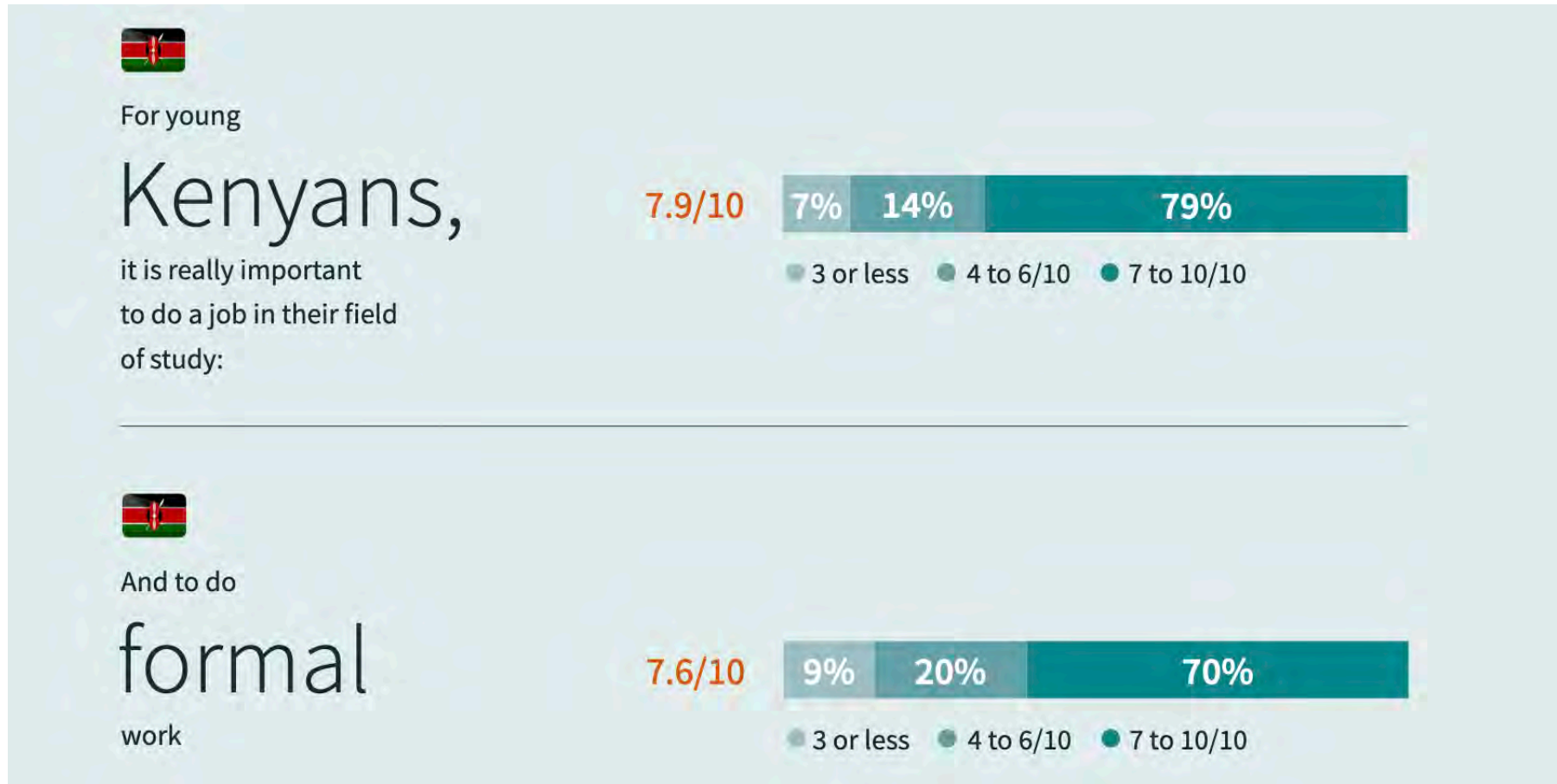


Youth experience unique socio-cultural barriers based on their intersectional¹⁰ identities, with some identity groups facing more barriers, and would benefit from customized support.

#6 Youth programs need to tailor support to address unique barriers to be inclusive.

6 things you should know: #1 Redefine Success

“Real life is very different from what you idealize.” “As youths, we live in a bubble that once you are out of school, things will fall in place. However, things don’t happen like that.”





6 things you should know: Redefine Success



“When you’re in school, you hope for the best. You expect a steady transition while in school and once you are done in school, you notice the difference on the ground.” “My views were that after school, I would get the job immediately.”

“Even though our informal business is very successful, nowadays I still feel uneasy knowing that the business has nothing to do with what I decided to study.”

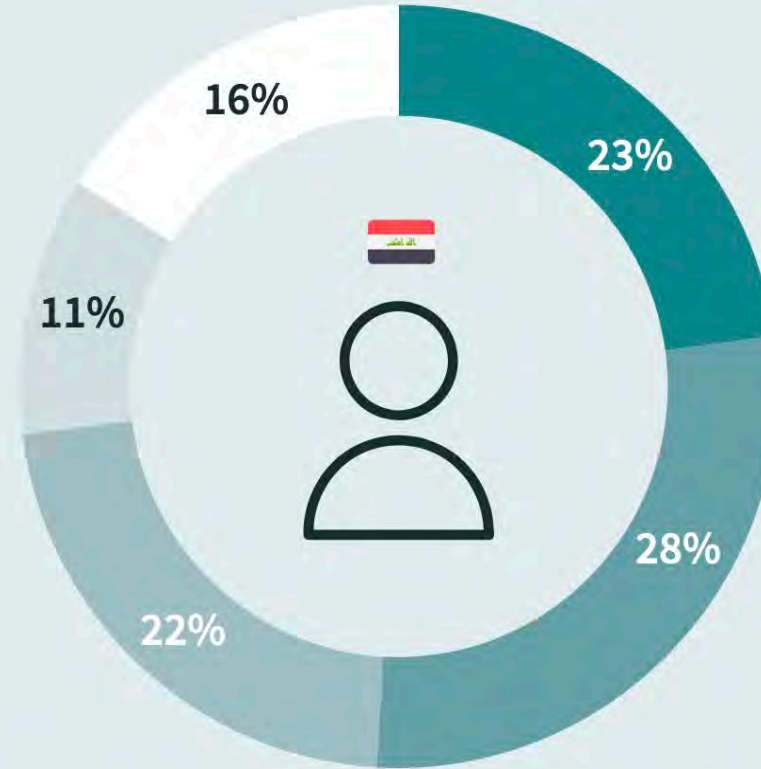
Fatema, 26, Iraq, Long-term unemployed

6 things you should know: #2 Mental Health



51%

of Iraqi youth reported that their job search affected their emotional wellbeing



● A great deal ● Quite a bit ● Somewhat ● Very little ● Not at all



81%

would like support for their emotional wellbeing. They prefer:

“When you have no job and have to be self-reliant you feel devastated and disillusioned with life, things go haywire.”



6 things you should know: #3 self-employment & work that is not formal &/or fulltime



“Throughout my education I received no lectures or preparation on how to use money. So many times, my expenses exceeded earnings and it was difficult to make ends meet. I wish I knew these ups and downs were normal when I started my business.”

“I engaged in a temporary job and was given Ksh 3000 daily. Just to get something to sustain me I continued engaging in side hustles such as fixing electronics. I am working at an electronics kiosk but still searching and I hope to get employment soon.”

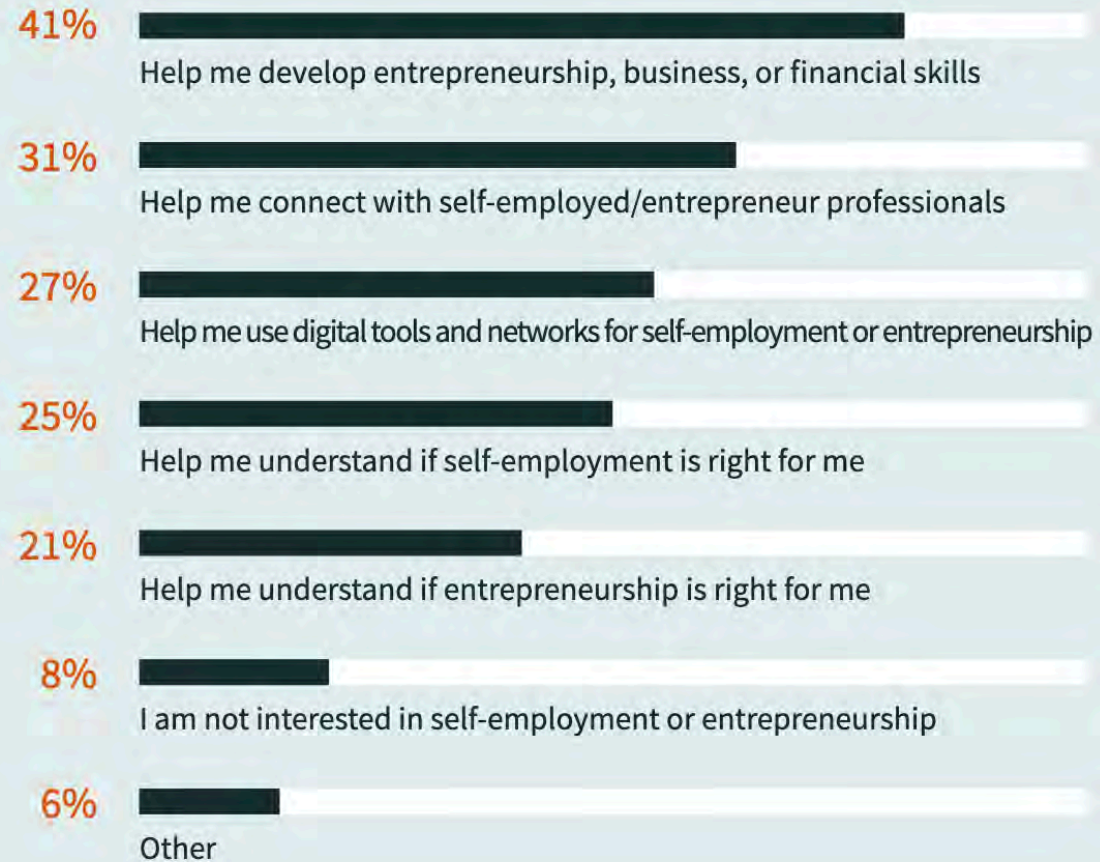
Solomon, 31, Kenya, Informal Worker

6 things you should know: #3 self-employment & work that is not formal &/or fulltime



92%

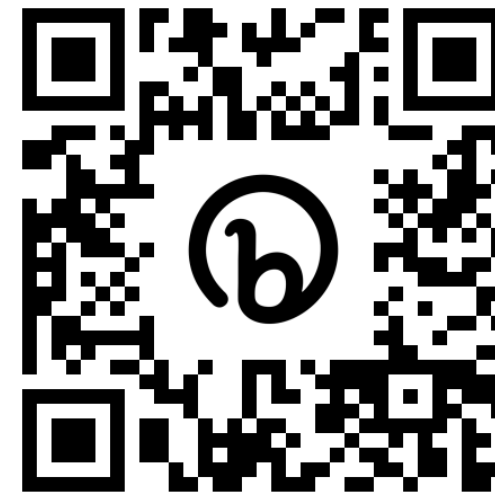
of youth surveyed told us they are interested in entrepreneurship and to succeed, they need:





So what?

- Share research power with youth to interrupt adult-youth power disparities – unlock new more responsive/relevant education and program innovations
- Share honest stories about the learning to earning journey
- Unlearn false narratives (which likely cause harm), celebrate, and support authentic journeys



<http://bit.ly/L2ELink>

Inclusion and Exclusion: Identities, Opportunities, and Barriers

A meta-synthesis of lessons learned from youth-led research on youth economic opportunities in Kenya, Guatemala, and the DRC

Mingyu Ma
Eva Kough
Casey Ortbahn
Karla Godoy



Overview

Youth Excel

- Youth Excel empowers young people & youth organizations
- Implementation research
- Partnerships with local organizations
- Issue-Based Collaborative Networks (ICONS)
- Place-based, whole-system-in-the-room collaboratives of youth-led and youth-serving organizations

This Project

- Meta-synthesis of Implementation Research (IR) findings
- Inclusion and exclusion in youth economic opportunities
- Three ICONs in Guatemala, Kenya, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).
- Commonalities and differences across ICON groups and contextualized learnings

Qualitative Document Review

Materials

- 350+ documents from Kenya, Guatemala, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo
- Youth Excel ICONs annual reports
- Quarterly reports Programmatic one-pagers
- Share-back presentations and reports
- Qualitative & quantitative raw data

Analysis

- Qualitative coding software
- Themes grouped and named based on commonalities
- 93 codes
- 7 major code groups
 - barriers, opportunities, empowerment, implementation research, collaboration, program activities, and entrepreneurship

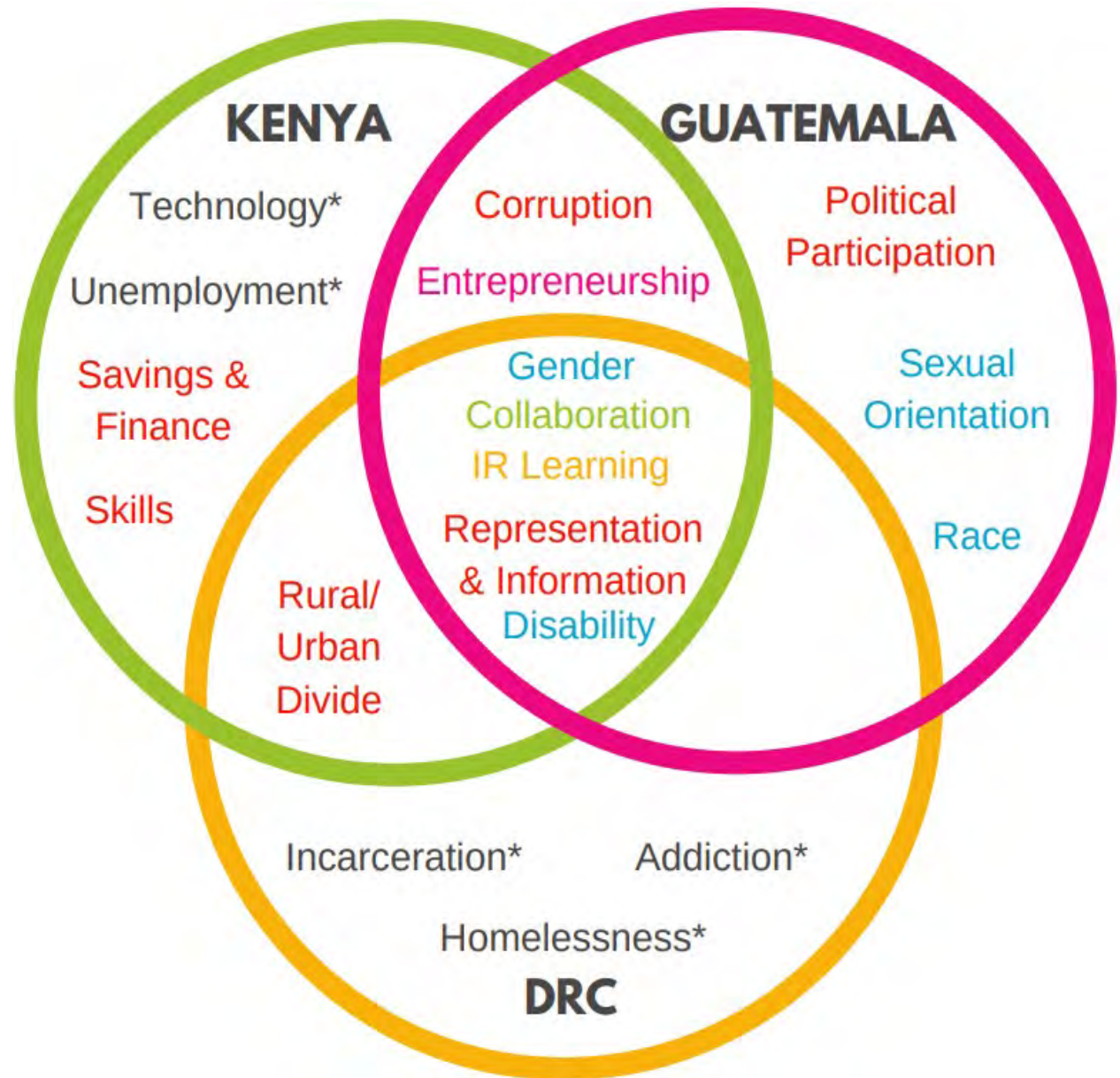
Regional and Topical Focus

Countries

- Kenya
- Guatemala
- DRC

Five Major Themes

- Structural barriers
- Identity-based barriers
- Collaboration and support
- Entrepreneurship
- Implementation research process learning



Six Key Takeaways

Representation
Matters

Certain identity
groups face
additional barriers to
employment

A reframing of
entrepreneurship
may be necessary

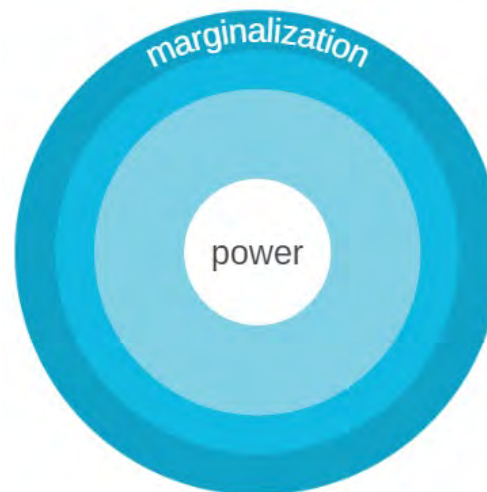
Collaboration is
critical in
overcoming barriers
to economic
inclusion

Opportunities
abound

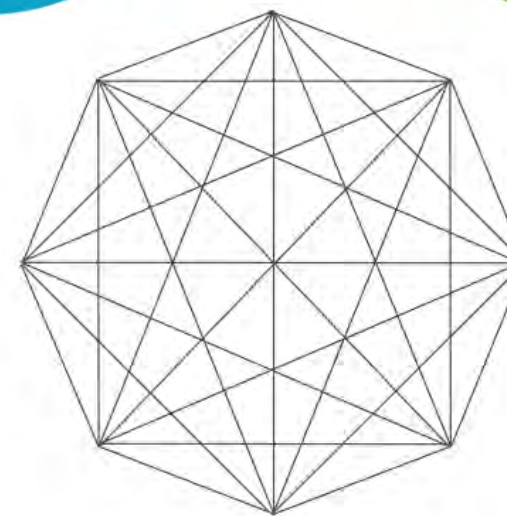
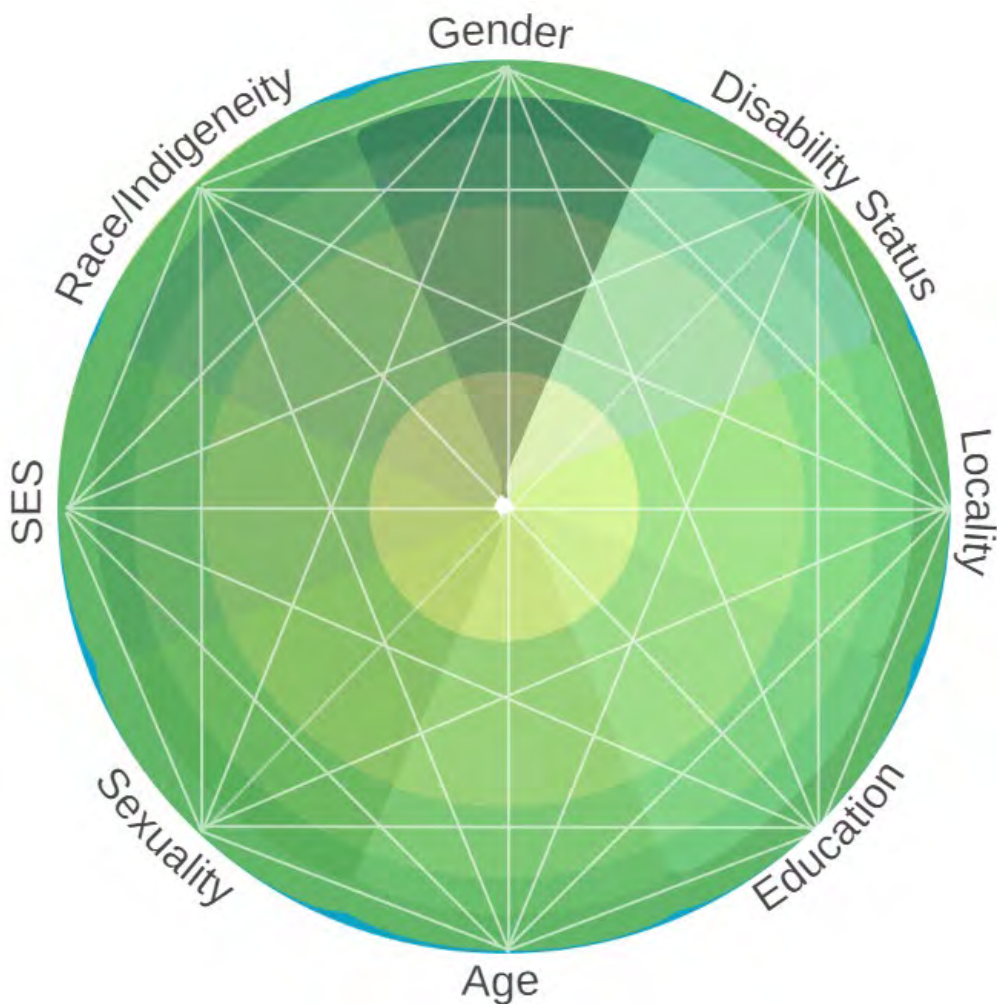
IR results are not
generalizable and
may not be
transferable

Complexity

spectrum of marginalization



identity groups



interconnectivity

Gendered Barriers

Overarching theme:

- Gender norms limit economic opportunities for young women
 - Women have lower educational attainments than men
 - Gender norms influence which skills girls pursue
 - Young women lack opportunities to build skills

“Most responses were; a belief that a woman’s biology is naturally unfavorable for some jobs, others believed that women’s role is in the kitchen, others said women are always too occupied at home thus no time for office work, naturally women will never equal men, women are dishonest and secretive to work with among others.”

- Dala Spaces, Kenya

Entrepreneurship in Three Contexts

- Entrepreneurship is informed by:
 - Lack of opportunities
 - The illusion of choice

Entrepreneurship as an action that generates independence and empowers the individual, this individual needs to have access to choices, they have to be able to choose.

Through analysis, it is understood that many participants chose to own a business **simply out of necessity**. They don't have options outside of taking action. Due to structural barriers, they **don't have choices other than creating their own business and surviving under less than ideal situations.**

Collaboration

Benefits

- Build trust and to disseminate and share information (*Nyalenda Bread Power, Kenya*)
- Create networks of mutual support between already existing groups (*Arise and Shine, Kenya*)
- Share interests, skills, and capabilities (*RIDER, Guatemala*)
- Create public awareness around different issues (*WISE Kenya, Kenya*)
- Lighten the weight of challenges and barriers faced by any particular organization (*Ignitus, DRC*).

Programs and Government Sectors

“... entonces es el objetivo trabajar transversalmente con la oficina municipal de la mujer con la oficina municipal de planificación por ejemplo para asegurar que los proyectos de desarrollo sean accesibles”

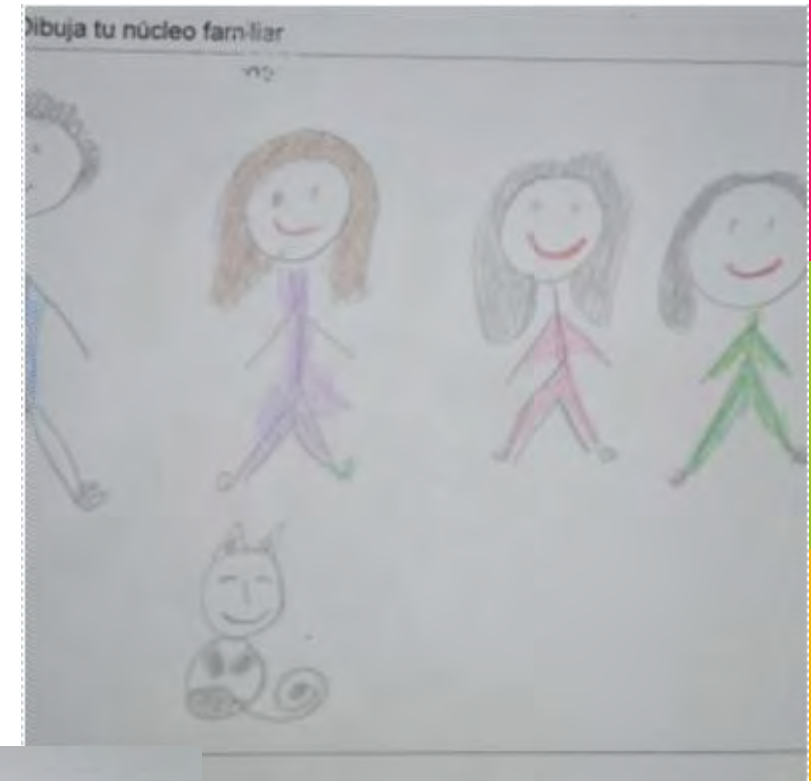
(so it is the objective to work transversally with the municipal women's office, with the municipal planning office, for example, to ensure that development projects are accessible)

- Enseñame a Volar, Guatemala.

Opportunities for IR

Innovative data collection methods

- Art as a data collection method to understand the emotions and perceptions of female YWDs.
- IR data also show that empathy can go a long way in making IR participants feel comfortable during the IR process.



Limitations, Challenges, and Adjustments

Selection Bias

- ICONs selection biases can create ungeneralizable information
 - **Vidas Paralelas in Guatemala interviewed mostly people with higher education degrees on themes related to sexual orientation.**
- ICON group participants in Kenya noticed they didn't have equal gender representation in their initial round of interviews and focus group discussions and decided to deliberately seek out women so that they could have more gender equality.

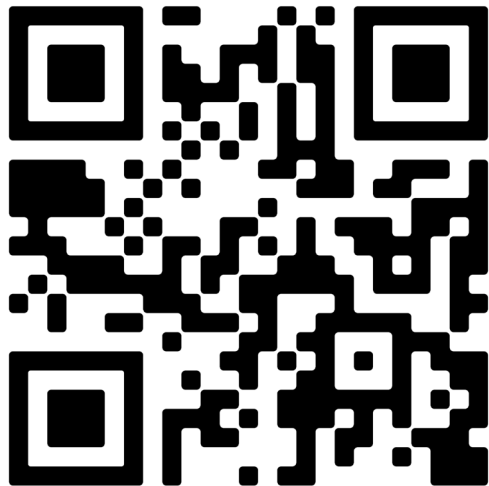
Research Design

How research is designed can limit usable information:

- One group in Guatemala found men are more comfortable talking about gender, self-care, and sexuality when they are around women than when they are around men
- A group in Kenya also found women tend to contribute less when there are male participants present compared to when there are only female participants.
- Both groups adjusted data collection after these lessons learned

Learn more here:

Full reports available on
YouthLead.org here:



PAUSE - Discussant Q&A

Jessica-Louise Lopez, USAID Center for Education





How intersectional, youth-led data leads to system strengthening in Kisumu, Kenya

CIES Highlighted Session: How youth-led research surfaces gaps and influences policy in local youth workforce development systems

February 20, 2023 – 9:30-11:00am



The problem

And our Theory of Change



Why doesn't research translate into practice?

Youth Excel Consortium Brainstorm, 14 January 2021

- **Failure to engage implementers/practitioners in research;** and to translate practice to research.
 - Research is separate; understanding of 'credibility and rigor'; misalignment of goals
 - Power & colonial roots. 'Objective' research ignores local/indigenous knowledge.
- **Research products** aren't useful/accessible/in local languages.
- Local organizations **don't know how to apply research** to daily activities
- **Timing** & shifting priorities

Our early North Star: Learning how to **translate research into practice *and* **practice into research****



Excepts from Youth Excel theory of change

IF...	THEN...	SO THAT....
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Youth and youth-led organizations conduct IR and are linked to each other.

Policy-makers and duty-bearers engage with youth and buy-in to youth-led research.

Youth-inclusive knowledge, learning, and evidence is shared broadly.

Youth-led initiatives achieve stronger results by aligning their efforts.

More policy-makers and donors engage with youth-led initiatives.

Youth-produced knowledge informs policy.

Adults and youth co-lead in program and policy decisions.

Youth co-lead to shape local and global development decisions.



Issue-Based Collaborative Networks

A solution that we tested





About the ICON model

Have you ever....

- Wished you had a way to ensure youth work and youth voices are elevated and supported by decision-makers?
- Realized that social impact projects work in silos and are too fragmented **to have large scale impact**? Wished there was a way to strengthen collaboration in place of competition?
- Thought it would be valuable to improve your programs through **collaborative learning and data**?



What is an ICON Activity?

- Issue-Based Collaborative Network
- A place-based, whole-system-in-the-room collaborative that convenes to collectively tackle a shared problem.

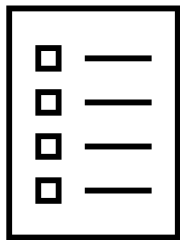
Tackling Systemic Challenges Together: Enhancing youth work readiness in Kisumu, Kenya

Youth Excel's Issue-Based Collaborative Network (ICON)

ICON participants are youth-led and youth-serving organizations and groups. They develop learning goals to gather data about implementation factors such as feasibility, stakeholder and participant relevance, reach, effectiveness, and more. They each select appropriate research methodologies such as surveys, focus groups, interviews, and/or observations.



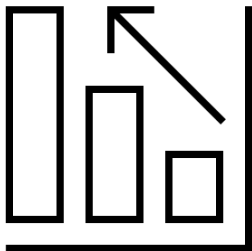
Key components of an ICON



Shared **youth development issue area**
and learning question



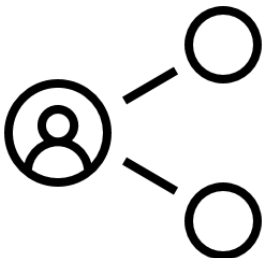
Iterative micro-grants for
Implementation Research projects



Collaborative data analysis
and **learning**



Intergenerational collaboration
engaging **Adult Allies**



Knowledge mobilization
and advocacy, including
Data Summits



Achieng's Story

- Achieng is the founder of "Youth enterprise Kisumu" which places youth into **meaningful internships**.
- Youth who take part in these internships are more **likely to get a job** than those who don't.
- She can **only support a handful of youth** a time and would like to be able to do more but lacks the capacity and networks to do so.
- Achieng is excited to be a part of the Kisumu ICON and hopes the initiative will help her increase **her impact** and provide recommendations **to achieving collective impact** for the youth in Kisumu.



Frank's Story



- Frank is a **senior officer at the directorate of Women, Youth and PWDs Affairs in Kisumu county.**
- While the county had a number of initiatives to create youth employment, there wasn't anything he felt that had a **sustainable effect on the problem of youth unemployment.**
- His friend at United Millers often complained about the challenges they face with having to **retrain hires fresh out of school since they lacked the skills** to succeed at work.



What do we want to learn?

We need to know if our project beneficiaries are practicing the skills they learnt so that we can adapt our training strategies.

Arise and Shine

We need to know if the skills we are providing are necessary for the job market so that we can strengthen the effectiveness of our program.

Data Spaces

We need to know the market skills gap so that we can design a more relevant digital skills program for the youth from the slums within Nyalenda.

Nyalenda Bread Power

We need to know if social entrepreneurship programs are a priority for youth with disability so that we determine if this is a suitable program to start.

Njema Disabled Self Help Group

We need to know how youth in Nyando subcounty can use digital skills to amplify their businesses so that we can understand how they can maximize profit.

Sustainable Rural Initiatives

We need to know how many youths are willing to start savings so that we can build their capacity on savings and link them to loaning/ financing opportunities.

Young Women's Christians Association (YWCA)

We need to have accurate data on unemployed youth, women and PWDs in Kisumu County in order to develop a job placement strategy to link them with available job opportunities.

Youth Alive Kenya

We want to know the barriers to growth for Youth-Led sustainable enterprises so that we can come up with strategies tailored to addressing the barriers appropriately.

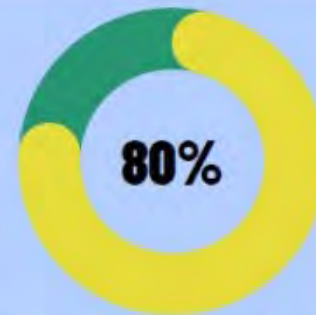
Wise Kenya

Arise and Shine

Supporting youth in agriculture



60% of the youth respondents perceive agriculture as 'a job for the dirty man'.



80% of youth mentioned lacking skills in financial management, business management and general agribusiness skills.

Youth are Ready for Collaboration

98% of the youth respondents feel that there is a **need for the creation of a farmers' network** and are willing to collaborate in a farmers' network. Of this 98%, 70% are women. At present there is a silo effect with each piece of the value chain (production, value addition, marketing etc.) working autonomously.

Lack of Proper Training on Agriculture for Youth

There is a **lack of agricultural education facilities in Muhoroni contributing to youth agricultural skills gap**. In the Muhoroni area, there is no local agricultural institution, so youth have limited avenues to acquiring skills in Agriculture. The nearest facility is in Homa Bay which would be costly to access. 80% of youth mentioned lacking skills in financial management, business management and general agribusiness skills.

YWCA Kenya Empowering women and girls to access microfinance

Desire for Financial Institutions Linkages



8 out of 10 youth want to be linked with financial institutions

80% of the groups are willing to be linked with financial institutions as long as the terms and conditions from the MFIs are friendly.

Group savings are not common with youth



Only 33% of the youth in groups are actively participating in savings

Through the study only 33% of the youth in groups are actively participating in savings within the groups. These were those who belonged to groups that have IGAs within the group. Lack of a sustainable income was a major hindrance to youth and women consistency in saving within the groups.



How did the ICON fill systems gaps

And what incremental systems / policy changes are we seeing so far?

Strengthened systems & sustainable investments

Data and findings, collected and shared locally, are relevant and powerful!

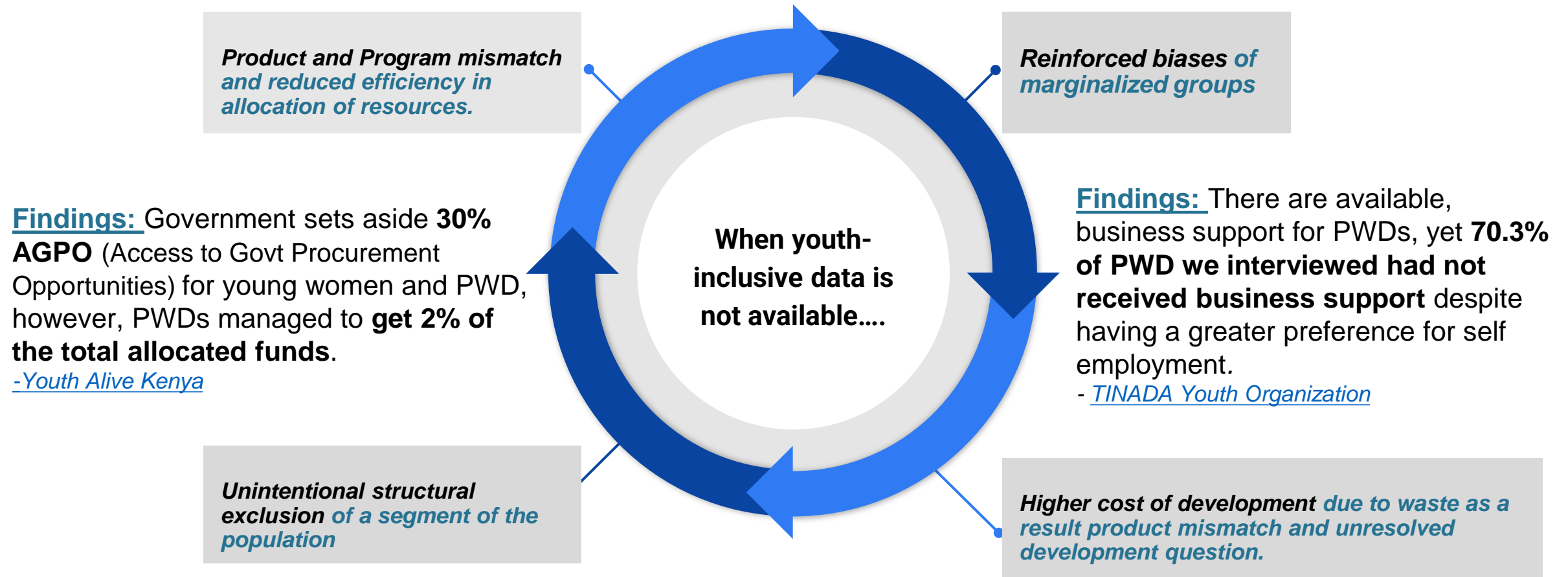
Kisumu, Kenya:
Issue-based Collaborative Network



Illustrative systems strengthening results:

- Local organization [Youth Alive Kenya](#) entered into an MOU with a USAID flagship agriculture program to provide training in two counties.
- Local organization [WISE \(Women in Social Enterprise\)](#) finalized an agreement with County Government to serve on a Country Technical Working Group.
- Local organization [Arise and Shine](#) formalized a partnership with UK-based development organization to serve as demo farm and receive resources.

Key example: Local knowledge production & inclusive data identifies system barriers





Video

Sustainable Rural Initiatives (SRI)

Updated: More systems strengthening results

New Partnerships:

Digital Opportunity Trust
I&M Bank
NAIROBITS
Authentium

For example:

SRI's MOU with
Authentium brings better
support to farmers with
rice grading machines in
Nyando sub-county.

Policy engagement:

Co-leading youth policy coordination for Kisumu and Siaya Counties, with National Youth Council (NYC) and Kenya Institution of Public Policy and Research and Analysis (KIPPRA)

– **SRI and Youth Alive! Kenya**

Joined Kisumu Gender Sector Working Group
--(**WISE Kenya**).

Co-hosted Entrepreneurship Clinics and Trade Exhibitions with the County Department of Trade and the Millennial Legacy Foundation.

–**Youth Alive! Kenya**

Promoting Youth Participation through Mutual Accountability

CIES, Feb 2023

Evan Bloom
Root Change

For Today:

- Introduction to the Youth Excel Equity Index and metrics
- Brief look at program activities and results
- Implications for future program design

Equity Measures



Leadership

Local YLOs are able to:

- Set strategic priorities
- Lead decision making
- Define success
- Are seen as subject matter experts
- Feel empowered



Connectivity

Local YLOs are able to:

- Develop purposeful linkages
- Leverage current relationships to a broader network
- Work together to solve problems



Mutuality

Local YLOs are able to:

- Develop strong bonds of mutual trust & respect
- Are open with one another
- Are responsive
- Work together to solve problems



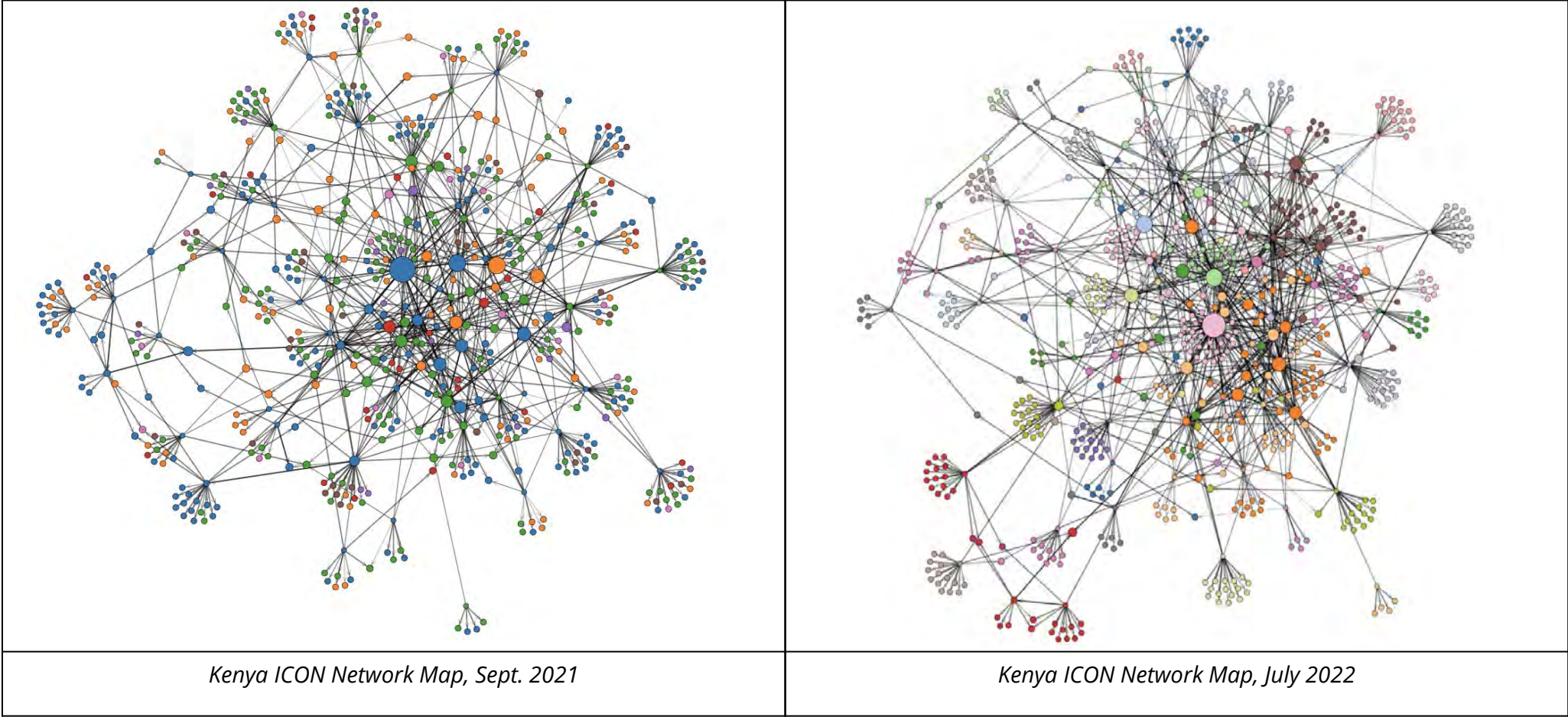
Financing

Local YLOs:

- Are confident in the local funding landscape
- Have access to local financing & resources
- Are becoming less dependent on external sources of money



Kisumu Kenya: Visualizing relationship dynamics



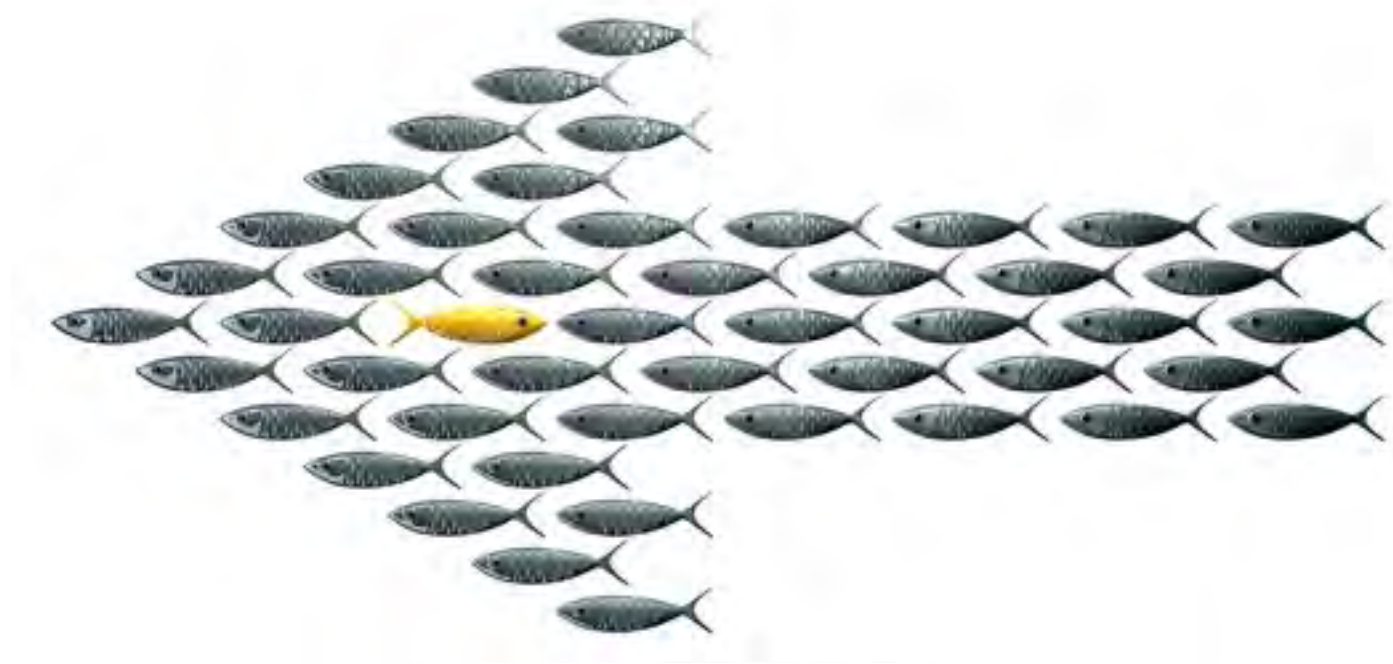


Program Activity: 5 Working Together Sessions

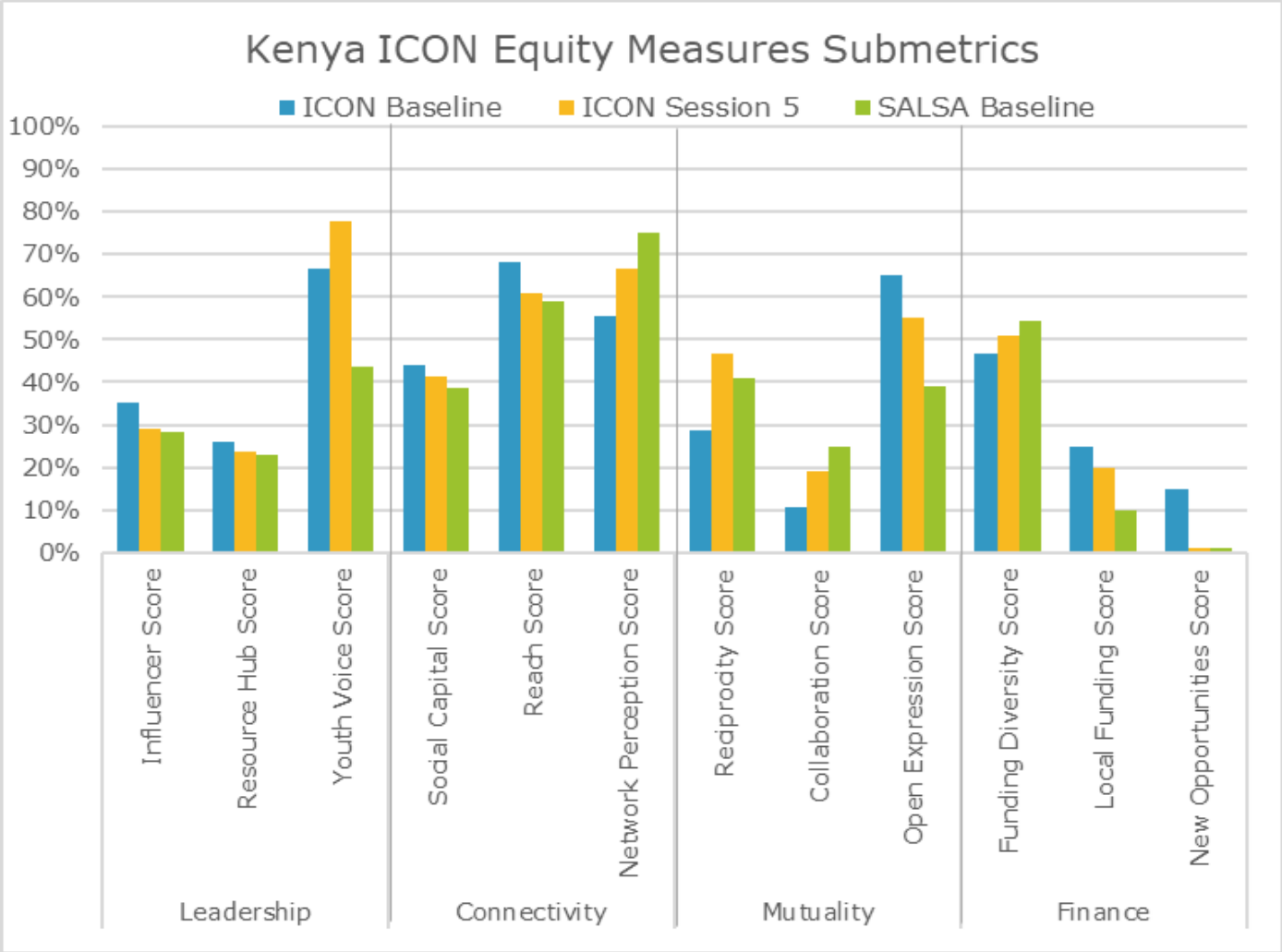
- 2-5 day workshops every 6-8 weeks
- 10 youth organizations
- Intensive training on IR, GESI, KM and Storytelling
- Intentional team building and cohesion activities
- Sessions based on capacity development needs assessment e.g. collaboration, partnerships
- Data Summit with adult allies

Swimming against the current...

Fighting against preferential attachment...



Kisumu, Kenya: Submetrics



Implications

Things to keep...

- Foster a culture of collaboration
- Provide resources and support
- Use data to inform decision-making
- Showcase the work of Youth-led organizations

Questions raised...testable hypotheses

- Create program touchpoints with 100 to 300 organizations
- Turn adult youth allies (and other key stakeholders) into *full collaborators and project participants*
- Proactively create “micro shocks” and stressors that necessitate courageous conversations around equity data!



Discussant – Facilitated Q&A

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Thank you!

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