



UMSIZI FUND



Supporting Youth Employment Ecosystem Coordination for Impact

Africa's youth unemployment challenge sits at the crossroads of colliding forces—the youth bulge, job disruption from the fourth industrial revolution, skilling systems that are increasingly disconnected from the reality of youth and market needs, and a changing macroeconomic environment. Organizations addressing youth unemployment are often constrained in their ability to achieve impact at scale unless they are able to work across ecosystems with multiple participants including governments, the private sector, and educational institutions, to produce coordinated responses to this very complex challenge.

Despite this significant need, investments from governments, philanthropies, and the private sector are often directed towards discrete and tangible programmes and initiatives rather than work that coordinates activity across ecosystems to address root problems and deliver larger, sustainable impact than could be achieved by any one institution. Governments and businesses must ready themselves by radically shifting the assumptions, funding flows and hiring practices that define today's approaches to youth unemployment. Education For Employment and Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator are two examples of organizations that have engaged in cross-ecosystem programming, and have seen that it can provide a scalable solution to addressing the youth unemployment challenge.

Education For Employment is deeply embedded in ecosystems in Morocco and Tunisia

Education For Employment (EFE) works to create economic opportunities for unemployed youth in the Middle East and North Africa so that they can create a brighter future for themselves, their families and their communities. To date, EFE has connected more than 100,000 youth to the world of work. The organization delivers direct training and job placement services for youth, but has also begun working across systems to address the root causes underlying high rates of youth unemployment in the region.

Under the five-year USAID Career Center program in Morocco, EFE worked with an international consortium to embed essential soft skills and job search skills within higher education institutions, to train institutional trainers in the use of innovative methods for teaching

soft skills, and to create permanent career centers within university and vocational training institutions. The consortium set up six brick-and-mortar Career Centers within host institutions in the pilot regions of Casablanca-Settat, Tangier-Tétouan-Al Hoceïma, and Marrakesh-Safi. It also provided in-classroom training to 19,200 students, as well as Training of Trainers (ToTs) to 415 professors, trainers, and career counselors working within government-run vocational training centers (OFPPT), the Ministries of Tourism and Craftmanship, University Hassan II in Casablanca, University Abdelmalek Essaadi in Tangier, and Université Cadi Ayyad in Marrakesh. These efforts have also resulted in the creation of a Virtual Career Center benefiting more than 109,000 job seekers across Morocco. Finally, the consortium succeeded in working with the Université Cadi Ayyad in Marrakesh to integrate soft skills training within all 14 bachelor's and master's degree programs, reaching more than 1,600 student beneficiaries during the 2018-2019 academic year alone. Following the program's success, the Moroccan Minister of Higher Education announced that this Career Center model will be generalized to all higher education institutions in Morocco. Since the program ended in September 2019, five satellite career centers have already been opened.

EFE is also leading systems change work in Tunisia aimed at integrating supply and demand sides of the labor market by strengthening linkages among key actors including the private sector, educational institutions, government, vocational training institutions, local associations and NGOs, and youth themselves, and by working in partnership with the Ministry of Vocational Training to adapt curricula that meet the needs of the private sector.

EFE is hopeful that these efforts will result in increased efficiencies that produce a youth employment dividend. These efforts have not simply been an act of 'connecting' the different actors to one another, but actively convening engagements, using an action-oriented methodology to drive results, developing toolkits that allow educational institutions to adapt and achieve the long-term alignment of curricula to changing private sector needs, and contributing to the capacity of university and public sector leadership to drive the initiative forward.

Harambee Accelerates Youth Employment across ecosystems in South Africa and Rwanda

Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator (Harambee) works to address unemployment in Africa at scale through partnerships. Since inception in 2011, Harambee has partnered with governments, private sector, and social enterprise stakeholders to create a network of nearly 700,000 youth and pathway over 140,000 into jobs and work experiences across Rwanda and South Africa. Harambee's experience in both markets emphasizes the importance of ecosystem work.

Harambee's counter-intuitive insight after eight years of learning: supporting work-seekers to maneuver around every obstruction will not change the system alone. It is critical to also support governments, businesses, industries, and donors to reorganize themselves for more open thoroughfares and throughways that will transition young people from learning to earning.

Harambee's 'Pathway Manager' approach uses the concept of an employability map (and the millions of data points it gathers) to guide the journeys of individuals and the collective action of the institutions in the ecosystem. The pathway manager is a multi-channel platform that serves young people in person, on the phone and online, catching them where they are and moving them along the labour market's many on-ramps and off-ramps with personalized 'nudges' towards the next best action for upgrading their profile and improving their employability.

Today, young work seekers typically cycle through various training programs, community organisations or even job initiatives. Each time, they start from a blank slate, not knowing how to show and quantify the employability they accrue at each one of these stops: "How can my volunteer experience last month leading a large team at my church 'stack up' so that the training program I start next month accounts for and builds on it?" Harambee's solution is customer-centric, placing young people at the center of systems design and forcing established actors to mirror the non-linear reality of their entries and exits from the labour market.

A testament of Harambee's success in building coalitions is the adoption of the pathway manager approach by the Gauteng Provincial Government, one of Africa's largest economies, with the establishment of pathway management labs in South Africa's Eastern Cape Province and in Rwanda. Harambee's experience demonstrates that this capability can provide governments with a blueprint for where to remove barriers and increase investments. As governments act on this blueprint, we see an emergent ecosystem that is organized around young people's ability to build their profiles, close their gaps and secure a first foothold in the economy.

Additionally, a key component of Harambee's work has increasingly become partnering with government to facilitate industry investments and stimulate job creation. In 2019, Harambee helped conclude a Memorandum of Agreement between the Department of Trade and Industry, itself, and the industry body Business Process Enabling South Africa (BPeSA) representing employers in the business process outsourcing sector in South Africa. The agreement formally commits employers in the sector to creating 50,000 new jobs (10,000 ring-fenced for youth) in the sector over five years in return for business incentives, and is an example of how inclusive hiring practices at a firm level can become embedded as policy with industry-wide application. This has already resulted in impact – we have exceeded our targets with over 26,000 new jobs created by the second year of the partnership, and are working to catalyze other stakeholders, public and private to increase their commitments and impact.

Harambee has worked as an interlocutor in the business process outsourcing sector in South Africa and in Rwanda by bringing together government partners who saw the growth potential of the sector but needed assistance executing against a plan. Harambee's approach to working with employers, its track record of work in the industry, and standing government relationships enabled it to bring these diverse interests together and similarly use an action-oriented methodology to build a cohesive plan to grow the industry and accompanying jobs.

Ecosystem coordination requires funding to achieve greater impact in youth employment

As these examples demonstrate, the work of ecosystem coordination is not just about linking different interests. There is an active investment in:

- A **systems-lens**, allowing organizations to understand different interests and maintain continued advocacy for change;
- A strong **outcomes focus** using an action-based methodology to co-create and drive a set of outcomes for which the different parties are accountable;
- **Relationship capabilities**, allowing to both convene different parties, understand incentives and to “speak the language of multiple partners,” and to ultimately build the capacity of the different parties for sustained impact.

Adopting a traditional approach of direct implementation financing for ecosystem work is insufficient, as ecosystem work is often very context-specific, messy, and difficult to measure. The growing interest from funders and funder collectives in collaboration for bigger impact is reassuring, but it needs to recognise that much of this work is not immediately tangible and visible. Similarly, it requires a mindset shift in how impact is understood to consider what can be attributed to organisations undertaking systems work.

Funding ecosystem work for scale impact requires an understanding of contextual factors, the importance of longer-term impact metrics, and an appreciation of the ecosystem as a whole. This requires that we move past traditional funder-grantee roles towards strong partnerships that target systems change, foster collaborations between and across actors, and have a longer-term impact horizon.

The African proverb *“If you want to go fast, go alone, if you want to go far, go together”* has never been truer than in the context of ecosystem work to address the complex issues of youth unemployment. We believe that investing in and supporting organizations to undertake the messy work of ecosystem engagement allows us to run farther *and* faster, together.