Young Entrepreneurs Bring Skills to Uganda’s Upper Secondary Classroom, Smoothing Workforce Entry and Raising Incomes

Context
Uganda has the world’s youngest population, a free universal secondary education system, and low unemployment. Yet 68 percent of youths were unemployed in 2012, entrepreneurship training in secondary education was theoretical, and the transition from school to work lacked a formal structure.

In 2002, the government instituted entrepreneurship in secondary schools (becoming the first to do so in Africa). Seven years later, the curriculum did not have practical, hands-on training and clear private sector links. Rote memorization and cramming for tests remained the basis of learning, and the resulting skills gap fueled growth in the informal sector.

Of the 32 percent employed youths, “68 percent of young men and 83 percent of young women are either self-employed or unpaid family workers” (World Bank 2015). Informal work is truncating the opportunities for youth to acquire skills and is making young Ugandans highly vulnerable to poverty.

This young population is expected to drive a twofold expansion of the workforce in the next 20 years. Raising the productivity of Uganda’s youth through education and training is key.

Development Challenge
The challenge for Uganda was addressing the mismatch between education and employment opportunities and establishing a replicable, effective, and cost-efficient skills training curriculum.

Intervention
The Educate! Experience, implemented by Educate!—a U.S.-based nonprofit—is an experience-based education program that addresses the mismatch between education and employment opportunities in Uganda. The program focuses on three areas: student skills development, teacher training, and advising on national policy. Educate! Scholars, a select group of secondary school students, are provided with skills training in leadership, entrepreneurship, and workforce readiness, along with mentorship to start real businesses at school. The Educate! Experience program is delivered by young entrepreneurs, called Mentors. As part of their work in schools, Mentors are also engaged in a business accelerator program, where they receive advanced business support and capital for their enterprises. The teacher training intervention offered by Educate! provides teachers with practical training in student-centered teaching methods to help develop students’ skills in critical thinking, problem solving, confidence building, and resource mobilization. A final component of Educate! activities includes advocating to high-level stakeholders for skills-based education methods to be integrated into Uganda’s national education system, as well as in the education systems of other Sub-Saharan African countries (Kwauk and Robinson 2016, 5).
Delivery Challenges

This delivery note analyzes key implementation challenges and examines how they were overcome.

- **Skills transfer.** The method to deliver skills to youth exiting upper secondary school was up for debate in Uganda. The Educate! after-school training for teachers and administrators proved ineffective in the classroom and in changing policy but effective at creating communities of practice (known as Experience Associations) for interactive-learning methods and project-based learning. The delivery cost of Educate! also led schools to opt for less effective but cheaper options.

- **Project design.** The government intended to raise the productivity of its informal sector and to overcome the sector’s credit constraints. Educate! had to demonstrate a tangible difference in the lives of its graduates as well as its capacity to scale exponentially while retaining quality. The program had to plan for broad access to mobile phones and limited access to the Internet.

Addressing Delivery Challenges

The following steps were taken to mitigate the delivery challenges related to **skills transfer:**

- Refined programming and delivery model by focusing on five components:
  - Leveraging the existing structures and systems of formal (public, private, and religious) secondary schools—creating structural efficiencies while developing in situ capacities.
  - Focusing on leadership, workforce readiness, and entrepreneurial education—creating a structured transition from school to work.
  - Providing a hands-on, experience-based approach—instilling learning by doing.
  - Including a mentoring component—bringing demonstrable success to the classroom.
  - Creating an open-source curriculum—facilitating replication across the country and the continent.

- Retained Experience Associations but replaced teachers with mentors and worked with the International Labour Organization and ministries of education to bring about systemic change.
  - Internal evaluation indicated that program graduates and young entrepreneurs (ages 19 to 25) were more effective in delivering lessons and designing experiential models for the classroom.

- Secured cost recovery through international nonprofits and donors and discounted the fee for low-income schools.
  - “If schools fail to pay the annual fee, the Educate! field team follows up to learn and understand why. In this regard, the fee is one of many indicators that Educate! uses to monitor the quality and relevance of its program across the hundreds of schools where it operates” (Kwauk and Robinson 2016, 9).

- Created a pipeline of trainers (students become mentors, mentors become managers), although the question of adequate numbers for the demand remains.

The following steps were taken to mitigate the delivery challenges of **project design:**

- Seized the opportunity to engage in the national dialogue on secondary education, using internally generated and third-party (J-PAL) data to explain Educate! and to gain market share.

- Dedicated 10 percent of the budget to monitoring and evaluation:
  - Set 20 performance indicators for 4 target outcomes, with weekly and trimester reporting.
  - Built the Secondary Skills Assessment Tool (the first in Africa), using open-source software, to measure soft and hard skills and, thus, progress over time.
  - Incorporated a startup feedback mechanism (the build-measure-learn loop) to test new ideas and program innovations.

- Designed program for scale-up from the outset (for example, the cost for 500 versus 1,000 schools or 500,000 versus 1 million students), thus surpassing competitors and gaining market share.
  - Emphasized a clear understanding of granular operational details.
  - Paced the scale-up process for intense growth and quality retention.
  - Divided the country into geographic clusters of 150 to 200 schools run as self-contained units (own management and operations system) with mandatory reporting.
  - Held replication and cost-effectiveness as the main measures of success.
Leveraged technology to maximize program uptake, gain efficiencies, and improve the back office.

- Created open-source curriculum to facilitate replication, targeting a niche of youths.
- Developed and launched SMS and smartphone data collection and reporting systems plus a central, web-based dashboard with publicly facing features.
- Adopted a mobile money platform (Beyonic), with 33 percent and 20 percent savings on, respectively, costs and time (teachers and recruiters no longer traveled to be paid).

Outcomes

- 94 percent of the first class of Educate! graduates own a business, have a job, or attended a university
- 105 percent increase in the average income across all program graduates and 120 percent among girls
- 152 percent increase in girls’ business ownership and twofold increase in girls leading a community project
- 5.5 percent rate of return on investment in the first four years of the program
- Educate! components adapted and integrated in Rwanda’s national entrepreneurship curriculum
- Educate! aims to expand to three other African countries and to bring skill-based reforms to secondary education

References
