African Centre for Women in Information and Communications Technology (ACWICT)

SNAPSHOT	
Organization(s)	African Centre for Women in Information and Communications Technology (ACWICT)
Project Name	The Vusha Project
Location	Kenya
Date(s) of Implementation	March 1, 2014 – February 28, 2017
Funding Amount	USD 504,210
Partner(s) / Funder(s)	The Rockefeller Foundation's Digital Jobs Africa (DJA) Initiative
Number of Youth Beneficiaries Trained	Total: 19,927 | Women: N/A | Men: N/A
Number of Youth Beneficiaries Employed	Total: 3,555 | Women: N/A | Men: N/A
Avg. Monthly Earnings of Youth Beneficiaries after Program	Short Term Contracts: USD 40 Long Term Contracts: USD 800
Type(s) of Digital Work	Private Sector – Non-ICT Sectors
Source of Metrics	Internal monitoring & evaluation

ABOUT AFRICAN CENTRE FOR WOMEN IN INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY (ACWICT)

ACWICT is a Kenya-based ICT for Development (ICT4D) organization whose mission is to promote women's and youths' access to and knowledge of ICTs as tools for sustainable development. Since 2007, ACWICT has worked with large organizations to address the challenges faced by poor and disadvantaged young people from the informal settlements of Kenya to improve their digital job skills and employability prospects.

The Vusha Project was a three-year initiative with the overall objective to improve the employability prospects and income-generating capacities of 4,500 high potential, disadvantaged women between the ages of 20-29 from low-income households in Kenya. The program focused predominantly on recruiting, training and placing women, but also had a small male contingent.

The intermediate objectives of the program included:

- Obtaining training tools for online work
- Recruiting and training a total of 4,500 young people from disadvantaged households
- Expanding ACWICT's existing employer network by actively engaging the private sector, county governments and non-profit organizations by hosting 36 quarterly employer roundtables
- Organizing at least 36 career counselling and mentoring workshops

The project coursework was designed to incorporate classroom, self-study, workshops and follow-up activities, on-the-job training (optional) as well as job placement support. The entire course duration was designed to take a total of 888 hours translating into 28 weeks including internships.

There were 2 phases of the Vusha Project model:

- **Phase 1: Training.** ACWICT worked with local partners to market the program to young women in their communities. All applicants accepted into the program were required to attend the ACWICT training. At the end of the training period, beneficiaries completed an online exam to test their technical IT skills. Those who passed this exam were awarded globally-recognized certificates[1]. Thereafter, they moved into job placement.

- **Phase 2: Job Placement.** ACWICT has a growing network of over 1,000 employers who hire ACWICT graduates. On average, at least 80% of the young people trained are placed into jobs, internships and apprenticeships. ACWICT established a feedback loop with employers, which allows employers to provide input and feedback on the relevance of the training and the quality of the graduates. This information is to improve subsequent training cohorts, and ultimately ensure the employability of ACWICT graduates. In addition to these placements within ACWICT's network, ACWICT also has a team that searches for external work opportunities for beneficiaries.

PROJECT DESIGN & IMPLEMENTATON

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

Through the Vusha Project, ACWICT provided youth with market-driven technical IT skills, life and entrepreneurship skills for employability and job-placement support. With these skills, young people engaged in online work as a new way of generating income. Key project activities included:

- Identifying four counties for implementation in the program's expanded strategy
- Recruiting and inducting county program staff (including program officer and community mobilizer) in each of the four counties targeted by the project

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[1] Including the following qualifications: CompTIA (Computing Technology Industry Association) A+ and EUCIP (European Certification of Informatics Professional) and advanced courses will be connected to the Microsoft Employability Portal

- Obtaining training tools for online work and integrating these in the employability training calendar
- Recruiting and training a total of 4,500 young people from poor and disadvantaged households in Kenya in Technical (IT) skills, online work skills, financial literacy skills and life skills for employability;
- Expanding ACWICT's existing employer network by engaging the private sector, county governments and non-profit organizations by hosting 36 quarterly employer roundtables (12 per year; three in each of the four counties targeted);
- Organizing events and activities such as career workshops and mentors' days to increase the profile for the project, project participants and project partners (including funding partners);
- Organizing least 36 (12 per year; three in each of the four counties targeted) career counseling and mentoring workshops; and,
- Carrying out continuous tracking, monitoring and evaluating project performance, activities and impact on the targeted youth and applying feedback received to improve project performance.

RECRUITMENT

The Vusha Project targeted high potential disadvantaged youth. The program targeted youth aged 20-29 from poor and disadvantaged households in Kenya, specifically from Nairobi's main informal settlements (Kibera, Kawangware, Mukuru, Mathare, Kangemi and Korogocho) and four counties outside of Nairobi (Mombasa, Kisumu, Kiambu, Machakos, Kajiado, Busia, and Isiolo). Additionally, young people targeted by the "Vusha" project were be at their transition point in their education from high school/vocational and/or tertiary education to the world of work. The program focused predominantly on recruiting women. However, the project faced challenges in recruiting and retaining only women. Consequently, the project expanded its targeting strategies to include a small male cohort.

During recruitment, ACWICT worked closely with local authorities, county government authorities and faith-based organizations to advertise their program and open applications. The application window was a period of one month. Young people who applied for the program were required have their applications certified by a community leader. Once certified, applicants submitted their paperwork at designated collection points. Applications were screened for ACWICT's eligibility criteria which is:

- Must be female
- Aged 19-24
- Out of school for at least one year
- Living in the informal settlements of Nairobi, Kisumu and Lake Victoria Shores.

After the screening process, the remaining applicants underwent an admission test and an interview. Successful applicants were announced and accepted into the training process.

IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

The main implementation challenge faced by ACWICT was attracting and retaining young women. Most women had severe constraints on their time due to the household responsibilities that they had to fulfill. ACWICT made a concerted effort to identify female beneficiaries. ACWICT also provided incentives for their participation by offering basic child care facilities.

The cost of transport to the training facilities was often prohibitive. High transportation costs meant that beneficiaries would not attend training. To address this, ACWICT collected information about the beneficiaries' addresses, distance traveled and ability to pay for transport was during the recruitment phase. Using this information, ACWICT established training centers in locations that beneficiaries could easily access.

Many beneficiaries could not afford to pay for meals. The cost of food while attending training was identified as another main barrier for beneficiaries' attendance. ACWICT provided a small stipend to beneficiaries for a meal after training. It is not clear how this stipend was disbursed to the beneficiaries.

BENEFICIARY EXPERIENCES

During the program, male beneficiaries were often more assertive and confident whilst female beneficiaries were typically quieter, more reserved and more supportive to fellow learners. In instances when a young man was paired to share a computer with a young woman, the man would often take the lead. However, when two young women shared a computer, they would support each other and facilitate joint learning. As a result, beneficiaries' learning and subsequent performance was found to be accelerated when they worked on their own computers or when they shared a computer with the same sex.

Trainers also perceived male beneficiaries to learn comparatively faster about technology than their female counterparts. Trainers accommodated the different paces of learning by allowing male beneficiaries to continue to explore more advance topics while the trainers reinforced the more basic concepts to female beneficiaries.

Female beneficiaries also experienced safety and security concerns once they entered post-training employment. On occasions when work ended late, young women feared being victims of crime when returning home. ACWICT encouraged female beneficiaries to negotiate alternative working hours to mitigate this risk.

EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES

3,555	**2,635**	**920**
beneficiaries generated income	**registered on online job platforms**	**placed in digital jobs**

Through scaling the Vusha project, ACWICT trained 19,927 beneficiaries over three years. This exceeded the initial target by 15,427 youth. Scaling was enabled by the county government of Kisumu and the national ministry of ICT, which funded the extension of the Vusha model to communities not originally targeted by ACWICT.

3,555 beneficiaries accessed income-generating opportunities because of the Vusha project. 920 of these beneficiaries were placed in digital jobs including data entry, online article writing, transcription, online

content writing, online sales and app development. Some of them are also engaging in social media marketing, web development and graphics and 2,635 signed up to various online job platforms.

USD 30 – USD 50 average task-based payment (short-term contracts)	**USD 800** average monthly income (long-term contracts)

The monthly incomes for ACWICT beneficiaries engaging in digital jobs, including data entry, online article writing, transcription, online content writing, online sales and app development ranged from USD 145 – USD 290. The average monthly income for youth engaged in online work was approximately USD 800 for long-term contracts. Task-based payments ranged from USD 30 – USD 50 per task.

Beneficiaries have been able to move out of their parents' homes and support additional family members because of having a job, engaging in online work or starting their own enterprises.

KEY FINDINGS

1. **Vusha Project beneficiaries typically found digital jobs in the insurance and ICT sector.** Most of these jobs were existing vacancies in firms in ACWICT's network of employers. Additionally, where beneficiaries were not placed in digital jobs, they undertook online work.

2. **Once placed in employment, female beneficiaries were often given back office roles whilst young men were given the opportunities to engage with clients.** On some occasions, women were able to address this with the employer as a result of the life skills training. However, in many instances, women did not feel sufficiently empowered to address this gender disparity.

3. **The prohibitive cost of internet connectivity, the high cost of acquiring computers, and the lack of ICT hubs in rural communities prevented beneficiaries from expanding the amount of online work they undertook.** In addition, unreliable power supply with frequent blackouts prevented continuous learning and led to beneficiaries missing out on online opportunities.

4. **Program staff reported that the program helped to reduce alcohol abuse among some youth.** In one county near Nairobi, high rates of alcohol abuse amongst the youth were recorded prior to the program. However, these rates were reduced for youth involved in the Vusha Project.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Conduct adequate research and scoping of the employment and entrepreneurship sector to ensure that the skills acquired by the beneficiaries are relevant to the job market.** This will increase the likelihood that beneficiaries access employment or income-generating opportunities once they complete the program.

2. **Partner with traditional authorities and government agencies to garner community engagement and support.** Such partnerships help to give credibility to programs that are new and

unknown to the community, and therefore increase the rates of participation, engagement and retention.

3. **Adopt specific targeting strategies for women.** Due to context-specific gender roles, women often require additional support. This can take the form of childcare facilities, meal stipends and flexible delivery modes (such as making the training available on digital platforms) to ensure that women can actively participate and engage fully in the program and receive the maximum benefit from the training. Gender-sensitive recruitment will help to ensure participation in digital programs and to ensure that they benefit from the training and placement.