

Friends of the British Council

SNAPSHOT	
Organization(s)	Friends of the British Council
Project Name	Digital innovation Center
Location	Ghana
Date(s) of Implementation	August 1, 2015 – December 31, 2016
Funding Amount	USD 500,000
Partner(s) / Funder(s)	The Rockefeller Foundation’s Digital Jobs Africa (DJA) Initiative
Number of Youth Beneficiaries Trained	Total: 1,003 Women: n/a Men: n/a
Number of Youth Beneficiaries Employed	Total: 631 Women: n/a Men: n/a
Type(s) of Digital Work	Online Outsourcing – Freelancing Private Sector – Digital Entrepreneurship
Source of Metrics	Internal monitoring & evaluation

ABOUT FRIENDS OF THE BRITISH COUNCIL

The Friends of the British Council (FBC) is an independent non-profit organization created to support British Council programs globally and work with the British Council's partners.

FBC engages with all levels of society, including civil and community leaders, influencers, educators, scientists, artists, business leaders, and the media. FBC also works extensively with marginalized and vulnerable populations such as women, at-risk youth, early learners, areas of rural poverty and post-conflict zones. FBC is also majorly involved with education and work with secondary and higher education sectors and with young people starting out their careers.¹

The objective of this Friends of the British Council (FBC) program, funded by the DJA initiative, was to help disadvantaged and unskilled or minimally skilled youth in Ghana to progress from unemployment into employment. The program further aimed to provide high potential disadvantaged youth (HPDY), defined as young people from marginalized sectors of society whose potential for future success is stunted by their lack of resources, with IT and soft skills training which are relevant for digital jobs. Additionally, the program aimed to place beneficiaries into digital employment through Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) centers and other IT service providers within eighteen months of training.

¹ <https://www.britishcouncil.us>.

PROJECT DESIGN & IMPLEMENTATION

Program Design	Supply-Side Components		Demand-Side Components	
	Training & Skills Development	✓	Improving Access to Finance for SMEs	×
	Employment & Intermediation Services	✓	Capacity Building & Information Provision	×
	Subsidized Employment	×	Targeted Sector-Specific Approaches	×

ACTIVITIES

The Digital Innovation Center is a space for young people to innovate, share ideas, network, and access IT tools, software and high-speed internet. The Digital Innovation Center was built with the intention of providing a workspace for beneficiaries to access online freelance IT jobs such as data entry, image capturing, document reviewing and typing.

Original Training Model – Employment in BPO Center

The program comprised of four weeks of face-to-face training and two weeks of self-study with peer learning and practical sessions at the innovation center in the Accra, capital city of Ghana. The training program had several features:

- The content of the training was based on a needs assessment of BPO and other IT service providers.
- The training included literacy and numeracy skills; communication, customer relations, intercultural working, time management, self-management and other relevant soft skills.
- Beneficiaries with the relevant IT skills were provided with an opportunity for guided on-the-job training, facilitated peer-to-peer learning and professional mentoring.
- Youth that did not have relevant IT skills were trained on the specific technical skills required for the BPO sector, including spoken and written communication, online marketing, project management and finance and accounting.

FBC initially intended to place beneficiaries in digital jobs in the Ghanaian private and public sector through a new BPO center. The *Ghana BPO center* was a government project that promised to employ many FBC beneficiaries. However, delays in the commissioning of the Ghana BPO center meant that FBC was not able to place the youth as originally intended.

Modified Training Model – Freelancing & Digital Entrepreneurship

FBC consequently adjusted their training and delivery model to include more online entrepreneurial components. Digital marketing and online freelance jobs were also incorporated into the curriculum to provide beneficiaries with additional employment opportunities outside the BPO sector. FBC also provided beneficiaries with access to a *Skills and Innovation Hub*. This Hub was equipped with high-speed internet and laptops, which helped beneficiaries to create their own digital companies and access other online freelance IT jobs.

Additionally, beneficiaries who expressed an interest in tech-entrepreneurship were enrolled in FBC's Tech20 pilot program. The Tech20 pilot program was designed to enable beneficiaries to progress to digital entrepreneurship opportunities such as freelancing and website development. The program exposed participating beneficiaries to different technologies for 3D design, aerial modeling and computer coding. 20 beneficiaries participated in the Tech20 pilot program and five of the most promising candidates were selected to participate in the British Council's Flagship Incubation Program. This is a six-month incubation program focused on technology and virtual mentoring. Through partnerships with established organizations, this program provides youth's technology start-ups with mentoring and seed funding to encourage their growth and development

RECRUITMENT

Calls for applications were circulated across a wide variety of information platforms typically accessed by FBC's target group. These included:

- Old student networks on digital platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp
- Faith-based organizations
- Networks provided by the British Council's pool of trainers
- Notices placed on the British Council website and social media platforms
- Notices placed at Ministry of Communications and Municipal heads
- Engagement with community leaders to support the recruitment of youth from urban slums

Applicants who met the criteria presented in Box 1 were shortlisted.

BOX 1 FBC Selection Criteria

- Ghanaian citizens
- 18-30 years old
- Senior, technical or vocational High School graduates
- Currently unemployed and economically disadvantaged
- Able to communicate and take instruction in English
- Available to commit to a full month of training
- From a target urban slum
- Demonstrate potential and interest in the IT sector as a source of employment

Shortlisted applicants were interviewed by FBC staff and successful applicants were selected for training. 1,003 beneficiaries were trained over the grant period. FBC's beneficiary retention rate was high, with 95% of youth recruited completing the program.

IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

The delay in the commissioning of the Government of Ghana BPO center affected the absorption rate of beneficiaries into jobs. Once it was determined that the BPO center would not be taking placements,

finding and partnering with other employers who were willing to take on a large quantity of program beneficiaries was a challenge. To address this, FBC explored self-placement initiatives, whereby FBC facilitated access to global freelance online IT jobs while providing beneficiaries with free internet access and workspace to access these jobs. Additionally, FBC adjusted the content of the training to give beneficiaries a broader scope for digital entrepreneurship, digital marketing and self-development to enable beneficiaries to pursue self-employment. Based on an evaluation of impact of DJA and case studies on FBC beneficiaries, this content was found to be highly relevant and aligned to the needs of the Ghanaian youth.

The high number of applicants exceeded FBC's expectations and capacity to process. FBC's target was to train 1,000 HPDY during the grant period. However, FBC received approximately 26,000 applications. This required additional resources to review all applications and resulted in delaying the commencement date as all applications needed to be screened.

Attracting young women to participate in the training program was difficult. Most applicants were male. This evidences the need to refocus the FBC recruitment strategy going forward, to ensure a more balanced gender distribution across applicants.

BENEFICIARY EXPERIENCES

"After the program, I came up with a start-up firm with the support of a previous beneficiary of the Digital Jobs Africa training. We specialize in Digital Marketing, Business Management, and Business Process Outsourcing (which includes writing of CVs for people, graphic designs, and all typing works). We also seek to empower the youth to be entrepreneurial and purpose driven; helping them to identify their hidden potentials and skills thereby creating jobs and a sustainable development in our society."

FBC Beneficiary, Ghana

The FBC program targeted marginalized youth with no tertiary education. Most were from rural, poverty-stricken areas with little or no income-generating opportunities. They often had low self-esteem, could not articulate themselves well and were not confident to speak up.

The training addressed this by providing an engaging and interactive training experience that encouraged beneficiaries to engage with the material and with one another. Facilitators created a conversational environment where beneficiaries could share their experiences and concerns and ask questions. Group exercises, presentations and role plays also made the training sessions interactive and engaging. Beneficiaries reported improved confidence levels and enhanced communication skills as key outputs from the training program.

Beneficiaries began the program with the expectation that they would be placed in full-time employment. When placement could no longer take place, the entrepreneurship components added to the training helped beneficiaries realize that even without permanent jobs, there are employment opportunities available through freelancing, self-employment and running small businesses.

EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES

631
youth beneficiaries
employed

1,003 beneficiaries were trained on technical, digital and soft skills during the grant period. Of those who were trained, 631 beneficiaries, representing 62.91% of the youth trained, secured some form of employment. Of the total number of beneficiaries employed, only 3% were recruited by BPO organizations and 7% by IT organizations.

190
youth beneficiaries
secured digital jobs

125
youth beneficiaries
established digital businesses

Of the 631 beneficiaries who found employment, 190 beneficiaries secured digital jobs, including online and mobile customer care, data entry, customer survey analytics and business analytics. Additionally, 125 of the 631 beneficiaries established digital businesses offering digital-based services, both inside and outside Ghana.

From the findings of the DJA evaluation of impact case studies, one beneficiary reported that he now runs an MTN mobile money business whilst another is an online freelancer who works on a contract basis.²

KEY FINDINGS

- 1. A detailed scoping of the digital employment sector in the country of focus is required to gain a better understanding of the opportunities and risks of digital entrepreneurship.** This will ensure that digital jobs programs are aligned to the needs and opportunities of the sector and adequately prepare beneficiaries for the world of digital work and digital entrepreneurship.
- 2. Beneficiaries noted that the FBC training shifted their perceptions of employment and increased their entrepreneurial ambitions.** Of those who decided to pursue entrepreneurial endeavors, beneficiaries noted that the soft skills and intercultural sensitivity components of the FBC training enabled them to better interact with clients and resulted in business growth and more income-generation activities.

² The Rockefeller Foundation (2018). *Evaluation of Impact*. South Africa: The Rockefeller Foundation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Digital employment initiatives can benefit from a careers advisory desk.** Advisory personnel should be specifically tasked with identifying opportunities for internships and employment, maintaining information about skills requirements of recruiters, and acting as a graduate liaison.
- 2. Beneficiaries should be provided with access to content and workshops which align with their areas of interest.** Doing so will ensure that beneficiaries are intrinsically motivated to pursue these interests, and are more likely to succeed in the long term where their interests align with their line of work. Additional electives could include 3D printing, web and app coding, software design and social marketing, amongst others.
- 3. Due to the substantial number of applications, it is necessary to provide online material and training for young people outside large city centers to benefit from training.** A sustainable and scalable approach would include a combination of online and face-to-face training.
- 4. Internet expansion in Ghana makes it possible to roll-out the training program online across the country's other nine regions.** This broader-based approach should be considered in future programs to provide opportunities to marginalized youth who would traditionally be excluded.
- 5. Business incubation was an impactful addition to this program and should be considered going forward in future programs.** Young entrepreneurs could be provided with the opportunity to subscribe to a 6-month incubation program focused on technology and mentoring.
- 6. Youth employment programs should focus on building sustainable partnerships with private sector organizations.** These partnerships give young beneficiaries access to further training and sustainable incomes through employment and entrepreneurship. Building these partnerships requires that youth employment programs develop a business case for private sector organizations such that these organizations see the value in participating in youth employment initiatives. Additionally, this requires that sufficient time be allocated to evidencing the value of these partnerships such that private sector organizations are not only aware of, but also are able to experience the value of, such programs.