

# Connecting African Youth to Tech-Enabled Jobs

**In 2013, in response to the opportunities presented by Africa's rapidly growing youth population and the ubiquity of information and communications technologies across the continent, The Rockefeller Foundation launched its Digital Jobs Africa initiative. The initiative aims to enable young people to access jobs by providing them with in-demand technology-related and other employability skills. Now just past its two-year mark, the Foundation is taking stock of the rich learning that has emerged from the initiative.**

Over the last decade, the international community has witnessed a proliferation in the accessibility and use of information and communications technologies (ICT). These tools have permeated even the most rural and remote communities in Africa.

At the same time, Africa has become home to the world's fastest growing youth population. Currently, 200 million Africans are between the ages of 15 and 24 – a number expected to double by 2045. While this vast population holds tremendous potential to contribute to the development of communities and economies, young people currently constitute 62 percent of Africa's unemployed population. Nearly three-fourths of African youth live on less than \$2 per day.

In 2013, The Rockefeller Foundation launched its Digital Jobs Africa initiative (DJA), seeking to leverage the power of technology and harness the potential of Africa's youth by catalyzing sustainable ICT-enabled employment opportunities. The goal

of the initiative was to train high-potential but disadvantaged youth in high-demand skills, enabling them to transition into the workforce.



## Sharing insights from the field

In order to magnify the potential impact of its work, The Rockefeller Foundation initiated a robust learning agenda for DJA. By generating evidence related to its reach, potential for replication, return on investment, and programmatic impact, the Foundation seeks to fill key knowledge gaps and ensure both internal and external stakeholders have a strategic understanding of what works.

This brief presents the learning that is emerging from DJA – learning that has been collected and analyzed by ITAD, the initiative’s monitoring and evaluation grantee. ITAD collected evidence in support of adaptive management and strategic learning for DJA, as well as identifying lessons learned that may be relevant to the learning agendas of the ICT for development and impact sourcing (IS) sectors.

## What have we learned?

### Reaching youth with ICT training and job support is possible

As of late 2015, DJA had provided training and support to 58,540 young people. Of these, 22,319 had successfully transitioned to the workforce and many were earning stable income. According to ITAD’s preliminary monitoring data, the majority\* of the youth who were transitioned



### Digital Jobs Africa: Who are we reaching?

Much has been learned about who can effectively be reached through this intervention model. On average, participating youth:

- were between the ages of 18 and 35 (mean age of 23) at the time of participation
- had at least some secondary schooling, with 40 percent having higher education diplomas
- provided for approximately three dependents, though some supported up to nine family members.

to the workforce were in permanent, full-time jobs or had ongoing or long-term contracts. These figures speak to the ability of training providers to reach large numbers of youth, as well as to markets’ ability to absorb skilled young people.

### Soft skills matter

Employers have indicated that they value soft and basic skills just as much – and sometimes more than – technical ICT skills. Though each employer and industry is unique, all those consulted remarked that they prioritize communication, analytical, and numeracy skills when recruiting youth. Patience, persistence, conflict management skills, and self-discipline were also emphasized. To date, employers have generally reported satisfaction with DJA-trained youth in these areas.

### Blended models work best

Training models that incorporate both in-person and e-learning have demonstrated the best outcomes for skills development. Those that rely predominantly on low-touch e-learning have proven less successful at preparing youth for the digital labor market. DJA grantee Harambee found that when youth are given an opportunity to practice self-directed learning as a complement to in-person training, they develop a high degree of autonomy and agency – two traits that are important for finding and securing work.

\* Based on the most recent monitoring data available from Q3 2015, 70 percent of youth who transitioned to employment were in full-time jobs.



### **There may be a value proposition for employers**

Preliminary evidence suggests that there may be a value proposition for companies to train and hire disadvantaged youth in impact sourcing roles. Engaging this demographic can broaden the talent pool from which they can recruit. Employers have remarked that disadvantaged youth are often highly motivated and suggested that long-term attrition is lower among this group. One private sector partner from the banking sector reported 97 percent retention rates within the first three months and 86 percent within 12 months – figures which surpass industry averages.

### **Households benefit when youth are employed**

There is initial evidence that the effects of DJA extend beyond individual trainees and benefit their broader families. Youth report contributing their salaries to household expenses such as rent, clothing, and school fees. These findings indicate that there may be large cohorts of people indirectly benefitting from the initiative. Given these lessons are still emerging, The Rockefeller Foundation continues to dig deeper into the effects of impact sourcing on sustainable livelihoods.

### **Families have an important role to play in supporting youth through the program**

Many youth cited family support as a critical factor for their success in DJA. Young people's family members often provide the emotional and financial support needed for them to thrive during their training. Social norms

within households and communities can be a significant barrier for young women accessing jobs. It is therefore critical for training organizations to engage families and generate their support.

## **Moving forward: lessons for the impact sourcing community**

### **Lessons for youth training organizations**

- **Partner with socially-oriented corporations and identify champions.** Champions, preferably senior management within those organizations, can help integrate IS, both strategically and operationally. Partner companies should approach IS as part of their business model, though corporate social responsibility could be a useful entry point for engagement. In some cases, multinational corporations can be valuable partners, as their brand recognition can be leveraged to instill confidence among clients and other companies working in IS.
- **Provide comprehensive training and support services for young people.** Offer balanced training programs that emphasize both the soft and technical skills that employers demand. Engage with parents to ensure youth are financially and emotionally supported through training. Remain mindful of the barriers that youth – particularly young women – face as they enter the ICT workforce and provide support accordingly. Develop deliberate approaches for facilitating young people's transitions from training to jobs. As an example, DJA grantee Digital Data Divide provides access to customized technical and soft skills training, offers jobs that provide fair wages and progressive career paths, and supports employees to attend university. This integrated approach ensures that youth are ready and able to work, and can advance their careers within the organization or elsewhere.
- **Coordinate collaboration among youth training organizations.** The impact sourcing community must coordinate efforts to promote its messages and generate broad support for impact sourcing and technology-enabled employment for disadvantaged youth. Collaboration has the potential to amplify awareness of this model.

## Lessons for employers

- **Test the business case.** For employers concerned about the viability of this model, the business case can be tested through small pilots before being scaled up.
- **Develop a realistic costing model.** To be realistic, any costing model should factor in the time required for socializing IS with clients, and recognize that scaling takes time and upfront investment. Drivers of cost include infrastructure, personnel, and updating of curricula and programs. To accurately forecast financials, employers should remain mindful of youth's learning curves and the fact that immediate attrition may be high, but it dips significantly in the long term.
- **Think long-term.** In the long run, disadvantaged young people can bring value to a company. They broaden the talent pool, and their robust soft skills, motivation and eagerness to learn all may contribute to an organization's bottom line.

## Broader lessons

- **Build the evidence base around impact sourcing.** The IS industry in Africa is still relatively young, and questions remain as to the potential of this model – from both an impact and corporate value point of view. Investing in robust monitoring and evaluation, and dedicating resources to sharing lessons broadly can add tremendous value.
- **Think beyond online work.** Those committed to truly impacting high potential yet disadvantaged youth may want to look beyond online work and think about impact sourcing more broadly. In order to be able to compete on global online work platforms, youth must have basic IT and other skills, which traditional education systems – particularly in Africa – often do not equip them with. In addition, online work earnings are frequently low, and opportunities in this space are unstable.
- **Focus on jobs, not just on training.** Youth have the interest and determination to succeed in their training programs, but a multitude of factors can inhibit their ability to translate this into meaningful employment. Support is required to begin to bridge that divide.

- **Think holistically.** When supporting IS initiatives, it is important to account for the policy and regulatory contexts in which IS programming is taking place. Factors such as accessibility of telecommunications and internet connections, and reliability of electricity supply are critical. There may be a role for philanthropy to play in influencing governments to introduce or improve the environment for ICT-enabled work.

## Conclusion

By contributing to the evidence base around demand-driven training for ICT-enabled jobs, The Rockefeller Foundation aspires to enable broader adoption of inclusive business practices, leading to job creation at scale. In service of the goal of catalyzing sustainable employment opportunities for African youth and improving the well-being of those employed, their families and communities, the Foundation remains committed to sharing best practices and engaging in dynamic conversations about lessons learned.

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### Monitoring and Evaluation at The Rockefeller Foundation

Committed to supporting learning, accountability and performance improvements, the Foundation's Monitoring and Evaluation Team works with staff, grantees and partners to monitor and evaluate the Foundation's pathways to impact in the short- and long-term, and to capture lessons about what works and what doesn't across the Foundation's diverse portfolio.

With special thanks to

