

Connecting the dots: Investing in youth with disabilities for enhanced access to employment in 4 districts of rural Uganda, End Term Project Evaluation

Executive Summary

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The EU-funded “Connecting the Dots” project run by Sightsavers in Uganda was implemented in collaboration with Uganda National Association of the Blind (UNAB) and the National Union of Disabled People of Uganda (NUDIPU) and completed in August 2016. The project sought to facilitate access to vocational skills for 324 youths with disabilities and to promote their ‘acceptance’ as productive employees by their families, vocational institutions, employers and the general public. The evaluation was commissioned to assess the extent to which the project had achieved these results and to document lessons learnt.

The evaluation used a range of tools, namely: focus group discussions with direct beneficiaries and their organisations; key informant interviews with project leaders, Disabled Peoples’ Organisations (DPOs) - including Blind peoples’ Organisation (BPOs), leaders of relevant government departments and vocational training institutes; case studies; and direct observation. In addition to the secondary data provided by the project, the evaluation generated statistical data through a random survey covering more than 20% of the 324 direct beneficiaries.

From the analysis of the data generated, the evaluation concludes that the project succeeded in meeting its objectives and has impacted positively on the lives of the youth with disabilities and their families. The project was successful in addressing both the practical challenges of individual persons with disabilities as well as the institutional barriers that inhibit their full participation in the socio-economic life of their communities, an approach that ensured that both economic empowerment and inclusion of persons with disabilities could be achieved. A summary of achievements as set out in Sightsavers’ rating scheme against the seven evaluation criteria is provided in **Table 1** below.

Table 1: Rating assessment of the evaluation criteria used

Evaluation Criteria	Evaluation findings	Rating
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Evaluation Criteria	Evaluation findings	Rating
Relevance: extent to which project is aligned to priorities & policies of beneficiaries recipient government and donors.	Overall rating on <i>relevance</i> criteria is “ excellent ”. Rating on specific issues is provided below: Alignment with local and international policies and priorities on disability and employment. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Sufficiently aligned with Uganda government strategy on vocational training for the youth as per the Disability Act 2006 and the National Disability Policy (NDP). – Well linked to government economic programs, i.e. youth livelihood program and women’s entrepreneurship fund. – It is line with UNESCO’s policy objectives on demand-driven non-formal vocational training for marginalised youths¹. 	
	Alignment with needs and priorities of youth with disabilities in Uganda: Both UNAB and NUDIPU consider it a model on vocational skills training and employment that can be replicated nationally.	
Effectiveness: the extent to which the objectives have been achieved and the anticipated results have been realised.	Overall score on effectiveness criteria is ‘ excellent ’: Rating on specific questions are: Engagement with different levels of government to achieve project objectives: Significant engagement of district-based DPOs and government - <i>but limited involvement with all three</i> ² <i>key national-level stakeholders</i> . The overall rating of excellent is based on achievement of project goals as stipulated in the logframe.	
	Extent to which unforeseen challenges were overcome Minimum education requirements in VTIs was addressed by tailoring trainings to the needs of youth with disabilities. This was, however, done <i>outside mainstreamed VIT processes limiting impact</i> .	
	Gender considerations Gender balance among trainees achieved - <i>although systematic long-term gender sensitive strategies were not very visible</i> .	
	To what extent was learning from the Mid-Term Review (MTR) incorporated into the project? Rated as ‘ excellent ’ with most of the recommendations and this contributed to the overall achievements of the project.	

¹ United National Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, Uganda.

² Based on views expressed by NUDIPU, UNAB and the national ministry responsible for disability

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	<p>Access to financial services Access to financial services was addressed through Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) and linking the youth to mainstream government programs. The evaluation considered these measures sufficient to meet needs of trainees.</p>	
<p>Efficiency: the extent to which results have been delivered with the least costly resources possible, and the manner in which resources have been efficiently managed and governed in order to produce results.</p>	<p>Overall assessment of efficiency was ‘excellent’: Assessment of links with existing government programmes – Strong links to DPO and district governments – seen from contributions in office space and voluntary time provided by members of DPOs – DPOs have lobbied for access to resources from mainstream government economic programs.</p>	
	<p>Was the project implemented in a timely manner with resources used according to plan? Implemented with minimal costs and targets achieved within project timeline and with no overspends despite fluctuations in exchange rates.</p>	
	<p>How were management and governance structures established in the project? Operational decisions made at project level and involved members of DPOs at district level. National partners were informed of activities in progress.</p>	
<p>Impact: the long term change or effects (positive or negative) that have occurred, or will occur, as a result of the project or programme, i.e. what difference has the project or programme made to peoples’ lives, to relevant systems or development</p>	<p>Overall rating for impact was ‘Excellent’: Were employment opportunities for youth with disabilities improved? At least 98%³ (Chart 1 below) of the trainees are earning an income, compared to 41% before project.</p>	
	<p>Changes (negative or positive) on youth with disabilities as a result of the project. – Positive changes in attitude on disability with 98% of those surveyed⁴ reporting an improvement in attitudes and 80% improvement in their environment – There were unplanned social spill overs, including marriages and being elected to political positions.</p>	
	<p>Changes the project had on the perception of the working capacity of youth with disabilities. FGDs with parents of trainees, VTI leaders and employers suggest improved attitudes on the youth with disabilities in regards to their work potential.</p>	
	<p>Extent to which the project has improved the</p>	

³ Based on random survey of beneficiaries as part of evaluation tools

⁴ Ibid (As above)

Evaluation Criteria	Evaluation findings	Rating
conditions?	<p>capacity of the project partners The capacities of eight district-based DPOs significantly strengthened while the two national DPOs indicated that there were limited investments in their capacities. VTI capacities improved.</p>	
<p>Sustain-ability: whether benefits of the project or programme are likely to continue after donor funding has ceased.</p>	<p>Overall rating of sustainability is “satisfactory”: Contribution to systemic changes leading to improvement in youth employment. Skills training processes, involvement of employers, job fairs and awareness processes systematically improved employment opportunities for trainees.</p>	
	<p>Likelihood of trainees to gain/remain in employment in the future? The trainees will sustain their gains since most of them are self-employed, and besides, employers, parents and communities have been sensitized. However, training was outside mainstream and level of benefit can reduce when project activities end.</p>	
	<p>Likelihood of DPOs/BPOs continuing at the same or improved level of activity DPO activities linked mostly to project funding and there is need for more strategic capacity support to ensure they will continue to function effectively</p>	
	<p>Likelihood of VTIs continuing disability inclusive training programmes The VTIs will require that parents pay for their children in these institutions for them to sustain training for YWDs. Limited success in mainstreaming youth training into VTI programmes</p>	
<p>Scalability / replic'ity: the scope and for the project to be suitable for replication or scale up.</p>	<p>What are the lessons from project and which elements are suitable for future? Linking youth to formal training institutions is innovative and can be replicated although supporting inclusion in mainstream courses would have been a better experience to scale-up. Other experiences like job fairs, training of institutions on disability and provision of start-up kits are all replicable.</p>	

Evaluation Criteria	Evaluation findings	Rating
<p>Coherence/co-ord. extent to which proj. co-ordinated with other similar initiatives & degree of internal coherence</p>	<p>To what extent did the project create synergies with other similar actors and agencies? Coherent with other initiatives by public and private actors in the Albertine Region⁵ to prepare youth for oil-sector growth. In line with other Sightsavers' projects in the thematic areas related to inclusive education and empowerment of persons with disabilities. Synergy with govt plans to improve skill for the youth and to promote access to livelihood opportunities.</p>	

Given that the project received a positive mid-term review as well as an encouraging Results Oriented Monitoring (ROM) report commissioned by the European Union (EU) and that phase two has already been approved by the EU, it should be no surprise to learn that the evaluation found the project to have been very successful. As a consequence, the project has been given an **excellent** rating for its overall performance. It has enabled all the intended 324 direct beneficiaries to gain vocational training, the overwhelming majority of whom are now earning far more than they were before (this in a context of high youth unemployment) and who were in turn found to be benefitting their families (i.e. an additional 1,620 indirect beneficiaries). Secondly, vocational training institutions (VTIs) have become more open and welcoming to youths with disabilities, and this acceptance is expected to continue, with the continued lobbying by persons with disabilities through their organisations and representatives in the local governance structures. Finally; district DPOs have become stronger, energised with a more vibrant membership and better able and more confident in fighting for their members' rights. This latter achievement will ensure that the benefits generated by the project will be sustained.

Key factors in the project's success were found to be the way in which relationships were built and maintained with the various key stakeholders; the very extensive use of voluntary labour, that both kept costs down and embedded the project within the 'donating' institutions (largely local government and DPOs); and its twin-track approach of direct support to youths with disabilities in accessing vocational training alongside the addressing of some of the wider social and institutional factors that hold PWD back.

The evaluation recommends that:

- New and creative measures are introduced to promote access to mainstream VTI courses for youths with disabilities. These could include scholarships provided by local government or provisions for partial scholarships provided in the next phase of the project.
- More awareness should be created about the special entry points available for persons with disabilities to join government-run tertiary institutions, including VTIs.

⁵ Western part of Uganda, along Lake Albert, considered to have high natural oils potentials.

Parents should be sensitised and encouraged to pay tuition for their children in these institutions.

- Further measures are taken to entrench disability access audits in public structures, support systems and quality assurance. Improving the quality of support will ensure that structures like ramps meet acceptable and uniform standards.
- A conversation is opened up with national DPOs and the government department responsible for disability to encourage them to take up these issues of PWD access to, and participation in, vocational training. .
- The roll-out of phase 2 of the project are used as a means for establishing a structured engagement with DPOs at national level.
- The engagement with DPOs is extended and systematised into a more structured and organised program of DPO capacity development.