

Skilling projects empower youth

By Agnes Kyotalengerire

Eunice Agoa is a resident of Inyaki village in Lira district. The 19-year-old orphan dropped out of school in Primary Seven. Her future, at the time, looked bleak, until she was introduced to the Empowering Youth for Sustainable Livelihood Project in the area.

She received training as a metal fabricator, then joined Aloji Corner Workshop. For the first three months, her employer paid her sh20,000 per day as a trainee who needed to perfect her skills. She proved herself and was taken on as a fulltime worker, who pockets 45,000 per day.

As a result, she has saved sh350,000, bought four goats, 13 chicken, a mobile phone and can afford decent clothes. In fact, Agoa plans to start her own workshop in the near future.

She is one of the several successful youth who have benefited from the project, currently run in Lira and Alebtong districts. The project is implemented by Plan International Uganda, in partnership with other organisations.

According to Patrick Ssebowa Lubowa, the

Youth welders busy at work in Lira District. The Empowering Youth for Sustainable Livelihood project supports 206 youth to develop skills for self-employment in Uganda



national programme manager of the scheme, the project aims at contributing towards peace, recovery and development in post-conflict northern Uganda, by supporting livelihoods and reintegration of the youth.

As we mark the World Population Day, the impact of such programmes on livelihoods, once again, comes into sharp focus.

"The intervention targets to increase access to employment for marginalised young women and men in

Lira and Alebtong districts, through foundational, transferable, technical and vocational skills, access to financial services, and stronger representation to and engagement with local and private actors," Ssebowa explains. He adds: "The project, with funding from European Commission, targets to reach 1,600 young men and women over the project period."

According to Ssebowa, 77% of the trained youth are employed, of which 28% are

in the formal labour markets. The youth employed in own-account enterprises are working longer hours (seven hours per day).

Notably, about 97% of them are saving in their Youth Saving and Lending Groups. These changes have triggered hope and aspiration for the future and positive attitude towards hard work.

Ssebowa further explains that being in groups has promoted social cohesion among the youth, and, therefore, access of peer-to-

peer support.

"With more vulnerable girls supported, such empowerment is yielding improved gender relations in terms of self-esteem, self-reliance and self-worth. Through asset accumulation, resilient livelihoods are evolving, as access to basic needs seems not a big challenge," he says.

Kawempe project

For Clare Zawedde, who, in 2010 failed to complete her bachelor's degree at Makerere University due to financial constraints, another similar programme has got her back on her feet.

Zawedde was introduced to Slum Women Economic Empowerment Programme at Century Enterprise Development Agency (CEDA) International Youth Centre in the city suburb of Kawempe, where she received free training.

Within five months, Zawedde had mastered key handicraft and catering skills. She had no excuse, but to put what she had learnt to proper use, though her challenge was initial capital.

Today, she owns a kiosk in Kawempe, where she displays and sells her products.

"My business is doing well and growing," she affirms.

She has trained a relative who works with her at the kiosk. Her dream is to own a chain of craft shops, selling special jewelry and wallets made from local materials across the country.

With the benefits visible, she does not regret having enrolled for a skills empowerment programme at the Youth Engaged Programme in Kawempe. However, she is not the only beneficiary. Hundreds of youth have been skilled from the centre and are now economically liberated.

"We have empowered the youth with critical business skills in catering, baking, hairdressing, pedicure, manicure and art and crafts, to enable them start generating income so that they can gain financial freedom," says Rehmah Kasule, the founder of CEDA International.

Launched in 2011, the youth engaged programme runs a youth centre in Kawempe.

The centre also caters for youth aged 15-30 years Kawempe, with the aim of countering crimes that perpetuate slum communities.