



District Youth Business Platforms

Developing local business and youths' income potential through networking platforms



EMPOWERING YOUTHS THROUGH THE CREATION OF OPPORTUNITIES

The District Business Platform initiative is pioneered by Swisscontact U-Learn II towards enabling the young people to gain knowledge, share their experiences, opportunities and best practices, and benefit from the networking opportunities. The platform encourages inclusive participation of young people to tap into various opportunities that may result in employment or improved sustainable livelihood. They will also be able to connect to a broader range of people, stakeholders and networks.

The platform allows the leveraging of partnerships, knowledge, experiences and resources for the growth and benefit of the young people in the targeted districts. This is the motivation behind the existence of the district business platform.

The district business platform provides services that the young people might require or benefit from, but which are not-so easily accessible or available in their communities. They will also be able to access information, opportunities and role models.

The U-Learn Project piloted three District Youth Business Platforms in the districts of Bundibugyo, Masaka and Hoima.

This involved leveraging on the existing local entrepreneurship ecosystem within each district and stimulating further collaboration to drive even more business growth opportunities.

This is being done through physical platforms, in the form of local networking events, as well as through virtual, ongoing platforms.

The physical platforms (events) foster connections among young entrepreneurs, and facilitate access to business information through advisory sessions, business and farm clinics, mentorship, information sessions and peer-to-peer learning.

The virtual platform further strengthens connections and facilitates anytime access to information through a web-based interface - www.imuka.co - using an internet connected smartphone or computer.



KEY OBJECTIVES OF THE BUSINESS PLATFORMS

- **Access to relevant knowledge and skills:** access new skills, discuss and explore emerging situations or opportunities, knowledge exchange through featuring a technical expert in a particular area of interest.
- **Access to market:** linkages to viable market opportunities.
- **Access to locally available skills and technologies:** exhibition of relevant local techniques and technologies within the platform, to promote successful practices.
- **Peer-to-peer connections and learning:** experience sharing and learning.
- **Access to business advisory support:** provision of business advisory support to individuals or groups of participants depending on area of interest.
- **Access to Youth Support Organisations:** linkages to relevant services or opportunities for the youths.

The Masaka Youth Business Platform event was held on Thursday 19 September 2019 at the Mayor's Hall. With 173 young people actively participating. In attendance were various public and private stakeholders, local banks and financial service providers, various local businesses and community members.

The Bundibugyo Youth Business Platform main event was held on 8 October 2019 at the District Community Hall, with 159 young people attending and benefiting from the occasion. The event involved the participation of the various stakeholders, both public and private, including local government participation by the District Youth Coordinator and Community Development Officers.

The Hoima Youth Business Platform event took place on 18 October 2019, with 186 young people attending the event. Both at the event and outside of it, the aim is for the youths to connect with one another, share their experiences and best practises, and connect with businesses, entrepreneurs, banks and others who could present opportunities to the youths.



POSITIVE IMPACTS ON LOCAL BUSINESSES

The platform provides many opportunities for information, advice, partnership, leads, joint ventures and more - all geared towards the successful growth and profitability of the business.

Experience- and knowledge-sharing

The platform is ideal for expanding business owners' knowledge by taking advantage of the viewpoints and prior experiences of others.

Problem solving and advice

The platform provides solutions to business problems, through access to advisory support, as well as networking opportunities with experienced entrepreneurs with expertise and advice to impart.

Staying current

In an ever-changing business climate, it is important to keep up with the target market conditions, as well as overall trends in the relevant industry.

The platform provides the conditions for a business to stay current and therefore relevant.

Visibility in the market

The platform allows the business to be noticed and gain visibility and eventually a reputation in the market.

New contacts and referrals

The platform benefits businesses by enabling them to meet potential clients and/or generate referrals, which - if followed up on - could lead to paying customers. The networking opportunities also help business owners to identify opportunities for partnerships, joint ventures, or new areas of expansion for their business.

Confidence and morale

Most entrepreneurs are optimistic and positive. Regular interaction with such people can be a great morale boost, particularly in the difficult early phases of a new business.

POSITIVE IMPACT ON THE MOST VULNERABLE YOUTHS

The platform allows inclusive access to skills, networks and information, especially for the vulnerable youths in rural communities who are often excluded. Through the Platform, even the most vulnerable have access to opportunities to transform socially and economically, and ultimately overcome poverty.

The approach of using both digital and physical Platforms helps to reduce "digital divides" between technology-empowered and technology-excluded communities, since they will be able to connect to the opportunities during the physical platform meet-ups. The platform strengthens youths' participation in the economic development and working capacity, thereby making them productive members of the community. This helps to reduce overall unemployment, poverty, lack of prospects and deprivation, ensuring social security and basic services.

A FEW SUCCESS STORIES

Youths in Bundibugyo who were unable to open bank accounts, have - through the Platform - reached an understanding with Stanbic Bank to open bank accounts, without the initial deposit normally required. This has a huge positive impact on confidence and opens opportunities because the account holder is able to access other financial products for the very first time.

Through the Platform, a youth from Hoima engaged in coffee roasting, grinding and packing was able to acquire a loan worth 6 million Ugx for the expansion of his business. The loan was used to increase operational efficiency, as well as focus on market penetration.

Through the platform in Masaka, three youths who heard about potential employment with an insurance company have taken up permanent employment with the company as part of the sales team. Not only do they receive a full salary, they also earn additional commission on their sales.



The Masaka youths engaged in cage fishing received a grant from the district local government, enabling them to purchase feed and protective equipment.

The platform also creates an avenue to sell products and services. The Masaka Youth Hospitality Team were able to get their first outside catering opportunity through the platform and were able to make sales of 288,000 Ugx. This was experiential opportunity to serve clients and receive feedback. The experience allows them to see the business side of the skills gained, and use it to apply for job opportunities. With the platform giving them the first outside catering deal, they can now gain more, since many of these opportunities are based on previous experience.

The Hoima youths involved in hospitality prepared food and provided restaurant services during the platform, which enabled them to earn income. This boosted their enthusiasm and confidence in managing big events.





CONCLUSION

The youth business platform described above clearly demonstrates its relevance in enabling young entrepreneurs to do business and access information and services. Conducted regularly, the platforms will not only create awareness of the underlying opportunities from various players, but also create sustainability and ownership of the platform by the youth. The platform model is sustained locally through a participatory process between young entrepreneurs, business actors, government representatives and local consultants. They continue to engage in dialogue, platform content development, product development, resource mobilisation and advocacy, to create awareness and opportunities for young entrepreneurs.