

Educational Quality Improvement Program 3

Engaging and Preparing
Youth for Work, Civil Society,
and Family Life



Lessons from Experience Series

Sports for Youth Development in Uganda: Monitoring and Evaluation of an Assets-based Approach

From the Education For All (EFA) Youth Challenge Grant Program in Uganda





Sports for Youth Development in Uganda: Monitoring and Evaluation of an Assets-based Approach

Part of the Education for All Lessons Learned Package

From the Education For All (EFA) Youth
Challenge Grant Program in Uganda

Prepared by

Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC)
The Kids League (TKL)

Compiled and coordinated by Alejandra Bonifaz (EDC)
with the following individual contributors:

Uganda (TKL):
Karen Cassidy (Lead Author)
Toby Fricker

2009

This report is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The content is the responsibility of Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC) and does not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

Introductory Letter

Dear Colleagues:

With some 1.7 billion 15-24 year-olds globally, the cliché that “youth are our future” is proving to be a reality—a reality many find unsettling. Demographic analyses and projections show increasingly youthful populations on the horizon. Political appraisals warn of potential unrest arising from young people lacking skills and livelihoods. Workforce and education assessments predict challenging demand and supply dimensions for a generation poorly prepared for modernizing economies. Global health concerns rise with the knowledge that the new HIV infection rate is highest in the youth population.

Nonetheless, young people everywhere show remarkable strengths, often exhibit astonishing resiliency, and demonstrate optimism even when faced with the most daunting of circumstances. Rather than be seen as liabilities, young people can and should be seen as assets for community development. When appropriately engaged and adequately prepared for roles in the work, family life, and civil society, youth often become key actors in the strengthening and transformation of their nations.

Much has been learned about how to build on youth’s positive attributes in initiatives and projects in many parts of the world. USAID’s Educational Quality Improvement Program 3 (EQUIP3) is designed to improve earning, learning, and skill development opportunities for out-of-school youth in developing countries. EQUIP3, a consortium of 12 organizations led by Education Development Center, is a mechanism through which USAID can access the expertise of these organizations to design and implement youth development programs. Perhaps more importantly, EQUIP3 provides the impetus and the platform for youth development organizations to learn from their experiences and share their lessons.

As part of a series of publications summarizing what is being learned “on the ground” from projects in more than a dozen countries, this report is from a three-part demonstration program called Education for All Youth Challenge Grant. *Sports for Youth Development* in Uganda summarizes the lessons from a fairly small-scale effort in two regions of Uganda – Lira and Kumi – to use sports as a means of engaging young people in education, healthy living, and peacebuilding in these post-conflict regions. In particular, the project sought partnership with a local non-governmental organization, The Kids League (TKL), in an effort to document the life of the project, and to establish a system for monitoring and evaluation of this and similar asset-based approaches to youth development. This document speaks about the project’s lessons learned in tracking youth developmental assets throughout the project as a way to monitor and document a holistic youth intervention. Multiple program elements and a highly participatory approach to both programming and documentation combined to make monitoring particularly challenging, but because a key purpose was to learn from the experience, challenges were to be expected.

Taken together with two companion pieces on small experiments in Jamaica and South Africa, this brief report is meant to add substance to the growing attention being paid to youth issues in international development. We look forward to sharing more lessons from EQUIP3’s experience, with the goal of improving youth development programs around the world.

Erik Payne Butler

Director, EQUIP3

Introduction to the EFA Youth Challenge Grant Program

The Education For All (EFA) Youth Challenge Grant Program was a multi-country initiative designed to strengthen young people’s livelihood skills and opportunities. Supported by USAID Country Missions and USAID/ Washington through the EQUIP3 mechanism, the EFA Program took place in Jamaica, South Africa, and Uganda for periods of 12-16 months for each project, between March 2005 and June 2007. All three projects adopted innovative approaches to address cross-cutting issues related to education, health, life skills, and livelihoods that youth face on a daily basis.

The EFA Youth Challenge Grant Program aimed to achieve its goal by building the capacity of organizations and agencies to provide relevant skills training for out-of-school youth. More specifically, the program assisted USAID Missions and implementing organizations to:

- Analyze and strategically address youth basic education and livelihoods issues.
- Build partnerships among USAID Strategic Objective teams, national government Ministries, the private sector, and NGOs to address youth issues in an integrated and creative manner.

To achieve its objectives, the EFA Youth Challenge Grant Program created in 2005 a co-financing mechanism with country USAID Missions to support the following innovative and strategic youth projects:

EFA Jamaica	This project addressed urban boys’ education and employment challenges in a community with high rates of violence.
EFA Uganda	This project used sports as a convening mechanism for education, healthy living, and peace-building among in- and out-of-school youth.
EFA South Africa	This project adapted a viable U.S. youth service model to a South African context to address employment, civic engagement, and education issues.

All three projects cut across education, health, life skills, and livelihoods issues. In an effort to learn from the experiences gained during the implementation of this initiative, at the beginning of each EFA project, partners in each country selected a theme that the project would examine throughout its implementation and agreed to produce a brief document that summarizes or illustrates the theme. Given the diverse nature of these projects and the particular circumstances on the ground, the themes selected varied across projects. The exercise resulted in the following lessons learned documents:

- **EFA South Africa: *City Year in South Africa: Adapting a U.S.-based Service Learning Model***

This paper focuses on the concept of program adaptation. Based on the experience of adapting the US-based City Year model into a South African context, the discussion reflects on the challenge of finding a balance between project elements that can (and should) be adapted in another setting and elements that must remain unchanged in order to maintain the integrity of the project. This paper was designed for practitioners who may be considering adapting or expanding a project to new settings.

- **EFA Jamaica: *Engaging Young Men in Jamaica's Urban Areas: Education and Employment as Complementary Strategies***

Based on EFA work with young men living in Grants Pen, Jamaica, this handbook provides methods, strategies, and insights on youth project design, community preparation, project implementation, direct intervention, public relations, and evaluation. It was designed for project implementers and policy makers who are working (or plan to work) with young males in volatile inner-city communities.

- **EFA Uganda: *Sports for Youth Development in Uganda: Monitoring and Evaluation of an Assets-based Approach***

This paper focuses on the process of developing a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) plan that supports an assets-based approach to youth development. The discussion is focused on observations of project activities in Kumi and Lira that highlight the multiple elements involved in an assets-based and highly participatory approach to measuring youth development. It is geared toward youth development practitioners who are interested in measuring project outcomes in a more holistic way.

This document is one of three lessons learned documents that form the *EFA Lessons Learned Package* that was developed to serve as a resource for youth development practitioners and project implementers. The *EFA Lessons Learned Package* was jointly developed by Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC), People's Action for Community Transformation (PACT), City Year US/South Africa (CY & CYSOA), and The Kids League (TKL) to share experiences gathered during the implementation of three youth-focused projects in Jamaica, South Africa, and Uganda. The documents were developed primarily by the implementing partner organization with direct input from project staff, youth, and local stakeholders.

EFA Uganda: Project Snapshot

The **EFA Uganda project** used sports as a mechanism for youth development for in- and out-of-school boys and girls. This project, implemented by The Kids League (TKL), built upon an already existing sports-based program in Uganda, expanding implementation to two new districts, Lira and Kumi, and placing greater emphasis on basic education.

PRIMARY OBJECTIVES

- Provide opportunities for leadership development and social interaction among participating children and youth
- Conduct sports-based outreach and advocacy to bring together community leaders, parents, and youth
- Expose community leaders, parents, and youth to positive education, health, and peace-building

LOCATION

Lira and Kumi, Uganda

DATES

October 2005-April 2007

TARGET POPULATION

270 children and youth aged 9 to 14, including street children, orphans in conflict-affected areas, and internally-displaced persons

HIGHLIGHTS

- Developed youth's resilience, personal discipline, motivation to succeed, and commitment to teamwork through involvement in sports league play, peer leadership opportunities, and community outreach activities
- Created a greater sense of security and a social safety net among participating youth
- Enhanced teacher skills (e.g., active and participatory teaching techniques) by recruiting teachers to become volunteer coaches
- Promoted positive relationships between youth and caring, supportive adults
- Provided opportunities for in- and out-of-school youth to interact and develop positive relationships with one another

EFA Uganda: Introduction

The EFA Uganda project used sports as a mechanism for youth development for in-school and out-of-school boys and girls. This project, implemented by local NGO The Kids League (TKL), built upon an already existing sports-based program in Uganda while expanding implementation to two new districts, Lira and Kumi, and placing greater emphasis on basic education.

During an 18-month period between October 2005 and April 2007, EFA Uganda used sports leagues (football and netball) and community outreach to provide opportunities for leadership development and social interaction among participating youth. The project also provided a social safety net for children and youth living in post-conflict areas by fostering positive youth-adult relationships and a supportive, bonding, and caring environment.

Target Population

The project served a total of 270 boys and girls, aged 9 to 14, in the districts of Kumi and Lira. The total included in-school and out-of-school youth, street children, and orphans living in conflict-affected areas. In Lira, some of the participating youth lived in internally displaced people's camps. In Kumi, participants included youth living in districts with high rates of school drop-out.

Main Activities

In order to implement the program in the districts of Kumi and Lira, the project developed two components. The first component involved sports-focused activities, namely two regular seven-week league seasons of football and netball, with each season consisting of 18 football teams (6 Junior, 6 Middle, and 6 Senior teams) and 6 girls netball teams. The second component was sports-based outreach and advocacy that brought together community leaders, parents, and youth to participate in recreational activities and be exposed to positive education, health, and peace-building messages.

Introduction to Study

This paper focuses on the process of developing an M&E plan that supports an assets-based approach to youth development. It discusses observations based on the experiences in Kumi and Lira, highlighting the multiple elements involved in an assets-based and highly participatory approach to measuring youth development. It is geared toward youth development practitioners who are interested in measuring project outcomes in a more holistic way.

The asset-based approach was reinforced and strengthened by Search Institute's The Asset Approach: 40 Elements of Health Development, 2002.

EFA Uganda: Observations and Lessons Learned

The EFA Uganda project, through its emphasis on M&E, gained a great deal from the process of implementation. By focusing on the final figures and findings of M&E plans, practitioners may miss out on valuable opportunities for community engagement, staff development, and a full understanding of the local context. Project planners and implementers should place great value in the process of determining indicators and the collection and analysis of data. Learning among project staff and beneficiaries can be fostered through careful planning, constant inquiry, reflection, integration of feedback, strategic thinking, and attention to detail.

The following observations and lessons learned along the path of M&E development and implementation in the Uganda context may serve to enhance learning among practitioners with similar programmatic objectives.

Observation 1: After comparisons and tests, project staff decided that the Search Institute's Developmental Assets captured the essence of the TKL programming in a way that past monitoring efforts did not.

Lesson Learned 1

Project developers should look carefully for existing frameworks that suit M&E needs. A "good M&E fit" will measure relevant indicators while providing learning and discovery during the process, thus enhancing a project beyond the measurement of specific aspect indicators.

Data collection within TKL prior to the EFA project focused on the number of participants involved directly and indirectly. Numbers were disaggregated for gender, age, and social circumstance. Though this information provided a valuable understanding of the size of the program and demographics of the beneficiary population, there was no clear measurement of the impact or comparative value of the sport-for-development model.

Individuals involved in TKL, as employees or volunteers, understood that youth experienced positive effects through participation in such activities. Many staff members had a long history with the organization and demonstrated a great deal of enthusiasm for their work. They often expressed the idea that M&E efforts, while understood as a necessary part of work, could not capture the social effects that they witnessed daily.

Early in the program development process for the EFA project, implementing staff met for an initial three-day training session. During the training, they participated in various open and honest discussions about their perspectives on the purpose of development through sport. This series of discussions served both as a data-generating exercise, as well as an opportunity to focus and excite the group about their common goals through participation in the project. Some of the comments heard during the conference were:

- "Youth feel proud."
- "Sport is an opportunity for integration."
- "Youth adopt healthy behaviors."

Comments were grouped by theme and explored further in conversation. At this point, the Search Institute’s Developmental Assets were introduced as a possible framework for data measurement, along with alternative instruments. The results of the work in the early days of the workshop distinctly mirrored the Assets model.

Working with staff members to discuss their impressions, outcomes, and results before introducing the indicators to be measured increases the likelihood of identifying relevant goals. No project is exactly like another, particularly in varying development contexts. Proper indicator “fit” can be achieved by using a bottom-up approach to M&E.

Observation 2: The investment of both time and funding in preparing and training project staff was high, but the benefits were greater. The training translated into greater commitment of project staff and a strategic approach of the staff members to their daily activities, as they were regularly exposed to feedback through their M&E efforts.

When the design and implementation of M&E is done by parties external to the project – whether it be a third party or staff from headquarters doing data collection instead of field officers, a valuable opportunity is lost. Through participation in data collection for Lira and Kumi baseline sessions, TKL field employees were informed in a way that would have been difficult to replicate. Each member had a stake in the effectiveness of the activity process, informed by their insight into the vision and goals behind M&E requirements. Focus group discussions, open conversation, and questionnaires exposed the nuances of the project, and all participants more easily recognized areas for improvement and linkage.

Lesson Learned 2

For a fundamentally formative M&E approach, implementers should prepare and train project staff as key partners in the development and execution of M&E activities, as an alternative or complement to external evaluators. To mitigate challenges that may emerge from an open and inclusive M&E approach, roles should be clearly established, and realistic goals should be set from the start.

By discussing the potential gains in involving teachers as volunteers and planners for community outreach, project staff began to consider other ways of creating linkages between local schools and TKL. One field officer suggested that activities and games used in community outreach be supplied to teachers with suggestions for their application in the classroom. Teachers also participated in the selection of youth ambassadors. Engagement in this selection process encouraged teachers to increase their reliance on these student leaders as resources in both their classrooms and their schools. These steps resulted from active exploration among staff members.

Prior to the implementation of TKL projects in Lira and Kumi, meetings between head office personnel and field staff were often limited in content to work plan items and budgetary limitations. As a result, the relationship with local staff to headquarters was mainly administrative. Intensive engagement of both headquarters and field staff in the common task of collecting and interpreting evaluation data, however, enhanced the nature of this relationship. More discussion on the logic behind interventions took place, with questions centered on the potential for improvement of work and overall achievement of results.

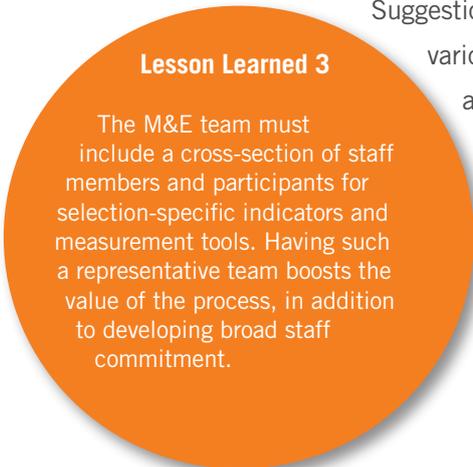
An open and inclusive M&E approach among project staff contributed to the overall project. However, the project team found that the costs of carrying out the M&E approach needed to be managed carefully. A strong initial focus on vision and the various possibilities created through this type of program made for an occasionally awkward transition to the realities of financial and time limitations. Careful establishment of roles from the start of a project, combined with a focus on realistic accomplishments, were helpful in mitigating these challenges.

Observation 3: The establishment of a clearly defined and agreed-upon plan for effective M&E was a three-step process that required the participation of project staff from different hierarchical levels.

Step 1: The first stage in capacity development consisted of modeling and experiencing M&E methodologies. An external EQUIP3 consultant facilitated focus group activities, small group discussions, and targeted interviews with staff members. The content of TKL youth interventions was explored in depth. Thoughts on individual commitment and opinions on theories of change were drawn out in conversation.

Step 2: After an introduction to various methodologies, the focus shifted to the practicalities of data collection. Staff members developed tools for use at the local level. They modified question guides and forms for collecting and interpreting data to optimize participation and commentary in a variety of settings.

Step 3: The third step in the training and design process was the testing of tools and methodologies. TKL staff members practiced their skills and tools in rural as well as town settings with both youth and adults. Testing the tools in a supported environment allowed the staff members to address challenges posed by variations in language and levels of literacy and to explore potential solutions. The testing phase was an exciting chance for TKL staff to understand how their own perceptions of the work of TKL differed from those held by a broad community base.

A circular graphic with an orange background and white text. The text is centered and reads: "Lesson Learned 3" followed by a paragraph: "The M&E team must include a cross-section of staff members and participants for selection-specific indicators and measurement tools. Having such a representative team boosts the value of the process, in addition to developing broad staff commitment."/>

Lesson Learned 3

The M&E team must include a cross-section of staff members and participants for selection-specific indicators and measurement tools. Having such a representative team boosts the value of the process, in addition to developing broad staff commitment.

Suggestions for improving the process were made after testing and experiencing the tools at various stages. Throughout the process, TKL management observed staff members in action which enabled them to better understand their strengths and weaknesses and assign tasks accordingly. For example, the Assistant Program Officer for the Lira office was a rigorous and observant note taker. His counterpart was better at facilitating conversations and making participants feel at ease. Thus, TKL management was able to take these aptitudes into consideration when creating the final implementation strategy.

Observation 4: The similarity in training between the districts of Kumi and Lira could not prevent differences in program realities.

Lira and Kumi field office teams were cohesive groups with a keen focus on quality in data collection as a result of their involvement in training and the overall design of monitoring and evaluation activities. Staff members were able to transfer skills from their involvement in training to their daily tasks, such as brainstorming, group discussion and compilation of data. This foundation was a distinct advantage for implementers as they launched programs in their respective locations.

As programs progressed in each district, however, the differences between locations became clear. Lira was a post-conflict district with a high concentration of displaced persons. Project beneficiaries included significant numbers of former abductees and orphans. Over-crowding in local schools was a particular issue, since many rural schools had been closed due to the threat of attack. These events in Lira and surrounding areas drew significant attention from a number of NGOs and international agencies. Though this resulted in the availability of a variety of local services for the community, it also created unique challenges for data collection and program delivery. Focus group discussions and interviews were less of a novelty for local residents, and recruitment for participation was often problematic. The two trained staff members were not fluent in the local language, which presented an additional barrier in accessing unfiltered information. Lastly, low levels of literacy among adults, overworked teachers, and limited parental involvement were important characteristics of the implementation environment that made access to more vulnerable populations more difficult.

Kumi was also considered a post-conflict district, though several years had passed since the last incidence of violence. General poverty and an absence of youth services were the key local challenges. Due to limited services, TKL was a focal point for the community, with parents and teachers willing to contribute their opinions and advice. Though their participation was a positive factor, their expectations for the scope of service to be offered by TKL were sometimes excessive. Managing community accountability was often difficult.

Observation 5: Discussions and consultations with local communities through focus groups and interviews not only generated data, but also resulted in community buy-in and ownership of the program that in turn made the staff more accountable for its implementation.

Involving parents, teachers, and local community members was an integral piece of the early programming phase. These engagements were essential; in addition to helping project implementers deepen their understanding of local perceptions, they provided valuable opportunities to generate support for the program and its objectives. Sharing the rationale behind the importance of youth development activities led to increased community “buy-in.” After understanding the full

A circular graphic with an orange background and a white border. The text inside is white and centered.

Lesson Learned 4

Different settings require different approaches. Although a uniform framework is recommended, implementers should be flexible and anticipate characteristics and challenges unique to each situation.

Lesson Learned 5

Capacity building does not translate into improved programming without a corresponding growth in budget and necessary supports (i.e., money, time, staff). Gradual cost increases should be expected and included in the program plan.

potential of a project, stakeholders were more likely to invest their energy and enthusiasm.

Participants in focus groups were eager to see the data generated from the activity and paid close attention to the progress of TKL within the community. Many discussion participants became coaches or general volunteers.

The engagement that was accomplished through early evaluation opportunities also created interesting challenges for program staff. The community consultations created high expectations for a quality product; consequently, staff members were reluctant to deviate from the project plan. Further, unanticipated funding delays for the TKL program meant that activities did not start according to the originally specified timeline.

The program roll-out was eagerly anticipated, and each delay was questioned and scrutinized carefully. TKL staff members often found themselves in complicated situations, as they could not respond with certainty to local concerns about whether and when a celebrated program would start.

Observation 6: Building capacity of the implementing partner in the area of M&E generated corresponding gradual cost increases throughout the project that were not projected from the onset.

As a central element to any effective program, M&E has costs that build quickly. Comprehensive data can be expensive to acquire and interpret, particularly in rural settings lacking in infrastructure. Additionally for a short term project, the creation and collection process for M&E data is intensified. For truly formative M&E efforts, systems for feedback are ideally an integral part of the core operations of an organization. However, in an uncertain and competitive funding environment, these activities are not often considered essential enough to be included in direct program costs and are consequently inadequately funded.

Within the EFA Uganda project, TKL and EDC jointly identified the need for technical assistance on M&E in order to better track and capture the impact of the intervention on participating youth. Thus, EDC and TKL formed a relationship in which EDC provided technical assistance to TKL in the field but mainly at a distance, relying heavily on the project team in the field. The inherent implication in this relationship was that M&E efforts had not been optimized in past programming efforts. Though capacity building is often thought to improve efficiencies and the overall quality of implementation, initial cost increases were inevitable, as unforeseen activities became part of the overall work

Lesson Learned 6

Mixed evaluation teams, including representatives from various locations and levels, should be available for data collection activities throughout the life of the project. Teams should also be rotated as a further precaution against bias in results.

plan. For example, focus group discussions, the key data collection method, involved a broad set of stakeholders living in diverse locations within the program districts. Engaging the appropriate mix of individuals was a time consuming and labor intensive activity. Examples of budget items that were stretched well beyond their original intended use included transportation and communication. In addition, staff hired for program activities often found their additional M&E responsibilities cumbersome. Discussions and data collection often seemed to occur at the expense of some other duty.

Observation 7: Objectivity, which is a challenge in any M&E approach, was even more difficult to achieve in a poor setting like post-conflict Uganda, where the daily income of project staff is perceived to be directly linked to a program's positive results.

Throughout staff training, the topic of objectivity in research received considerable focus. All staff members participated in discussions about the purpose and ultimate goal of data collection and received reminders of this at every opportunity. This preparation, however, could not prevent the perceived linkage between positive results and the chances for a longer term engagement of TKL on a local level. Long term job security and associated financial and social benefits became factors in the data collection process. In Lira, members transferred from headquarters were in charge of implementation; their position with the organization was less vulnerable, as they expected to transfer around the country according to programming needs. In the other district, staff members were recruited locally. Their contracts lasted for the duration of the project, with no promise of further employment. Given the extensive focus placed on the M&E aspect of the EFA program, the results for the latter district had a distinct positive skew. One plausible explanation for this variance is the project staffs' belief that their jobs would continue if the program were extended on the basis of positive community feedback.

The obvious benefits of involving local staff, particularly for a small project, outweighed the threats to validity posed by the bias of data collectors. However, the issues surrounding objectivity are slightly different in environments where resources are constrained. Therefore, additional attempts to mitigate bias must be taken in situations of poverty and economic uncertainty.

EFA Uganda: Conclusion

The EFA Uganda project was successful in deepening and expanding the activities of a sports-based program to reach youth in remote districts more effectively. The project also contributed to a growing knowledge base of the use of sports as a mechanism for youth development in a post-conflict environment.

Specific outcomes included:

- Expanded activities to Kumi and Lira and reached a total of 270 boys and girls.
- Developed youths' resilience, personal discipline, motivation to succeed, and commitment to teamwork through involvement in league play, peer leadership opportunities, and community outreach activities.
- Created a greater sense of security and a social safety-net among participating youth. Youth participants perceived an increasingly caring school climate and greater family support.
- Promoted positive relationships between youth and caring and supportive adults who served as coaches using techniques that nurtured talent, set expectations and boundaries, and help youth set personal developmental goals.
- Enhanced teacher skills by recruiting teachers to be volunteer coaches. As a result, teachers acquired active and participatory teaching techniques, which they then incorporated into their classrooms.
- Provided opportunities for in- and out-of-school youth to interact with one another. As a result, in- and out-of-school youth developed positive relationships, and out-of-school youth learned more about school from their in-school peers.



About EQUIP3

The Educational Quality Improvement Program 3

(EQUIP3) is designed to improve earning, learning, and skill development opportunities for out-of-school youth in developing countries. We work to help countries meet the needs and draw on the assets of young women and men by improving policies and programs that affect them across a variety of sectors. We also provide technical assistance to USAID and other organizations in order to build the capacity of youth and youth-serving organizations.

EQUIP3 is a consortium of 12 organizations with diverse areas of expertise. Together, these organizations work with out-of-school youth in more than 100 countries.

To learn more about EQUIP3 please see the website at www.equip123.net/equip3/index_new.html.



EQUIP3 Consortium: Education Development Center, Inc. • Academy for Educational Development • Catholic Relief Services • International Council on National Youth Policy • International Youth Foundation • National Youth Employment Coalition • National Youth Leadership Council • Opportunities Industrialization Centers International • Partners of the Americas • Plan International Childreach • Sesame Workshop • Street Kids International • World Learning