



The MasterCard  
Foundation

**2015-2016  
YOUTH THINK  
TANK REPORT:  
INSIGHTS INTO  
YOUTH ECONOMIC  
OPPORTUNITIES  
IN EAST AFRICA**

**JUNE 2016**



**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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Isabelle Kubiwana, a Youth Think Tank member from Rwanda.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The MasterCard Foundation Youth Think Tank is a research group made up of young people who are recruited to conduct research in their communities, make recommendations based on their findings, and advise the Foundation.

The 2015-2016 Youth Think Tank conducted research into economic opportunities for youth in East Africa and found that young people across the region face similar aspirations and challenges.

Young women and men across East Africa want to start and grow businesses, secure employment, learn and apply new skills, contribute to their families and communities, and participate in the decisions that affect their lives.

They face low levels of education and work-appropriate skills, precarious and informal work, and social exclusion.

This is influenced by a number of variables including location, gender, available resources and local contexts.

This research, which includes more than 400 interviews across four countries, found that young people in East Africa are committed to developing their skills, have a positive attitude towards self-employment, are utilizing technology and especially mobile technology, recognize the attempts of government to develop youth employment programs and are eager to participate in the policy decisions that impact their lives.

The research findings build on a number of complementary research initiatives supported by The MasterCard Foundation. Three areas where respondents' findings shed additional light include:

- Young people recognize the skills gap between education and employment. They are taking proactive steps to develop employment and entrepreneurship skills through volunteering, and accessing skills through mobile and information and communication technology (ICT).
- Young people make informed decisions about moving from rural to urban areas and are considering opportunities in agriculture, rather than migrating to urban centres.
- The efforts of government interventions for youth were recognized. Individual rather than group loan applications, and longer engagement to provide additional marketing and business skills to ensure businesses succeed, were identified as missing components.

Key findings from the research include:

## **Local entrepreneurship and employment opportunities**

Young interviewees had a positive perception of self-employment, despite the reported challenges involved, including high taxes, bureaucratic business registration requirements, unaffordable credit, and group conflicts. Despite the advantages that self-employment offers, such as economic independence, it is clear that it is perceived as an alternative for youth that have failed to secure formal employment.

## **The mismatch between local opportunities and relevance of education and skills training**

A majority of young people across the region recognized the mismatch between the skills gained from formal education and those needed to find work. Graduates of the formal education system often invest additional time volunteering, or pursuing technical and vocational training, in order to gain the practical skills needed to find a job in either the private or public sector, or even to start their own businesses.

### **The influence of the private sector and government on youth economic opportunities and employment**

Government representatives recognize the need to create an environment conducive to private sector-led investment. Despite these efforts, young people often remain marginalized, with the majority being casual labourers, reporting low pay and exploitative tendencies from some private sector businesses. Many of the young people interviewed feel that youth-led indigenous businesses are not adequately supported or insulated against stiff competition from well-established foreign firms.

### **The role of Information Communication Technology**

Advances in technology provide youth with access to new opportunities and networks, notably in business development and access to information. The advent of mobile money technology has provided employment for both male and female youth as mobile money kiosk owners, managers, attendants and franchise agents. Some rural youth access vital market information for their product through mobile technology. Youth in urban areas are using information and communication technology (ICT) to create businesses and jobs through Internet cafés, gaming rooms, and by downloading and selling songs and videos.

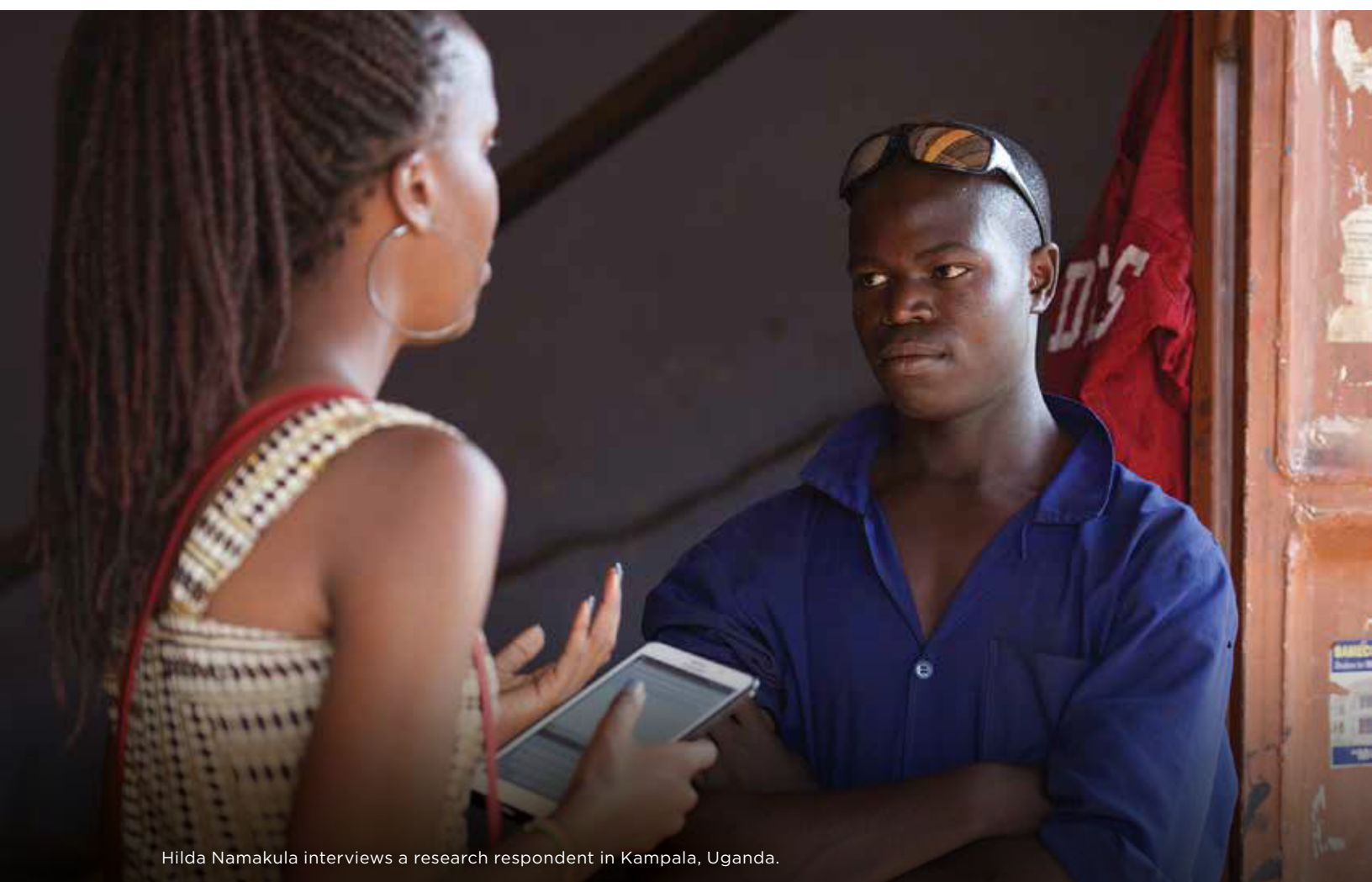


Mobile phones are the most common form of ICT used among youth due to their affordability. A smaller proportion of youth with more advanced computer skills are engaged in developing computer applications, organizational systems, and web design.

### **Other barriers that impede access to training and business opportunities**

Young people reported that negative stereotypes of youth, their role and abilities, have an adverse effect on both their ambitions and access to

resources. These attitudes and practices are exacerbated along gender lines. Despite various advancements, most significantly in Rwanda, young women's economic potential is held back by cultural barriers that limit their access to resources, especially land, and by negative perceptions about their abilities. Rural women are most vulnerable; early marriage and domestic exploitation that deny young women the proceeds of their labour are common occurrences.



Hilda Namakula interviews a research respondent in Kampala, Uganda.



# PREFACE FROM RESTLESS DEVELOPMENT

Over the last year, Restless Development has been excited to partner with The MasterCard Foundation to convene the Youth Think Tank in East Africa. The work builds on 30 years of experience within Restless Development, putting young people at the forefront of change and development, but it has also challenged us to continue to adapt the way we work with young people to lead work in their communities. We applaud The MasterCard Foundation for investing in a thoroughly youth-led process to inform its important work with youth in Africa and beyond.

We hope this report will not only inform young people and development actors about youth livelihoods, but that it will also inspire others to incorporate youth-led approaches into their work, at all levels. We hope that it will encourage organizations and partners to build youth-led research into their programming, and to find other creative ways of incorporating youth voices that support and influence young people. Perhaps most importantly, we hope that the example of the Youth Think Tank researchers themselves, all aged 24 and younger, will encourage young people everywhere to take leadership roles in their communities and to support their peers in pursuing healthy ways of earning a sustainable living.

We would like to thank all those who supported the Youth Think Tank team. Special thanks goes to the representatives of over a dozen MasterCard Foundation partners who have provided the Youth Think Tank members with valuable guidance and information.

Finally, we would like to thank the youth researchers for their hard work and commitment over the last 12 months, and congratulate them for an extraordinary piece of research. Their interactions impacted and influenced many young people and partners throughout the research process. Through this report, we are confident, insights and findings will continue to bring about innovative approaches to youth development around the world.

**Nik Hartley OBE**

**Chief Executive Officer, Restless Development**



Isabelle Kubwimana conducting research at the University of Rwanda in Kigali.

# PREFACE FROM THE MASTERCARD FOUNDATION

The MasterCard Foundation is committed to the meaningful engagement of young people throughout our programs. We are proud to partner with Restless Development to facilitate our 2015–2016 Youth Think Tank.

Now in its third iteration, The MasterCard Foundation Youth Think Tank demonstrates the abilities of young researchers to engage with their peers and community leaders to deepen our understanding of young people's aspirations.

These 15 young leaders conducted close to 400 individual and group interviews to better understand the contexts, opportunities and challenges of young people's livelihoods across Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda.

The data they collected is highly relevant and sheds light on how young people prepare for and enter into the labour market and engage in the economy.

The differences in experience between urban and rural areas, gender and formal and informal work is important learning for our partners as well as governments and policymakers in the youth development space.

It builds on our 2013–2014 Youth Think Tank Report, which examined how to engage young people in the non-profit and private sectors. It also builds on peer-to-peer, participatory research supported by the Foundation, which also focuses on understanding the livelihoods of young people. This enables the Foundation and our partners to better incorporate both data and the voices of young people into the design of our programs to develop initiatives that are more relevant and impactful.

Importantly, the desire of young people to participate in the decisions that affect them demonstrates their eagerness to be active contributors to the programs and policies that touch their lives.

I'd like to extend my thanks to the Restless Development team and the Youth Think Tank members for their efforts and contributions to this important piece of work.

The MasterCard Foundation will share this report widely, incorporating the learning into our strategy and programming. More importantly, we will continue to support future cohorts of Youth Think Tank members and the contributions they make to increasing the engagement and economic empowerment of young people in Africa and beyond.

**Ann Miles**

**Director, Financial Inclusion and Youth Livelihoods**



Francis Arinaitwe interviews a respondent in Mayuge District, Uganda.



# YOUTH THINK TANK MEMBER PROFILES

Kisa Kasifa with research respondents in Kampala, Uganda.



**Francis  
Arinaitwe, 21**  
Uganda

Francis recently became a volunteer with Restless Development in the rural Mayuge District of Uganda.

“Based on my research as a Youth Think Tank member, I hope to develop strategies to address economic issues faced by youth in my community.”



**Aliguma  
Ahabyona  
Asimwe, 23**  
Uganda

Aliguma is a previous volunteer with Restless Development.

“My role will provide a platform to share, learn and shape new ideas which are essential in informing stakeholders so that they can meaningfully engage young people in the development process.”



**Hope  
Ibuyat, 23**  
Uganda

Hope volunteered with Restless Development before joining the Youth Think Tank. She has a Bachelor of Development Studies from Makerere University.

“As a think tank researcher, I will benefit my community in such a way that the findings will help organizations like Restless Development and The MasterCard Foundation make informed decisions on how to better support youth development.”



**Kisa  
Kasifa, 21**  
Uganda

Kisa is a youth mentor with BRAC Uganda.

“Through my participation with the think tank, I will be able to help people in my community move forward.”



**Collins  
Kimaro, 21**  
**Tanzania**

Collins has recently completed his Bachelor of Science, Economics from Warwick University. He has also completed a dissertation addressing the effect of ethnic diversity on democracy in Africa.

“Research from the Think Tank will be able to guide policy and lead to more targeted solutions and strengthen youth engagement across the country. It can also empower young people to take ownership of their development.”



**Abubakar  
Kassim  
Kisambira, 24**  
**Uganda**

Abubakar holds a Diploma in Information Technology from Bethel Training Institute. He has volunteered on different initiatives within Restless Development and has taken part in various research tasks involving smartphones.

“After the training, I will be equipped with the knowledge and skills on how young people can live sustainable lives. I will also be able to exercise those skills to help young people in my community.”



**Ritah  
Kobusingye, 24**  
**Uganda**

Ritah has a degree in Information Systems Management. She is passionate about farming and is currently managing a piggery and flower farm.

“My participation in the Think Tank will help share what I know about small business development with young people in my community so that they can meet their needs.”



**Isabelle  
Kubwimana, 20**  
**Rwanda**

Isabelle is currently studying Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Rwanda. She is a previous participant of several training sessions with Digital Opportunity Trust.

“My participation will help me better understand the major problems affecting youth in my community.”



Augustine  
Malija, 24  
Tanzania

Augustine holds a Bachelor of Arts in Economics from the University of Dar es Salaam. He is a graphic designer at the JHM Foundation of Tanzania.

“Being a Youth Think Tank member will increase my understanding of how the private, corporate world in Tanzania can increase youth engagement and economic empowerment for youth.”



Anne  
Mapendo, 23  
Rwanda

Anne is a fourth-year student at the Adventist University of Central Africa and is studying information management.

“The Think Tank research will help me better understand the problems that are facing young people in my community. I want to create strategies that will address these problems.”



Wilson  
Mwangashi, 23  
Kenya

Wilson holds a certificate in electrical installations and was a participant of CAP Youth Empowerment Institute in Kenya.

“I think the findings from our research will help the development of my community.”



Hilda  
Namakula, 21  
Uganda

Hilda is currently studying social sciences at Makerere University. She has also completed monitoring and evaluation training with Development Research and Training (DRT).

“Being part of the Think Tank will help me improve my professional skills in social work. I will use the skills I gain to pioneer humanitarian and development goals to improve the lives of the most vulnerable.”





Philip  
Njoroge, 23  
Kenya

Philip is a graduate of TechnoServe’s STRYDE Program and is a qualified graphic designer.

“My involvement will help my community as I share my skills and information with young people. I want to motivate young people to achieve their goals.”



Lucky  
Ongwen  
Obangaber, 23  
Uganda

Lucky recently completed her Bachelor of Adult and Community Education at Makerere University. Prior to joining the Youth Think Tank, she volunteered with the Lira District NGO Forum where she conducted a four-month assessment into children’s education in the district.

“My participation will help me become a change agent.”



Innocent  
Onika, 24  
Uganda

Innocent was the National Vice President of Organizational Development at the Uganda Chapter of the Association Internationale des Étudiants en Sciences Économiques et Commerciales (AISEC).

“As a member of the Youth Think Tank, the insights I gain from the engagement will broaden my scope of knowledge and enable me to be a more entrepreneurial leader in my community.”



Oburu  
Stanley, 23  
Uganda

Oburu is a former team leader on the Restless Development International Citizens Service (ICS) project. He holds a Bachelor of Social Sciences from Makerere University.

“I believe that the outcomes of the Youth Think Tank research will shape youth-friendly policies and practices in my community.”

# METHODOLOGY

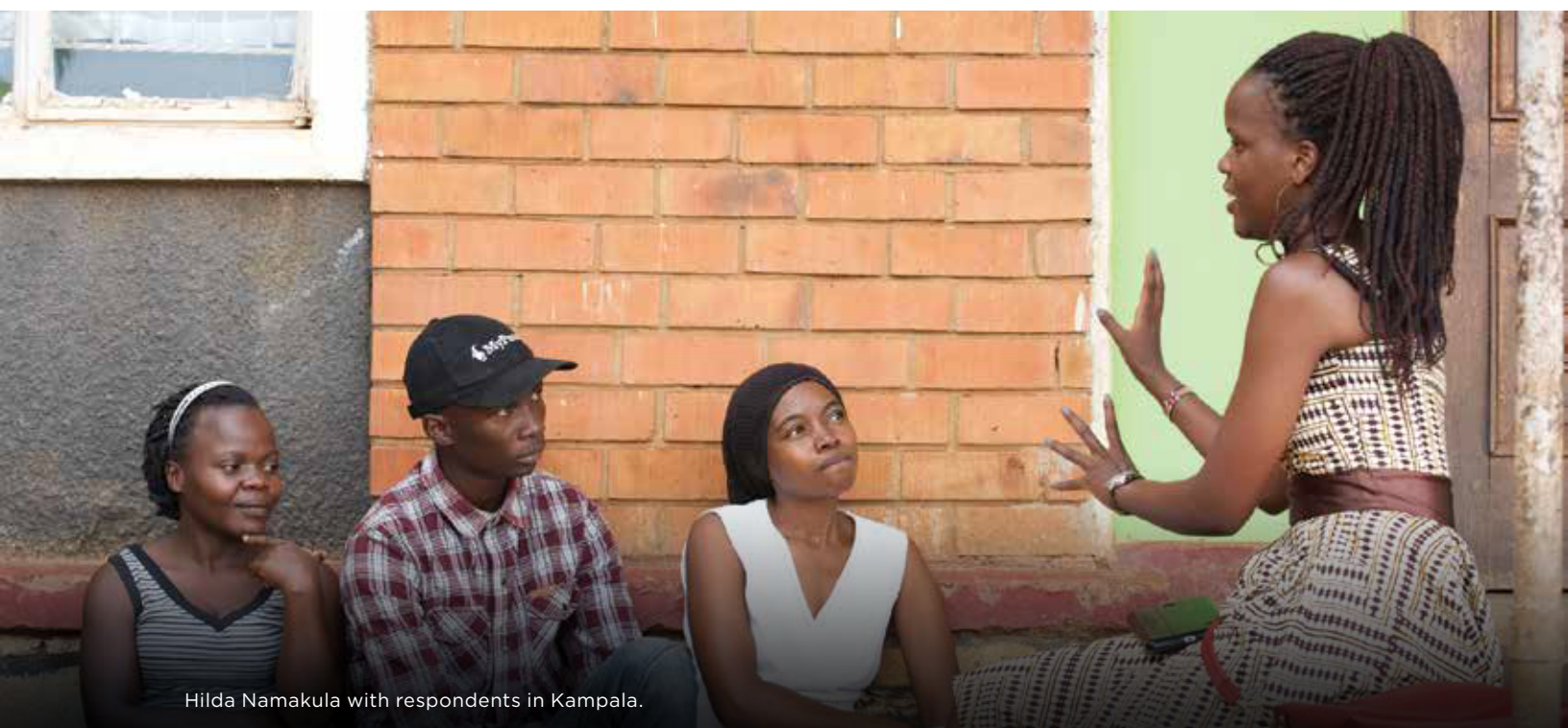
## The youth-led research process

The MasterCard Foundation is committed to the meaningful engagement of young people in the decisions that affect them. The Youth Think Tank is a committed group of young researchers, who help to inform our Youth Livelihoods' strategy, programming, monitoring, evaluation and governance. Since its inception, Youth Think Tank members have:

- Published three research reports
- Participated in conferences and events on behalf of The MasterCard Foundation
- Presented to our Board of Directors
- Reviewed proposals, strategies and learning frameworks
- Participated in Advisory Committees
- Participated in due diligence visits

Over the course of two earlier research projects, the Youth Think Tank has evolved. Informed by feedback from young people, partners and others, a number of changes have been made based on our learning to date. These include:

- Increasing the number of young researchers to 15 and expanding the selection process beyond The MasterCard Foundation's partners to ensure a diverse cross-section of young people
- Focusing the geography to four countries—Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Rwanda—to deepen the research and identify regional trends
- Partnering with an organization with presence in East Africa to ensure a high degree of support and engagement throughout the research process
- Expanding the length and depth of research to include additional training, a higher number of interviews and stakeholder engagement
- Developing a youth-led research question, aligned with the Foundation's Youth Livelihoods' strategy, designed by the young researchers themselves



Hilda Namakula with respondents in Kampala.

### **Youth Think Tank team recruitment and selection**

Recruitment of the new Youth Think Tank team was jointly undertaken by The MasterCard Foundation and Restless Development using the following criteria: self-motivated young people, between 18–24 years of age, from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds, from both urban and rural areas.

### **Youth Think Tank team training**

Restless Development hosted an 11-day training session that brought together all the Youth Think Tank members to train them on how to conduct youth-led research.

During the training, participants discussed youth-led research methods and developed research questions they wanted to explore during the research phase.

The training methodology included group discussions, presentations, participatory mapping, stories, role-playing, thematic scenarios and pictorial illustrations.

### **The research methodology**

Building on their own country-specific experiences, youth researchers were supported through the process of developing their own research methodology.

The researchers divided into their respective country groups to map out the socio-economic conditions affecting young people in their countries.

### **Data collection tools**

To conduct the qualitative research, the Youth Think Tank members chose to use focus group discussions, market observations and key informant interviews as their methods of data collection. Using convenience sampling, the principal data collection tool was focus group discussions, as this would enable them to uncover deeper insights into youth economic opportunities in the region.

### **Leveraging cutting edge mobile technology in this research**

Each researcher and staff support team was provided with an Internet-enabled tablet phone to support the data collection. Research software was used on the tablets to collect and transmit the field data in real time.

### **The data analysis and validation phase**

All data were categorized under each of the thematic research questions, which were aligned with The MasterCard Foundation Youth Livelihoods' strategy and learning questions:

1. Income generating activities that youth engage in
2. Perceptions of self-employment as a source of income
3. Market trends and their influence on youth agricultural enterprises
4. The role of the private sector
5. ICT for livelihoods
6. Influence of cultural beliefs on youth economic opportunities
7. Opinions about youth equitable opportunities and any other unique emerging theme

### **Validation of the findings**

Each research team took away the specific findings from their area and together with training staff, identified issues they would like to explore further. They also agreed on a plan to share the preliminary findings with the respondents through community validation dialogues, ensuring participants involved in the research had the opportunity to respond to findings.

Detailed validation guidelines were developed and shared with the team to facilitate a uniform understanding of the process.

## KEY FINDINGS

These findings include consolidated feedback from individual interviews and focus groups discussions, facilitated by Youth Think Tank members, in urban and rural locations across Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda.

### Local entrepreneurial and employment opportunities

Interview and focus group discussions found that young people in rural areas are mostly attracted to and engaged in agribusiness ventures such as poultry, cattle rearing and growing crops.

Whereas young men are engaged in small-scale commercial agricultural production, young women are engaged in domestic production and the lower end of the agribusiness value chain, such as selling prepared food in the market. This is influenced by the engendered cultural dynamics of land usage and ownership as reported across the region. Young men typically have more access to land for farming than their female counterparts.

Other common economic activities for young people in rural areas include charcoal burning and selling, working in quarries, and providing motorcycle transport services.

Rural youth are disadvantaged in their search for economic opportunities, as they often lack access to vital information, services, infrastructure such as electricity, and markets for business and investment. Feedback from rural youth, especially those engaged in agriculture, indicates that they are also prone to exploitation from middlemen, as they do not have the connections to urban markets.

The economic activity of most urban youth included: craft-making; performance dance groups; taxi driving; water hawking; garbage collection; working as sales agents for private businesses; operating salons; food vending; selling apparel; running barber shops; operating small kiosks; and selling hot food in stalls.



Importantly, despite the resilience displayed by many who seek opportunities in the urban centres, the harsh urban business environment (for example, difficulties in meeting formal business requirements, barriers to informal businesses) can drive youth back to rural areas.

Both rural and urban youth expressed positive attitudes towards self-employment. Besides enabling them to have ‘a limitless income’, youth reported that self-employment allows them to develop skills in areas such as financial management, people management and networking.

While youth are primarily engaged in informal work, such as casual and low-paying jobs as porters, street vendors, metal fabricators, and sand miners, there are a few examples of young people developing relatively large businesses as sole proprietors. For example, one respondent who was able to raise enough capital to obtain

his pilot license and is currently in the process of setting up his own charter company. There are also successful examples of group ventures like the Kalangala Youth Development Association (KAYODEA) in Uganda who have ventured into cage fishing.

It is clear from this research that many young people have not started formal businesses on their own due to a range of barriers including lack of capital, the bureaucracy associated with registering businesses—especially in Kenya and Tanzania—and corrupt practices that take place during the process.

### **The skills mismatch**

All focus group discussions reported that the formal education system has not produced hands-on, skilled young people ready to confront the challenges of securing sustainable employment or growing a profitable business.



Hilda Namakula interviews a respondent in Kampala, Uganda.

The most common concern interviewees expressed was that the education system is not practical and does not make them job-ready. Training in vocational entrepreneurial skills was widely recommended to close the skills gap between the formal education system and the labour market.

A considerable majority of youth also highlighted a disconnect between formal education skills and local opportunities. Youth in rural areas are often eager to volunteer with any organization or institution that will build their capacity with hard skills like silage making, manure and fertilizer mixing, and entrepreneurial skills such as dairy farming, and growing crops. They recommended that formal education institutions incorporate these practical skills as well as entrepreneurial skills into the primary and secondary education curricula.

A majority of young people across the region recognized the importance of formal education. But called for a 'hybrid education system' where components of formal and vocational education are integrated with work placement opportunities. This would start in secondary school and go right through to university.

Young people from across the region voiced a shared belief in the value of volunteering as a source of sustainable skills building. "From college I started volunteering with a local NGO where I acquired skills in project proposal writing and started my own youth organization," said the Founder of Kiryateete Young Stars Academy, Hoima District, Uganda.

### **The influence of the private sector and government on youth economic opportunities and employment**

The research shows that most private sector players have not invested in long-term skills development among young people (for example, providing on-the-job training, apprenticeships and internships to build necessary skills for the workplace). It was observed that most private sector big businesses set up in urban areas, benefitting only urban youth and contributing to the youth rural-to-urban migration.

Researchers also heard that private sector companies generally seek highly skilled young people, excluding those youth who may not have all of the necessary qualifications.

### **Government investment in youth businesses**

Across all locations, government respondents reported a number of initiatives that seek to enhance youth livelihoods.

They reported positive examples of government-led initiatives that present promising models, such as the Rwandan government-led affirmative action program for youth businesses. Rwandan youth are taking advantage of it through the Business Development Fund and the Young Entrepreneurs Chamber (established by the Private Sector Federation). In Tanzania, the 'Kijana Jijiri' program helps young people start their own businesses through business training and connects them to mentors and financial institutions.

Despite the good intentions of these government initiatives, a majority of youth interviewed do not feel these have had a substantial impact on their livelihoods.



This is not to say that governments do not make the effort or lack interest in improving the livelihoods of youth, but rather that there are too few opportunities for youth to appreciate or take advantage of in their communities.

There is an indication that if governments engaged youth more meaningfully and shared more information, especially in rural areas, a greater number would seek out available opportunities.

Interestingly, responses from young people and government actors were contradictory. The research pointed overall to a lack of trust and confidence in government programs by young people, with some young respondents indicating that these initiatives tend to benefit or repeatedly favour only a select number of individuals and groups. On the other hand, some government respondents blamed the apathy of youth for low levels of engagement and participation.

### **The role of Information Communication Technology**

It's widely recognized that the ICT is transforming the economic landscape across East Africa.

Youth in agribusiness benefit from ICT by viewing weather forecasts through televisions and gaining additional information and skills by viewing TV programs on agriculture. Other youth expressed interest in vocational training opportunities such as repairing television sets, mobile phones and computers so that they can set up their own businesses. In urban areas, ICT has been used as an enabler of entrepreneurship as young people are using the Internet to get new ideas, and open up and expand their businesses.

Youth in urban areas are also using ICT to create employment through Internet cafés and gaming rooms.

The advent of mobile money technology has led to employment for many female and male youth who are either owners of, or employed by, mobile money kiosk managers.



Anne Mapendo, a Youth Think Tank member from Rwanda.



A smaller number of youth with more advanced computer skills are engaged in developing computer applications, organizational systems and web design.

### **Other barriers that impede youth from accessing youth training and business opportunities**

The research found that there are clear differences in the types of economic activities engaged in by young men and women. For example, young women find themselves engaged in putting up food stalls, selling vegetables, washing clothes and working in day-care centres.

While this is a pervasive challenge across all locations, it is more prevalent in rural areas. As a young farmer from Soroti, Uganda, sees it, “Young women cannot flourish in business. They are usually viewed as providers of casual family labour which has caused some young women not to think of any potential business that can help them in the future.”

Some young women, however, felt strongly about the need to have equal rights and opportunities, as Harriet, a young Ugandan from Kabarole District, pointed out “all categories of young people should be given equal rights and opportunities irrespective of age, tribe and gender.”

Governments and stakeholders reported that they recognize this challenge and there are efforts to address the situation through affirmative action initiatives that would improve girls’ and women’s access to education, finance and job opportunities.

The research found that in some communities, the education of girls, be it formal or vocational, is undervalued. This is because the only perceived path to economic success for women is through marriage. The youth respondents reported that this can have a profound impact on young women’s access to opportunities.

From evidence generated through research, across all locations, marriage often creates a disincentive for women to work. Some women are completely forbidden from working outside the home after marriage. The societal perception of what constitutes appropriate work for males and females has limited young people from taking advantage of economic and employment opportunities.

### **The barrier to young people’s quest for land**

Improving access to and ownership of land is a key consideration for young people in enhancing youth livelihoods, though this demand has been met with resistance from adults. Whereas land facilitates agribusiness in both rural and urban areas, and most mainstream financial institutions value land as collateral for loans, only a few youth are able to own this critical resource.

The mode of land ownership sometimes impedes youth productivity. Across all locations, restrictions on land inheritance by young women limits their business potential and locks young women out of the wealth benefits that accrue from land ownership.

The research also demonstrates the following:

- There are limited employment opportunities available to urban and rural youth
- Young people are willing to start their own businesses
- Mobile technology has the potential to not only improve access to information but also generate employment
- There are gaps between well-intentioned government interventions and the young people they are intended to reach

# RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are based on findings that emerged from the Youth Think Tank research.

## **Local income generation, entrepreneurship and employment opportunities**

For young people to secure financing for new businesses, the personal identification documents required by financial institutions should be convenient and easy to access. For example, young people could easily obtain academic certificates, as opposed to trying to acquire property or land titles. In general, young people recommend that existing financial services be made more youth-friendly.

Micro-finance institutions should also consider lending money to promising individual youth with clear business plans as opposed to prioritizing those organized in groups. This will reduce the challenges of collective responsibility and the frustrations of many talented young entrepreneurs.

## **The mismatch between local opportunities and relevance of education and skills training**

Governments and other stakeholders should prioritize equipping young people with market-driven vocational and entrepreneurial skills. This should be pursued with both in-school youth and those out of the formal education system. This will help close the skills gap associated with the formal, education-only system that does not do enough to equip young people to start their own businesses or prepare them for the challenges of the labour market.

## **The influence of the private sector and government on youth economic opportunities and employment**

Young people recommend that employers offer job-specific training when they are hired. The private sector should consider investing in youth with on-the-job training and ongoing mentorship, in order to enable youth to take up meaningful roles within these businesses.

In addition, there needs to be more and better information sharing on youth initiatives from government bodies. Information channels need to be improved so that young people have access to relevant employment opportunities and are empowered to participate in policy and program development initiatives.

## **The role of Information Communication Technology**

Emerging technological innovations have provided youth with more economic and livelihood opportunities. Youth call for improvements in infrastructure and connectivity, especially in rural areas. This will enable them to have equal access to information and services such as Internet access and mobile phone networks.

Youth also contend, given how pervasive technology has become, that interaction with technology should start at an early age so that youth become more knowledgeable and confident in their abilities as they grow.

### Other barriers that impede access to training and business opportunities

Government and civil society organizations should work with communities to address cultural barriers affecting youth economic opportunities such as gender beliefs, and land ownership practices. Improvements in these areas could go a long way in addressing the key economic challenges that face young people in the East African region.

### Role of government

Young people recognized the efforts of government on youth employment programs. However, they suggested that young people should be able to apply as individuals and have access to ongoing training in leadership and business development to ensure the growth and sustainability of group enterprises.

Young people also confirm that more affirmative action is needed facilitate youth participation in business. In particular, they want fair treatment for youth-owned businesses including registration and taxes to offset the challenges of limited savings and personal identification documents.

### Youth engagement

Young people want to be engaged at different levels of decision making on issues that affect them directly. They call for more connected, empowered and impactful channels of decision making that allow them to present their challenges and obtain feedback in a timely manner. This can help build trust between youth, governments and other key stakeholders, and address negative perceptions of young people.



Research respondents in Kampala, Uganda.



## HOW THIS RESEARCH WILL BE USED

The MasterCard Foundation and Restless Development are committed to sharing the findings from this report. More specifically, the findings of the report will:

- Inform the the Foundation's Youth Livelihoods strategy and program design
- Be shared with our partners and other relevant stakeholders to further strengthen their programming and approaches to youth engagement
- Help to inform the design of a youth engagement toolkit
- Be shared with alumni from the Youth Think Tank network to extend the reach of learning among young people

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Restless Development Uganda extends special thanks to The MasterCard Foundation for the financial and technical input that enabled the success of the 2015/2016 Regional Youth Think Tank Project.

We would also like to thank the following stakeholders for their immense and invaluable contributions: The Youth Think Tank members, who truly owned, and formed the core, of this project: Anne Mapendo and Isabelle Kubwimana (Rwanda); Collins Kimaro and Augustine Malija (Tanzania); Innocent Onika, Lucky Obangaber, Stanley Oburu, Francis Arinaitwe, Hope Ibuyat, Hilda Namakula, Kisa Kasifa, Aliguma Asimwe, Rita Kobusingye, and Abubaker Kisambira (Uganda).

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The MasterCard Foundation and Restless Development partners in the East African region who supported the initial recruitment for the project.

# Elevating

the voices of  
young people  
in Africa

