

QUALITY TRAINING FOR SCHOOL LEAVERS IN KEY SKILLS SUPPORTING THE CONSTRUCTION SECTOR IN RIVERS STATE

Niger Delta Youth Employment Pathways (NDYEP)
June 2019

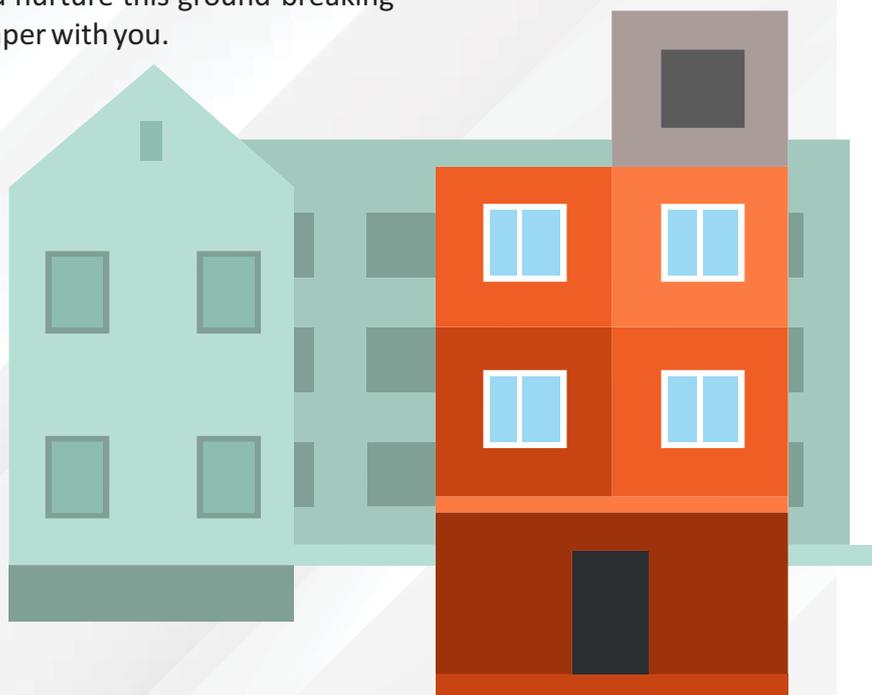


Acknowledgements

This practice paper was commissioned by the Foundation for Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta (PIND) to document emerging models, lessons and practices from the on-going implementation of its pilot youth skills training and employment pathways program. We are enormously grateful for the contribution and acknowledged expertise of Kirsty Milward, independent consultant, who is the main author of this practice paper.

This practice paper reflects the work of many people who: conceptualized and brought the Niger Delta Youth Employment Pathways Project (NDYEP) to life, adapting its approach to continually improve results; who provided key insights and facilitation of the evaluation; and who guided the several iterations of this paper. We wish to extend special thanks to: Emeka Nwankwo, PIND's Planning and Evaluation Manager for his wisdom, guidance and dedication to the evaluation of the project and development of related practice papers; to Emeka Ile, the Project Team Leader and Patrick Ekpe, Project Advisor for their orientation, technical insights and guidance and for organizing and accompanying the field work; John Femi Osuntokun, the Monitoring and Evaluation Coordinator for reassuring logistical support; and Chinonso Onwunali and Yvonne Jonah, Private Sector Advisor for excellent research assistance with note taking, transcriptions and contextual information.

Above all, we are grateful to the project partners, their staff, trainees, the employers and other respondents who gave their thoughts, and time – sometimes quite considerable – out of their busy schedules, to answer our many questions, and without whom there would be no project to evaluate. The last word of thanks is reserved for PIND Foundation leadership, especially Dara Akala, the Executive Director and Tunji Idowu, his astute deputy, who had the courage and foresight to support and nurture this ground-breaking project. We are happy to share this practice paper with you.



Summary

Niger Delta Youth Employment Pathways (NDYEP) began in 2018 to develop models of youth training in which marginalised young people are trained in market-relevant skills and subsequently supported into sustainable jobs or enterprise. It currently works through 13 implementing partners in the aquaculture, construction and ICT sectors, in Rivers, Abia and Akwa Ibom States. This paper explores the methods applied and the mid-term results achieved in the construction sector in Rivers State, using the example of the project implemented by the MRE Consortium: a partnership between Entrepreneurship and Innovation Centre Ltd + Est Master Construction + Rivers State University.

The construction sector in Rivers State has historically been driven by oil companies' investments in infrastructure alongside state government investments, but research for NDYEP also identified housing construction as a growth area, requiring skills particularly for 'finishing' tasks. Construction companies generally contract skilled and semi-skilled labour from supply pools on a project basis, and rely on certification to assure quality skills, rather than investing in skills upgrading themselves. Workers also seek work in local markets on a self-employed basis.

NDYEP set out to position young trainees to take advantage of opportunities in the sector by equipping young people with market-relevant skills and supporting them to achieve contract-based employment and self-employment. In Port Harcourt, the intervention took the form of the Rivers Construction Skills Training and Empowerment Linkages (STEM) project. Since December 2018, the project has trained 75 young people: 41 in plumbing and 34 in tiling. Of these, 12 were young women: nine in the tiling stream, and three in plumbing. 27 of the plumbing trainees have subsequently been linked to WichTech industries for internship. In addition, five tilers have been linked to D&G Tiling Masters, a company distributing and marketing tiles and sanitary hardware. Five further plumbing trainees have been linked to Noble the Facilitator (Nobtel Hydro Tech), a Port Harcourt plumbing services provider. In summary, 49% of the trainees have been linked to onward placements, and women have had nearly as much success in securing placements as men.

Key features of the implementation model supporting these results are:

- **Combining business and development sector approaches:** NDYEP identified partners through competitive tender seeking entrepreneurial, business-oriented organisations. In the construction sector in Rivers, the MRE Consortium was specifically created for the NDYEP project, with each member bringing a different dimension of support to the project: E&I brings facilitators and the market linkages to support trainees after their training; EST Master Construction has contributed to ensuring the relevance of skills taught and provided some 'live' construction sites for practical elements of the training, as well as taking on interns with prospects for retention based on performance. Rivers State University has provided the training venue and construction companies handling some building construction at the University have also provided some of the 'live' construction sites for the practical training
- **Working to strengths:** NDYEP's project management in PIND has been flexible concerning training content, approach, and the relationships built by grantees to support training, enabling organisations to evolve methods based on their strengths. For the STEM project, this has meant drawing on the relationships and experience already embedded in the MRE Consortium - such as that E&I was able to build on its prior relationship with RSU and its



experience of facilitating their vocational skills training modules for 3rd year students, and adapting these for the NDYEP profile of trainees with less prior education



- **Enriching training with an integrated approach:** The trainings developed by the Consortium in plumbing and tiling uses the curriculum of the National Institute of Building (NIOB), modified for age and education levels by integrating visuals into the delivery. Into this core content, it has integrated business and soft skills components, as well as practical, hands-on, elements both in the classroom and at ‘live’ construction sites where trainees get to put what they have learned into practice.
- **Nurturing strategic partnerships:** for the STEM project, the Consortium itself is a key partnership. In addition, E&I’s subsidiary organisations HeRock Nigeria, a manpower supply platform, provides an important linkage to the labour market for trainees. The Consortium has also strengthened links to the Rivers State Ministry of Employment Generation and Economic Development, aiming ultimately to make an arrangement for some trainees to be absorbed into each construction project on government contract. It has also initiated dialogue with the NIOB to ensure professional certification for trainees following completion of training and internships.
- **Creating accountability to the onward pathway:** Creating effective job linkages is at the heart of the Consortium’s approach, and an important pillar of E&I’s ongoing work as a business linkages facilitator. This has meant building the linkages between the demand side opportunities in construction, and a pool of competent and competitive artisans, training centres, and hardware supplier enterprises. E&I have been working towards creating ongoing opportunities for training graduates since the early days of the project. In addition, participants have prepared for the entrepreneurship pathway, enabling them to be self-reliant in terms of seeking contracts, and undertaking supply-side roles in the building materials trade, either directly marketing to building construction companies; working at individual level; or opening sales outlets. Internships in these dimensions of the sector are also being sought out by E&I.

NDYEP promotes an inclusive approach for the programme, and had set a target that at least 40% of trainees benefitting from the programme should be a combination of women and people with disabilities. The STEM project has found this target a major challenge, due to strong labour force segmentation which generally keep women out of the construction sector. Social norms around men’s work and women’s work are powerful, and the project simply received few applications from women. At present, 16% of the trainees are women, with the majority of these (9) in the tiling stream. However, the project has now also created experience of the positive effects of including women in the groups. Female trainees interviewed agreed that it had been a very positive experience, and increased their confidence. Some of these women trainee graduates now emerging could make good role models and mentors for new batches of women trainees.

Lessons to date suggest that there are different possible pathways available in the construction sector, which require different types of support from the partner’s skill base. Most trainees will aim for employment in construction, but will do this as individual freelancers, either sourcing small scale work locally or securing contracts as a member of a manpower supply pool. To achieve this, they will need to secure further experience (ideally through further internship/apprenticeship, or through individual contracts); a mechanism for minimum levels of finance (savings or loans) for tools and business basics; and links to a manpower supply pool. Others will move into hardware supply and marketing, as the training has continuously emphasised opportunities across the value chain. These trainees will take their next steps either through internship with an established supplier, or by building experience and knowledge of the trade through individual local jobs. This group will also need mechanisms for building the experience that can give full knowledge and understanding of products and how they are used; and basic finance to get established as a supplier.

Emerging recommendations for organisations moving into similar youth work readiness approaches include:

- Ensuring accountability of the project to employment / sustainable business outcomes, not simply training, and planning for the post-training activities and support that will be

necessary to facilitate the onward process of strengthening skills, building experience and accessing finance.

- Initiate strong, transparent partner and trainee selection processes which identify partners embedded as businesses in the sector; and select trainees according to clearly understood criteria.
- Design a curriculum which integrates business and soft skills with technical skills, and use a methodology which give opportunity to apply and practice all these types of skills over the course of the training. In the construction sector, it is important to address the issue of certification of these skills.
- Use strategies for inclusion of women in order to contribute to gender equality, and consider using early female trainees as role models to encourage others.

NIGER DELTA YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PATHWAYS

The NDYEP is a two-year collaboration between Foundation for Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta (PIND) and Ford Foundation which aims to contribute to addressing the critical issue of youth unemployment in the Niger Delta. In its first year, the pilot program has focused on three priority states of Abia, Akwa Ibom, and Rivers.

The overall goal of project is to develop models of youth job readiness that provide marginalized young men and women in the Niger Delta the opportunity to secure sustainable jobs through training that prepares them with market relevant skills.

To achieve this, the project articulated four strategic change objectives expressing the implementation logic of the project, to:

1. Develop an understanding of the employment and skills landscape in the Niger Delta region to inform strategic investments in skills development programming;
2. Promote a demand-driven approach to skills development in the Niger Delta through partnerships between youth employment ecosystem players, especially employers, policymakers, development partners and training institutions;
3. Develop programs that demonstrate model pathways from skills training to employment through the provision of direct vocational training in three sectors of the economy, ICT, agriculture and construction, and other sectors where opportunities are identified; and
4. Monitor and evaluate the project and document, and disseminate key learnings.

NDYEP in its first year has worked through 13 implementing partners across the three priority states. These partners have been tasked with training and supporting young people into enterprise and employment in the three sectors of aquaculture, ICT and construction.

THE CONSTRUCTION SECTOR

The construction sector in Rivers state has historically been driven by oil companies' investments in infrastructure alongside state government investments, especially in Port Harcourt. The recent dampening of construction demand in the wake of Nigeria's macroeconomic challenges increased construction companies' dependence on government-funded projects, but oil and gas based investment has started to return in recent months.

Research for NDYEP in the inception phase identified opportunities particularly in the housing construction sector as companies work to fill the national housing deficit of 17 million houses; this sub-sector is less dependent on government or oil-driven projects. Within residential construction, the skilled labour need is for 'finishing' skills such as carpentry, electrical fittings and installation, plumbing and tiling.



The project-based nature of construction means that full time staff employment by construction companies is minimal; rather lower skilled labour will be contracted from labour supply pools as needs arise, and companies do not expect to invest in skills upgrading, relying instead on certification to assure quality skills from short-term contract based workers. Workers, in turn, when not employed on a large project, will seek work in local markets on a self-employed basis.

However, existing training programmes do not usually emphasise the practical knowledge needed to produce high quality skills that companies need to be able to source quickly when projects arise. Therefore the companies continue to source some skilled labour from outside the state and internationally, constituting a drain on economic development in the state. In Q3 of 2018, Rivers State had the second highest overall rate of unemployment in Nigeria, at 36.4%¹

Employers also note that soft skills such as attention to detail, positive attitude, commitment, integrity and timeliness are important. Affected by the oil-driven 'handout' culture, the research notes that a negative attitude to work on the part of young people is a particular challenge in the state.²

CASE STUDY METHODOLOGY

This Practice Paper presents a case study of the approach and methods used in the construction sector for youth employment readiness by NDYEP. It uses the example of the MRE Consortium: a partnership between Entrepreneurship and Innovation Centre Ltd + Est Master construction + Rivers State University created in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, to implement the NDYEP project. This MRE Consortium had trained 75 young people in tiling or plumbing by April 2019.

The paper forms one of three case studies developed following the first year of programme implementation. The overall purpose of the three studies is to capture learning from the programme for wider dissemination supporting a broader understanding and uptake of the project's approach. The studies set out to identify the factors and conditions of implementation that have supported promising results.

Qualitative methods were used to collect data for the studies from different perspectives. Key informant interviews and focus group discussions were held with implementing partner staff, trainees in both tiling and plumbing streams; and potential employers. Observation methods were also used during visits to training venues.

Data collected was analysed using social science key word coding methods, and triangulated against information collected from a document review and the programme's results database. The methodology also drew on a data collection process for the programme's Mid Term Evaluation (MTE), and field visits for these two processes were synergised. The field visit took place in all three states during March 2019.

HOW HAS THE NDYEP PROJECT BEEN TRANSLATED INTO ACTION IN CONSTRUCTION?

NDYEP's intervention in construction aimed to equip disadvantaged young people with quality, market-relevant skills. These are skills which are in demand in the industry through contract-based employment as well as for self-employment on smaller projects. In particular, it was important to overcome the negative attitudes to work and training opportunities among young people which are perceived to be common in the state.

¹ Labour Force Statistics – Volume 2: Unemployment and Underemployment by State Q3 2018, National Bureau of Statistics, April 2019.

² Identifying Pathways to Employment for Youth in the Niger Delta, an analysis of Abia, Akwa Ibom and Rivers States, PIND/DAI 2019.

Like NDYEP's interventions in the other sectors, its approach builds on the recognition that most traditional skills acquisition programmes have failed to deliver sustainable results because they do not pay enough attention to what happens (post-training) to the entrepreneurs they produce. Secondly, training courses often do not give sufficient scope for hands-on practical experience that can provide opportunity for the application of theoretical knowledge.

NDYEP seeks to avoid this pitfall by in-building the conditions for post-training opportunities into the project structure, and by integrating practical teaching methodologies into skills training. In Rivers State, the intervention took the form of the Rivers Construction Skills Training and Empowerment Linkages (STEM) project.

Overview of the Rivers Construction Skills Training and Empowerment Linkages (STEM) project

Since December 2018, the MRE Consortium in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, has trained 75 young people in plumbing and tiling. Of these, 12 were young women: nine in the tiling stream, and three in plumbing.

All of the selected trainees have successfully graduated from the training: 41 in plumbing and 34 in tiling.

27 of the plumbing trainees have been linked to WichTech industries for internship. This is planned as a four-month internship, providing further training in how to install WichTech's plumbing and drainage products. The interns have already attended a pre-internship orientation before starting the actual internship. They will receive a small stipend during the internship, and will also be able to make some extra money through commission on marketing the company's products.

In addition, five tilers have been linked to D&G Tiling Masters, a company distributing and marketing tiles and sanitary hardware. Five further plumbing trainees have been linked to Noble the Facilitator (Nobtel Hydro Tech), a Port Harcourt plumbing services provider.

In summary, 49% of the trainees have been linked to onward placements, and women have had nearly as much success in securing placements as men: five of those placed are from among the 12 women trainees.

Aside from the technical skills they have gained through the training, trainees emphasise the value they find in the personal development dimensions of the training: *'The managers have been great and they have helped in developing our minds. The training has made me more focused on what I need to do and my goals'*. They also specifically mention some of the softs skills they have developed: *The centre taught us how to be disciplined. Even at the orientation, they taught us how to behave*, and note that these support a sense of efficacy for their future work: *'I can now plan and understand how to go about a job'*.

What are the processes that have supported these promising results?

KEY FEATURES OF IMPLEMENTATION THROUGH THE NDYEP-MRE PARTNERSHIP

1. COMBINING BUSINESS AND DEVELOPMENT SECTOR APPROACHES

A defining feature of NDYEP is that it has partnered, through a competitive tender process, mainly with entrepreneurial, business-oriented organisations. Through these organisations, it has deployed profit-oriented strategies with the objective of contributing to stimulating economic growth in selected sectors, and (indirectly perhaps) to demonstrate 'business thinking' to trainees.

For the construction sector in Rivers, the tender process stimulated the development of a consortium of organisations, each consortium member bringing a different dimension of networks, knowledge and resources to the project.



How did the Consortium come about, and what does each member bring to it?

The MRE Consortium was specifically created for the NDYEP project, with the aim of bringing together different specialisations and networks to work towards the programme's objectives in the construction sector in Rivers State.

Entrepreneurship and Innovation (E&I) is the lead company in the partnership for the purposes of implementing the programme. The company was established in 2008 with the primary purpose of creating sustainable jobs through facilitating business linkages and providing advisory support to SMEs. With a mission to deepen and broaden the local economy, it aims to improve the capabilities of local companies and the supplier base with a view to attracting inward investment. For the Consortium, E&I has taken the lead in the formalities of project design, monitoring and reporting, and provides facilitators for the training programme.

EST Master Construction Ltd is another Consortium member. Based in Port Harcourt, EST Master Construction was established in 2000 and specialises in residential, commercial and road construction, with capacity to undertake large and complex projects. The company attends job fairs to fulfil their need for skilled manpower. So; the NDYEP programme offers potential as sustainable alternative route for locating human resources. As a Consortium member, it has contributed to identifying what the construction sector needs and how this might be achieved. Staff members have taken part in overseeing the training to ensure the skills taught meet requirements of companies like theirs, and the company has provided some of the 'live' construction sites for the hands-on practical parts of the training. They also will be taking on interns from among the pool of trainees as long as they have ongoing projects in which to place them and with prospects for retention based on performance; if not, they will be able to link trainees with other construction companies.

Rivers State University (RSU) is the third Consortium member. The University already has a vocational training facility for the use of RSU students undertaking vocational modules to their courses. RSU has made these facilities available for the NDYEP training, since the programme has a close fit with their objectives for the facility. Construction companies handling some building construction at the University have also provided some of the 'live' construction sites for the practical training, like EST Master Construction. E&I also already had strong links with RSU, as they work together under a Public-Private-Partnership arrangement.

All partners in the Consortium are signatories to an MoU which specifies roles and responsibilities for each partner.

For this project, one benefit of this approach has been to draw on the business orientation of partners to support the project. For E&I, this has meant linking the project to its subsidiary enterprise, HeRock Nigeria Ltd. This is an emerging manpower supplier in the sector, and on completion, trainees will be linked to this organisation as one route into finding contract-based employment.

2. WORKING TO STRENGTHS

Like its work in other sectors; the NDYEP has developed a strategy of working with existing strengths of partner organizations in the construction sector. Aside from specifying trainee profiles, PIND project management has allowed partners to take initiative in designing and developing training curricula, and in developing the relationships that will provide and support the pathways of trainees into placements, jobs, or self-employment.

For the STEM project, this has meant drawing on the relationships and experience already embedded in the MRE Consortium. For instance under the Public Private Partnership arrangement that E&I had prior to NDYEP with RSU, the organisation was already training university students in specific vocational skills for a compulsory module for 3rd year students on 4 year courses. Twice



weekly sessions were running for 12 weeks, on skills such as soap making, public speaking, catering, waste management, welding and fabrication, electrical wiring, AC/refrigeration, fashion and design, landscaping and brick-making/masonry etc. These trainings took place at the RSU training centre facility, on the university campus. Therefore; much of the infrastructure was already in place for E&I to facilitate training under NDYEP, in coordination with RSU. This included training facilitators who had experience to adapt the training curriculum for the somewhat younger and less educated trainees that NDYEP was targeting. NDYEP aims to serve the under-privileged young people, with an age limit of 26, and including those who cannot access further education. For the construction sector intervention, it prioritised secondary school leavers, whereas the earlier trainings were for 3rd year undergraduates.

3. Enriching training with an integrated approach

The Consortium's curriculum for the trainings in plumbing and tiling uses the curriculum of the National Institute of Building (NIOB), but with delivery methodologies modified to address the age and education levels of the target group. Modification was mainly achieved by integrating visual elements into the teaching methodology, especially video.

A second method used by the Consortium to adapt the course to the target group has been electing class governors for each group, through whom trainees can freely express concerns or request special permissions. This mechanism was added in response to the realisation that their lower education levels were associated with greater difficulties than anticipated in expressing themselves and relating to course officials and facilitators.

The training, which lasts approximately 4 months, includes substantial practical sessions - at least four full weeks in tiling and two weeks in plumbing. This dimension includes exposure to 'live' building projects and opportunity to apply newly learned skills at these live sites. This exposure to live building projects is very powerful in enriching the training: One trainee interviewed said: *'It was a mind-boggling experience. When I close my eyes, I see myself on site'*.

The curricula are already orientated to practical skills - with sessions in plumbing, for example, on installing septic tanks and rain gutters. Delivery for the project includes many practical elements built into classroom sessions, with tools provided to trainees as they work in groups of five or six to practice skills and apply knowledge. For trainees, this is an important dimension, that distinguishes this training from others they know about: *'I have attended a different youth empowerment training. The difference was that it was all talks and no practical'*.

The training also emphasises business and soft skills, and draws trainees' attention to opportunities in construction across the value chain - for instance, in hardware supply and marketing.

All facilitators and trainees interviewed for this case study particularly note the soft skills elements of the course as adding value. At the beginning of the training, the course includes extensive 'mind-set reorientation' training, which includes issues such as timeliness and discipline which are key elements of success in the workplace, along with essentials about health, safety and the construction environment. Safety aspects of the curricula are emphasised in part through the provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) at the beginning of the course. Facilitators and the centre manager clarify to trainees that they are expected to use their PPE at all times in work places.

The soft skills modules of the training are an important element which trainees appreciate. One respondent said: *The soft skill training has been one of my biggest achievement since I came here.* While the schedule for these modules was, for reasons of scheduling, placed as the final element of the training, E&I and the training facilitators agree with other NDYEP partners that it would be more effective to integrate the soft skills modules - which include information on marketing their handwork and new products and providing quotations, for example - alongside personal development elements such as conflict management - earlier in the course.



Mueme's story

Mueme Goodluck Barineka left school after attaining O levels, and then found it difficult to find work because no skills. First; he took up a job in a laundry, then his brother spotted an advertisement for a job working with MTN, a local mobile network, which involved registering SIM cards. He was living with his brother, who was paying for his upkeep at the time, so he was happy to get a job that meant he could contribute to the household.

He was delighted when his aunt, who works in the state secretariat, told him about the NDYEP training because he wanted to have a real skill, and even more happy when he was selected. He chose the tiling training stream of the programme with the MRE Consortium because he likes the designs you can make with tiles, and finds it takes creativity to make beautiful designs.

Mueme has really appreciated the integrated, hands-on approach to the training. He says, *'Nothing is missing from the training because they are giving us both the theory and the practical part of it'*. He feels he has developed his tiling handwork, but also that he has developed his personal skills: the conflict management component of the soft skill training has helped him control his temper and manage his anger. And the good thing is that these are skills for life: *'The learnings I have are now a part of me.'*

To continue developing his experience, after the training he plans to buy some tiles and fix the floor where he is staying. Also, he is lucky that one of his brothers is also a tiler. This means that after the training, he will be able to work with his brother and continue to develop his skills, in return for a small stipend. And he is confident that they will get work. In the area where he lives there are several new buildings coming up, and he is sure that once he lets people know he has certification and can do the job, people will call him.

4. Strategic partnerships

From the outset, partners to NDYEP have been encouraged to create and strengthen strategic partnerships which can support the objectives of the programme.

For the MRE Consortium, like other partners in the programme, this has meant building and strengthening ties with organizations which can provide opportunities to trainees to continue building their experience on the pathway to sustainable employment and entrepreneurship. Clearly, this has included bringing EST Master Construction as a consortium member; and also building the profile of HeRock Nigeria, which will serve as a platform for the trainees to provide services.

In addition, E&I has strengthened links to the Rivers State Ministry of Employment Generation and Economic Development, aiming ultimately to make an arrangement for some trainees to be absorbed into each construction project on government contract. This relationship has also already been fruitful in spreading the youth employment strategy: the Ministry has recently initiated the RIVERS L.E.D CONSTRUCTION SKILLS LINKAGES AND EMPOWERMENT PROJECT (RIV- L.E.D), which adopts the NDYEP strategy in its implementation approach.

Importantly, E&I have also initiated dialogue with the NIOB, whose curriculum the project uses as a basis, to ensure professional certification for trainees following completion of training and internships. Up to date and credible certification is a particularly key issue for the construction sector, in which companies seek skilled manpower on a project-to-project basis, and require that workers can carry out a task with minimal supervision. Therefore E&I aims to certify trainees to the standard demanded by the oil and gas sector and other professional bodies.

5. ACCOUNTABILITY TO THE ONWARD PATHWAY: CREATING THE BUILDING BLOCKS FOR POST-TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Creating effective job linkages is at the heart of the Consortium's approach, and an important pillar of E&I's ongoing work as a business linkages facilitator. This has meant building the linkages between the demand side opportunities in construction, and a pool of competent and competitive artisans, training centres, and hardware supplier enterprises.

E&I have been working towards creating ongoing opportunities for training graduates since the early days of the project. These include through the strategic partnerships sought, and also through links with multiple other organisations working in the sector, including Port-Harcourt based private contractors; construction companies working in and around RSU, and government building projects.

The project is now on the point of reaping some of the dividends as 37 trainees now move into onward placements with WichTech, Nobtel Hydro Tech, and D&G Tiling Masters.

What do construction companies in Rivers want from an employee?

The MRE Consortium includes EST Master Construction, an established construction company in the state, and has also made links with WichTech which designs and produces plumbing supplies.

Staff of EST Masters are clear about what they need from employees: they need people who are skilled; trained based on their needs; and able to deliver quality work without constant supervision by engineers. They also need good communication skills, so they will fully understand instructions from the engineers and the company's requirements for quality, and be able to follow these.

For WichTech, the key issues are that the trainees should know and understand the materials being used, and have the entrepreneurial capacity to *"take the bull by the horns"*. WichTech are confident that they have good products, but they need good installers if they are to increase their market penetration. Previously they have trained installers themselves, and have now worked with the MRE Consortium to run demonstrations and internships for their trainees, so that they are familiar with the products and have prior contact with the company.

Other stakeholders engaged in employer perspectives are aware that safety awareness is a growing issue which can support growth in the industry generally, as on-site accidents can contribute to depressing the sector. They also want to see awareness of details required to deliver quality finishing; alongside soft skills like being regular and punctual at work. A stakeholder from the Ministry of Employment Generation and Economic Empowerment in Rivers State recognises that in the past when they have supplied young trainees to organizations *'they complain that these youths are unemployable. When we give them starter packs, the youths sell them on and then enrol in another training'*.

But like the others, he is confident that the NDYEP trainees will demonstrate professionalism.

In addition, participants have prepared for the entrepreneurship pathway, enabling them to be self-reliant in terms of seeking contracts, and undertaking supply-side roles in the building materials trade, either directly marketing to building construction companies; working at individual level; or opening sales outlets. Internships in these dimensions of the sector are also being sought out by E&I.

CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED DURING IMPLEMENTATION

REACHING NDYEP'S TARGETED PROFILE OF TRAINEES

NDYEP's programme included guideline targets for 40% of trainees to be young women (and/or people with disabilities). The STEM project has found this target a major challenge, due to strong labour force segmentation which keeps women out of the construction sector except, at times, in administration roles. Social norms around men's work and women's work are powerful, and the project simply received few applications from women. At present, 16% of the trainees are women, with the majority of these (9) in the tiling stream. The project also suffered a setback when, having received six applications for plumbing from women in the first batch (of which 3 were selected), they received none for the second batch of training.



The partner is aware, due to lessons from other partners, of some strategies which can be taken into the next phase of the programme for attracting women into the courses, including women-specific advertising, and mixed-gender advertising which places strong emphasis on clarifying that women are encouraged to apply.

The project has now also created experience of the positive effects of including women in the groups. Female trainees interviewed agreed that it had been a very positive experience, and increased their confidence: *It's been a great experience being a girl in the training. It gives me confidence and makes me proud.* A number of young men also mentioned positive effects of having women as classmates (see Box below).

One female trainee noted that having other women in the training was encouraging for her. This suggests that some women trainee graduates now emerging could make good role models for other women. Their stories or profiles could be used to emphasise how women can achieve success in these sectors. One such story is set out below.

Blessing's Story (name changed)

Blessing is an articulate, 26-year-old resident of Port Harcourt. She currently still lives with her parents and her home circumstances are modest: her mother is self-employed with a small catering business; her father is a maritime worker. So, she has always tried to contribute to the family income.

Blessing has a clear dynamism which is likely one of the characteristics that brought her the NDYEP training opportunity. She has used this dynamism before, taking up a variety of jobs including working as a filling station attendant for three years; and more recently working in a printing firm, initially as a secretary, and then, since she showed aptitude, the boss offered to teach her the printing process. She has yet to complete her degree in Mass Communication, but already does a bit of journalism from time to time.

Blessing sees no problem at all as a woman in wanting to be a plumber: *I had seen guys doing plumbing and wanted to beat them, and she was interested in the opportunity because 'the skills were different; it's a real means of livelihood and I can get employment from it'.* She did not experience any kind of unfair treatment and did not feel discriminated against because of her gender. Instead she really enjoyed the competitive edge created by men and women working alongside each other in a trade normally dominated by men. Her male classmates concur: *'It makes the competition good; we want to impress the girls. It increases our motivation when the women are working very hard. If something goes wrong and the women are solving it, it makes us try harder!'*

Blessing has found the training course truly enriching: *They are trying to make us different from general young people; trying to make us think and prove that we are special.* But she is also aware that more practice, or opportunities to gain experience, will be necessary before she can work fully confidently as a plumber.

She has already taken up some extra-curricular opportunities to gain this experience. Outside the training centre building at RSU there is a fish pond. It used to be defunct, but a group of trainees – with Blessing among them – designed and installed the water supply system voluntarily as a result of their newly learned skills. Her father is ready to help her gain more experience too. He has a building that has just been constructed. When the training is complete, Blessing is going to fit part of the plumbing in this building, and try to use it as a showcase of her skills to generate more work.

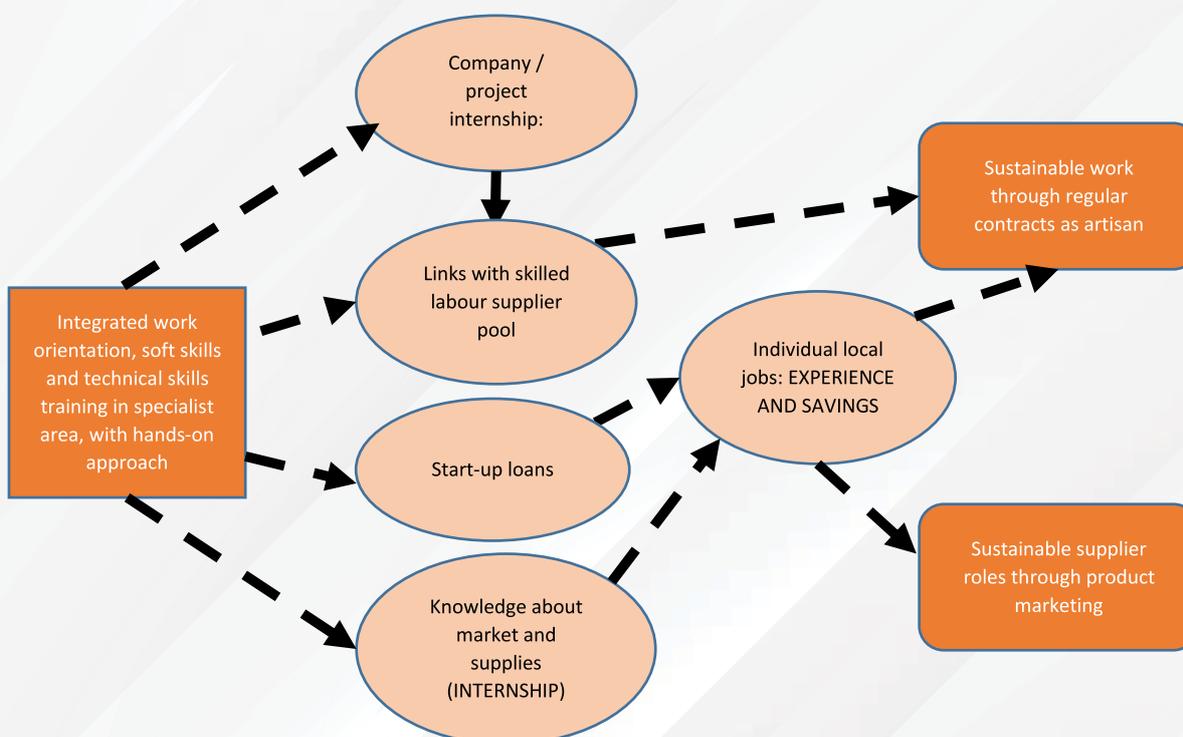
WHAT EMPLOYMENT AND ENTERPRISE PATHWAYS ARE BEING ESTABLISHED?

For the construction sector, onward pathways from the training have only just begun to be forged. Lessons to date suggest that there are different possible pathways available, which require different types of support from the partner's skill base.

As figure 1 illustrates, most trainees will aim for employment in construction, but will do this as individual freelancers, either sourcing small scale work locally or securing contracts as a member of a manpower supply pool. To achieve this, they will need to secure further experience (ideally through further internship/apprenticeship, or through individual contracts); a mechanism for minimum levels of finance (savings or loans) for tools and business basics; and links to a manpower supply pool.

Others will move into hardware supply and marketing, as the training has continuously emphasised opportunities across the value chain. These trainees will take their next steps either through internship with an established supplier, or by building experience and knowledge of the trade through individual local jobs. This group will also need mechanisms for building the experience that can give full knowledge and understanding of products and how they are used; and basic finance to get established as a supplier.

Figure 1 illustrates the pathways to sustainable youth enterprise in construction sector.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ORGANISATIONS CREATING YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMMES IN THE CONSTRUCTION SECTOR

NDYEP's experience suggests the following lessons for creating successful approaches

1. Approach

Ensure that the goal of the initiative is clearly focused on employment and/or business competence outcomes, not simply training. This means at the design stage including components for post-training support for trainees into sustainable employment / business. These components should include opportunities to 1) strengthen skills and build experience in the sector and 2) access funds for business start-up / basic tools; either through employment allowing for saving, or through finance linkages. Roles to implement these components might include:

- mentor roles;
- advisory / incubation services for start-ups;
- market and input supply linkages;
- facilitation of access to finance beyond the training period.

2. Partner and trainee selection

Aim to work with organisations embedded in the sector as commercial actors / entrepreneurs, and engage them in a transparent, competitive selection process. Wherever possible, aim to work to the strengths of selected organisations, drawing on existing relationships, specialisations, and opportunities. In turn, engaged organisations should invest early in building relationships with other stakeholders in the sector who have an interest in seeing the field strengthened, especially in terms of skilled labour.

Similarly, trainees must be selected in an open and transparent process on the basis of clear criteria.

3. Curriculum

The training curriculum should be integrated in two dimensions:

1) Integrating **soft skills** and **business skills** into a strong technical skills training for the sector.

- The ‘business thinking’ part of business skills training should be an early module, and used to orientate young people from the outset.
- Soft skills should be relevant and adapted to the context, for example including peacebuilding approaches in the Niger Delta.

2) Integrating a strong hands-on approach and practical elements for the technical skills and the soft skills, enabling students to apply their learning in practice at each step. This means creating ‘making’ and ‘doing’ opportunities as integral to the curriculum delivery, and delivering the technical curriculum using methodologies that allow practice of soft skills: e.g. including group projects to practice team work and presentation; classroom competition and peer evaluation etc.

4. Inclusion

Set out to achieve an inclusive process which supports people with disabilities and contributes to gender equality. To do this:

- Conduct focused outreach prior to trainee selection: liaise with specialist organisations who understand the needs of and have links to people with disabilities;
- Design women-specific advertising for work sectors which do not normally include women;
- Consider showcasing women trainees in non-traditional sectors from the early batches to act as role models and mentors for subsequent batches of women entering the sector.

5. For Construction interventions specifically:

- Address the need for certification of skills / measurement and testing of competencies which is particularly necessary due to labour practices in the sector.
- Given the temporary / contract nature of employment in the sector, include strong linkages with manpower supply pools as part of post-training support, from where construction companies are likely to source project-based labour.



Learn More

 www.pindfoundation.org

Connect & Engage

 @pindfoundation
 www.facebook.com/pindfoundation
 @pindfoundation
 @pindfoundation
 @pindfoundation

Visit or Call

ABUJA
25, Jimmy Carter Street, Asokoro
+234(09)2910454

WARRI
1 PIND - EDC Drive, Egbokodo Itsekiri
+234(0)8172401598 +234(0)9030808794

PH
6, Tombia Street, GRA phase 2
+234(0)8110521802



FOUNDATION FOR PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVES IN THE NIGER DELTA