

HOW TECHNOLOGY CAN HELP INCORPORATE YOUTH VOICE IN EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS

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How Technology Can Help Incorporate Youth Voice In Employment Programs

This Brief is part of the Solutions for Youth Employment (S4YE) Knowledge Brief series focusing on the design and implementation of youth employment programs.¹ In this Knowledge Brief, we discuss the importance of incorporating youth voice in the design of youth employment programs and the factors organizations must consider when utilizing radio, short message service (SMS) text, and social media platforms.

This Brief also features how technology platforms have been used by S4YE's Partners and the World Bank, to incorporate youth voice in projects. The Note highlights practical insights, challenges, and solutions that can help youth practitioners.

1. INTRODUCTION

WHY IS IT ESSENTIAL TO INCORPORATE YOUTH VOICE IN THE DESIGN OF YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS?

Across the globe, 67.6 million young women and men are unemployed youth living in poverty.² Organizations and youth employment practitioners must ask how they can put youth voice in the driving seat of programs and policies for dignified work across the globe. Incorporating youth voice into the design of youth employment programs ensures that organizations efficiently meet the current market demands and address the challenges facing youth. It allows employment practitioners to fully understand the local context's nuances and the specific constraints that young people face.

Incorporating youth voice is also essential to address the unique employment challenges that youth face in a COVID-19 world. The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that more than one in six young persons have become unemployed due to the pandemic.³ Furthermore, among young people who remained employed, working hours have fallen by 23 percent.⁴ Therefore, youth must be allowed to highlight their employment concerns through technology platforms by organizations as they develop solutions to manage the COVID-19 crisis.

¹ Solutions for Youth Employment (S4YE) is a multi-stakeholder coalition that aims to provide leadership and resources for catalytic action to increase the number of young people engaged in productive work. The S4YE Secretariat is housed in the Jobs Group within the Social Protection and Jobs Global Practice at the World Bank.

² ILO (2020), "Global Employment Trends for Youth 2020 Technology and the future of jobs"

https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_737648.pdf

³ See ILO (2020), "ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the word of work. Fourth edition" https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_745963.pdf

⁴ See ILO (2020), "ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the word of work. Fourth edition" https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_745963.pdf

2. USING TECHNOLOGY AS A SOLUTION

There are numerous ways organizations can incorporate youth voice in youth employment programs. They can involve traditional methods of communication and more recent advancements in technology. The method chosen to incorporate youth voice depends on the local context and the financial budget available to the team. Additionally, organizations can consider various sub-groups based on gender, age, socio-economic status, rural vs. urban, disable youth, indigenous youth, and youth in school versus out of school to determine the best approach to incorporate youth voice. **In this section, we discuss the three most used technology solutions: SMS, radio, and social media.**

Figure 1. Common Channels of Communication to Engage Youth.



Table 1. The purpose and cost of different technology solutions

Technology Category	Purpose	Cost Factor
Two-way SMS Platform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It allows organizations to broadcast a message to many young people who have cellular phone access. It allows young people to express their opinion safely and provide information quickly in a cost-effective manner. It fosters trust since youth can feel as if they are actively involved in a project. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The cost would depend on the number of youth to be included in the outreach. The number of staff needed to understand, interpret what is being said, and maintain an engaging conversation with youth. An organization could partner with local telecommunication companies to obtain cost-effective options to utilize large scale text message services if the targeted youth is numerous.
Radio Broadcasting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Radio is an engaging platform that reaches a broad audience. It is useful in settings where other connectivity options with youth are unavailable. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The cost of using radio is based on the type of content, adapting it for a radio audience, and maintaining radio programming to reach the appropriate youth audience. However, this communication is one-sided and can be used mainly for disseminating.
Social Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It allows the organization to engage with youth in real-time. It allows the organization to utilize visual content to engage with youth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The project team should factor the cost of Internet connectivity. Some social media platforms require Ads to promote the page successfully.

Furthermore, organizations must assess how youth access information and communication channels locally to determine the best avenues to be utilized when incorporating youth voice. **In the assessment, employment practitioners should ask the following questions as a guide:**

1. What are the channels of communication regularly utilized by youth in the local community now?
2. Which channels of communication do local youth trust the most and the least?
3. What is preventing youth from receiving information about youth employment programs?
4. Are there certain youth groups within the local community who have more difficulty accessing information, and if so, why?
5. How would youth most like to communicate with youth employment programs? E.g., what time of day do youth generally access technology channels?
6. What are the local cultural protocols in the community for youth that impact their use of the communication channel?
7. Are there any local laws or regulations that impact the organization’s engagement with youth regarding consent?

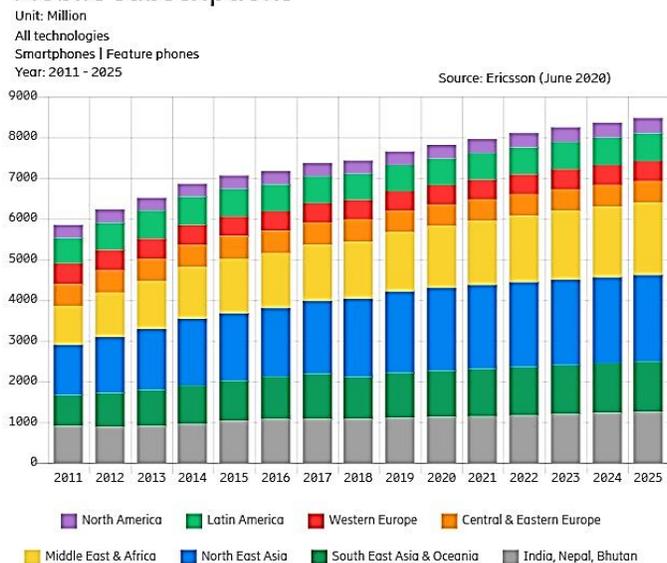
2.1 Two-Way SMS Platform

In the last decade, mobile phones have provided new opportunities and methods to engage youth in both advanced and emerging communities. **Each year, developing countries see an annual gain of about 500 million new smartphones, virtually all of which generate not only call data records but also possess GPS and Wi-Fi capabilities.**⁵ In advanced and emerging economies alike, young people are much more digitally connected than older generations.⁶ Additionally, mobile phones have a noticeable lead over PCs/laptops for social-related activities, with many youth acknowledging that smartphones play a central role in their lives.⁷ Furthermore, despite the uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of smartphones and feature phones across the globe continues to increase (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Mobile subscriptions usage growth 2011-2025.

Source: [Ericsson Mobility Visualizer](#)

Mobile subscriptions



A mobile phone with a working number will be able to receive SMS at any corner of the world, irrespective of whether the person is connected to the Internet. **This increase in cell phone subscriptions has allowed many young people to have the opportunity to engage and communicate with their family, friends, and**

⁵ World Bank Group (2015), “Advancing Development with Mobile Phone Locational Data” <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/22310/AdvancingDevelopmentWithMobilePhoneLocationalData.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

⁶ Pew Research Center (2019), “Smartphone Ownership Is Growing Rapidly Around the World, but Not Always Equally” <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/02/Pew-Research-Center-Global-Technology-Use-2018-2019-02-05.pdf>

⁷ Global Web Index and Snap Inc. (2019), “The Youth of the Nations: Global Trends Among Gen Z” https://assets.ctfassets.net/inb32lme5009/7wDlUsslOnSxTUqPmRb081/603b8ffb77757549d39034884a23743c/The_Youth_of_the_Nations_Global_Trends_Among_Gen_Z.pdf

colleagues via short message service (SMS). SMS also reduces the barriers for young people with hearing and speech disabilities.⁸ Therefore, project teams could use SMS platforms to incorporate youth voice in their youth employment program to access all youth, including vulnerable youth in the local community. Additionally, project teams will be able to collect data that can provide region-specific data so that youth programs can be tailored appropriately to their youth target audience.

When deciding to use SMS to incorporate youth voice, practitioners must consider the following factors:

1. What is the objective of the outreach to youth, and is it to seek specific feedback?
2. Is SMS an appropriate channel to structure the specific engagement?
3. What is the approximate age of the target youth group?
4. What is the universal language spoken/dialect within the target youth group?
5. Do gender and education levels within the target youth group affect how inclusive SMS can be?
6. Have the target youth group consented to the SMS outreach measure?
7. What are the challenges the organization may face using the SMS platform to engage youth voice?
8. Does the SMS message have a cost for the target youth group to respond to the message?
9. Does the organization have the technological infrastructure and human resources to deliver, maintain, digest the data received from the SMS platform, and engage with youth to respond to questions that may be asked via SMS? Or should the organization engage with an external service provider who can do the heavy lifting from a technological and administrative standpoint?
10. Should the organization choose to use individual SMS messages to youth, or can the organization finance a service provider to use the chatbot and other large-scale SMS platforms?
11. Are there limitations, usage experience issues, or ethical issues with using chatbots in the local community?
12. Have other local organizations successfully incorporated youth voice using SMS that the organization can partner with?

2.2 Radio

Radio is one of the most widespread information communication technology systems globally, with over 85% of the world listening to the radio every week.⁹ Data for the developing world shows that 75 percent of households have a radio.¹⁰ A radio is a device capable of receiving broadcast radio signals, using popular

⁸ World Bank Group (2016), "World Development Report 2016: Digital Dividends"
<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/961621467994698644/pdf/102724-WDR-WDR2016Overview-ENGLISH-WebResBox-394840B-OUO-9.pdf>

⁹ World Bank, "Youth, ICTS and Development"
<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/514651468313788904/pdf/389370Youth1IC1ent0Mar200701PUBLIC1.pdf>;
Deloitte (2019), "Radio: Revenue, reach, and resilience TMT Predictions 2019"
<https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/industry/technology/technology-media-and-telecom-predictions/radio-revenue.html>

¹⁰ International Telecommunications Union (2010), "Target 8: Ensure that all of the world's population have access to television and radio services" https://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/publications/wtdr_10/material/WTDR2010_Target8_e.pdf

frequencies, such as FM, AM, LW, and SW.¹¹ It includes a radio set integrated into a car or an alarm clock but excludes radios integrated with a mobile phone, a digital audio player (MP3 player) or a computer.¹²

Radio, as a platform to reach youth, is reliable and useful for youth who live in areas where Internet-based technology systems are not affordable or available. Radio can also overcome literacy issues, language barriers, and is relatively affordable for organizations to utilize as a method of engagement. Additionally, the medium can carry any message at any time even without electricity allowing it to be a useful mechanism for youth in poor and rural communities.

Radio is a one-way communication channel as it is mostly used by organizations to transmit messages from the radio station to the varied targeted audience simultaneously. However, radio can be used as a platform to engage youth listeners by asking the targeted audience to “call-in” to provide feedback on a proposed question or issue. Radio programs in developing countries commonly use this engaging approach as it leads to greater interest in the initiative being discussed.

Organizations, when deciding to use radio to engage youth, must consider the following factors:

1. Do youth in the local community own or have access to a radio?
2. Do youth in the local community listen to the radio to obtain information?
3. What time are youth more likely to listen to the radio?
4. What radio programs do youth regularly listen to?
5. Do youth who listen to radio programs share the information broadcasted with other young people in the local community?
6. Are there any challenges to using the radio with youth in the local community?
7. What is the cost of using local radio programs?
8. Does the organization have the human resources needed to utilize radio programs to engage youth?
9. Have other local organizations successfully incorporated youth voice using radio, that the organization can partner with?

2.3 Social Media

Social networks are fundamental to human society, and digital technologies have accelerated their formation.¹³ **Over 3.8 billion people are social media users.**¹⁴ Globally, social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Twitter, and Instagram are considered the most used social media platforms.¹⁵ These platforms have helped facilitate economic interactions, information, and dissemination, and encourage political mobilization and social change.¹⁶ Additionally, the mobile

¹¹ International Telecommunications Union (2010), “Target 8: Ensure that all of the world’s population have access to television and radio services” https://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/publications/wtdr_10/material/WTDR2010_Target8_e.pdf

¹² International Telecommunications Union (2010), “Target 8: Ensure that all of the world’s population have access to television and radio services” https://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/publications/wtdr_10/material/WTDR2010_Target8_e.pdf

¹³ UNICEF (2011), “Young people, mobile phones and the rights of adolescents” <https://www.unicef.org/sowc2011/pdfs/Young-People-mobile-phones-and-the-rights-of-adolescents.pdf>

¹⁴ Datareportal (2020), “Digital 2020: Global Digital Overview” <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-global-digital-overview>

¹⁵ Datareportal (2020), “Digital 2020: Global Digital Overview” <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-global-digital-overview>

¹⁶ UNICEF (2011), “Young people, mobile phones and the rights of adolescents” <https://www.unicef.org/sowc2011/pdfs/Young-People-mobile-phones-and-the-rights-of-adolescents.pdf>

phone has become the de facto access channel to the Internet and social media platforms in places where there is low computer penetration.¹⁷

When deciding to use social media platforms to incorporate youth voice, organizations must consider the following factors:

1. What social media platform is commonly used by local youth?
2. Do local youth use social media to obtain information about employment opportunities?
3. Is Internet access readily available to local youth using social media?
4. Do local youth have Internet access on their mobile phones?
5. Do local youth use social media on the phone or the computer?
6. How often and for what purpose do youth use social media?
7. Are there local influencers who could be partners to support the engagement with youth?
8. What is the universal language spoken/dialect used on social media platforms for local youth?
9. Are there any challenges to use social media in the local community?
10. What is the cost of using social media platforms?
11. Does the organization have the human resource needed to utilize social media platforms regularly?
12. Have other local organizations successfully incorporated youth voice using social media that the organization can partner with?

3. HOW IS TECHNOLOGY HELPING S4YE PARTNERS INCORPORATE YOUTH FEEDBACK IN THEIR YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS?

In the following section, we highlight how three youth employment programs have used technology to reach out to youth and incorporate their voice in the design of their programs.

Table 2. Approaches adopted by S4YE partners to incorporate youth voice in their youth employment projects.

Project Name	Approach Adopted
Africa’s Voices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SMS Platform • Radio • Focus Group Discussions
World Bank Mexico Youth Labor Market Inclusion Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SMS Platform • Facebook • WhatsApp • In-person Interviews • Phone Interviews
Educate!	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SMS Platform • Whatsapp • Facebook

¹⁷ UNICEF (2011), “Young people, mobile phones and the rights of adolescents” <https://www.unicef.org/sowc2011/pdfs/Young-People-mobile-phones-and-the-rights-of-adolescents.pdf>

3.1 Africa's Voices¹⁸

Over the last five years, [Africa's Voices Foundation \(AVF\)](#) has reached over 400,000 people in Africa, with most of the programming supporting youth across the region on priorities ranging from education, to youth employment, and gender equality. AVF combines a set of unique capabilities - social science, media expertise, and technology - to build innovative solutions for citizen engagement and insight generation that can help program implementers adapt their work to the needs and opinions of the people they serve. Utilizing technology to incorporate citizen's voice has allowed Africa's Voices to help its partners with better design programs and policies in line with local citizen needs and opinions. The organization has utilized focused group discussions, sustained two-way SMS text, and interactive radio shows (where audiences participate by sending in their input via SMS) as a strategy to incorporate youth feedback.

In 2018, Africa's Voices joined forces with [Mastercard Foundation](#) to pilot a [two-way feedback and engagement channel](#) to amplify the voice of African youth and place them at the heart of Mastercard Foundation's youth employment project. This channel provided vibrant interactive communication, which allowed youth to be recognized and involved in the process of creating work-related programs. The pilot enabled youth to share their ideas, requests, complaints, and feedback about the project. Perspectives that youth shared through the channel provided data that Africa's Voices analyzed and interpreted to support Mastercard Foundation's program decision-makers. The youth opinions and experiences shared also provided a source of nuanced and timely insights to encourage more accountable, efficient, and effective programming.

How Africa's Voices developed the youth voice platform

Africa's Voices utilized a unique capability, Katkati, a platform that uses advanced technology to enhance researchers' ability to provide tailored responses effectively and in a timely and conversational manner to large volumes of SMS messages. Africa's Voices piloted the platform's effectiveness in allowing youth voice to guide the design of youth employment projects in four stages:

- Step 1- Formative research:** The organization conducted key informant **in-person interviews** with Mastercard Foundation partner organizations [CAP-Youth Empowerment Institute](#) (CAP-YEI), [Shining Hope for Communities](#) (SHOFCO), and eight focus group discussions with male and female youth from informal settlements, in vocational training and in college in Nairobi. The formative research supported Africa's Voices hypothesis that there is a need and demand for youth perspectives in programming both from the implementers' and the beneficiaries' point of view. CAP-YEI and SHOFCO provide technical and vocational training to youth aged 18–25.
- Step 2- Proxy project:** The Africa's Voices team then worked with Kenyan organization Spatial Collective in Nairobi, to co-create a youth employment-focused event in Nairobi - a proxy-project to test the **SMS platform** throughout a program lifecycle. The use of the SMS system developed by Africa's Voices allowed researchers on the team to efficiently read and respond to a large number of messages in a timely and cost-effective manner. Young people across the city collaborated on the event's development, using the **SMS platform** to provide feedback on the design of the event, its objectives, and its outcomes.

¹⁸ Africa's Voices Foundation emerged out of four years of research on citizen engagement, communications, and governance in Africa led by their Co-Founder and first Executive Director, Dr. Sharath Srinivasan, and the organization's first Head of Research and Innovation, Dr. Claudia Abreu Lopes, at the Centre of Governance and Human Rights (CGHR), University of Cambridge. In late 2014, Africa's Voices was launched as an independent, non-profit organization and UK-registered charity. The organization's primary office is in Nairobi, Kenya.

- **Step 3- Mobilization:** Young people were mobilized through Spatial Collective’s network and the popular local radio station **Ghetto Radio** to use the SMS system developed by Africa’s Voices (Figure 3). Ghetto Radio presenters shared the following question on air, to which participants were required to respond via SMS:

“Tell us your best idea that could help you and your friends achieve your employment goals! We will share the best ideas with Nairobi on Ghetto Radio.”

Approximately 1700 youth were engaged during this mobilization period (700 offline and 1000 on the radio), of whom 388 opted to join the proxy project and help shape the event. Once the youth opted into the initiative, Africa’s Voices for 25 days utilized the two-way SMS channel by engaging youth on a youth employment event that supported youth in finding work locally.

Throughout this youth engagement, the text messages contained the following approaches:

- 1) **baseline survey messages** which had both open and closed questions to understand youth expectations and barriers. The open questions asked youth to provide a name for the event and send questions to the Africa’s Voices team. The organization focused on this mixed approach as only closed-answer questions constrained the expression and range of responses available to youth,
- 2) **quick poll messages** to obtain feedback as to dates for events, topics to be discussed, speakers to be engaged with, and event registration within the youth employment program, and
- 3) **information-out package messages** were sent, which provided further details about the event once the team finalized it based on the feedback they received.

Figure 3. Africa’s Voices team using Ghetto Radio.



Building on this engagement, the name of the event was chosen by the participants to be called #MaYouthTujijenge (Sheng for "Youth let’s ‘build’ ourselves") which featured experts and role models selected based on the preferences the participants expressed through the SMS channel (Figure 4). Youth leaders from Nairobi’s slums, representatives from the Kenya Commercial Bank, business skills specialists, and entrepreneurship gurus were invited to the event.

Figure 4. Participants at the MaYouthTujijenge Event.



- **Step 4- Road test:** The learning from the proxy project laid the basis for a larger-scale deployment of the platform. Africa's Voices collaborated with CAP-YEI, who was interested in exploring how open-ended SMS engagement with students could inform program decision-making and better meet students' needs and requests.

The Road test was conducted when students responded via SMS to two open-ended questions:

1. What is the most useful thing you have learned during the training course? Tell us why it is useful; and
2. If you could change one thing about the program, what would it be?

This approach led to over 1500 open text, local language responses that were quickly interpreted and categorized in 2-3 days. Then, relevant findings were identified and disaggregated by gender, training center, and training course. For example,

- Aside from vocational skills, students valued the entrepreneurial, communication and interpersonal skills they had gained from the CAP-YEI course, and
 - 18% of respondents overall complained about the lack of learning material/equipment. This complaint was raised by 35% of respondents in Naivasha.
- **Step 5- Learnings and evaluation:** The road-test focused on using the platform for rapid feedback on course satisfaction and improvement ideas. The team approached two-way SMS as a conversation, rather than an instrument for surveys or solely outbound communication. This plan allowed Africa's Voices to receive *unfiltered* youth voices, which allowed CAP-YEI to take relevant action. Students were then informed via SMS when the organization acted, which allowed the students to feel as if they were part of the program and making an impact on policy development.

What challenges did Africa's Voices encounter in developing a two-way SMS platform?

Some of the challenges the organization had to face in deploying and piloting a two-way SMS platform were:

1. **Ownership** - how to ensure buy-in from partners, value for Mastercard Foundation programs, and platform operation/analysis independence? Africa's Voices managed this issue by consistently

interacting and communicating with the partners involved to keep the practitioners engaged in the data collection process.

2. **Useful insights** - how to scale open-ended engagement with youth and still deliver timely and robust evidence that is acted upon? The Africa's Voices team created a strategy to ask questions relevant to the topics that the partners wanted to focus on relating to youth employment.
3. **Replicability** - tailoring a youth engagement platform for different African contexts. Africa's Voices team investigated the local norms in each area to see the accessibility and use of mobile phones by youth.
4. **Data protection** - how to balance the moral imperatives of acting on what the team learned and protecting the confidentiality of what youth have told them? Africa's Voices ensured that the identity of participating youth was protected by arranging to have the platform meet the relevant security measures to prevent hacking. Additionally, Africa's Voices obtained the consent of youth before sharing their identity with employment practitioners.

3.2 Mexico Youth Labor Market Inclusion World Bank project¹⁹

The [Mexico Youth Labor Market Inclusion \(MYLMI\) project](#) aims at generating evidence on interventions that promote the labor inclusion of low-income youth into formal quality jobs in strategic productive sectors. The World Bank and the Government of Mexico are implementing the project in the state of San Luis Potosi. The initiative targets low-income youth between the age of 17 to 21 years graduating from upper secondary school before they enter the labor market by offering them tools to guide their study and work decisions, strengthen their skills, and connect them with quality employment opportunities in local medium-size firms in strategic productive sectors.

How MYLMI developed an SMS-based youth voice platform?²⁰

To engage youth in the MYLMI employment project, the team arranged to utilize an SMS platform to monitor youth trajectories after graduating from upper secondary school, remind and update them about project activities, and incorporate their feedback in the program design and evaluation.

Figure 5. Youth participants of the MYLMI project.



The team took the following three steps to create an SMS platform to engage with youth:

- **Step 1- Outreach Strategy Development:** The team began by clearly defining the primary purpose of using text messages to communicate with young people. This approach helped the organization design an appropriate plan to interact via SMS. The team then developed a modular structure for the SMS strategy and the content of the published messages. The main questions that were considered by the team were:

¹⁹ The Mexico Youth Labor Market Inclusion project has been made possible through a grant from the World Bank's Jobs Umbrella Multidonor Trust Fund (MDTF), which is supported by the Department for International Development/UK AID, the Governments of Norway, Germany, Austria, the Austrian Development Agency, and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency.

²⁰ Further details about the Mexico Youth Labor Market Inclusion project is discussed in S4YE's How To Notes Issue 1 and Issue 2.

- Should the SMS messages be delivered to a specific sample group or open to all youth involved in the program?
- How frequently does the team intend to send SMS messages to youth?
- How many messages per round of surveys does the team intend to send to youth?
- What format (length, characters, close or open questions, poll survey, etc.) is appropriate for the team to use on the SMS platform?
- What tone (formal, educational, peer like discourse) does the organization intend to convey in the SMS text?
- Does the organization plan to incentivize youth to respond to the SMS texts?

In dealing with these questions, the MYLMI project chose to target all the youth within the program with differentiated questions for selected samples, to regularly text students and send them reminders to respond, and to provide economic incentives for youth to respond to the SMS surveys.

- **Step 2- Collaborating with local telecommunication providers:** The MYLMI project collaborated with local telecommunication companies such as [Telcel](#), [Movistar](#), and [AT&T Mexico](#) to develop the bulk messaging to be applied to the SMS platform. The team ensured careful coordination between the telecommunication companies and the SMS-platform provider [Text.it](#). Many testing sessions were conducted until the service was ready to be launched. The team decided to take on the management of the SMS platform to ensure control of the messaging content and access data collected. For example, the MYLMI team regularly analyzed the tone of the messages based on real-time datasets collected from SMS responses and frequently rephrased the general communication content.
- **Step 3- Launch strategy and safeguards:** The MYLMI project introduced the SMS platform with the students at schools through face to face engagement in a workshop. Students were able to interact with the platform and ask questions on how the platform works. The team collected signed consent forms at the time they administered the SMS baseline surveys at schools. Simultaneously, the SMS platform provided students with the option to unsubscribe from the platform by sending the trigger word “UNSUBSCRIBE” via text. This option automatically unsubscribed the student from the SMS platform.

Additionally, the MYLMI team sends SMS text reminders to youth up to two times every two days to boost the survey’s response rates. Furthermore, the team sends the SMS text in the afternoon since they assessed during Step 1 that this was the most appropriate time to send SMS text based on the response rates during the initial stage when the platform was first launched with in-person consultations with targeted youth. This is because targeted youth are either at school or work in the morning period.

By implementing the three-step approach for the SMS platform to administer text surveys, the project was able to obtain crucial information about youth trajectories immediately after graduation from upper secondary school and local labor market outcomes. This data helped the team identify youth who were not in education, employment, or training and included the following:

- Employment status,
- Hours worked,
- Formality of employment,
- Job rotation,

- Level of satisfaction with the current job,
- Job search intensity,
- Approaches used to search for a job,
- Access to higher education, and
- Participation in internship programs

What challenges did the MYLMI team face in developing an SMS platform?

The main challenge for the MYLMI team during the SMS platform's execution was obtaining and maintaining youth responses to all the sent messages. During the first phase of the project, there was a low response rate. The team then sought to address this by modifying their communication approach during the second phase of the initiative by:

- **Introducing the SMS platform in local schools and adopting personalized messaging with the targeted youth.** During workshops in the schools, the SMS platform was introduced using a socio-emotional component for the treatment group that analyzed the personality characteristics of young participants. The socio-emotional component also allowed students to reflect on the most important values and how they can apply them in their daily life. This approach helped youth do a basic assessment of some of their personality traits and encouraged greater self-knowledge about their socio-emotional skills. The control group provided insights about their use and perception of social networks. Presenting the SMS platform in a face-to-face manner increased the program's credibility and helped raise the response rate of the SMS messages.
- **The team used a diverse range of communication mechanisms by integrating messages via WhatsApp and Facebook, with more entertaining content.** The team consistently enhanced the messaging sent on these social media platforms as it was a continuous process of improvement based on the reaction to the responses observed.
- **The team strengthened economic incentives to improve the response rate.** For example, the surveys sent to students through SMS allowed students to accumulate points that could later be exchanged for money on an electronic wallet. Additionally, some other incentives the team included were a raffle for movie tickets for which the results were published on Facebook to collectivize their peers' participation while reinforcing the credibility of the MYLMI project.

Incorporating these design tweaks helped the team to increase participation rates in the SMS surveys among the students. During Phase 1, 270 young people responded at least once to the SMS messages sent, while in Phase 2, over 1,182 youth students responded to the SMS messages.

3.3 Educate!²¹

Educate! tackles youth unemployment by reforming what schools teach and how they teach it so that students in Africa have the skills to attain further education, overcome gender inequities, start businesses, get jobs and drive development in their communities. Educate! measures impact to ensure that every dollar spent maximizes life outcomes for youth.

²¹ Educate! started in 2002 when the organization's founder Eric Glustrom visited a refugee camp in the poorest corner of western Uganda. The Educate! Experience model was launched in March of 2009. The organization works in Uganda, Kenya, and Rwanda to bring leadership, entrepreneurship, and workforce readiness education and support at a systems-level to youth in secondary schools.

How Educate! developed their youth voice platform

Educate!, one of S4YE’s partners incorporates youth voice to inform program design and to make continuous program improvements. Educate!’s flagship in-school model in Uganda was built in direct collaboration with youth and education stakeholders (schools, teachers, government education officials) with extensive reliance on youth feedback to develop the curriculum and learning materials.

Figure 6. Student participants in Educate! school program



Since the coronavirus pandemic, the organization has had to pivot, delivering remote education and skills-learning solutions. It has leveraged technology to collect input and feedback from youth for developing these new remote solutions. **Educate!’s primary mechanism for collecting youth feedback during the coronavirus pandemic has been SMS and monitoring surveys.** The organization’s monitoring system – which uses SMS as a key component – was launched in 2014 and measures the impact of their regular youth employment programs. This monitoring system regularly tracks 20+ key performance indicators (KPIs), which immediately feeds data back into a monitoring dashboard. The monitoring system with the use of SMS has allowed Educate! to streamline their surveys and gather regular information from remote parts of the country in a very cost-effective manner.

Educate!’s coronavirus-era model leverages SMS as well, with direct messages to and from youth containing learning prompts and learning assessment questions, and reminders to tune into radio lessons and mentoring phone calls. Educate! designed the coronavirus-era model based on youth survey responses and the most significant needs and challenges at the start of the pandemic, immediately after school closures were instituted. The SMS system has enabled the organization to stay connected to youth and continually collect feedback about their experience in real-time, allowing Educate! to make programmatic adjustments and strengthen the services provided. **Today, youth are in direct contact with their Educate! Mentors via technology – SMS, WhatsApp, and Facebook – and are continually sharing their progress, starting business projects, participating in remote lessons, and implementing the skills delivered by Educate!**

What Challenges did Educate! encounter with developing an SMS platform?

One of the main challenges for Educate! was to collect contact information to communicate with youth and to obtain regular feedback from all youth engaged through the SMS system.

The team dealt with these challenges in the following ways:

- 1) Educate! initially began to collect student contact info, but quickly learned that many of their youth did not have consistent access to phones (they shared phones, or frequently did not have airtime, or changed their numbers often). As a result, the organization shifted to a strategy of collecting parent/guardian contacts and working with parents to get parent buy-in (so parents not only let youth use the family phone but also reminded their students about the program and encouraged their participation). This strategy was successful and dramatically increased the team’s contact rate;
- 2) Educate!’s locally-based and led teams developed messaging that was suitable to the local cultural norms; and

- 3) Educate! marketed the new strategy extensively through existing communication channels, i.e., by calling Head Teachers and having them inform their students, and by having Mentors conduct direct outreach to students via the phone, etc.

Educate! is continuously utilizing new avenues in Uganda, Kenya, and Rwanda to engage youth in their education and provide young people with support for a post COVID-19 world.²²

4. THE ROLE OF STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION IN INCORPORATING YOUTH VOICE

Organizations deciding to develop an initiative using technology to incorporate youth voice into their program should factor in the role of stakeholders in the local community. Teams should conduct a stakeholder assessment to identify the most important stakeholder groups. A stakeholder is any person, social group, or institution involved in, or affected by a particular issue or outcome. Stakeholder collaboration provides a dynamic approach to responding to complex problems that isolated efforts may not solve. Stakeholder collaboration to incorporate youth voice requires early, proactive, and ongoing interaction with those potentially affected.

Engagement of stakeholders during the planning stage helps create good faith and mutual trust and contribute to sustainable development outcomes beyond the project.²³ A key objective at the planning stage is to accurately identify key stakeholders who may have a keen interest in or ability to influence what is being planned, including potential groups who may benefit from the project, those who may also be adversely impacted, and groups potentially opposed to the planned intervention.²⁴ Working with a broad range of stakeholders will likely help to define project parameters and fill critical knowledge gaps, and, if necessary, generate alternative ideas regarding project design and potential risks and mitigation measures, monitoring, and grievance mechanisms.²⁵

Organizations must communicate clearly to each stakeholder group their role in the process, ranging from providing input to reviewing designs, and making decisions. Some stakeholders will assume more responsibility than others, depending on the organization's initiative to incorporate youth voice. Once a project has identified the appropriate stakeholder groups, the team can categorize the stakeholders into three categories: key stakeholders, primary stakeholders, and secondary stakeholders. **Key stakeholders** are those actors without whose support and participation the targeted results of the youth project normally cannot be achieved.²⁶ **Primary stakeholders** are those actors who are directly affected by the youth project, either as designated project beneficiaries, or because they stand to gain or lose power and privilege.²⁷ **Secondary stakeholders** are actors whose involvement in the youth project is only indirect or

²² Educate!, "Educate!'s Coronavirus Response" <https://www.experienceeducate.org/covid-19-response>

²³ UNDP (2017) "Guidance Note UNDP Social and Environmental Standards (SES) Stakeholder Engagement" https://info.undp.org/sites/bpps/SES_Toolkit/SES%20Document%20Library/Final%20UNDP%20SES%20Stakeholder%20Engagement%20GN_Oct2017.pdf

²⁴ UNDP (2017), "Guidance Note UNDP Social and Environmental Standards (SES) Stakeholder Engagement" https://info.undp.org/sites/bpps/SES_Toolkit/SES%20Document%20Library/Final%20UNDP%20SES%20Stakeholder%20Engagement%20GN_Oct2017.pdf

²⁵ IFC (2007), Stakeholder Engagement: A Good Practice Handbook for Companies Doing Business in Emerging Markets, https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/affbc005-2569-4e58-9962-280c483baa12/IFC_StakeholderEngagement.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=jkD13-p

²⁶ TRANSfer, "Tool: Stakeholder Map by GIZ" http://transferproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/NYP_GIZ_TRANSfer_Tool-1-4-1_Stakeholder-Map.pdf

²⁷ TRANSfer, "Tool: Stakeholder Map by GIZ" http://transferproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/NYP_GIZ_TRANSfer_Tool-1-4-1_Stakeholder-Map.pdf

temporary as it is the case, for instance, with intermediary service organizations.²⁸ The incorporation of youth voice by an organization must be based on a broad coalition of key stakeholders, including civil society, academic experts, private sector etc. (Table 3).

Table 3. Youth Voices Stakeholder Groups

Stakeholder Groups	Examples
Youth organizations	Youth clubs organized through schools, community centers, NGOs etc.
Civil society and international organizations	NGOs, community-based organizations, or multilateral organizations that directly focus on youth or have a direct interest in the specific issue that is being explored (e.g., community development).
Academic experts	Individuals with professional or academic expertise on youth rights or have thoroughly researched on youth development issues.
Parents	Guardians, who can provide insights about youth welfare, their activities, or use of resources.
Government	National or local committees or ministries for youth.
Private Sector Business	Companies that are sector peers or are operating in the same geographical area or present in the same value chain can provide insights on youth employment issues and how they are addressing their impacts, either on an individual or collaborative basis.
Youth	Groups of youth (e.g., young workers) that may be positively or negatively impacted by the youth initiative.

The MYLMI project, Africa’s Voices, and Educate! each collaborated with stakeholders in the local community early on to ensure the success of their initiatives. Africa’s Voices worked alongside Mastercard Foundation and the local Ghetto Radio to establish their platform to obtain youth feedback. The **MYLMI** team coordinated with local private sector stakeholders like the SMS-platform provider [Text.it](#) to establish the platform utilized to obtain youth voice for their youth employment program. While **Educate!** engaged with governments in Uganda, Rwanda, and Kenya to incorporate their model within the national education system.²⁹ This collaboration has allowed Educate! to provide technical advisory support on these countries’ local education system and incorporate the feedback received by youth into this advisory.

CONCLUSION

Africa’s Voices, the MYLMI project, and Educate! have placed youth voice at the heart of their youth employment programs to efficiently meet the current employment demands and address the challenges facing local youth. Each team has adopted the most suitable methods to incorporate youth voice based on the local norms and have modified their approaches based on the feedback received from young people. Employment practitioners can learn and adapt these collaborative approaches to their specific context and ensure that youth have a voice in the way that programs are designed to support them

²⁸ TRANSfer, “Tool: Stakeholder Map by GIZ” http://transferproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/NYP_GIZ_TRANSfer_Tool-1-4-1_Stakeholder-Map.pdf

²⁹ Educate! “Educate! partners with governments to deliver the skills-based education students need through national education systems” <https://www.experienceeducate.org/government-engagement>

especially in a post COVID-19 environment. This can help youth employment programs be a part of building a resilient recovery.

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S4YE is a multi-stakeholder coalition that aims to provide leadership and resources for catalytic action to increase the number of young people engaged in productive work. S4YE’s partners include the World Bank Group, Accenture, The Rockefeller Foundation, Mastercard Foundation, Microsoft, Plan International, International Youth Foundation (IYF), Youth Business International (YBI), RAND Corporation, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Governments of Norway and Germany, and the UN Office of the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth. The S4YE Secretariat is housed in the Jobs Group within the Social Protection and Jobs Global Practice at the World Bank Group.

This Knowledge Brief does not necessarily reflect the views of the World Bank or each individual S4YE partner. For additional resources for youth employment, please visit <https://www.s4ye.org/s4ye-publications>