

Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator

SNAPSHOT	
Organization(s)	Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator
Project Name	N/A
Location	South Africa
Date(s) of Implementation	February 28, 2015 – August 31, 2017
Funding Amount	USD 4,000,000
Partner(s) / Funder(s)	The Rockefeller Foundation’s Digital Jobs Africa (DJA) Initiative
Number of Youth Beneficiaries Trained	Total: <i>approx.</i> 100,000
Number of Youth Beneficiaries Employed	Total: 12,319
Avg. Monthly Earnings of Youth Beneficiaries after Program	USD 350
Type(s) of Digital Work	Online Outsourcing – Microwork Online Outsourcing – Freelancing Online Outsourcing – Business Process Outsourcing
Source of Metrics	Mid-term evaluation Internal monitoring & evaluation

ABOUT HARAMBEE YOUTH EMPLOYMENT ACCELERATOR

Harambee is not-for-profit company established to accelerate youth inclusion in South Africa. Addressing barriers in the labor market, Harambee provides an end-to-end, solution that is designed to transition disadvantaged 18 to 28-year-old unemployed work seekers, with no prior work experience, into entry level jobs. Harambee’s model identifies specific sectors in the South African economy where there are existing and potential labor absorption opportunities and emphasizes the need to understand the recruitment needs of employers in these sectors.

The DJA project was used to leverage the core competencies and operational processes of Harambee to accelerate:

- The development of a work-ready pool of candidates to enable the growth of a digital jobs talent pool and accelerate placement and retention of young work seekers.
- The inclusion of young work seekers from poor backgrounds in the formal mainstream economy.
- To promote skills-led economic growth beyond 2014.

Harambee prepares beneficiaries to enter the job market by providing fit-for-purpose work readiness and behavioral skills interventions (called bridging programs) that directly address the risks identified by employers. Harambee facilitates the placement of beneficiaries by inviting employers to interview

applicants who have completed the bridging program. Employers then select and offer open positions to candidates who meet their requirements.

On the demand side, Harambee works closely with employers to understand their requirements for new employees, including types of positions, number of candidates needed, and the profile of candidates most likely to succeed in those positions. Harambee vets its employer partners to ensure that the work into which beneficiaries are placed is dignified and not exploitative. Harambee runs diagnostics with employers to understand the work environment and conditions like hours, wages, job tasks, and work attire. It assesses the culture of the organization, how teams are structured, and the performance metrics against which employees are measured. Harambee also encourages employers to not ask questions that are biased against those with job experience.

On the supply side, Harambee recruits candidates where existing corporate networks do not reach, and assesses their behavioral and technical competencies to match them to jobs where they are most likely to succeed.

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

Harambee carried out the following activities within the DJA project period:

- Demand-side planning to secure 2,500 digital jobs and digitally enhanced jobs in retail, hospitality, transport, financial service and BPO.** Harambee secured placement with 35 employers in this regard. Harambee employs highly skilled and experienced Key Accounts Managers (KAM) to facilitate and oversee engagements with employers. Key account managers will identify and target clients and secure job opportunities to ‘activate demand.’
- Functional competence work-readiness bridging.** Harambee implemented ‘bridging programs’ to support placements in BPO and financial services. Bridging included improving conversational English, voice requirements for BPO, critical digital skills such as IT-based multi-tasking, touch-typing and numerical aptitude, and soft skills such as communication, punctuality, self-awareness and self-confidence. Trainees were also provided access to computer labs to improve their computer literacy.
- Supply-side work seeker support services.** Harambee provided intensive interview preparation sessions, group and individual career counseling, job search coaching, direction, mentoring,

guidance on developing a CV, digital citizenship with email address, and detailed assessment reports.²

- **Forums to strengthen enabling environment.** Harambee convened two forums on digital jobs for youth in 2014 and 2015, bringing together labor economists, government officials, industry representatives, corporate HR practitioners and social investment funders.
- **SME Solutions.** In South Africa, according to Harambee, over 50% of hiring is done by SMEs. Harambee recognizes that the SME sector is a difficult market to crack for multiple reasons. The sector is poorly organized and dispersed and SMEs tend to have limited HR resources. As a result, and to respond to the potential of the SME sector, Harambee has developed an “SME Solutions” dedicated unit within its organization to develop strategies to overcome barriers in working with SME employers.

RECRUITMENT

Harambee recruited marginalized youth that were excluded from the formal labor market. Beneficiaries were South African citizens between 18-24 years old who came from poor families and had completed high school. The secondary school requirement shows the commitment and persistence of the applicants. Beneficiaries were required to have less than one year’s work experience and had to have been looking for full-time employment for at least six months. The six-month requirement is to show youth the appreciation for the difficulty of finding employment.

Potential beneficiaries were reached in several ways. Harambee’s ‘Feet on Street Campaign’, where recruiters campaigned in poor neighborhoods, was one of the main tools used by the organization to reach and attract young people. Other methods included Harambee’s Facebook page, outreach campaigns through email and job search platforms, mobile phone contact systems and referrals from community-based partners, faith-based organizations and youth clubs.

Successful applicants completed two stages in the selection process:

- **Stage One: Phone Screening.** Applicants were interviewed telephonically by Harambee employees. The purpose of the interview was to ensure that applicants met the criteria to confirm that Harambee was sourcing youth from their target demographic.
- **Stage Two: Computer-Based Assessments.** Applicants who met the criteria were invited to visit Harambee’s office and complete a suite of computer-based assessments which were designed to assess work-readiness, capacity to learn and suitability for different kinds of entry-level jobs.

Approximately 50% of those who are assessed are selected to attend the Bridge programs. Low numeracy skills and poor command of the English language are the primary reasons that those who are tested are not suitable candidates for Bridge programs.

Applicants who did not pass the assessment tests were invited to take part in the ‘Step-Up program’; an in-house self-directed study program where young people who failed the assessment could work to increase their proficiency in literacy and numeracy. Once they completed the required content they were re-invited for the assessment.

BRIDGE PROGRAM RETENTION

200,000
applicants

50%
accepted

Of the estimated 200,000 applicants, approximately 50% were invited to attend the bridge program which was tailored to the kinds of BPO and digital jobs for which the applicant was most suited. The combination of the screening phase and the computer-based assessments helped Harambee determine candidates' suitability for various entry-level BPO and digital jobs. Once this was complete, Harambee facilitated the placement of beneficiaries.

Retention was a key aspect of the digital jobs program. Harambee believes that young people who stay employed for more than six months increase their chance of remaining in employment over the long term. In addition, retention is a benefit for employers who typically experience high churn in entry-level positions.

Harambee have found that retention risk is highest in the first three months. To minimize retention risk, Harambee tried to reduce beneficiaries' transport costs by ensuring that they were one taxi ride away from a job.

In the retail sector, Harambee found that there was a link between attrition and the festive season. Long, irregular hours over the festive season and associated transport challenges increased retention risk exponentially and 60% of Harambee's resignations occurred in the festive season between December and February. Therefore, Harambee attempted to ensure beneficiaries were acclimatized to the work environment before the high-risk period.

IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

The biggest challenge faced by Harambee was overcoming beneficiaries' transport costs associated with attending the assessments and traveling to work. Young people living in some areas could not be placed in employment opportunities close to where they live because there was very little economic activity in the area. Harambee's solution was to try to ensure that youth are one taxi ride away from a job. Harambee considered the distance travelled from work to home, and used the cost of transport when deciding which candidates to put forward for certain jobs. However, this accommodation was not always achievable.

BENEFICIARY EXPERIENCES

"The training prepared me for the long hours ... [the training] gave me the skills I needed to deal with customers who are demanding and rude and to work in a team with my colleagues."

Harambee beneficiary, South Africa

During the training, female beneficiaries took their children to day-care facilities or left them with family members so that they could attend the training. Though Harambee does not specifically target or tailor the program to women, nor do they deliberately pursue a gender-focus, 60 percent of participants in Harambee are young women. The disproportionate number of women that apply to the program is indicative of the interest young women have in pursuing employment opportunities through Harambee. Another hypothesis of the high number of women is that many of the female candidates have children or family dependents and are in need for an income.

Female beneficiaries reported that they find the training useful and practical. They further reported that they gained valuable skills on how to prepare for interviews, conduct themselves in the workplace and adequately handle the pressures of the work environment.

EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES

12,319
youth beneficiaries
placed into entry-level
employment

13,367
youth beneficiaries
self-placed into
employment

12,500
youth beneficiaries
provided with work-
seeker support

Harambee established a placement pipeline with 12,319 candidates placed into entry-level full-time jobs from Q3 2015 to Q3 2017. Beneficiaries were placed in jobs in the retail, hospitality, BPO, ICT, manufacturing and financial services sectors. An additional 13,367 beneficiaries self-placed into employment opportunities. The jobs that they secured were of similar nature and in similar sectors to those in which Harambee facilitates placement.

Harambee further provided work-seeker support to 12,500 youth across South Africa. This refers to support provided to youth to improve their ability to independently find work in the digital economy.

USD 350
average monthly income

In 2015, beneficiaries employed in BPO organizations earned an average of USD 350 per month.¹ Program staff reported that Harambee graduates accessed higher quality jobs, with greater access to benefits such as medical aid and pension funds.

Harambee established partnerships with over 300 employers in several sectors across the economy including retail, hospitality, BPO, ICT, manufacturing and financial services.

¹Genesis Analytics (2015). *A mid-term evaluation of Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator*. South Africa: Genesis Analytics.

²Clinton Global Initiative. (n.d.). *Commitment by Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator Initiative*. New York, New York: Clinton Foundation. Available at: <https://www.clintonfoundation.org/clinton-global-initiative/commitments/harambee-youth-employment-accelerator-initiative>.

KEY FINDINGS

1. **Young women – particularly those with children – had a stronger intrinsic motivation to actively participate in the program than young men.** Of the estimated 200,000 applicants, approximately two-thirds young women. Program management suggested that this was likely because, in South Africa, the responsibility for looking after and supporting children typically lies with the mother or other female relatives. These women thus have a greater intrinsic need to obtain employment and earn an income so that they can fund the needs of their children.

This was reinforced through the DJA evaluation of impact case studies, where one female Harambee graduate noted that she was “very worried about [her] situation when [she] fell pregnant” as she was not sure how she would be able to support her child. After the Harambee training, however, she noted that she and her child were much better off and she is now able to support her child.

2. **The Harambee model and the training that accompanied it enabled beneficiaries who were not placed into full-time work opportunities to secure employment on their own.** 17,500 beneficiaries have self-placed into employment opportunities as a result of the training provided by Harambee.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Digital jobs programs should incorporate training on coding into their initiatives.** Coding is one of the fastest growing skillsets in the global information technology industry. This presents a potential area of absorption for young people. However, there is very little demand-side coordination in the coding sector and employers have long waiting periods of readiness for opportunities. Greater coordination between employers is required to fully leverage the opportunities provided by coding.
2. **Digital jobs programs should prioritize building communication skills for youth.** International call centers present large-scale opportunities for youth employment. These centers require workers to be competent and confident in their professional communications abilities. It is imperative to shift the communication competence of young people for these opportunities to be realised.
3. **Looking at the broader youth employment landscape in South Africa and including public sector stakeholders is crucial for future program sustainability and overcoming the wide-spread challenge of youth employment.** Funding should be channeled to what works, and what has been proven to be successful in overcoming the barriers to youth employment. This requires that stakeholders combine innovation with what has been successful to develop widescale, sustainable youth employment initiatives. Further, this requires that exit strategies are envisaged prior to implementation, that technology platforms are leveraged to increase reach of training, and that the public sector invests in developing and growing the ICT skills base.