



# Service as a **Strategy**

## Combating Youth Unemployment

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## **Addressing Youth Unemployment**

Today's young men and women are the most educated, well-informed, and communications and technology-savvy that the world has seen. Still, they are having a harder time than ever finding employment - especially in developing countries, where unemployment rates are highest. Even when young people do find work, it is often under harsh working conditions and for low compensation.<sup>1</sup> Today, 88 million young men and women are unemployed around the world.<sup>2</sup>

Unable to support themselves and often without access to constructive alternatives, unemployed youth are at a high risk of experiencing “a sense of vulnerability, uselessness and idleness.”<sup>3</sup> These states can aggravate relationships, contribute to poor health, and increase the likelihood of engagement in risky behaviors and activities, such as drug use or abuse, gang-related activity, and sexual promiscuity.<sup>4,5</sup> Without access to training opportunities and skills development, these young

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men and women are more likely than their employed counterparts to face unemployment in their adult lives.<sup>6</sup> Providing them with structured opportunities in which they apply their talents and abilities while developing skills and habits that transfer to economic viability can mitigate these negative effects.

While the associations between youth unemployment and violence, poor health, and general underdevelopment are well-documented, there are few large-scale initiatives—particularly in developing countries—that take advantage of the extent to which economies and societies stand to benefit from actively engaging youth. This analysis draws on the experiences of job/skills training programs to establish a framework for how youth service programs can most effectively create opportunities for unemployed youth. While job/skills training programs are more established, the impact of the emerging field of youth service on youth unemployment has recently been demonstrated in developed countries and is corroborated by the promising experiences of youth service programs around the globe. This paper seeks to elucidate some of these experiences as well as to examine

how youth service programs can provide a valuable addition to traditional youth employment strategies. The paper concludes that youth service programs, when well designed and context-sensitive, are a significant strategy for engaging youth as a force for positive change, enabling them to strengthen their own employability, gain widely-applicable life and work skills, and deepen their civic engagement.

## **Youth Employment Strategies**

The most common intervention strategies that have been used to address youth unemployment include: 1) public works projects, such as employing youth to build roads and other infrastructure; 2) incentives directed at the private sector, such as “tax rebates, wage subsidies, or loosening of employment regulations”<sup>7</sup>; and 3) job training schemes, including apprenticeships. Despite their aim to counter the negative effects of youth unemployment, there are draw-

backs to these policies. Public works and private sector incentives typically focus on the immediate number of jobs created rather than on the quality of employment and the future employability of the youth. With the exception of apprenticeships, job/skills training schemes incorporate off-the-job skills training and are the most similar to youth service initiatives that tackle unemployment; therefore, they form the central point of reference for this paper.

### **I. Job/Skills Training**

Job/skills training programs are implemented outside the formal education system and are designed for individuals who are seeking work or want to enhance specific skills. These programs comprise a popular form of labor market initiatives that have been used to address youth unemployment around the world. In the United States, for example, a strong economy has contributed to the success of Job Corps, a federally-funded training program launched in 1964 for youth between 16 and 24 years of age. With a strong job market and enough public funding to support market-sensitive curricula development, Job Corps has

had modest but positive effects on the employment rates of its participants.<sup>8</sup> In developing countries, where youth unemployment rates are highest, however, the effects and applicability of these programs have had more mixed results.<sup>9</sup> Small-scale and innovative responses such as pairing skills training with micro-credit schemes are overcoming some of the problems associated with

cially in developing countries, there are several factors that contribute to the costs of such programs often outweighing their benefits. First, a shortage of long-term employment opportunities forces young workers who have received training to engage in short-term labor that doesn't develop or apply the specialized skills they may have acquired through training programs.<sup>13</sup> A second con-

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these programs, yet on the whole they face several major challenges for addressing youth unemployment. The following overview of these challenges provides important lessons for developing programs that successfully tackle youth unemployment.

**Sector Focus and Economic Dependency:** Job skills/training programs are less likely to produce significant results in the absence of a strong economic growth rate and job market and are rarely focused on the sectors that are likely to continue hiring in the face of reduced business activity. In addition, job/skills training schemes often focus exclusively on the private sector rather than on high-quality jobs within the non-profit or government sectors. In the context of global strengthening of civil society and expansion of non-governmental organizations, this private-sector bias of job training programs renders them increasingly ineffective at preparing youth for a diversity of opportunities. Unfortunately, publicly funded skills training programs are often no better, especially in developing countries. According to a report by the International Labour Organisation, such programs are generally ineffective beyond conditions of economic prosperity and, even then, have only “marginally improved the employment prospects of participants by lowering their reservation wages rather than through an improvement in the quality of their skills.”<sup>10, 11</sup>

**Cost-effectiveness:** Analyses of job/skills training programs in many countries, including Hungary, Colombia and Mexico, point to the difficulty of maintaining cost-effectiveness in program implementation.<sup>12</sup> Espe-

dition contributing to training programs' cost-ineffectiveness is the tendency for most trainees to begin such programs with poor or insufficient formal education. Unfortunately, the short-term and skill-specific training they receive cannot compensate for their fundamentally “lower stocks of human capital.”<sup>14</sup> A third condition is developing countries' “smaller typical scale of production,” which creates a surplus of workers who are often willing to take jobs that do not align with their training.<sup>15</sup> In short, the returns on investment in job/skills training materials, instructors, curricula development, and other program expenses are diminished by much larger economic conditions that influence young men and women's choices and opportunities.

**Matching quality training with needs and context:** In large part due to their costliness, job/skills training program models implemented in developing countries are often criticized for their failure to align with local labor markets,<sup>16</sup> to use culturally sensitive curricula and teaching, and as highlighted in a forum on the challenges of youth unemployment held by the International Labour Organisation in 2001, to provide quality training.<sup>17</sup> In some cases, given the costs associated with developing and updating them, training materials don't reflect changing market demands. The continued use of obsolete curricula produces young men and women whose employment prospects are no better than they would have been without training and undermines the justification for investing in such programs in the first place.<sup>18</sup> In developing countries in Africa, which tend to import such programs from elsewhere,<sup>19</sup> the wide use

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of job/skills training “oriented towards high-tech industrial employment, which requires only a few highly skilled personnel”<sup>20</sup> and for which the market is still very small, actually worsens unemployment.

Actively engaging youth: As Richard Curtain notes in “Youth and Employment: A Public Policy Perspective” (2001), there is a tendency for policymakers to operate under the “assumption that young people are passive clients,” often dismissing the “evidence that consensual, participatory and transparent processes achieve more effective outcomes.”<sup>21</sup> One strategy for increasing active youth participation is to facilitate opportunities for gaining actual work experience. Skill development alone is not enough to combat unemployment. The International Labour Organization’s World Employment Report 1998-1999 elucidates this point:

The poor performance of training programmes for youth is explained by the fact that barriers to employment opportunities for many young people are not limited to their lack of skills. They have limited experience and little access to on-the-job training. Some may suffer from discrimination if they come from socially excluded communities or from ethnic minorities. Training programmes that provide some form of in-firm work experience can both help to overcome negative attitudes towards young inexperienced workers and allow for essential on-the-job training opportunities.<sup>22</sup>

Without real work experience, the skills that trainees could use to market themselves have little value. For young people who are neither in school nor employed, having no work experience and

**the tendency for young people to possess less social and human capital often minimizes their likelihood of locating or securing employment opportunities**

often poor or insufficient formal education precludes the accumulation of social and human capital, assets that are essential to securing a job.

Social and Human Capital Accumulation: Human capital, or the knowledge and skills that individuals acquire through formal and informal education and use to solve problems and earn a living, is

“embodied in individuals”<sup>23</sup> and is one of the strongest engines for economic growth. Social capital, by contrast, is accumulated through relationships, and can contribute to unifica-

tion and equality as well as to division and power asymmetry between individuals and groups.<sup>24</sup> Generally, it is a concept used in reference to a range of interpersonal and community characteristics, including: “social networks and support structure; empowerment and community participation; civic and political involvement; trust in people and social institutions; tolerance of diversity; and altruism and philanthropy.”<sup>25</sup>

Though conceptually distinct, the interdependence of these two kinds of assets cannot be underestimated: not only does social capital “embod[y] norms and values which are influenced by education and training systems [human capital],”<sup>26</sup> it can also determine the ease with which one may access opportunities for accumulating skills and knowledge. Job/skills training programs may aim toward the generation of human capital, but there are few models that consider this interdependence, much less provide opportunities through which youth may amass these assets simultaneously.<sup>27</sup>

In addition to addressing the mutually reinforcing aspects of social and human capital, youth employment programs must tackle a “catch 22” in which many unemployed youth find themselves: without experience, one cannot get a job, and without a job, one cannot gain experience. As highlighted in the World Development Report 2007, inactivity in the workforce precludes youth from building human and social capital.<sup>28</sup> The ten-

**one strategy for increasing active youth participation is to facilitate opportunities for gaining actual work experience**

capital to enhance their attractiveness to employers.”<sup>29</sup> While job/skills training programs are designed to facilitate human capital accumulation, the absence of opportunities for hands-on learning experience and skills application has contributed to their poor results addressing youth unemployment.

Identifying solutions to the problematic components of job/skills training programs that tend to weaken their effectiveness, particularly in developing countries, is critical to combating youth unemployment. In a briefing on the state of youth unemployment with respect to the Millennium Development Goals, Deputy Director of the Childhood Poverty Research and Policy Centre Rachel Marcus outlines the broad conclusions that may be drawn from evaluations of a range of youth employment programs. She asserts, “an approach which tackles the multiple problems faced by disadvantaged youth in an integrated manner may be more effective than individual employment focused programmes.”<sup>30</sup>

## II. Youth Service Programs

Service programs, which engage youth in responding to important community needs while giving them opportunities to build skills and gain work experience, may be uniquely positioned to offer the kind of integrated approach to youth unemployment described by Marcus. When these initiatives are well designed and implemented, as well as fashioned with the specified goal of increasing youth employment, they become an effective mechanism through which youth build skills—such as leadership, responsibility, the ability to take supervision and make decisions, self-

**service programs may be uniquely positioned to offer**

**an integrated approach to youth unemployment**

management, team-building, and cooperation—that will be valued by employers in a variety of fields in both the for-profit and non-profit sectors. Such essential and cross-cutting “soft” skills will allow program participants to take on positions of increasing responsibility in their chosen areas.<sup>31</sup> In addition to developing these skills, service activi-

ties introduce youth to the sense of achievement that comes from active involvement in community-valued affairs as well as foster young people’s awareness of their power to instigate positive change.

Social and Human Capital Accumulation: In “Volunteerism During the Transition to Adulthood,” Sabrina Oesterle identifies the tendency for social and human capital to facilitate one’s participation in volunteer activities. Among adults, analyses indicate that higher earnings increase volunteerism.<sup>32</sup> For young people, however, the relationship between these assets and engaging in service is bi-directional. Perhaps because most youth start out with less social and human capital than adults, their participation in service activities fosters asset accu-

mulation. This participation can help youth transition from unemployment to employment, complementing existing youth employment interventions by giving youth an alternative platform upon which to develop human and social capital and, consequently, enhance their potential employability in quality positions upon completion of their service.

Not only do service programs foster the accumulation of social and human capital, they also address many of the underlying factors that contribute to youth unemployment. Among these factors are the effects of HIV/AIDS, poor or non-existent infrastructure, and environmental degradation. In this way, youth service is a strategy that, when well-designed and context-sensitive, may address both the interdependence of social and human capital as well as the aforementioned “catch 22.” By improving the health of communities, service programs help ensure that job oppor-

tunities will exist for youth in the future.

Changing the Paradigm: Engaging Youth as Resources for Change: Around the world, young men and women of all backgrounds are changing their communities through service. They are building houses and community centers while developing skills in construction, project planning,

**service programs foster the accumulation of social and human capital, and address many of the underlying factors that contribute to youth unemployment**

and teamwork. They are running skills development camps while learning how to take direction, lead, train, and assume responsibility. Perhaps just as important, they are challenging the typical focus of government officials, policy-makers and others on youth needs and deficiencies. By identifying and addressing local needs, youth engaged in service make important contributions to communities while reinforcing positive views of young men and women as assets rather than burdens to the collective wellbeing.<sup>33</sup> Instead of feel-

**NASCC engages more than 23,000 out-of-school and unemployed youth in community service activities in 37 states and the District of Columbia**

ing useless and alienated, these youth achieve a sense of purpose and accomplishment that enables them to enter the workforce and actively contribute to the development of their communities and countries. The governments of Nigeria, Pakistan and Turkey, among others, have recognized the important benefits of youth service and are implementing national youth service programs.

In the United States and Australia, where systems are in place to measure the outcomes of long-running programs, the capacity of youth service to reduce youth unemployment is well-documented. In countries such as Mexico and South Africa, where young people's access to employment or education and training opportunities is more limited, similar programs have been developed in the past five years and are still too new to have undergone formal assessments. Nevertheless, the early results of these programs offer concrete examples of both the kinds of initiatives that could be brought to national scale as well as the multiple forms that such initiatives can take. It should be noted that these examples do not represent the full variety of contexts in which youth service programs are being implemented, but rather focus on the formal sector in lower-middle-income and middle-income countries.

**Service as a Strategy:  
Lessons from the Field**

*The Welfare-to-Work Project (National Association of Service and Conservation Corps)—United States*

There are an estimated 3.8 million youth between the ages of 18 and 24 in the United States

who are neither employed nor in school—roughly 15% of all young adults. The National Association for Service and Conservation Corps (NASCC) engages more than 23,000 members of this population in community service activities in 37 states and the District of Columbia. The Welfare to Work Project (1999-2003), run by NASCC and funded by a \$3.8 million grant from the U.S. Department of Labor, engaged young people in projects that addressed critical community needs while making deliberate connections with poten-

tial employers.<sup>34</sup>

The overarching objectives of the Welfare-to-Work program are to “meet local communities’ needs for essential services” and to help “youth make successful transitions into adulthood and become productive members of their communities” by helping them “(1) develop academic, job, and life-skills, (2) obtain academic credentials, and (3) get jobs.”<sup>35</sup> During its four years of operation, the Welfare-to-Work program engaged youth who received, or were eligible to receive, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) in service-learning activities in areas such as environmental restoration, education, healthcare, construction and infrastructure renovation for an average of six months to one year.<sup>36</sup> Through these activities, they improved their communities as well as gained the skills, knowledge and support needed to make the transition from poverty to gainful employment.

In addition to catering to the specific needs of these youth through training sessions on parenting, anger management, and STD and drug awareness, each of the nine Corps that participated in the project also hired job developers who provided Corpmembers with “counseling, referrals to necessary intensive support services, and intensive career” guidance and preparation assistance.<sup>37</sup> Corpmembers in the Welfare-to-Work project met with a job developer to discuss their career

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ambitions, conduct mock interviews, develop career action plans and resumes, and perform job searches. Several Corps incorporated English as a Second Language (ESL) courses and Graduate Equivalency Diploma (GED) preparation into their programs. As a result, 246 young men and women (55% of all participants) from disadvantaged backgrounds were placed in unsubsidized employment, and 210 (47%) remained in employment for at least 6 months after placement. These achievements were possible for an average annual cost of \$712,500, or around \$1,597 per Corps-member.<sup>38</sup>

### Green Corps projects are aimed to preserve and restore

#### Australia's natural environment and cultural heritage

##### *Green Corps—Australia*

Green Corps, launched in 1996, is a volunteer program for young people aged 17 to 20 years funded by the Australian Government and managed by a national NGO that subcontracts projects to other partnering agents. Green Corps projects, which are primarily located in remote areas of Australia, are aimed to preserve and restore Australia's natural environment and cultural heritage. For example, one Green Corps project focused on restoring and building a sustainable environment at an educational and tourist facility located on Jigamy Farm. The Corps team, which included both indigenous and non-indigenous members, also built a traditional Boora Ring for aboriginal dance troops and led international visitors on a cultural tour.<sup>39</sup>

A program cost of about \$19.1 million a year, or around \$11,200 per program participant, covers travel and accommodation; an accredited training component; supervision, including the recruitment, training and payment of supervisors; and other management expenses. Adding the participant's allowance, which is well below the minimum wage, the total cost per participant is about \$17,000.

Green Corps projects consist of 10 young men and women who work together with a partnering agent on a project that may last anywhere from 14 weeks (for one major project) to over six months (for a series of small projects). Partnering agents, which provide equipment, materials and other support, are local and regional community or en-

vironmental groups and may include local government authorities and state government agencies.

Green Corps participants are chosen through a competitive application process and are selected on the basis of level of interest in, and commitment to, the environment and ability to work in teams. The allowance paid is determined by the participant's level of education (whether he or she has completed high school) and, where applicable, the number of years that he or she has been out of high school. A person who has left school recently gets an allowance that is about half the rate of a person who has left school five years ago. Partici-

pants also receive a uniform, accredited training, and work experience. The program is open to all young people and is not directed at those whose unemployment status is designated "long-term." Between 1997 and 2005, more than 15,000 young people participated in over 1,500 Green Corps projects.

An evaluation in 1999 showed that 60 percent of Green Corps participants made a successful transition to employment, education or training within three months of completing their Green Corps placement. Before entering the program, only 40 percent were studying, working or receiving training.<sup>40</sup>

##### *National Youth Service Program—South Africa*

In sub-Saharan Africa, where the spread of HIV/AIDS is rampant, the rate of youth unemployment is the second highest in the world. These unemployed young men and women are at a much greater risk of contracting the virus.<sup>41</sup>

Unfortunately, despite the elimination of apartheid legislation and the establishment of a democratic government in 1994, South Africa's "provision of inferior education that did not prepare its graduates for the working world" caused many youth to drop out of school.<sup>42</sup> Many youth remain stagnated by a lack of learning and skills development opportunities that preclude them from obtaining employment

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when it is available.

Since 2003, when the National Youth Service Program (NYS) was formally adopted by the South African government, the participation of at-risk young men and women in this initiative has illustrated the potential of this population to combat these obstacles—particularly unemployment—through service. The program aims at “enabling young people to acquire the skills, competencies and experience they need to achieve economic independence, while completing a service project that contributes to national or local development objectives.”<sup>43</sup>

To carry out this initiative, a Partnership Project Team (PPT) comprised of the National Youth Commission, the South African Youth Council, and the Umsobomvu Youth Fund (UYF) implement projects that address needs in housing, HIV/AIDS, sustainable development, and basic infrastructure. More than 3,500 young men and women have participated in 9-to-12-month-long National Youth Service projects, spending half of the time receiving structured education or training and the other half performing service activities.<sup>44</sup> In 2001, during the program’s preparatory phase, NYS launched “Youth for Environmental Accessibility,” a \$6.25 million project in which 420 young men and women, each paid a daily stipend of \$5.14, came from three provinces to receive relevant training and apply their services to 267 projects. In the Eastern Cape alone, 144 youth participated in 14-day and 45-day courses in technical training, with over 50 percent of participants securing employment as a result. Through the efforts of these 420 individuals, more than 100 schools and colleges, 25 hospitals and clinics, and over 100 government buildings were made accessible to disabled people.<sup>45</sup>

### *Jóvenes Constructores de la Comunidad—Mexico*

In Mexico City, only half of all school children will enter the eleventh grade, and high unemployment spurs an estimated 500,000 youth each year to seek opportunities outside Mexico.<sup>46</sup> Out of school, and almost exclusively from impoverished households, many youth are often relegated to the streets to make money in the informal sector. Here they are susceptible to a multitude of

dangerous forces, especially the recruiting efforts of an ever-expanding population of violent gangs.

Launched in Mexico City in 2003, the overarching goal of Jóvenes Constructores is to “convince local and federal government, businesses, the mass media, and communities throughout the nation to trust, include, and invest in youth, to support and establish policies for youth training and production, and to promote a more positive stance toward unemployed and poor youth.”<sup>47</sup> Since its first project began in May 2004, Jóvenes Constructores has engaged 270 out-of-school and/or unemployed youth between the ages of 17 and 29 in structured community service projects through which they are gaining the skills and confidence necessary to secure formal employment. In doing so, Jóvenes Constructores gives youth not only an incentive to remain in their communities, but a chance to become part of the solution to the problems surrounding them.

The average length of participation in Jóvenes Constructores is between four and six months, and the number of participants per project ranges from 20 to 100. Around 28 percent of these participants are young women, and 15 percent are concurrently enrolled in school. Participants receive a minimum-wage-based stipend and are engaged in reforestation, gardening, and the construction or repair of buildings, football fields, basketball courts, and community centers. Some of these projects are publicly funded, while in other cases Jóvenes Constructores or another local non-profit organization is contracted by the owner or recipient of the facility that youth will construct or repair, minimizing costs and helping communities afford such infrastructure development.

To date, Jóvenes Constructores has completed 18 projects in Mexico City’s historic center and has completed, or is in the process of completing, six projects in the Chiapas region (particularly in hurricane-devastated areas). In each project, Jóvenes Constructores seeks to instill general life skills

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such as leadership, teamwork, confidence, responsibility, and openness to supervision. Each young man or woman receives practical on-the-job training in several trades, including carpentry, masonry, iron-work, electricity, plumbing, tree-planting/gardening, and painting.

**experiences with large-scale government youth service schemes designed to enhance youth employability have not been universally positive**

Beyond the many skills that participants develop through the construction and renovation projects they carry out with Jóvenes Constructores, they are also exposed to a variety of tasks that facilitate their awareness of the types of work in which they might be interested. Each young person must join a project planning commission, covering areas such as Press, Community Relations, Security and Recreation. Performing the duties specific to each commission may require the use of computers, interpersonal communication, negotiation tactics, and decision-making.

In addition to these program components, participants help arrange, and engage in, field trips to real-world businesses and institutions. Through this activity they see the kinds of opportunities available to them and may establish connections that can facilitate their post-service employment and expand their job networks. At the end of each service project, Jóvenes Constructores staff members actively facilitate participants' transition to employment, serving as references and helping these young men and women make additional

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contacts, refine their resumes, and set up job interviews.

Jóvenes Constructores is still early in its development in Mexico and has not yet undergone a formal evaluation. However, it presents a very promising model built on the positively evaluated experience of YouthBuild in the US. Since 2005, Jóvenes Constructores has worked to gain the support of 35 organizations for its plan to develop a national youth service program, called Juventud en Servicio Nacional, which it will present to the

national government for implementation in 2007.

### ***A Critical Approach to Youth Service Programs***

Studying youth service programs that have had a positive impact on youth unemployment is essential for beginning to identify the components of youth service that render it effective as a youth employment strategy. However, a critical evaluation of the ways in which some programs have not lived up to their promise is also necessary. In her opening address at the 2000 Worldwide Workshop on Youth Involvement as a Strategy for Social, Economic and Democratic Development, Alison Bernstein, the Ford Foundation's Vice President of the Education, Media, Arts and Culture Program, cautioned "for us to understand youth service better, the topic deserves more loving critics and fewer uncritical lovers."<sup>48</sup> Like job/skills training schemes, the drawbacks of which present a valuable set of lessons for youth employment policy, the effectiveness of youth service programs is contingent upon a variety of factors, including program design and implementation, community needs and contexts, and socio-political climates.

Some examples of potential pitfalls that local and national stakeholders must take into account when developing and implementing successful youth service initiatives include providing inadequate incentives or supervision for program participants; trying to adapt military service models to non-military settings; not ensuring sufficient socio-economic, racial, religious or ethnic diver-

sity among program participants; establishing program goals and parameters without consulting stakeholders; and not engaging potential program partners like existing service and community organizations.

Experiences with large-scale government youth service schemes designed to enhance youth employability have not been universally positive for several reasons. As Don Eberly, President of the International Association for National Youth Service, has noted, National Youth Service

“contributes to employment policy by giving young people full-time work experience and career exploration, thereby assisting the transition from school to work.”<sup>49</sup> At the same, he says, “training activities are sometimes out of line with job prospects,” leading to a situation in which participants “become disillusioned with the program if they cannot move directly into jobs.”<sup>50</sup>

**in some struggling economies, employers view youth service members as a substitute for permanent staff and a means of cutting operation costs**

Another potential negative outcome of youth service programs designed to combat unemployment is that program participants can end up unintentionally taking jobs away from paid workers.<sup>51</sup> In some struggling economies, employers view youth service members as a substitute for permanent staff and, therefore, a means of cutting operation costs. As a result, while such service programs enhance youth employability, they also inadvertently contribute to limited employment opportunities for participants upon graduation from the programs as well as unemployment for some paid workers. One potential solution is to promote program activities in service-oriented occupations (like teaching or healthcare) with the most “acute staffing shortages.”<sup>52</sup>

### Conclusion

Given the diversity and fluctuation of community and market needs, the promise of service as a strategy for addressing youth unemployment rests on its adaptability as a model as well as its ability to provide integrated or holistic solutions to the challenges both youth and their communities face. Well designed and implemented youth service programs that consider local contexts and engage youth in contributing to their communities’ development while building valuable work and life skills can be applied to nearly any context. In light of the lessons learned from the implementation of these programs and of job/skills training schemes, as highlighted here, there are several key issues that must be considered when developing youth service programs aimed at combating youth unemployment. Specifically, it is essential to focus on ways to engage multiple stakeholders throughout the community in the design, implementation and evaluation of any pro-

gram, to conduct an assessment to determine the most relevant areas for employment-oriented programs in both the for-profit and non-profit sectors, to match participants to program goals, and to invest significant time and resources in learning from other models to design solid recruiting, training, management and supervision systems. By investing in adequate planning and preparation

for youth service programs, and looking to lessons from other global and local experiences, context-specific youth service programs can become an effective tool for combating youth unemployment. By participating in projects valued by their communities, such as cleaning parks or building schools, for example, unemployed youth who may be marginalized or at risk of becoming marginalized, gain the trust, support, and gratitude of their service beneficiaries. Assessing community needs, developing work plans, and cooperating as part of diverse teams, they are able to accumulate the social and human capital they will need to market themselves in a competitive workforce. Programs such as those highlighted above present a potentially cost-effective strategy for youth employment, while also calling on young people to play an important role in the development of their countries by addressing community needs. Innovations in Civic Participation recognizes that youth service cannot, on its own, overcome youth unemployment; however, when utilized at its full-scale potential and carried out through well-structured and context-sensitive programs, youth service presents a promising and valuable addition to current strategies.

#### Key design features of youth service programs should include:

- Engaging multiple stakeholders in program design, implementation and evaluation;
- Conducting an assessment to determine the most relevant areas for employment-oriented programs in both the for-profit and non-profit sectors;
- Matching participants to program goals; and
- Investing significant time and resources in learning from other models to design solid recruiting, training, management and supervision systems.

## *Endnotes*

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