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Mali Out Of School YOUTH PROJECT

FINAL REPORT



October 1, 2010 –
November 30, 2015
Submitted to USAID/Mali

PAJE-NIËTA: PROJET D'APPUI
AUX JEUNES ENTREPRENEURS

UNDER LEADERSHIP ASSOCIATES
LWA GDG-A-00-03-00010-EQUIP 3
AWARD NUMBER: 688-A-00-10-00167

PRODUCED FOR REVIEW BY THE UNITED STATES
AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
BY EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT CENTER, INC.



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ACRONYMS

AJA	Association Action Jeunesse
AMSS	Association Malienne pour la Survie au Sahel
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
EDC	Education Development Center, Inc.
EQUIP3	Educational Quality Improvement Program 3
GOM	Government of Mali
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IGA	Income-generating activities
MEN	Ministry of National Education
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
OLA	Out-of-School Literacy Assessment
OSYP	Out-of-School Youth Project
PSP	Private Sector Providers
SILC	Savings and Internal Lending Communities
UNICEF	The United Nations Children's Emergency Fund
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Before enrolling in the Mali Out-of-School Youth Project's (OSYP) first cohort¹, Kany Keita of the Manako village in the Kayes region of Mali had limited prospects for the future. Like the majority of rural Malian women, she had never been to school and spent most of her time engaged in domestic chores and the seasonal demands of helping on the family farm. As an OSYP participant, she learned to read, write and do basic math, and received vocational training in market gardening as well as a starter kit of seeds and essential equipment that enabled her to start her own business. Today, two years after the close of her training cycle, Kany continues to manage and expand her market gardening business, with a monthly income of about \$100USD.

Like Kany, Moumini Sanogo also had limited prospects for the future before enrolling in the project's second cohort of youth. Moumouni spent most of his time chatting and drinking tea with friends throughout the day and helping out on his family's farm in the village of M'Pedougou in the Sikasso region. Moumouni had never been to school and, with no formal training, the options for his future were limited to either continuing his current lifestyle or taking his chances at migrating to the capital city or beyond. When he heard about the OSYP, he decided to enroll in the hopes of securing a better future for himself. Today, a year after finishing the program, Moumouni continues to manage and expand a livestock fattening enterprise he started with project support. He has even hired his own employee and earns a monthly income of around \$200USD.

These are just two out of thousands of similar stories of life transformations that occurred among the 10,951 rural youth who completed the youth development cycle in one of the Mali Out-of-School Youth Project's three cohorts between 2010 and 2015. The project was led by Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC), in collaboration with implementing partners Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Swisscontact, Association Jeunesse Action (AJA) and for the Timbuktu region, Association Malienne pour la Survie au Sahel (AMSS). Except for the period of the coup d'état in Mali (2012-2013), it worked under the tutelage of the Ministry of Employment, Professional Training, Youth and Citizenship. The primary goal of the project, conceived under EQUIP3² and jointly financed by the Education, Economic Growth, and Democracy and Governance Teams of USAID-Mali³, was to enable rural youth between the ages of 14 and 25 who had either never been to school or who had dropped out in the early grades to become more educated, economically productive, civically engaged and empowered to improve their lives and those of their families and communities. The project addressed four intermediate results of USAID-Mali's strategic plan:

- IR 1: Increased access to relevant basic education
- IR 2: Increased access to relevant skills training
- IR 3: Increased entrepreneurship opportunities and job networking
- IR 4: Increased civic engagement

¹ In order to achieve the project goal of training and helping 10,000 youth become entrepreneurs, the project worked with 3 cohorts of youth between 2011-2015.

² EQUIP3 was a USAID funding mechanism of youth projects

³ Funding sources included, among others, the Feed the Future Initiative and the Trans Saharan Counter Terrorism Partnership

Context

Like many governments in other African countries, the Malian Government has identified youth employment as one of its top priorities. According to a UNICEF report, roughly half of Mali's population is under the age of 18⁴; youth as a whole make up 69% of the population.⁵ Yet about a third of the country's school-aged children are not in school and retention and return-to-school rates for enrolled children are poor. In addition, only about half of adults who graduated from Grade 6 are literate, throwing into question the quality of instruction for those who do attend school.⁶ Mali faces some of the highest adult illiteracy rates in the world, at 71% for adult males and 79% of adult females. Aside from the waste in human potential, youth unemployment and illiteracy pose a threat to political and social stability, placing youth at risk for recruitment by violent extremist groups and serving as an underlying cause for the flood of migrants from Africa to Europe.

The rapid youth assessment conducted by EDC in Mali in 2010 as a prelude to the design of the Out-of-School Youth Project found that youth in rural and peri-urban areas wanted to earn a living and preferred to remain in their own communities to work if economic opportunities were available to them. It further established the critical need for accelerated basic education support, including numeracy, literacy and work readiness skills for youth as foundational elements in advancing economic security and the overall well-being of Malian families and communities.

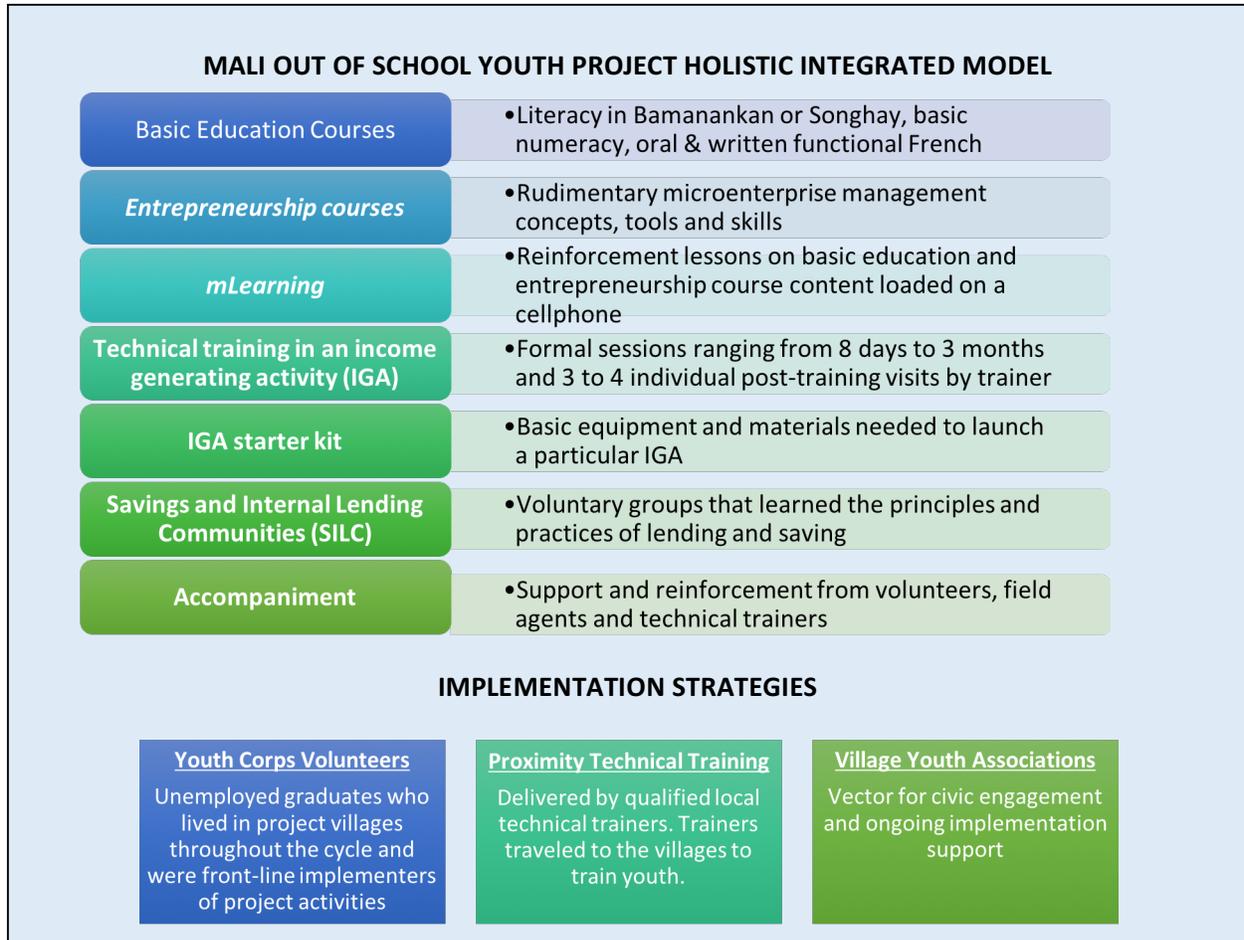
Based on the results of the rapid youth assessment, consultations with key stakeholders (the then Ministry of Employment and Professional Training, Ministry of Youth and Sports, Ministry of Education as well as USAID), and lessons learned through other EQUIP3 youth projects, EDC and its partners developed an integrated holistic model of the youth development cycle to be used in the project. A cursory overview of the model is found on the next page and a more detailed description in section II of the report. Between 2011 and 2015, three cohorts of youth completed this cycle. With each new cohort, the model was adjusted based on evaluation data, difficulties encountered and lessons learned from the previous cohort.

A youth market opportunities study was conducted for both the southern and Timbuktu regions and served as the basis for the income generating activities selected by the rural youth. Most employment opportunities were in the informal agriculture sector or in small service/artisanal industries.

⁴ http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/mali_statistics.html#68 accessed April 21

⁵ Ministry of Youth and Sports, Technical Note on Mali's Youth Policies, September 2009

⁶ Rapport d'Etat sur le Secteur de l'Education Nationale



Results

For its first cohort, the project recruited 5,740 youth (including 3,114 women) in 100 villages of the Kayes, Koulikoro and Sikasso regions. A total of 3,148 (55%) participants, including 1,813 women, completed the training cycle. The second cohort, which operated in the Sikasso region only⁷, consisted of 1,255 youth (including 631 women) in 21 villages (26 centers⁸). A total of 997 (79%) completed the cycle, of which 546 were women. The third cohort consisted of 7,858 youth (including 4,734 women) in 107 villages (178 centers) and 6,806 (87%) completed the cycle (including 4,303 women).

Although the project aimed for gender parity, women made up 54% of the youth in Cohort 1 and 60% in Cohort 3. Cohort 2 was almost evenly divided between women and men.

⁷ The number of regions and youth for the second cohort were reduced, as the cycle began during the period of the 2012 coup d'état and ensuing instability and uncertainty.

⁸ When the number of youth who wanted to enroll in the project was greater than 60, 2 or 3 volunteers, depending on the number of youth, were assigned to the village.

Improvements over the life of the project were particularly evident in completion, microenterprise start-up and self-employment rates. As just noted, completion rates successively increased, from 55% in Cohort 1 to 79% in Cohort 2 and 87% in Cohort 3. Likewise, income-generating activity (IGA) or microenterprise start-up rates increased from 60% in Cohort 1 to 94% in Cohort 2 to 95% in Cohort 3. Over the life of the project, **88% of the youth who completed technical training and received an IGA starter kit actually started their microenterprise and, of these, 94% were self-employed.** Indeed, as of November 2015, **70% of youth in Cohorts 1 and 2 were still operating their microenterprises, with 64% of these as self-employed, even 24 months after the close of Cohort 1's development cycle (and 12 months after the close of Cohort 2's development cycle).** **Between 83% (Cohort 1) and 85% (Cohort 2) of youth still in operation reported an increase in profits.**

Of the Cohort 1 youth who were still in operation, 68% were female. In fact, regression analysis revealed a positive correlation between being female and being self-employed for Cohort 1 youth. Moreover, the odds that a woman will maintain her IGA were found to be twice that of a man. Across both cohorts, youth have higher odds of maintaining their IGA if they are female, have remained in their communities, are older or have less education.

As for basic education, completion rates increased with each cohort from 33% in Cohort 1 to 45% in Cohort 2 to 59% in Cohort 3, and the average completion rate across the three cohorts was 48%⁹. While program adjustments (more focused training of volunteers, condensation of courses to a shorter period, faster delivery of professional inputs, etc.) contributed to this increase, it is important to note that the project's threshold for completion was lowered: For Cohorts 2 and 3, a youth was considered to have completed basic education



"I treasure listening to the lessons so much that I guard my phone with care. I have no doubt that I will still use the phone after the project ends. Even if one day I forget something I had learned from the Mali Out of School Youth lessons, I will always be able to return to Stepping Stone and replay the lessons on my phone."

—Mariam Coulibaly, 25, Mali Out of School Youth, June 2013

Youth review OSY lessons at their own pace on their mobile phones. The mLearning package includes audio-visual basic education lessons (includes reading, writing, math, entrepreneurship and functional French) and the Nieta Kalan audio series. Nieta Kalan tells the story of two entrepreneurs who have launched their poultry-raising business, and discusses their challenges and how they overcame them. The phones also allow access to "Senekela" a service call line that provides information about agriculture-market prices.

Mariam explains: "The lessons that are loaded onto the phones are very interesting. They help me improve my French skills. The series are great ... In the series, Ali and Oumou explain how to manage all aspects of the poultry-raising business: how to build a chicken coup correctly, how to take care of the hens, their eggs and even how to feed the chicken up to 3 months."

Phones were distributed to youth along with training on how to operate them and the Stepping Stone application.

⁹ Completion of basic education courses was defined by the percentage of classes attended. For Cohort 1, a youth completed if they attended at least 80% of the classes and the completion rate using this target was 24%. Recognizing that the 80% target was unrealistic given the context, for cohorts 2 and 3, this was revised to 65% of the classes. For the sake of consistency when comparing the three cohorts, we applied the 65% rate to Cohort 1, which gave the 33% completion rate.

classes if he or she attended 65% of classes offered, whereas for Cohort 1 it was 80%¹⁰.

Cohort 2 and 3 youth's literacy gains were measured using EDC's Out-of-School Literacy Assessment (OLA), which indicated that **59% of Cohort 2 youth and 42% of Cohort 3 youth improved their OLA scores from baseline to endline.**

Analysis of data regarding the use of EDC's Stepping Stone mLearning application found a positive and significant relationship between the number of reading lessons completed on a cellphone and literacy gains. However, this needs to be further analyzed, given challenges encountered with the log files.

A total of 9,534 youth (including 5,802 women) across all three cohorts also participated in the savings and internal lending community (SILC) groups that the project helped support, mobilizing a total of approximately \$100 USD. The average size of loans across the three cohorts was \$14, a relatively small sum that often made the difference in a youth's ability to develop his or her microenterprise (for example, to buy needed ingredients/raw materials or to transport his or her goods to a nearby market for sale). Over 65% of the loans across cohorts were taken out by women.

With respect to civic engagement, each of the 121 youth associations of Cohorts 1 and 2 and the 107 youth association coordinating committees of Cohort 3¹¹ designed a community service project, with 177 of the 228 projects seeing completion before the end of their cohort. The projects generally focused on sanitation or clean-up, the repair of existing infrastructure such as housing for teachers and midwives or literacy centers, the repair of water pumps and wells, and road repair. In all, 3,863 youth participated in the conception of the projects. In addition to the community service projects, 4,906 youth in Cohort 3 were trained in conflict mitigation, creating a culture of peace and citizenship.

The Mali Out of School Youth model was implemented in the region of Timbuktu, following the 2012 coup-d'état and subsequent invasion by insurgent and jihadist groups. Although the goal of the project was not centered on countering violent extremism, it provided youth in the region with access to education, economic opportunities and helped youth become more engaged in their communities. Project interventions in the Timbuktu region were evaluated in 2015 as part of a multi-country study that looked at US Government funded development programs operating in at-risk countries. The report concluded: "As a multi-faceted and holistic approach to countering violent extremism, Out-of-School Youth's integrated empowerment approach to deprived, out-of-school, uneducated, and largely unemployed youth should be replicated elsewhere in northern Mali and in other countries of the Sahel."

Our experience over the last five years has demonstrated that the Mali Out of School Youth model truly offers uneducated youth the possibility of a new beginning. The model has attracted significant local and international interest: not only are the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of Employment, Professional Training, Youth and Civic Engagement in the process

¹⁰ The 80% threshold for completion was deemed to be unrealistic and therefore lowered to 65%, following Cohort 1.

¹¹ With Cohort 3 rather than just selecting only one youth association in the village, the project created youth association coordinating committees and any interested youth association could send 2 representatives. Both the coordinating committee and the participating youth associations benefited from the trainings and capacity-building activities.

of validating the basic education, technical training and entrepreneurship modules and materials developed by the project in order for other projects to benefit from them, but the Ministry of Employment, Professional Training, Youth and Civic Engagement is actively seeking financing in order to replicate the model in other regions. In addition, the project has informed the design of various new projects in Mali including projects financed by the government, IFAD and the World Bank. We are excited and hopeful that the model will further benefit other communities across Mali and in other countries in Africa with similar contexts.

Challenges and lessons learned

The project began in October 2010 and the youth development cycle for the first cohort of 5,740 youth in 100 villages with 100 volunteers was launched in June 2011. Throughout the development cycle of each cohort, project staff reviewed evaluation data, identified problems and challenges and made recommendations for improving retention, quality and performance. A few of the major challenges and lessons learned are described below, with a more detailed section at the end of the report.

Challenge 1: High dropout rate of youth from Cohort 1

One of the major challenges faced by the project was the **high dropout rate of youth from Cohort 1**. The expected dropout rate for each cohort was 20%, but for Cohort 1, 45.2% of the youth initially enrolled in the project dropped out. After careful analysis, we concluded that although youth enrolled in an entrepreneurship program, the emphasis from the very beginning of Cohort 1 through the first 6 months was on literacy and numeracy acquisition. Many youth lost sight of the vision that had prompted them to join the project in the first place, that of launching their own microenterprise and improving their economic condition. It was difficult for them to see the link between learning to read, write and do basic math and their ultimate goal of earning money for themselves and their families.

Beginning with Cohort 2, greater emphasis was placed on entrepreneurship from the very beginning of the project. The very first week of the youth development cycle was devoted to an “Introduction to Entrepreneurship” workshop where youth learned what qualities and competencies were needed to be a successful entrepreneur and also selected and validated the IGA in which they would be trained. Each youth received a badge with his or her name and a picture of the IGA she or he had selected. In addition, successful local entrepreneurs were brought in to share first-hand their experiences with the youth and the critical importance of literacy and numeracy to running successful business. The basic education curriculum was also revised to more explicitly integrate entrepreneurship and work readiness skills and content throughout. Exercises and practical work focused on the skills youth would need to manage their microenterprises.

Other measures taken were to revise the volunteer training to ensure that the volunteers were more involved in engaging youth outside of class time and to motivate the youth associations to assume a more active role in monitoring class attendance and outreach to youth, their parents and their spouses. As a result, **the dropout rate for Cohort 2 was reduced to 20.6% and 13.4% for Cohort 3.**

Challenge 2: Low rate of IGA start up after technical training

Another challenge was the **low rate of IGA start up after technical training** and receipt of starter kits. Only 60% of youth in Cohort 1 who completed technical training and received a

starter kit actually launched their IGA compared to 94% for Cohort 2 and 95% for Cohort 3. For Cohort 1, only youth who were reported to have launched their microenterprises during visits conducted by surveyors were counted as having launched their IGA. This was changed in subsequent cohorts. Some of the other measures adopted after Cohort 1 to improve the situation were to ensure that the IGA starter kits were distributed within 3-4 weeks after the end of technical training, to ensure that technical trainers carried out the post-training visits as contracted and that the visits focused on expected technical outcomes.

In addition, some of the particular problems linked to specific IGAs were addressed. For example, the production and repair of agricultural equipment IGA, which had the lowest start-up rate of any IGA, was revised to exclude the production component and focus on repair. (The starter kits the youth had received in Cohort 1 did not include an energy source, which was essential to the production component.) For the livestock-fattening IGA, a waiver was requested from USAID, allowing the project to purchase and distribute two sheep to each youth in addition to animal feed, feeding troughs and a salt block. (For Cohort 1, it was assumed that the youth would already have access to animals they could fatten and that only animal feed needed to be provided by the project—this was a great source of frustration to these youth, who despite being told otherwise, believed that they were going to receive livestock.)

Challenge 3: The role and structure of youth associations

Finally, according to the original project design, **youth associations** were expected to assume a major role in project implementation. They were to support the volunteers as they carried out their responsibilities, conduct awareness-raising activities with families and the community, help troubleshoot problems and serve as a vehicle for civic engagement.

Unfortunately, the first capacity-building training for youth associations in Cohort 1 took place in January 2013, seven months before the end of the 26-month youth development cycle and too late to enable the associations to provide on-going support throughout the cycle. Part of the problem was the delay in developing the youth association training modules. In addition, existing staff already had a heavy workload and were juggling multiple tasks and priorities.

The solution was to hire a civic-engagement specialist whose primary focus was to work with the youth associations. For Cohorts 2 and 3, the diagnostic assessment and training of youth associations took place within the first six months of the youth development cycles; these trainings were also consolidated into one intensive week of training rather than being spread out over several weeks or months as was the case with Cohort 1. As a result, participation was greater and association members participated in all of the sessions rather than just one or two.

Another challenge related to the number of associations per village¹². The initial strategy was to work with only one youth association in each village, selected according to defined criteria. However, in order to broaden participation as much as possible, a youth association coordinating committee was established with Cohort 3, with the participation of two representatives from any interested youth association. The actual trainings were open to all members of the associations in the village. In addition, after noting the poor representation of women as association members or as officers in Cohort 1, frank discussions were held with the

¹² Actually the initial assumption was that there was only one youth association per village, but we later found on average five youth association per village in the south and seven per village in the north.

associations in cohorts 2 and 3 regarding the importance of women participating at all levels. In some instances, associations were asked to consider re-electing their officers. As a result, there was a significant increase in the membership of women and in the number of women elected as officers.

Conclusion and Recommendations for Future Programming

The model developed and implemented under the Mali Out-of-School Youth project offers an effective program for providing youth in rural areas with access to education, improved livelihoods, increased civic awareness and overall, for improving their quality of life and curbing migration from rural areas. The model also empowers women in particular, giving them a chance to develop their capacities and acquire skills to improve their lives and those of their children.

The basic education modules and supporting materials developed, produced and used under the project have been officially validated by the Ministry of National Education as appropriate for the target audience and a valuable resource for the Ministry and other structures, partners and NGOs working with similar populations. The technical training modules and supporting materials for 14 IGAs¹³ were validated by the Ministry of Employment, Professional Training, Youth and Citizenship.

To further improve the model and achieve better results, based on the project's final evaluation and the end-of-project reflections of staff and partners, we make the following recommendations:

Project start-up at village level

In order to build stronger relations with the community and facilitate greater implication of the youth associations and community in project implementation, volunteers should be installed in project villages one month prior to the launching of the youth development cycle. For all three cohorts of the Mali Out-of-School Youth project, volunteers were installed several days before they were expected to begin activities. This did not give much time to build relationships in advance of the launch. In the same vein, Youth Association Coordinating Committees and their respective youth associations should also be trained during the month prior to launching the youth development cycle. This will enable them to more effectively assume their responsibilities from the very beginning of the cycle. During this month, they should also be assisted to conduct a mini-market opportunities study for their immediate area, which would inform the "Introduction to Entrepreneurship" workshop and IGA selection by the youth.

Length of the cycle and chronology of inputs

The length of the cycle should be 22 months, with the second year primarily focused on developing the youth microenterprises instead of concurrently continuing basic education courses. This will avoid one project activity being in competition with another, as youth often had to choose between going to year 2 basic education class and tending to their microenterprise

¹³ The 14 IGAs the project worked with are: poultry raising, bakery, hair dressing, sewing, livestock fattening, masonry, agriculture (market gardening and grain cultivation), carpentry, photography, telephone repair, repair of agricultural material, setting up a small restaurant, soap making and processing of fruits and vegetables.

during the second year. Instead, the full basic education courses should be taught intensively during the first year.

The last four modules of the entrepreneurship curriculum, more focused on essential elements for managing a microenterprise should be taught during the second year and the volunteers should assist the youth in applying what they are learning directly to their microenterprises. Activities to reinforce literacy can be undertaken in smaller, more targeted groups using storybooks with themes of interest to youth.

The intensive week-long workshop on conflict mitigation, creating a culture of peace and citizenship should also be dispensed within the first 6 months of the youth development cycle and the training should be open to interested members of the community. These skills are important, and the earlier training will facilitate youth applying them in their day-to-day activities and at the community level.

To ensure that youth reap the full benefit of the reinforcement lessons and content loaded on their cellphones, the cellphones should be distributed within the first month of the start of basic education classes. In the first few weeks, volunteers should have the youth bring their phones to class and at the end of each lesson, have youth practice accessing the various reinforcement lessons, to ensure they are able to easily do so.

Regarding the participation of women in class, arrangements should be made to provide childcare for those with small children, so they are better able to concentrate in class and benefit from the courses. A solution should be found, in consultation with the Youth Association Coordinating Committee during the month prior to launching the youth development cycle. The majority of women in all three cohorts were already married and had 2-3 mostly young children. This seems to be the norm in most rural areas.

Technical training and IGA start-up

One of the keys to the success of the Mali Out-of-School Youth project was the distribution of IGA starter kits to youth shortly after they completed technical training. If the project had simply provided training without the starter kits, it's unlikely that we would have had the success rate of youth actually launching their microenterprises and the relatively high sustainability rates that the project registered. Our kits were fairly modest with an average value of \$130, and there were pieces of equipment that our technical team felt was important for youth to have that we could not afford. We therefore suggest that the average value of kits be increased to \$150 - \$175.



Youth from the village of Dialaya get hands on experience on how to take apart an repair a motor during technical training.

In addition, it would be beneficial to establish the savings and internal lending communities (SILC) within the first three months of the youth development cycle. Youth need cash to

develop their businesses, and the SILC groups provided access to cash. Establishing the SILC groups earlier, would give youth a longer period of savings so that more funds would be available for loans once youth begin developing their microenterprises.

Details regarding all of the elements in this brief overview of results, challenges, lessons learned and recommendations are found in the full report below. The thousands of empowered and productive youth whose lives were changed forever remain the best testimony of the project's success.

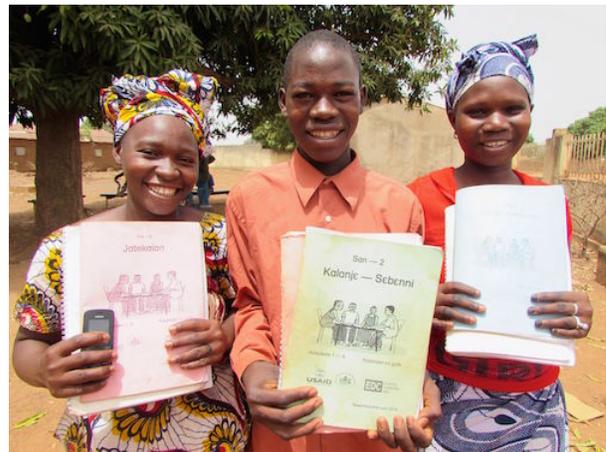
THE MALI OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH PROJECT MODEL

Following the rapid youth assessment in 2010, EDC carried out extensive consultations with the Ministry of National Education, Ministry of Employment and Professional Training, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the Ministry of National Education, USAID and other key stakeholders to develop the project model. Based on the results of these consultations, data from the Mali youth assessment and lessons learned through other EQUIP3 youth projects, EDC developed an integrated holistic model for the youth development cycle.

Prior to launching the first cohort in the south, a market opportunities study was conducted for the southern regions to identify promising livelihood possibilities and value chains for rural youth. A similar study was conducted for the Timbuktu region in 2013, prior to beginning activities in the north. The results of the two studies paralleled those of the youth assessment, indicating that most employment opportunities were in the informal agriculture sector or in small service/artisanal industries. For the first two cohorts, youth were trained in market gardening, grain cultivation, livestock-fattening, poultry-raising, the transformation of agricultural products, the production and repair of agricultural equipment and material, soap-making, and establishing a small restaurant or bakery. With the third cohort, more service-oriented IGAs were added: carpentry, masonry, sewing, hair-dressing, photography, and cellphone repair.

A. Basic Education and Entrepreneurship

The first four to six months of each year of the youth development cycle were devoted to the **basic education curriculum** with a goal of providing the youth with literacy and numeracy courses in their mother tongue (Bamanankan for the south and Songhay for the north), oral functional French in year 1 and written functional French in year 2. The goal was to provide the youth with the minimum competencies they would need to manage their microenterprises. In both years 1 and 2, modular **entrepreneurship courses** were delivered focusing on the set of basic skills the youth would need: work readiness and leadership qualities; basic essential tools such as invoices, receipts, profit/loss sheets, etc.; how to develop a marketing plan and how to develop a business plan. Each youth also received a cell phone preloaded with EDC's Stepping Stone learning application with curricular content in support of the literacy, numeracy, functional French and entrepreneurship courses. This provided youth the opportunity to review course work outside of class in a systematic manner. The phones also contained an audio-drama about the experiences, challenges and successes of two youth as they launch and develop a poultry-raising business.



Youth show off their basic education materials after class.

B. Youth Volunteers

The frontline implementers of the project were a **corps of youth volunteers**, unemployed university or professional school graduates who committed to living in the target villages, dispensing the basic education and entrepreneurship courses and accompanying the youth as they launched their microenterprises. In addition, the volunteers collaborated with the village youth associations and assisted in community service activities. For Cohort 1, 100 volunteers served in 100 project villages; for Cohort 2, 26 volunteers served in 21 project villages¹⁴ and for Cohort 3, 177 volunteers served in 107 project villages/sites¹⁵. In all, there were 303 volunteers including 77 women. Volunteers signed a commitment at the beginning of the project, were housed by the village and received a small monthly living allowance (about \$100) for their voluntary services. In addition, as a further incentive, the project set aside a sum of \$20 a month that was given to each volunteer who completed the full term of his or her service. The volunteers were recruited from within the administrative regions where they would work, so they would already be familiar with the language, customs and life of the target villages.

C. Youth Associations

Under the project model, **youth associations** in each village were selected (Cohorts 1 and 2) to support the volunteers and overall project implementation. For Cohort 3, as already described above, a youth association coordinating committee was formed, composed of two representatives from each youth association in the village interested in working with the project. The youth associations and coordinating committees also served as the primary vector for activities related to civic engagement. Work with the associations began with a diagnostic assessment of their organizational capacity and functioning. Training modules were developed to strengthen their administrative and financial management and their strategic vision, planning and engagement in their community. As part of the training, each association identified and assessed problems that existed within the community. Later in the cycle, each association selected one problem that the youth could address and designed a corresponding community service project. The association then mobilized youth in the community to execute the project, with a nominal contribution from the project in the form of equipment or material (valued on average at approximately \$1,600). With expansion into the Timbuktu region with Cohort 3 due to additional funding from USAID’s Democracy and Governance team, training modules on conflict-mitigation and creating a culture of peace and citizenship were also included in the youth association training. In addition, Cohort 3 youth were trained on these same themes using a simplified version of the modules in a special 5-day workshop.

Youth Association Training Modules

- Internal Governance
- Organizational Management and Leadership
- Financial Management
- Mobilizing Resources
- Civic Engagement
- Long term planning and sustainability
- Citizenship
- Conflict mitigation
- Creating a culture of peace

¹⁴ When the number of youth recruited was over 50, two or more volunteers were placed in a village.

¹⁵ Exceptionally in the Timbuktu region, given the aftermath of the rebel takeover and war in the north, the project worked in four sites (composed of 8 neighborhoods in Timbuktu town, the only urban center served by the project).

D. Technical Training

Under the leadership of implementing partner Swisscontact, working in close collaboration with the other technical partners, CRS and AJA, training modules, trainer guides and supporting youth guides were developed for each of the 14 IGAs. The modules and guides included necessary content to ensure environmental protection and mitigation based on USAID guidelines and recommendations. Using standardized modules and technical documents for trainers and youth ensured that youth in a given IGA received the same training, regardless of geographic location.

For each IGA, the project identified local professionals living in reasonable proximity to the youth to serve as trainers, so that training could be provided at the village level and to facilitate post-training follow-up visits by the trainers to each youth individually. Trainers worked with a maximum of 20 youth per site, and training focused on practical application of the content. Each trainer was provided a stipend to purchase the basic supplies needed for practical demonstration during trainings. In all, 553 trainers (including 101 women) were recruited, trained in the project's modules, and went on to deliver the technical training courses to project youth: 159 for Cohort 1 (including 27 women), 69 for Cohort 2 (including 11 women), and 423 for Cohort 3 (including 85 women).

E. IGA Starter Kit

Shortly after the youth completed technical training, they received a starter kits for their IGA. These kits included the minimum set of equipment and material needed to launch their microenterprise. For example, for market gardening and grain cultivation, the youth received a variety of improved seeds, a plow, watering can and other essentials. For soap-making, the youth received basic equipment, a customized soap-cutting table, protective gear and essential supplies. For establishing a small restaurant, youth received a table and benches, cooking and serving utensils, and a small local stove. The average value of the kits was \$130.



A youth participant shows off part of her starter kit (one of her sheep, animal feed and salt block) at a distribution fair.

F. Savings and Internal Lending Communities (SILC)

Youth were also trained by the volunteers and assisted in forming and managing savings and internal lending communities, which gave them access to cash, based on a model developed by implementing partner CRS that is used internationally. Each community established two funds: a general fund that provided loans for microenterprise development and a social fund that provided loans for personal needs such as illness, marriage and baptisms. Members committed to saving a specific sum each month and learned the principles of saving and lending, charging small amounts of interest on loans and delivering penalties for late payments. Toward the end of

each youth development cycle, youth were introduced to micro-finance institutions within their region. Representatives shared with the youth the procedures and requirements for securing loans. Based on their demonstrated capacity to manage their microenterprise, a number of youth were able to secure loans from microfinance institutions after the project ranging from \$1,000 to \$2,000 USD.

KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The project's successes can be demonstrated by the stories of the Malian young men and women whose livelihood opportunities have improved as a result of the project, as well as by the numbers of youth who were trained and who launched and maintained microenterprises.

A. Technical Training, Launching Microenterprises

Between 2011 and 2015, a total of 10,951 youth (61% women) completed technical training, representing 74% of the total youth ever enrolled in the project. Of these, 8,077 youth (73%) started their microenterprise as self-employed, either individually or in groups. Noteworthy is the fact that completion rates improved successively from 55% of youth in Cohort 1 to 79% in Cohort 2 and 87% in Cohort 3. This is a testament to the project's ability to ascertain and address challenges so as to better serve the youth (see section on *Challenges, Lessons Learned and Recommendations for Future Programming* for more detail). The following table summarizes enrollment and technical training completion numbers over the life of the project.



Youth received starter kits for their income generating activity.

Table 1. Increase in youth completion rates over the life of the project

Youth	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Life of project
Number of youth enrolled in the project				
Women	3,114	631	4,734	8,479
Men	2,626	624	3,124	6,374
Total	5,740	1,255	7,858	14,853
Number of youth who completed technical training				
Women	1,813	546	4,299	6,658
Men	1,335	451	2,507	4,293
Total	3,148	997	6,806	10,951
Percentage of youth initially enrolled who completed technical training				
Women	58%	87%	91%	79%
Men	51%	72%	80%	67%
Total	55%	79%	87%	74%

For Cohorts 1 and 2, as Feed the Future financing dominated, all of the IGAs selected were agro-sylvo-pastoral in nature. For Cohort 3, with a diversification of funding, other service and artisanal industries were added such as carpentry, hair-dressing, and sewing. The table below

provides a summary of the number of youth trained in each cohort by income-generating activity.

Table 2. Number of youth completing technical training by IGA

Income Generating Activity (IGA)	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Life of project
	# of youth completing			
Agriculture ¹⁶		406	2083	2489
Grain cultivation	285	n/a	n/a	285
Market gardening	596	n/a	n/a	596
Plant production	5	n/a	n/a	5
Bakery	8	1	106	115
Food processing	77	14	188	279
Livestock-fattening	782	165	992	1939
Poultry-raising	521	203	1023	1747
Repair and production of agricultural equipment	314	30	n/a	344
Repair of agricultural equipment ¹⁷	n/a	n/a	329	329
Setting up a small restaurant	86	55	389	530
Soap-making	474	123	987	1584
Carpentry	n/a	n/a	131	131
Cellphones repair	n/a	n/a	26	26
Hairdressing	n/a	n/a	138	138
Masonry	n/a	n/a	54	54
Photography	n/a	n/a	11	11
Sewing	n/a	n/a	349	349
Total	3,148	997	6,806	10,951

As already described, once youth completed technical training, they received a starter kit containing the minimum necessary equipment needed to start-up their income generating activity. This was a key element of the model that contributed to the large number of youth who were able to actually launch their microenterprise. As is evident from the average amount of savings per SILC groups, youth in rural areas do not have easy access to cash. If they had been required to procure their own equipment to start their microenterprises, it is probable that only a small percentage of the youth would have been able to launch. An example of this is found

¹⁶ For Cohort 1, grain cultivation and market gardening were considered separate IGAs and youth chose one or the other. Beginning with Cohort 2, the two IGAs were combined into one (Agriculture) and youth were trained and received starter kits in both. Plant production actually was plant nursery and was incorporated into the agriculture modules of cohorts 2 and 3.

¹⁷ With Cohort 3, the “Repair and production of agricultural equipment” IGA was significantly revised due to low-start-up rates among youth who had selected this IGA. The production component was dropped to become simply “Repair of agricultural equipment.”

with the poultry-raising IGA. With Cohorts 1 and 2, youth were required to procure the material to build the chicken coops themselves and the project supplied them with two improved race baby roosters and 10 female chicks. The quality of the coops built often did not meet the required specifications and many youth never built a coop at all, so never launched.

With Cohort 3, the project supplied youth with the necessary material to build a coop according to the required specifications. Once the youth built the coops and the trainers inspected them to ensure they were built as required, the project supplied the two baby roosters. Youth this time were asked to mobilize ten female chicks. The required investment on the part of the youth (between \$30 and \$50 USD) was much less than what had been required to build a coop (between \$100 to \$130). However, even with this reduced investment, many youth either were unable to procure the local chickens or purchased fewer than the ten requested. However, even with this reduced investment, many youth either were unable to acquire the local chicks or purchased fewer than the ten requested.

As we progressed from cohort to cohort, improvements were made in both the quality of the kits and the time delay between completion of technical training and reception of the kits. In the south for most of the IGAs and for cohorts 2 and 3 we were able to reduce the interim period to approximately one month. The Timbuktu region was the exception given the difficulties encountered in both procurement and distribution, because of the security issues in that region.

The following provides a summary of the youth from all three cohorts who received such a kit.

Table 3. Number of youth who completed technical training and received a kit

Income Generating Activity	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3
Agriculture		402	2,077
Grain cultivation	236		
Market gardening	440		
Plant production	4		
Bakery	4	1	106
Food processing	33	14	185
Livestock fattening	428	162	992
Poultry raising	339	200	1,021
Repair and production of agricultural equipment	225	30	323
Setting up a small restaurant	48	55	386
Soap-making	302	121	985
Carpentry			129
Cellphones repair			26
Hairdressing			136
Masonry			53
Photography			11
Sewing			347
Total	2,059	985	6,777

B. Micro-Enterprise Start-Up

A youth was considered to have launched his or her IGA if he or she met one of the following criteria:

- He or she completed significant work regarding his or her activity, such as preparation of the ground (ploughing, delimiting), construction of an oven or housing for animals, establishment of a site for a restaurant, hair dressing salon or a food processing area or soap-producing unit.
- He or she had incurred expenses related to installation, such as purchasing inputs, finding customers, or buying equipment.
- He or she had already sold products or services.



A OSYF beneficiary displays the results of his nursery (market gardening IGA).

Because the project was primarily interested in self-employment, further criteria had to be met in order for a microenterprise to be considered as *self-employment*. A youth was considered self-employed if he or she reported to work for themselves. For grain cultivation, a youth was considered self-employed if:

- He or she worked on an individual plot¹⁸.
- He or she worked on a secondary plot and received more than 50% of the profits.

If the youth only worked on a common or secondary plot and did not earn 50% or more of the profits, he or she was not considered self-employed.

The following table summarizes microenterprise start-up results for all three of the project's cohorts. **Over the life of the project, 82% of youth who completed technical training and received a kit were self-employed. Women outperformed men as 87% of women were self-employed compared to 75% of men.** Moreover, rates of microenterprise start-up increased over the life of the project, from 60% in Cohort 1 to 76% in Cohort 2 to 90% in Cohort 3. This was the result of careful activity monitoring, reflection and adjustment of project support techniques and strategies.

¹⁸ Traditionally, farming at the village level groups a number of households, who work together on a common field that represents the largest part of the land cultivated by the unit. Production of and revenue from the common field are managed by the head of the farming unit, who also determines inputs, labor, and pays taxes. Secondary fields may be farmed by particular households or individual plots by individuals.

Table 4. Number of youth reporting self-employment

	Women	Men	Total	Target
Cohort 1				
# of youth reporting initiation of self-employment	810	428	1238	2,400
% of youth who completed technical training and received a kit	67%	50%	60%	
Cohort 2				
# of youth reporting initiation of self-employment	436	311	747	691
% of youth who completed technical training and received a kit	81%	70%	76%	
Cohort 3				
# of youth reporting initiation of self-employment	4,005	2,087	6,092	3,855
% of youth who completed technical training and received a kit	93%	84%	90%	
Life of Project				
# of youth reporting initiation of self-employment	5,251	2,826	8,077	6,946
% of youth who completed technical training and received a kit	87%	75%	82%	

The following table provides a break-down of self-employment for youth in Cohort 3 by IGA. The IGAs that had the most successful rates of launching as self-employed were soap-making, livestock fattening, poultry raising, food processing, photography and sewing (in descending order, all with a rate of 90% or higher). The lowest self-employed rates were for cell-phone repair, the repair of agricultural equipment and establishing a small bakery (in descending order, under 80%).

Table 5. Number of Cohort 3 youth self-employed

Self Employment of Cohort 3 Youth					
Income Generating Activity	# youth completing technical training	Youth initiating self-employment			Percentage of youth who completed technical training who were self-employed
		Women	Men	Total	
Agriculture	2,083	1,245	557	1,802	87%
Bakery	106	28	43	71	67%
Carpentry	131	1	114	115	88%
Cellphone repair	26	0	20	20	77%
Food processing	188	164	8	172	91%
Hairdressing	138	104	16	120	87%
Livestock fattening	992	499	459	958	97%
Masonry	54	1	46	47	87%
Photography	11	1	9	10	91%
Poultry raising	1,023	509	430	939	92%
Repair of agricultural equipment	329	0	242	242	74%
Restaurant	389	309	9	318	82%
Sewing	349	194	120	314	90%
Soap making	987	950	14	964	98%
Total	6,806	4,005	2,087	6,092	90%

C. Youth Implementation of New Agricultural Techniques

After helping youth initiate production and selling practices related to their microenterprise, the project also wanted to ensure that agricultural production processes met high-quality standards and afforded youth the best opportunities to insert themselves into local markets and value chains with value-added commodities. Another concern was that the techniques being implemented conform to USAID recommendations for environmental protection. For youth who were new to practicing an agriculture-based IGA, this meant teaching them project-validated techniques for production and environmental protection. For youth who had practiced their IGA even before OSYP, this meant updating and modernizing production and farming techniques to improve yields and again ensure environmental protection. The project considered a youth to be practicing the same IGA if during the study on youth start-up, he or she reported to have been carrying out the same IGA before the technical training *and* if the job reported during youth enrollment was similar to his or her chosen IGA¹⁹.

To assess the impact of the project’s technical trainings on youth practices and techniques, beginning with Cohort 2, we established four categories of youth implementing an IGA²⁰:

- 1) Youth without prior experience in their chosen IGA (regardless of whether they were self-employed or not). We consider that they are implementing new techniques, de facto.
- 2) Youth with prior experience in their chosen IGA, who were implementing their IGA but were not self-employed. They were either employed by someone else or were part of a family or collective unit. We consider that **they were not implementing new**



"The project has taught me new farming techniques. I have learned how and when to plant, how to prepare the grounds and maintain my plots, what varieties of seed should be used for different soil types, how to protect my land from erosion as well as the importance of reforestation – all of this knowledge contributes significantly to improving my yield."

—Oumar Koné, OSYP participant, 25

Oumar had been farming produce to support his family. He explains: "We would use techniques that we learned from our parents because that is all we knew."

With his cohort that chose agriculture 'market gardening and grain cultivation' as their IGA, he received a 10-day training and starter kit (including a plow, wheelbarrow, watering can, and certified improved seeds.)

Thanks to the project’s technical training and entrepreneurship classes, he understands the need of actively monitoring his business. He now knows how much he invests and what his profit margins are. Each month he earns up to \$68 USD from the sale of each type of produce (peppers, okra, cabbage, etc.). The project provided Oumar with the knowledge to improve productivity for his business: "When I am behind in planting, weeding or harvesting, I hire 10- 15 additional laborers to help, and pay them a daily rate of \$1.5 USD per person in addition to lunch (rice and fish) that we offer."

¹⁹ If during the study on youth IGA start up, a youth indicated that he was a farmer and during enrollment said that he was involved in market gardening, this was counted as having prior experience because farming and market gardening are "similar."

²⁰ This strategy was introduced and used to assess impact on Cohort 2 and 3 youth.

techniques due to the fact that they were not responsible for making decisions regarding what techniques to use.

- 3) Youth with prior experience in their chosen IGA, who were implementing their IOGA as an employee before OSYP, but transitioned to implementing their IGA as a self-employed individual. We considered **that they were implementing new techniques**, at the very least regarding management, marketing, and accounting.
- 4) Youth with prior experience in their chosen IGA, who were currently self-employed and were also self-employed prior to joining OSYP. To determine whether they were implementing newly acquired techniques, a comparison between techniques used before OSYP support and techniques currently used was required. The final evaluation, carried out in June for Kayes and Sikasso regions and in August in Timbuktu region enabled the project to determine, for each IGA, the percentage of self-employed youth who improved their practices and were using new techniques.

The following table summarizes the number of youth who began practicing new and improved agricultural production techniques with OSYP support. **As can be seen, 83% of youth who completed technical training introduced new agricultural management practices into their microenterprise, whether they were new to the IGA or not.**

Table 6. Number of youth implementing new agricultural management practices.

	Women	Men	Total
Cohort 1			
Youth implementing new practices	1,302	739	2,041
% of youth who completed technical training	72%	55%	65%
Cohort 2			
Youth implementing new practices	482	353	835
% of youth who completed technical training	88%	78%	84%
Cohort 3			
Youth implementing new practices	4,090	2,152	6,242
% of youth who completed technical training	95%	86%	92%
Life of Project			
Youth implementing new practices	5,874	3,244	9,118
% of youth who completed technical training	88%	76%	83%

D. Savings and Internal Lending Communities

In addition to providing technical training and start-up kits, a principal input from the project along the microenterprise start-up pathway, was support for youth to create savings and internal lending communities (SILC). In total, over the life of the project, Mali Out-of-School Youth Project provided training and resources for the creation of 481 such groups, comprising 9,534 project participants, as summarized by the table below.

Table 7. Establishment of Savings and Internal Lending Communities (SILC)

	Women	Men	Total
Cohort 1			
# of SILC groups	151		
# of members	1,775	1,343	3,118
Cohort 2			
# of SILC groups	44		
# of members	510	417	927
Cohort 3			
# of SILC groups	286		
# of members	3,517	1,972	5,489
Life of Project			
# of SILC groups	481		
# of members	5,802	3,732	9,534

A study conducted in 2013 of Cohort 1 youth revealed that nearly 37% of youth used SILC funds for their microenterprise, as summarized in the table below disaggregated by IGA:

Table 8. Percentage of Cohort 1 youth who used SILC funds

IGA	Percentage Who Use SILC	Average SILC Amount Used (USD)
Food processing	50.0%	\$28
Grain cultivation	26.3%	\$49
Livestock fattening	29.2%	\$4
Market gardening	46.9%	\$33
Poultry raising	20.9%	\$16
Setting up a small restaurant	35.0%	\$34
Soap-making	49.5%	\$23
Total	36.5%	\$32

As shown in the table below, 21% of Cohort 3 youth who launched their IGA had secured loans from their SILC group to help with their microenterprise. This rate is higher for women than for men. This finding confirms that the project’s savings and internal lending communities positively contributed to helping youth launch their microenterprises.

Table 9. Percentage of Cohort 3 youth who used SILC to launch their IGA

IGA	Total		
	Women	Men	All
Bakery	29%	30%	29%
Food processing	21%	13%	20%
Livestock fattening	15%	11%	13%
Market gardening	32%	15%	27%
Repair of agricultural material (REMA)	0%	10%	10%
Setting up a small restaurant	27%	11%	27%
Carpentry	0%	11%	11%
Cellphones repair	0%	5%	5%
Hairdressing	17%	21%	18%
Masonry	50%	8%	9%
Photography	0%	0%	0%
Poultry raising	24%	18%	21%
Sewing	21%	15%	19%
Total	25%	14%	21%

E. Sustainability of Youth-Led Microenterprises

While some 8,000 youth launched businesses over the life of the project, the durability and sustainability of these microenterprises remained an open question. To address this, the project conducted a follow-up study as part of the final project evaluation in July 2015, 24 months after the close of the project cycle for youth in Cohort 1, and 12 months after the close of the project cycle for youth in Cohort 2.²¹ **As we detail below, the study revealed that 70% of youth microenterprises were still in operation, with between 83% (Cohort 1) and 85% (Cohort 2) reporting an increase in profits.** For the study, 20 villages from Cohort 1 were first randomly selected from the 62 villages in two (Kayes and Sikasso) of the three southern

²¹ The project also conducted sustainability studies as part of its mid-term evaluation, conducted 6 months after the close of the Cohort 1 youth development cycle. Above, we only present findings from a final evaluation study conducted in July 2015. The results of the mid-term evaluation study found that 83% of the youth in the sample who had completed technical training were still engaged in their microenterprise, with 72% self-employed. The sample in the mid-term evaluation was composed of 15 randomly selected Cohort 1 youth from 13 randomly selected project villages in each of the three southern regions (Kayes, Koulikoro and Sikasso). A second study, conducted in 2014 by CRS, 15 months after the close of the youth development cycle, found that 79.2% of the youth surveyed were still implementing their IGA. Of these, 71% (or 89% of the youth still implementing their IGA) were doing so **as self-employed**. The CRS study queried 953 youth in 99 of the 100 Cohort 1 villages (approximately 9.5 youth per village), randomly selected from SILC members. As the focus of the CRS study was on SILC groups, this was not a pure random sample from among all of the project youth in the village, and thus some level of bias may be introduced.

intervention regions and then 15 youth were randomly selected from each village. For Cohort 2, 15 youth were randomly selected from each of the 21 project villages in the Sikasso region, the only region in which OSYP operated during that period. Surveyed youth were asked if their business was still in operation since first launching, how it was being managed and how much profit, if any, it was generating. If youth were absent from their communities at the time of the survey, a family member or close friend was given a shortened version of the survey and asked to answer on the youth's behalf.

To analyze the data collected from surveyed youth, weights were applied to Cohort 1 and 2 youth respectively. Data for Cohort 1 was weighted by region, sex, and income-generating activity. Data for Cohort 2 was weighted by sex and income-generating activity, with region excluded as all Cohort 2 youth came from the Sikasso region. Therefore, the findings describe the population of both cohorts of youth who benefited from the OSYP intervention that were studied (Cohorts 1 and 2).

The below findings are disaggregated by cohort, with Cohort 1 findings generalizable to the rest of Cohort 1 alone and with Cohort 2 findings generalizable to the rest of Cohort 2 alone.

Demographic Characteristics of Youth Surveyed

Youth surveyed were predominantly female in both cohorts. The Cohort 1 sample was 59% female and 31% male, and the Cohort 2 sample was 51% female and 49% male. Youth in Cohort 1 were slightly younger, with an average age of 19 compared to age 21 for Cohort 2.

Further, many more youth in Cohort 2 were present at the time of the survey, at 76.8% compared to just 54.9% for Cohort 1 youth. This was a statistically significant finding, meaning that it was not just a random effect of the sample, but seemed to reflect a structural feature of the two populations. Two reasons for this difference may be i) that 24 months had passed between the end of the Cohort 1 project cycle and the time of data collection, while only 12 months had passed for Cohort 2, and ii) that Cohort 1 youth enrolled in the program in May 2011, just at the time Mali was facing a severe food shortage, compelling many youth to leave their villages in search of work (well-documented in the OSYP FY2011 annual report).

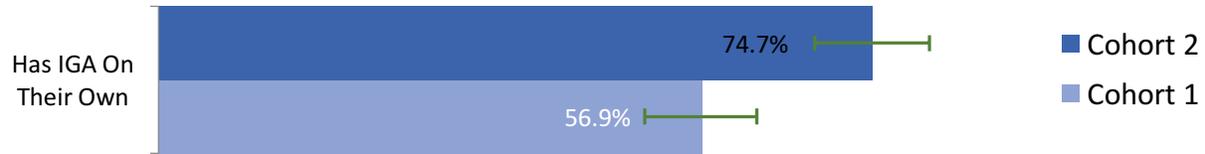
Overall IGA: Analysis of Youth Who Were Present or Absent Combined

During the period of data collection, youth participants in OSYP who were still present in their communities completed the survey directly through face-to-face surveys. Where the OSYP participant had moved on from his or her community, a relation or close friend was asked to answer questions about the participant on their behalf. This section examines data of both present and absent youth who were still implementing their IGA in aggregate. Of all youth surveyed in both cohorts, 70% were still running their OSYP-initiated microenterprises: 63.4% in Cohort 1, 2 years after completion of the cycle; and 79.6% for Cohort 2, 1 year after completion of the cycle.

Of the Cohort 1 youth who still had an IGA in operation, the vast majority (68%) were female. For Cohort 2, the gender breakdown was more evenly divided, at 51.4% female and 48.6% male.

The following chart illustrates the percentage of youth managing their IGA as self employed in cohorts 1 and 2.

Figure 1. Percentage of youth managing their IGA as Self-Employed in Cohorts 1 and 2



Of those youth still operating a microenterprise, 64% were doing so as self-employed, while the rest were managing their microenterprises with their family. When this data is broken down by cohort, it becomes apparent that significantly more youth in Cohort 2 still ran their IGAs as self-employed when compared to youth in Cohort 1 (see figure above; $p < .001$).

Overall, women tended to run their businesses as self-employed while men were more likely to run it with their families. Of those who still had their IGA and ran it independently in Cohort 1, nearly three-quarters (74%) were female. Of youth who ran an IGA on their own in Cohort 2, 53% were female and 47% were male. Of youth who ran their business as part of a family, 60.2% were male in Cohort 1 and 56.3% were male in Cohort 2.

The majority of youth who were still living in their communities but were no longer running their IGAs were working while the rest were unemployed (none were pursuing further education). Youth who were working but no longer running an IGA had found employment in a variety of sectors, with the majority (85%) working in agriculture. The remainder had found employment as a tailor, a butcher, a “discharger” in butter production, or in grain cultivation.

When asked why they were no longer implementing their IGAs, youth who remained in their village responded with a variety of



"I always wanted to run a restaurant for a living. That is why when the project gave me the opportunity to select an incoming generating activity (IGA), I chose that without hesitation."

—Aminata Sanogo, 24, Youth Participant

Before joining OSYP, Aminata sold cooked beans to earn income. Seeing the demand for a restaurant in her village, she hoped to one day open her own, although she lacked start-up capital. Her husband Yacouba, who is also one of the project’s youth, opted for poultry raising to diversify his knowledge and skills. Along with 51 fellow youth in the village of Djitamana, the couple attended OSYP classes, completed training and received kits to launch their IGAs.

Aminata opened her restaurant with a \$17 USD loan from her savings and lending group (which has been repaid). She said, "All the trainings I got from OSYP have taught me to organize my work, plan my shopping, run my kitchen and restaurant and also attract and maintain customers."

Her husband supports Aminata on her path to entrepreneurship: "I have seen enough to understand that a woman's life cannot be limited to domestic chores. I also know that education has many benefits, which is why I encouraged my wife to participate in the project."

reasons, the top three being: i) non-financial resource problems, such as difficulty accessing water or seeds, and difficulty in keeping animals alive or obtaining animals, ii) difficulty accessing financing to support their IGAs and iii) illness (either their own or a family member) which prohibited them from continuing their IGAs.

Income Generating Activities: Youth Who Were Present

For those youth who were present and still running their IGA at the time of the final evaluation survey (as mentioned, nearly 70% of the total sample from Cohort 1 and 2), more specific information as to management structure and profit was obtained by the project.

Associates and Employees. For the Cohort 1 youth in the sample, 20.4% reported working with one or more associates (an average of nearly two). Most of the youth working with an associate were female (74%) and from the region of Kayes (86%). For Cohort 2, 21% of youth reported working with one or more associates (on average five) and of these nearly 75% were female.

Almost 7% of Cohort 1 youth employed others in their microenterprise, on average two employees. Most of the youth employers were female and from the Kayes region. For Cohort 2, nearly 5% of youth employed others, with an average of nearly six employees.

Changes in Profits. 83% of Cohort 1 youth who were present and still ran their IGA reported that they had seen an increase in their profits; 5.3% indicated that profits had fallen; 10% reported that profits had stayed the same, and the remaining 1.7% did not respond. Of those whose profits had increased, 72.5% were female. In terms of gender, the Cohort 1 youth from the sample who were present at the time of the survey and who still ran their IGA were 73.1% female and 26.9% male. The ratio of female to male of youth who had launched their IGAs after completing technical training and receiving their kits was 67% female and 50% male. There was no significant difference ($p= 0.892$) between the share of males and females in the population and the share of males and females who experienced an increase in their profits for Cohort 1.



A youth shows off different kinds of local soap she learned how to make as a result of OSYF's technical training.

For Cohort 2, 85.1% of youth said profits had increased, with 3.5% saying they had fallen, 5.7% said profits had stayed the same, and the remainder did not respond. Of those whose profits had increased, the gender distribution was nearly evenly split, at 49.2% female and 50.8% male. Here, it is important to remember that the group of youth from Cohort 2 who was present and still ran their IGA was 51.4% female and 48.6% male. There was no significant difference ($p= 0.629$) between the share of males and females in the population and the share of males and females who experienced an increase in their profits for Cohort 2. For Cohort 2 youth who

completed technical training, received a starter-kit and launched their IGA, the gender split was 81% female and 70% male.

Reported Amounts of Profit. Only youth who were present for the survey were asked about their profits from an IGA. Some youth with IGAs reported their average profit on a monthly basis, while others for a season, depending on the type of IGA.

- **Monthly Profit.** Of the Cohort 1 youth still implementing their IGA who reported profits by month, the average monthly profit ranged from \$45.52 USD to \$300 USD. Of those who reported seasonal profit, the average profit was between \$141 USD and \$1300 USD.

While a larger proportion of women reported an increase in profit, the average monthly profit for females in Cohort 1 was lower than that of their male counterparts, at \$56 USD for females and \$67 USD for males, though these are not statistically different ($p = 0.432$). Disaggregation by region and sex for Cohort 1 monthly profits revealed no statistically significant differences between males in the two regions or between females in the two regions.

Disaggregation by sex for Cohort 2 revealed that the average monthly profit for females was \$27 USD and \$31 USD for males, though again the difference is not statistically different ($p = 0.521$).

- **Seasonal Profit.** Disaggregation of seasonal profit for Cohort 1 revealed that the average seasonal profit for males and females overall was not statistically different ($p = 0.269$). Disaggregation by region and sex were also not statistically significant.

However, disaggregation by sex for Cohort 2 revealed that the average seasonal profit for females was \$54 USD compared to \$184 USD for males, a statistically significant difference ($p = 0.020$).

While there were no statistically significant differences in males' and females' monthly profits for either Cohorts 1 or 2, seasonal profit was significantly higher for males compared to females in Cohort 2.

In summary, as of November 2015 70% of youth who launched microenterprises between 2011 and 2013 were still operating their businesses. Of these, between 83 and 85% of the youth had experienced an increase in profits since they had launched. Women, in particular, were more likely than men to have maintained their IGA, and recorded an average monthly profit of \$45 USD.

F. Countering Violence Extremism

The coup d'état in Mali in March 2012 paved the way for a rebel takeover of the north by insurgent and jihadist groups. Although the Government of Mali, with assistance of France and other outside military forces, was able to restore control of the region in February 2013, much of the infrastructure in the region was destroyed and the economy of the region was severely weakened. OSYF had just begun to work in the Timbuktu region when the coup occurred and in November 2013, with additional USAID funding from the Democracy and Governance Team, the project was able to return to the region, recruiting a cohort of 1200 youth, including youth in

five sites in Timbuktu town. Although the goal of the project was not centered on countering violent extremism, it provided youth in the region with access to education, economic opportunities and helped youth become more engaged in their communities. It's widely recognized that poverty, lack of economic opportunities, low levels of education, and a sense of alienation and marginalization among youth in particular, are all factors that make them potential and often easy targets for recruitment by jihadist groups.

In April 2015, an external group assessed the impact the OSYP was having on youth enrolled in the project as part of a multi-country study looking at the impact of US-Government development programming in diminishing risks related to violent extremism. Though the study took place before the youth had completed the full cycle of inputs and activities, the researchers noted: "Survey evidence points strongly to increased economic confidence of and opportunities for participants, leading to reduced vulnerability to radical narratives and the lure of extremist recruitment." Overall they found OSYP youth to be optimistic about their future, pleased with the training and inputs they had received, and confident that they would be able to improve their economic condition. The study also found OSYP youth statistically more confident than the control group of non-participants.



Two boys who selected sewing/embroidery as their IGA demonstrate their needle work skills.

Another aspect that the study found successful was the increased commitment of OSYP youth to serve their communities or city-sector. In particular, they noted the activities of the Youth Association Coordinating Committees. The study observed: "The degree to which youth have an economic and social stake in their community will determine to a large extent whether they abandon their community for perceived opportunities in Bamako or even in other countries.... The success of the Out-of-School Youth project in strengthening youth associations and in involving youth in civic engagement to serve their communities suggests that the more that local youth have an economic and social stake in their communities, the less appeal armed groups and violent extremism may hold for them."

G. Basic Education Accomplishments

In order to assess the literacy levels and learning gains of youth participants, beginning with Cohort 2²², the project used EDC's standardized Out-of-School Literacy Assessment (OLA). The OLA was designed by literacy experts at EDC in 2011-12 to measure the literacy skills of older youth and young adults in developing countries. It builds on reading research, best practices in evidence-based literacy instruction and assessment, and existing youth literacy assessment tools. The instrument assesses aspects of phonics, word recognition (decoding), oral reading fluency, and comprehension. The tool was translated into Bamanankan and adapted to the

²² For Cohort 1, the project used a literacy test developed by EDC technical support staff from the home office.

Malian context for the south. When the project expanded to the Timbuktu region, a Songhay version of the tool was produced.

In order to count the readers who had improved, the project created ten skill levels according to the baseline distribution of OLA scores²³. A youth was considered to have demonstrated learning gains if he or she moved up at least one level. The following table shows the total number of improved readers among project youth, disaggregated by cohort.

Table 10. Number of improved readers in OSYP

Number of Improved Readers in OSYP				
Cohort	Year	Number	% of youth initially enrolled in project	% of youth who completed technical training
Cohort 1	2012-2013	3,416	60%	109% ²⁴
Cohort 2	2013-2014	709	57%	71%
Cohort 3	2014-2015	3,283	42%	48%
Total		7,408	50%	68%

In addition to counting the number of improved readers, OSYP sought to understand improvement in subskills associated with reading. Evaluations of such learning were conducted using samples from each cohort. The results are summarized below. As OLA was created after the completion of Cohort 1, improvements in reading subskills for youth could not be conducted for this group. What follows are results for Cohorts 2 and 3.

Cohort 2: Improvement in Reading Subskills

The table below presents average scores for each subtest of the OLA reading test, the average total score, and the average percent of success (average of subtests scores, equally weighted).

Table 11. Comparison of baseline, midline, and endline results in literacy (Cohort 2)

All youth tested	Baseline	Midline	Endline	Diff. Base/End
	n=199	n=164	n=134	
Letters named correctly (out of 26)	12.2	17.7	19.9	+62%
Letter sounds correctly identified (out of 19)	6.3	12.0	12.0	+91%
Familiar words read correctly (out of 100)	15.6	22.5	26.9	+73%
Environmental text words read correctly (out of 3)	1.9	2.1	2.4	+25%
Oral reading passage 1 words read correctly (out of 36)	13.3	16.6	20.2	+52%

²³ Levels are created with the decile of the baseline's distribution score. (A decile is any of the nine values that divide the sorted data into ten equal parts, so that each part represents 1/10 of the sample.)

²⁴ For Cohort 1, the number of youth who completed basic education was greater than the number of youth who completed technical training.

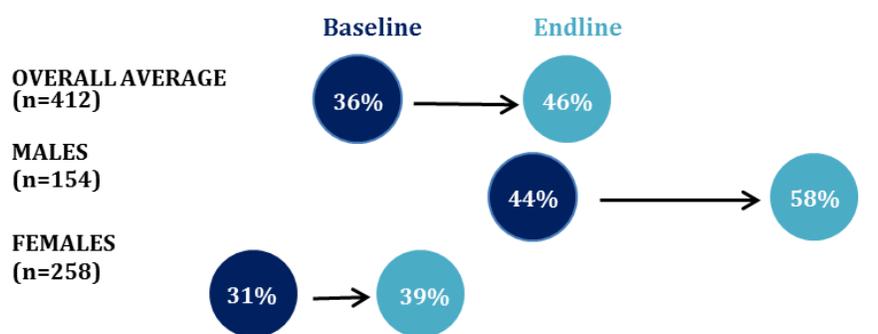
Oral reading passage 1 comprehension questions answered correctly (out of 4)	1.5	1.9	2.1	+44%
Oral reading passage 2 words read correctly (out of 77)	24.9	30.9	38.6	+55%
Oral reading passage 2 comprehension questions answered correctly (out of 4)	1.4	1.8	2.4	+73%
Silent reading passage 1 comprehension questions answered correctly (out of 4)	0.4	0.8	0.8	+87%
Silent reading passage 2 comprehension questions read correctly (out of 4)	0.5	0.9	0.8	+70%
Total points (out of 278)	78.0	107.3	126.0	+62%
Total score (%)	32%	45%	50%	+56%

As illustrated above, average scores increased for all subtests. All increases are statistically significant at the $p = .01$ level. The average total score for Cohort 2 increased from 78.0 at baseline to 126.0 at the endline, a 48-point or 62% improvement. The highest gains were recorded in the section on the sounds of letters (an improvement of 91% on average). Despite being the most challenging section of the test, gains were also recorded in the silent reading passages.

Cohort 3: Improvement in Reading Subskills

The figure below shows the average total OLA scores for Cohort 3 youth. It illustrates the average percentages across all ten subtests (each equally weighted). **Overall, average OLA scores significantly increased ($p < .001$) from baseline (36%) to endline (46%),** which is a 10 percent point increase or a 27.7% increase. An analysis of the results by gender shows that **both males and females demonstrated statistically significant gains ($p < .001$)**. In addition, overall OLA scores from baseline to endline increased significantly. However, it should be noted that males performed significantly ($p < .001$) better than females at the endline: on average, males scored 58% on the OLA exam compared to 39% for females, representing a difference of 19 percentage points.

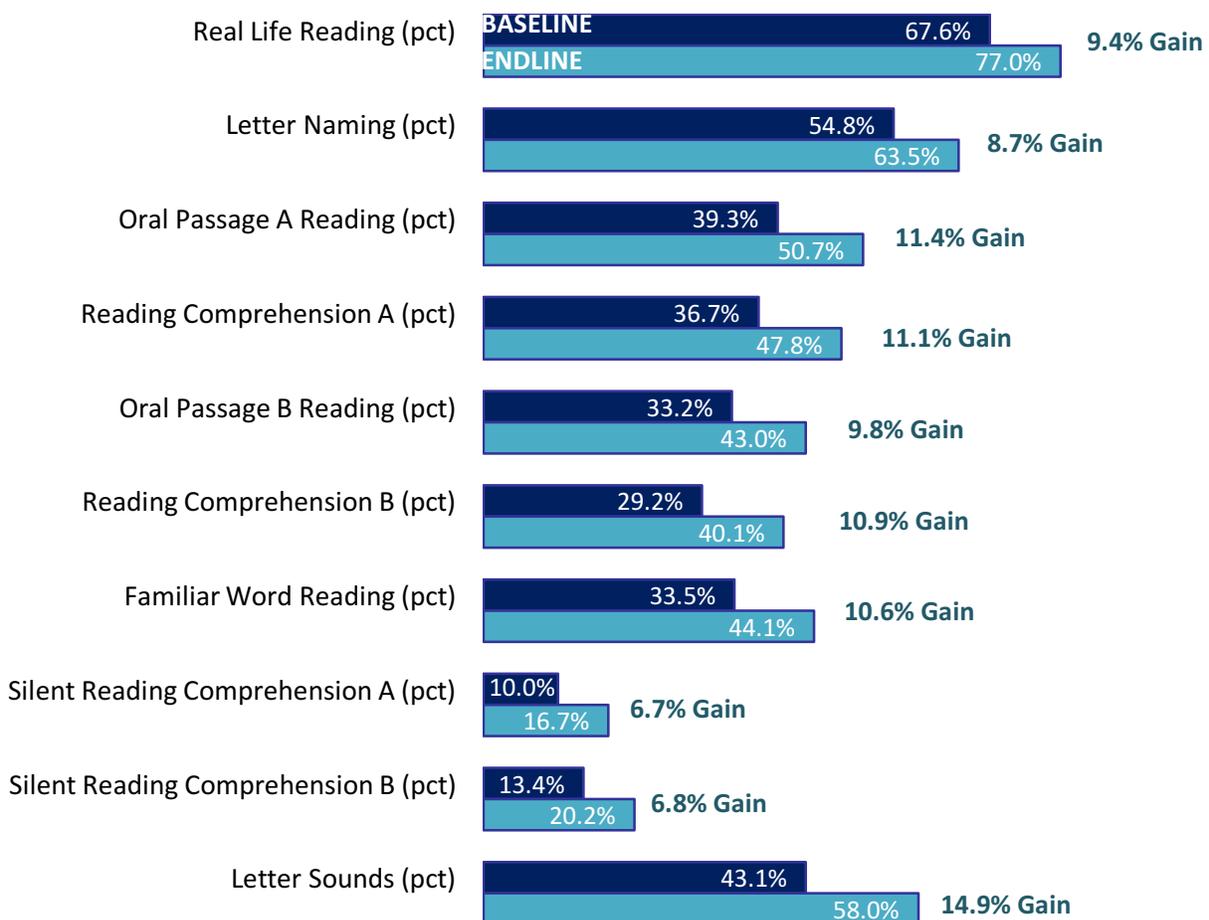
Figure 2. Average literacy results (OLA) – Overall and by sex (n=412)



Analysis of average subtest results showed statistically significant ($p < .001$) gains from baseline to endline for each subtest. The figure below shows the average percent of correct responses for each OLA subtest at baseline and endline. Youth performed the best in the *real life reading*, *letter naming* and *letter sounds* parts of the test at endline. Youth struggled the most with *silent reading* which is the most challenging OLA subtest. However, youth still saw slight gains in these subtests. The largest gains were recorded in the *letter sounds subtest*, *oral passage reading subtest A* and *reading comprehension subtest A*.

Analysis by gender showed that males performed significantly ($p < .01$) better than females on OLA subtests at baseline with the exception of the *second silent reading comprehension subtest*. At endline, this trend continued in which males continued to perform significantly better than females on all OLA subtests.

Figure 3. Literacy results (OLA) at baseline and endline for Cohort 3 (n=412)



H. Mali Out-of-School Youth Project Volunteers

While out-of-school youth were the project's primary target population, the project also sought to provide young educated Malians with an opportunity to acquire relevant job skills by serving

as volunteer community development agents and classroom facilitators. Through a two-year service term, youth volunteers acted as the project's front line implementers, living in project villages, dispensing courses, accompanying the youth and assisting with awareness raising and community service activities. Over the life of the project, the Mali Out-of-School Youth project deployed 303 graduates to serve as Mali Youth volunteers, 77 of them women.

To determine the impact of their service on their own lives, the project conducted a follow-up study of volunteers. A representative sample of 67 volunteers from the project's southern intervention regions were surveyed, 23 from Cohort 1 (including 7 women), 6 from Cohort 2 (including 2 women) and 40 from Cohort 3 (including 17 women).

Volunteers felt the most significant impact of service on their personal development had to do with community engagement. When asked what the most important skills were that they learned during their tenure, the most frequently cited responses were communication and awareness-raising (72%) followed by basic education delivery and pedagogy (69%), entrepreneurship (43%), community mobilization (40%) and creation of savings groups (37%).

As for the impact of their volunteer service on the community, respondents overwhelmingly felt that it consisted of teaching youth basic education skills such as reading and writing (81%) and many also felt it consisted of helping youth begin their IGA (72%). This tracked with what respondents said were their preferred components of the volunteer service experience: 79% said they preferred teaching basic education courses, followed by assisting youth with the start of their IGA (66%) and helping with the creation of savings groups (31%).

As future job-seekers, training on how to find a job was particularly sought after by volunteers, 96% of whom benefitted from such training. Job preparation training for volunteers focused on four principal themes: writing a cover letter, creating a CV, appropriate dress and behavior at an interview, and looking for job opportunities.



"This volunteer experience is unforgettable for me. I am very appreciated in the village, people respect and look up to me."

—Famagan Kamissoko,
22, Youth volunteer

Famagan was a youth volunteer in the village of Toumoumba, Kita after his training in Dec 2013. He explains: "I joined the project's volunteer corps right after completing my master's degree in public law. It is my first work experience, and I have been so excited to serve in this capacity."

As a volunteer, Famagan accompanied youth to set up their income generating activities and engaged with the community. He taught basic education and entrepreneurship courses, assisted youth in professional training, and helped them establish savings and internal lending credit (SILC) groups.

His class had a stellar attendance rate. He attributes his success to working hard to ensure that the village community trusted and had confidence in him.

The entire village became very interested in the Mali Out of School Youth project.

Famagan's contribution to the community made a lasting impact, and he was confident his rich experience would add to his resume as he sought paid employment after his volunteer service ended.

According to 67% of volunteers surveyed, the most important training received was on writing a cover letter, followed by creating a CV (55%) and appropriate behavior at a job interview (49%).

Of the volunteers surveyed, 29% indicated they had already found a contract job: among these, 60% were working as community development agents, with the rest working in a variety of sectors, including accounting.

As a testament to the value they placed on being a volunteer, 96% of those surveyed said they would recommend serving as a volunteer to a friend, given the skills and experience it afforded them. One volunteer, Salimou Traore, from Sikasso region, when asked if he would recommend being a volunteer said: *“Yes, because the experience I had, I wish that all youth could have it, just like me.”*

I. Project Products

In order to ensure that youth beneficiaries had the necessary tools to become better educated, more economically productive and civically engaged, the Mali Out-of-School Youth project developed a series of products covering various technical areas that were used as training tools. The table below provides a summary of the products developed that are available for future use by interested organizations and projects. All materials were translated into the relevant language of instruction: Bamanankan for use in the south and Songhay, for use in the north.

Basic Education

The basic education and curriculum development team produced a two-year curriculum (Year 1 and Year 2) consisting of teacher and youth guides in three subjects: i) reading and writing in mother tongue (Bamanankan for the south and Songhay for the Timbuktu region in the north), ii) math and iii) functional French (oral and written). In order to ensure that the content was consistent with that developed and validated by the Government of Mali, the project collaborated with the Ministry of National Education (MEN) in the development of the curriculum. At the beginning stages of development, working sessions with the MEN were organized and government officials contributed to the overall brainstorming and design of the curricula. The

BASIC EDUCATION CURRICULUM

- 2 year curriculum, 4 subjects: reading and writing in mother tongue (Bamanankan/Songhai), math, oral and functional French
- Pedagogical approach focused on learners, based on active learning
- Guides mostly illiterate youth to acquire the minimum functional competencies to run an enterprise

Reading and writing: alphabet, sounds of letters, reading and writing small texts, reading documents related to IGAs, write documents used for managing IGAs

Math: counting, addition, subtraction, telling the time, using a calculator, weight and capacity measurements, multiplication, division, resolution of problems, fractions and percentages etc.

Oral and functional French: Greetings, presentations, names of jobs and trades, names of IGAs, communication for entrepreneurship, working with management documents (bills, receipts, stock tracking sheets, etc.).

MLEARNING CURRICULUM

218 lessons to reinforce learning

- 5 subjects: reading and writing in mother tongue (Bamanankan/Songhai), math, oral and functional French and entrepreneurship
- 85 *Nieta Kalan* episodes on entrepreneurship: two youth who launched microenterprise who discuss their challenges and successes

coup d'état interrupted this collaboration for over a year, but cooperation with the Ministry of Education was renewed following the democratic elections in Mali.

Throughout the project, the basic education team continuously reviewed and assessed the effectiveness of these modules. In collaboration with curriculum development technical staff from EDC's home office and representatives of the Ministry of Education, the basic education team finalized the complete package of Year 1 and Year 2 materials in 2015. The modules, instructor guides and student manuals were validated by the MEN in July 2015. Participants in the validation workshop included representatives of the Ministry of National Education (the National Center for Non-Formal Education, the Center for Literacy and the Promotion of National Languages and the Malian Academy of Languages) along with other education experts under the leadership of the Ministry's Technical Counselor responsible for the Promotion of National Languages, Decentralization and Koranic Schools.

The workshop participants unanimously provided technical validation of the modules and supporting pedagogical documents, pending integration of the minor recommended corrections and modifications. They confirmed that the documents were effective for achieving the goal of providing basic literacy and numeracy competencies to rural youth with little or no education enabling them to manage a microenterprise. They further confirmed that the materials constituted an effective resource that could be used by the Ministry of National Education or benefit other projects in similar contexts.

On October 29, 2015, the project held a ceremony at the Ministry of National Education to officially transfer the basic education modules and materials produced by the project to the MEN. This ceremony was attended by dignitaries including Mr. Barthélémy Togo, Minister of Education and Mrs. Erin Pacific, Deputy Director of USAID-Mali.

Technical Training

Given the project goal of helping youth become economically productive and providing them with skills to launch their own microenterprises, technical training was the heart of the youth development cycle. To ensure the quality and appropriateness of technical content, the project, under the leadership of implementing partner, Swisscontact, developed technical training modules and materials to assist the project youth to acquire the minimum technical skills necessary to launch and manage a microbusiness in a trade of their choice. The Mali Out-of-School Youth project designed training modules (trainer manuals and user manuals) as well as accompanying materials for 14 agro-enterprises and service income generating activities: poultry raising, baking, grain cultivation and market gardening, hairdressing, sewing, livestock fattening, masonry, carpentry, photography, telephone repair, repair of agricultural material, setting up a small restaurant, soap making, and processing of agricultural products.

A 3-day validation workshop for the project’s technical training documents was held from September 29 to October 1, 2015. Participants included over 30 representatives from the Ministry of Employment, Professional Training, Youth and Citizenship, technical experts from 13 out of the 14 IGAs²⁵, and other Government of Mali technical bodies in charge of entrepreneurship and professional training²⁶.

Following a thorough review of the documents, participants unanimously declared that the modules effectively enabled out of school youth or youth who had never been to school to acquire the minimum necessary competencies needed to successfully launch a microenterprise, and recommended that the modules be validated, pending the incorporation of minor suggested changes. Participants confirmed that the Ministry and other development partners could use the modules and materials to serve communities in other regions and contexts in Mali.



USAID’s Erin Pacific, USAID-Mali Deputy Director and EDC’s Adwoa Atta-Krah, OSYP Deputy Chief of Party, present the OSYP’s basic education material to the Mr. Barthelomy Togo, Minister of Education.

Savings and Internal Lending Communities (SILC)

Given that access to credit is a challenge for rural youth entrepreneurs, the project established Savings and Internal Lending Communities (SILC) using a methodology that implementing partner Catholic Relief Services (CRS) has successfully used around the world. The project adapted already existing SILC curricula for use with rural youth in the Malian context.

Table 12. Objectives of SILC modules developed for OSYP

Module Number and Title	Description of expected outcomes
1: Self-evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of conducting auto-evaluations and how to go about them • Identification of positive and recommended personal qualities
2: Savings groups, training and managing a group (governance)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Characteristics of a functional group • Importance and composition of a General Assembly and Management Committee

²⁵ Both the expert and consultant in soap making were unable to attend the workshop. Following the workshop, however, they met to discuss and conduct the same thorough review that the other modules were subjected to. The recommended changes were incorporated into the documents.

²⁶ In addition to the Ministry of Employment, Technical Training, youth and Citizenship, experts came from the following institutions: National Directorate of Professional Training (DNFP), National Agency for the Promotion of Employment (APEJ), Training Institute of Technical Training Engineering (INIFORP), Missabougou Training Center, Institute of Rural Economy (IER), National Directorate of Agriculture (DNA), National Directorate of the Animal production.

3: Responsibilities of members of the managing committee, elections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roles, responsibilities and expectations of members and consequences of not fulfilling responsibilities • Importance and organization of elections
4: Status of groups, policies on savings and how to ensure the security of assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of policies and terms of saving • Enforcement of measures to protect money
5: Rules of managing loans and solidarity funds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine criteria for obtaining loans, amounts, interest rates and fines • Determine what solidarity funds can be used for
6: Meetings and finalizing status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify measures to motivate members to attend meetings, finalize the group's status
7: Record keeping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revisit the benefits of record keeping and the steps to follow • Practice record keeping, make entries during meetings
8: Meeting procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Correct organization of meetings (savings and credit) • Recommended procedures to follow during meetings
9: Sharing of funds at the close of a savings cycle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine usage of savings, calculation of each member's savings and profits • Conduct analysis of the financial cycle

Civic Engagement

As part of the project's civic engagement activities, Mali Out-of-School Youth sought to strengthen the capacity of existing youth associations in the respective implementation villages. In order to improve the organizational capacity of these youth associations, project staff developed a training manual consisting of the first four modules outlined in the table below. Members of youth associations and volunteers were trained on the content

Citizenship, Conflict Resolution and Promoting a Culture of Peace

Coordinating committees of Cohort 3 Youth Associations benefitted from additional training on citizenship, conflict resolution and promoting a culture of peace. Although the youth association training includes a module on this topic, project staff produced a simplified version to use in training youth directly. Given the importance of these topics, project staff preferred to organize a separate, focused training in order to ensure that youth had a clear understanding of the concepts and strategies. In collaboration with the volunteers, program agents trained the youth on the content in their respective villages.

Youth Association Training

- Administrative management
- Planning and implementing community service projects
- Financial and material management
- Citizenship
- Conflict resolution and promoting a culture of peace

J. Sustainability Efforts

To promote **sustainability** of project activities, the project employed several strategies including the capacity development of existing local youth associations, the integration of youth volunteers, the development of a local training network, and the implementation of the Private

Service Provider approach designed by CRS to foster sustainability of savings groups. Furthermore, the project's collaboration with the Government of Mali will help ensure that the materials developed and lessons cultivated under the project will benefit the GOM's efforts in education and youth development. Below is an overview of the strategies employed:

A. Strengthen the organizational capacity of existing youth associations and involve them in the management and implementation of project activities

As described above, the project provided organizational capacity building training to members of youth associations. One training module covers the development and implementation of community service projects. As per the OSYP model, youth associations organize youth to identify problems in their communities that they can address through a community service project. Youth are mobilized to design and implement community service projects in their respective villages. (See section on youth associations for more information on project-supported community service projects.)

Project staff pay special attention to ensure that youth associations are consulted, informed about and involved in activities at the village level. For example, youth association members played a central role in not only encouraging youth to enroll in the project, but to remain committed to project activities. Youth association members also played a key role in monitoring youth participation in basic education classes, technical trainings, and other activities. For technical training, they ensured that the sites were appropriate and helped monitor the presence of the trainer and youth in the trainings. They also assisted with the distribution of IGA starter kits and cellphones. In addition, they consulted with the village chief and elders to ensure youth had access to land and appropriate spaces to implement their IGAs. When difficulties or problems arose, in general the volunteers first turned to the youth associations for assistance. Ensuring the active-involvement of youth association members in project planning and implementation positively contributed to youth completing the program and fostered the sustainability of the project efforts.

B. Development of Local Training Network

Providing skills training directly to youth in their villages through proximity trainers rather than requiring them to relocate to training centers in larger towns or cities was a key intervention strategy for the project. To build such a network, the Mali Out-of-School Youth project had to recruit local trainers with the required technical expertise and assign each a visitation circuit among intervention villages to ensure that groups of no more than 20 youth received the skills training they signed up for. Ensuring that enough trainers were deployed to villages with sufficient frequency to meet training standards and support youth toward completion of their training program was an intensive management and monitoring component of the project. For Cohort 1, 159 trainers were recruited to rotate among and provide training to youth in 100 intervention villages.

For Cohort 2, 74 trainers were deployed to jointly serve 21 villages, and in Cohort 3, 441 trainers were supported to complete their training schedule among 107 intervention villages. Moreover, the project had to ensure that trainers adhered to uniform standards with respect to both

technical content of trainings as well as pedagogical techniques employed. For this reason, all 550²⁷ trainers engaged by the project were given an intensive training on the project's skills training manuals as well as on techniques for working with youth who had dropped out of school or who had never attended school. To test the project's efficacy at building the capacity of trainers in its network, baseline and endline tests covering technical training content, training monitoring, entrepreneurship and pedagogy were administered to trainers. Over the life of the project, 206 trainers showed significant improvement in their training capacity, well over the project target of 142 trainers with improved capacity.

The role of trainers did not end once skills training was administered, as trainers were also expected to conduct between three and four post-training monitoring visits to ensure that youth were properly executing what they had learned in order to launch their microenterprise. Depending on the IGA, monitoring visits concerned anything from the proper preparation of a seedbed for market gardening to the appropriate construction of a chicken coop for poultry raising. Over the life of the project, a total of 42943 such post-training monitoring visits were conducted.

C. Pilot the Private sector providers (PSP) approach

After a September 2014 study of Cohort 1 SILC groups revealed that only 25% of the groups were still operational after the end of the youth development cycle, the project initiated a pilot between January to June 2015 (FY15 Q2) to implement CRS' Private Service Provider (PSP) approach in an attempt to enhance the sustainability of project activities during the last year of the project. Under this approach, which has had positive impact on other CRS-implemented projects in other countries, communities select a representative to serve as a PSP candidate, who undergoes training in order to monitor and scale up SILC, basic education, and entrepreneurship related activities after the end of the project. The final objective is to certify an individual in each intervention village well prepared to provide services to community members long after the project ends. PSPs receive payment for the services they provide the community. In July 2015, 25 finalists (20 men and 5 women) were selected and certified as PSPs (13 from Sikasso and 12 from Kayes). No data is currently available on the impact of this pilot on the sustainability of project activities.



Youth celebrating the end of their development cycle at the project's closing ceremony.

²⁷ Some trainers delivered trainings in more than one IGA, and at 97 were trainers in more than one cohort.

CHALLENGES, LESSONS LEARNED, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PROGRAMMING

The Mali Out-of-School Youth project began in October 2010 and the youth development cycle for the first cohort of 5,740 youth in 100 villages with 100 volunteers was launched in June 2011. Two other cohorts followed and the project was able to overcome challenges and distill lessons from each experience that enabled staff to improve on project results.

Timing

The first year of the project was devoted to developing the training modules and supporting materials for the basic education curriculum, the first intervention with youth. The conception, formative evaluation and production of the curriculum and accompanying materials took longer than originally anticipated. As such, with the first cohort, we were often simultaneously developing and implementing, with delays in the availability of curricular materials. Under pressure to begin courses after the delay in curriculum development, the project launched Cohort 1 basic education courses during the rainy season, which was not the optimal time for implementation. Mali is a Sahelian country with only one rainy season and most families in rural areas are subsistence farmers who grow the food their family will consume for the year and the stock they will sell for extra income during this time. All family members are intensely mobilized during these few months. With volunteers not always having the new curricular materials they needed in time, there was a great deal of repetition and remedial work. Cohort 1 volunteers reported on average 760 hours of course time compared with the 321 prescribed hours for the curriculum.

Youth Age Range and Competing Priorities

Another challenge was the age range (14 to 25) of youth in the program. Younger adolescents differ in significant ways from young adults and typically would need a differentiated curriculum, which time and budgetary constraints did not allow us to provide. We recommend raising the recruitment age to a minimum of 17 rather than 14. The mentality, maturity level and characteristics of youth in the 14-16 range are quite different from those of older youth. If the donor wants to maintain the broader age range, then the youth should be divided into younger and older groups and a new curriculum developed for the younger group, designed to better respond to their needs.

In addition, a majority of the youth across all three cohorts were married with family responsibilities. The young women in the program already had 2-3 children on average. The competing priorities of participating in courses and providing for their families was a tension that existed in all three cohorts and often contributed to irregular attendance among youth. The active involvement of youth associations in meeting with youth and their parents and families to encourage attendance and help troubleshoot problems aided in improving attendance. Going forward, arrangements should be made to provide childcare for women with small children, so they are better able to benefit from classes. A solution should be found, in consultation with the Youth Association Coordinating Committee during the month prior to launching the youth development cycle.

Volunteer Training & Reinforcement

The range in skill and commitment levels of the volunteers was undoubtedly another factor impacting the motivation and retention of youth. The majority of the volunteers were unemployed university or professional school graduates with no previous experience as instructors. Although they spoke the language of instruction (Bamanankan in the south and Songhay in the north), few were literate in that language. As such, there was a steep learning curve for the volunteers to first learn to read and write the national language and then learn how to effectively work with and teach youth. They were often faced with teaching a classroom that had both youth with some rudimentary knowledge of reading and writing as well as those who had never been to school and didn't even know how to hold a pencil. The wide age range of the youth, as mentioned above, also had its impact on the capacity of volunteers to keep the youth motivated.

Sequencing of Curriculum

Throughout the project, attendance in the basic education courses proved a challenge. Youth had enrolled in the project to improve their livelihood and most did not understand the link between basic education and improved economic productivity. The highest dropout rates were with Cohort 1 for which, as mentioned, the project was simultaneously developing curriculum and implementing the program. Many youth dropped out even before the technical training courses began.

Rather than continuing to launch the youth development cycle with basic education courses, the project made adjustments to start the cycle with a one-week introduction to entrepreneurship workshop for Cohort 2 and 3. This shift served to frame the cycle for the youth as being a pathway to entrepreneurship, with the basic education courses as a foundational element for being a successful entrepreneur, rather than just learning to read, write and do basic math for the sake of improved education levels.

Feedback Loops

Improvements were also made to the basic education curriculum itself. Based on the results of an internal evaluation at the midpoint of Cohort 1, survey data and feedback from youth and volunteers, all of the literacy and numeracy modules were reviewed and modified to provide a greater emphasis on entrepreneurship and better integrate work readiness and entrepreneurship skills throughout all the modules. Practical exercises ensured that youth were applying skills they would need as they implemented their own businesses.

The timing of basic education course offerings was shifted to the first five (maximum) months of the calendar year. Given that Mali has only one rainy season, and families depend on the production from the farming season to feed their families throughout the year, family farming is the necessary priority focus of the period between June and September. Avoiding this period for intensive basic education courses reduced at least one factor that contributed to high absenteeism.

Youth Associations Involvement

The more effective involvement of youth associations in supporting project implementation in cohorts 2 and 3 was another factor. Youth associations monitored class attendance, visiting

youth and their families when they were absent and encouraging them to be more regular in attending classes and troubleshooting any particular problems that the youth might have. For example, the attendance rate in courses in the village of Toumoumba was 98%. When asked what contributed to such a high rate of attendance, we were told that any time a youth was absent from class, representatives from the youth association immediately visited the family to understand the reasons for the absence and encourage parents and youth.

Conflict Mitigation, Creating a Culture of Peace and Citizenship

With Cohort 3, the youth associations and project youth were trained on conflict mitigation, creating a culture of peace and citizenship. These trainings were well received and generated a great deal of interest among the youth and community members. For the youth associations, the trainings were incorporated into the one-week intensive organizational capacity building training. For project youth, a special one-week training was organized in the closing months of the project. It would be preferable to organize these trainings during the first 6 months of the youth development cycle and open the training to interested members of the community. The skills learned assisted the youth to take a more active role in solving conflicts within their families and communities and helped them realize that they were agents of change.

Volunteer Training

As already mentioned, the volunteers were the front-line implementers of project activities at the village level. The success of the project in large measure depended on the quality of their work. Although dispensing literacy and numeracy courses was one of their major responsibilities, their tasks were not limited to this. The intention was that they accompany the youth on their journey to becoming a micro-entrepreneur, providing encouragement and advice while helping to troubleshoot problems. However, it was clear from the feedback and actions of many Cohort 1 volunteers that they saw

OSYP's Modules and Training in Conflict Mitigation, Creating a Culture of Peace and Citizenship Enable Youth to Resolve a 16-year Old Conflict in Their Community

"Many projects help people in their economic activities, but OSYP has helped us more to handle very old and very deep internal conflicts.... Today, thanks to OSYP, peace has come back to the village and our young people have learned to be economically productive!"

—Bhupendra Taiwo, Village Chief of Diongaga (circle of Yélimané, region of Kayes)

For 16 years, a clan conflict divided the village of Diongaga and affected all relationships. Despite this, after rounds of social negotiations, OSYP selected the village to participate. Through the project, youth from both clans formed a youth association committee and attended training events, thereby unintentionally laying a foundation for peace in the village. As Magno Santos, a committee member explained: "With OSYP, things began to turn around. Youth began to attend meetings with youth of the other clan, without incident."

Youth took part in the organizational capacity-building modules, where the topic of promoting a culture of peace and conflict resolution really hit home. Committee members organized sessions with other youth in the village and raised awareness about what they had experienced.

The youth of Diongaga wanted to reconcile the conflict that had long divided, them and now had the tools to do so. They focused on youth in the village, and after obtaining their support, continued efforts with adults and elders and those who have moved out of the village. The youth's ambition and persistence proved successful; after years unresolved conflict, the elders came together and named one village leader.

themselves primarily as classroom instructors, with a minimal, if any, role outside the classroom.

Following Cohort 1, the project made a number of adjustments to the volunteer training. The revised initial 3-week training began with a clear overview of all of the responsibilities of the volunteer (liaising with parents and the community, mobilizing and encouraging youth, teaching the basic education and entrepreneurship classes, facilitating use of the mLearning lessons, helping youth establish and manage SILC groups, monitoring the technical training workshops, assisting with the distribution of kits, encouraging the youth as they launched their microenterprises, accompanying youth to ensure they were advancing and helping to troubleshoot problems and working with youth associations). The role of the volunteer was framed as that of a community development agent. Since the first major task of the volunteers was to dispense the literacy and numeracy courses, more than 60% of the sessions were still devoted to learning and practicing delivery of the modules. However, increased emphasis was placed on the other aspects of the volunteer's responsibilities.

Most of the volunteers had no experience as teachers. Beginning with Cohort 2, a second week-long workshop was organized between 4-6 weeks after the initial training focused on the delivery of the basic education courses. As the volunteers now had real-time experience in the classroom and a much better understanding of what was required and the challenges they encountered, the training had a much more practical focus and could be applied in the classroom in real time. Strategies for dealing with multiple skill levels within the same class were covered along with remedial techniques for ensuring that all learners were progressing. Also beginning with the second cohort, the volunteers were trained to dispense the entrepreneurship courses and to follow up with youth to ensure they had practical mastery of the content.

In addition to the formal training sessions, the project employed field agents at an average ratio of 1 agent to 5 volunteers. The primary focus of the field agents was to support the volunteers in implementing the youth development cycle, interface with the community and local authorities, train and work with the youth associations and assist with data collection and quality control overall. On average, each volunteer should have been visited at least once every two weeks. The field agents were asked to observe the volunteers in class and provide guidance and assistance as needed. In the same way that volunteers were asked to encourage and accompany youth on an on-going basis, the field agents were asked to encourage and accompany the volunteers. In addition, members of the central basic education team made periodic supervision visits to observe and provide guidance and assistance. As they were also involved in curriculum development and production, unfortunately these visits were not as frequent as they might have been.

To ensure that volunteers receive the support they need to effectively carry out their tasks, any program implementing this approach should review the profile and experience of field agents to ensure that at least some are particularly strong in either literacy instruction and/or microenterprise development. This will introduce a more experienced level of expertise than what the volunteers had, further strengthen the volunteers' competencies in these areas and provide additional support for project youth.

On a quarterly basis, 2- to 3-day volunteer in-service sessions were held. These provided volunteers with the opportunity to share their experiences, learn new content, discuss successes and difficulties, find solutions, and make plans for the coming quarter. Typical problems related to, for example, their living conditions, absenteeism from class and youth who were not progressing. The opportunity to share and learn how similar problems were solved elsewhere was a motivating factor for the volunteers. These regular in-service sessions for volunteers were an important feature and should be continued in future programming.

Technical Training and IGA Start-Up

Only 22% of the youth, initially enrolled in Cohort 1, completed technical training, received their starter kits and actually launched their IGAs. This was partially due to the forced interruption of activities caused by the March 2012 coup d'état and subsequent suspension of the project for 3 months. Another challenge was the need to adapt and in some cases develop the initial training modules for each of the eleven²⁸ IGAs while simultaneously implementing the youth cycle. The completion rates markedly improved for the two subsequent cohorts, with 74% of the youth, initially enrolled in Cohort 2, who completed technical training and received starter kits launching their IGAs and 82% of the youth in Cohort 3.

Of the 553 trainers (including 101 women), 97 were trainers in two or three cohorts. Training the more than 7000 youth of Cohort 3 proved particularly challenging, as the number of trainers needed more than doubled, and many new trainers had to be recruited both for the six new IGAs introduced and to ensure that all youth were trained within a reasonable amount of time.

Although several months passed before all of the youth in Cohort 1 received their kits after training, the project was able to reduce the delay to a maximum of two weeks to one month for cohorts 2 and 3. With regard to the composition of the IGA starter kits, staff recommended increasing the average value from \$100 to between \$150 and \$200. Apart from the cell phone and class textbooks, the starter kits were the one substantial input the youth received related to their microenterprises. Without the kits, far fewer youth would have been able to launch their businesses. This is one element we strongly recommend keeping in all future youth workforce development projects in rural areas.

Overall, the technical training youth received was considered introductory and was relatively short in duration, ranging from 8 days for IGAs such as soap-making to 3 months for REMA and sewing. It was sufficient for the youth to begin exercising their IGA, but there was more to learn and refresher and supplementary training would be beneficial. Staff recommended that in the future, youth participate in a second two-week to one-month technical training to review the development of their microenterprises thus far and further expand their knowledge of their IGA. In addition, all youth would benefit from an internship, even of short duration, rather than simply those who are having difficulties launching their businesses. Seeing firsthand how a local entrepreneur manages his business, procures needed stock, carries out production, markets his product, keeps records, etc. makes what was learned in training that much more real.

²⁸ For Cohort 1, market gardening and grain cultivation were considered separate IGAs. For cohorts 2 and 3 they were combined into one (agriculture) IGA. In the same way the transformation of peanut paste, dried cereals and fruits and vegetables were separate IGAs in Cohort 1, combined into the transformation of agricultural products for cohorts 2 and 3.

Another recommendation related to IGA start-up is that the SILC groups be established within the first three months of the youth development cycle, so that more funds will be available sooner for loans. The project does not provide youth with cash and at the beginning of the cycle they are not in a position to seek loans from microfinance institutions. However, they do need money to develop their business and the SILC groups provided them with access to cash, both for their microenterprises and for personal needs. Another incentive might be to provide each SILC group with a nominal start-up contribution to help funds increase more quickly.

Youth Associations

The original project design called for youth associations to assume a major role in project implementation, both in supporting the volunteers as they carried out their responsibilities and in serving as a vehicle for civic engagement. Unfortunately the training for youth associations in Cohort 1 came only 7 months before the end of the 26-month youth development cycle, too late to enable the associations to provide on-going support throughout the cycle. With Cohort 3, the diagnostic assessment and training took place in the second quarter of project implementation, enabling the associations to assume a much more active role in supporting project implementation.

We recommend for the future that Youth Association Coordinating Committees and their respective youth associations be trained during the month prior to launching the youth development cycle. This will enable them to more effectively assume their responsibilities from the very beginning of the cycle. During this month, they should also be assisted to conduct a mini-market opportunities study for their immediate area, which would more accurately inform the “Introduction to Entrepreneurship” workshop and IGA selection by the youth.

In the same vein, volunteers should be installed in project villages one month prior to the launching of the youth development cycle. This would facilitate their integration in the community and enable them to be involved with youth associations and the training of youth associations from the very beginning.

Length and Order of Activities of the Cycle

In the future, we recommended that the length of the cycle be 22 months. Basic education courses should be taught intensively during the first year, so that the second year is primarily focused on developing the youth microenterprises. The latter four modules of the entrepreneurship curriculum, more focused on essential elements for managing a microenterprise, should be taught during the second year, when youth are developing their microenterprises and the content has immediate application. The cycle for Cohort 1 ran 26 months, for Cohort 2, 18 months and for Cohort 3, 19 months. We feel 26 months was too long and 18-19 months was slightly too short.

The chronology of the youth development cycle was such that in year 2, youth were expected to simultaneously develop their microenterprises and attend regular basic education classes for the year 2 curriculum. This meant, in effect, that elements of the development cycle were in competition with each other. For example, for one group of women who had launched a small restaurant and were serving one meal a day, the demand was so great that they expanded to two meals a day. This made it difficult for them to attend class. Those who were doing market gardening needed to tend their plants. Along with other competing family responsibilities, this

made it difficult for them to also attend class. If the primary purpose of the project is to help youth become successful in developing profitable enterprises, it's important that the activities of the project be designed in such a way as to facilitate rather than be an obstacle to this goal. We recommend that the second year of the youth development cycle be focused on assisting youth to develop their microenterprises. The majority of basic education classes should be concentrated in year 1. In year 2, rather than grouping all of the youth together, the volunteers should be trained to work with youth in smaller groups or individually, focusing on their specific needs and challenges, the management tools they need or how to better market their products.

With Cohort 3, the project established a partnership with Peace Corps. Two volunteers with experience in small enterprise development were placed in two project villages. Given that the Peace Corps Volunteers were much more knowledgeable and experienced in business development than the Malian Youth Corps Volunteers, they were able to provide much more practical guidance and assistance to the youth. They were also in a position to mentor the other volunteers and further develop their entrepreneurship knowledge and expertise. For example, one soap-making group was having difficulty selling their bars of soap for \$1 USD per bar. The Peace Corps Volunteer suggested that they cut the bars in half and sell them for 60 cents (USD) a bar. These sold rapidly and the profit was greater than it would have been if they had just sold the larger \$1 USD bars. In another village, the youth were unable to sell all of their tomatoes and the Peace Corps volunteer suggested that they dry them, introducing a new product into the market and preventing losses. It would be beneficial to develop similar partnerships with Peace Corps so that all youth in the project could benefit from the expertise of these volunteers. This is an area that holds great promise for the future.

Size of the Cohort and Ratios

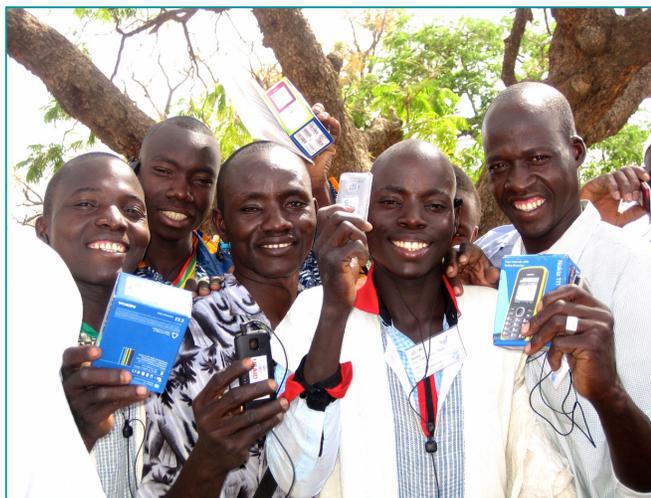
The initial recruitment for Cohort 1 was 5,740 youth and it was for 7,858 for Cohort 3. Although our completion and success rates with Cohort 3 were much better than with Cohort 1, the pressures of managing such a large group, particularly in the context of a rural environment with limited resources, makes us recommend an initial recruitment of no more than 5,000 youth per cohort. The greatest difficulties were finding qualified volunteers and qualified local technical trainers in each IGA in the numbers needed. In order to provide services to all of the youth in the required timeframes, we often had to lower our recruitment standards. For example in some IGAs, local trainers who had the required technical expertise but were illiterate were selected and had to be assisted by a literate person. Likewise, in the Kayes region there was a high turnover of volunteers in Cohort 3. We generally trained approximately 20% more volunteer candidates than the number of volunteers needed, and selected the best, based on performance during the training workshop, to serve as volunteers. The remaining candidates were classed as reservists and were called up as volunteers resigned. However, because numerous volunteers resigned, we went through the entire list of reservists in the Kayes region. The project ended up enlisting candidates who we would not have selected otherwise. As an incentive for volunteers to remain until the end of the cycle, we also recommend increasing the amount set aside each month as savings from \$20 to \$46 USD. This would mean that at end of the 22-month cycle, the volunteer would have a nest egg of about \$1,000 USD, a substantial amount in the context of the current economy. With the second cohort, we also gave each volunteer an installation kit that included a mattress, solar lamp, and mosquito net. This practice should be continued.

Data collection was another primary function of the volunteers. The various forms and data collection instruments were completed in pen and paper version by the volunteers, who submitted them to the field agents, who in turn submitted the forms to the M&E officer in the regional offices. Mid-way through the project we pilot tested using Android telephones for data collection tasks with six volunteers. The pilot was successful, but budget constraints prevented us from switching to the electronic format for all volunteers. However, using an electronic platform for data collection will lighten the tasks of the volunteers, result in more direct and speedier uploading of data, and in turn, more rapid analysis and return to the field of results.

Going forward, we would also recommend reducing the volunteer/youth ratio from 1/50 to 1/40. Fifty is the average targeted class size for Malian schools. However, given the volunteers' lack of experience and considering the various tasks they are expected to perform, we think the 1/40 ratio is more manageable. We also recommend not simultaneously having more than one cohort of youth in a village.

mLearning

The project's mLearning component was intended to reinforce the learning that occurred in class. Each cell phone provided youth with a set of lessons in literacy, numeracy, functional French and entrepreneurship that were linked to the courses taught in class. In the student texts used in class, a section at the end of each lesson or module indicated where the youth could find reinforcement lessons on their phones. In addition, an audio drama of 85 episodes was provided that chronicled the efforts of two youth to launch a poultry-raising business (including their problems and challenges and how they resolved them). For various reasons, the project was never able to reap the maximum benefit from the mLearning component.



Youth participants receive their mLearning equipment along with training on usage.

With Cohort 1, the phones were distributed near the end of the 26-month cycle, after all classes had ended. For Cohort 2, the phones were distributed to almost half of the youth in July 2013, after the year 1 courses had ended. The remaining Cohort 2 youth received their phones in March 2014.²⁹ The results of the study did not show a significant difference between the

²⁹ In an effort to determine the impact of having a cellphone on learning gains, 400 Cohort 2 youth were tested with OLA at the end of the year 1 courses. Of these 200 youth received cellphones and the remaining 200 did not. The youth were tested again in February 2013. Unfortunately there was not a significant difference in learning gains. However so many youth had had problems with using the cell phones (losing the Stepping Stone application, etc.), that in the end, it was not a very reliable measure of the impact of mLearning.

learning gains of the treatment group and control group. However it's possible that the numerous problems youth had with the phones impacted usage. Although the study results were inconclusive, we did learn a great deal that enabled us to improve the mLearning component. For example, when the teams went out to evaluate, they found that many youth no longer had functioning phones or that the Stepping Stone application had been erased from their phones. As the youth often removed the memory cards from their phones to insert music memory cards, this manipulation either erased the application or caused it to malfunction. In addition, it was found that many of the volunteers, who were expected to train the youth on using their phones for the mLearning content, had not mastered these techniques and were unable to show the youth what to do. With Cohort 3, these problems were addressed. At the end of the training to train volunteers to use the stepping stone application and mLearning content, each volunteer was individually tested to ensure that he had mastered use of the phone and accessing and using the mLearning lessons. Any volunteer who had not mastered the techniques was coupled with a member of the mLearning or regional team to train the youth in his or her village. In addition, the Stepping Stone application was placed on the field agents' laptops and they were taught to install the application on phone memory cards, so that in their visits to villages, if they found youth with cellphones that had lost the application, they could reinstall it and also assist with additional training.

To achieve maximum benefit from the mLearning component, cellphones should be distributed within the first month of the start of basic education classes. Budget permitting, Android phones should be purchased to avoid the numerous problems resulting from the removal of memory cards. The latest version of Stepping Stone allows automatic tracking of usage, but if the memory cards are removed, disturbs the tracking mechanism, making it quite difficult to determine with accuracy, how much the application was used.

In addition, we note that the distribution of cellphones alone was a great source of motivation for the youth, many of whom had never even touched a cellphone before. The phones were also of benefit to participants' microenterprises, enabling them to check on market prices, communicate with clients or potential clients as well as other youth and producers.

CONCLUSION

Providing meaningful employment opportunities for youth is a major concern for many countries in Africa and around the world. If job prospects are slim for university and professional school graduates, how much more acute is this issue for uneducated youth in rural areas who have few, if any prospects to escape the cycle of poverty in which their families have lived for generations? As demonstrated by the results and achievements described in this report, the integrated holistic model developed by Education Development Center and implemented under the Mali Out-of-School Youth project offers an effective, practical and replicable program for i) improving the education levels of youth in rural areas who have never been to school or who dropped out in the early grades, ii) providing them with viable, sustainable opportunities to become economically productive in their own villages and iii) increasing their civic engagement and empowering them to become actors for change within their communities. In addition, the program significantly impacted the lives of women in rural areas, most of whom had never been to school, giving them a chance to develop their capacities and acquire skills to improve their lives and those of their children.

Of particular note was the staying power of the intervention as evidenced by the final evaluation results presented in this report. Conducted in November 2015, **24 months after the close of the youth development cycle for youth in Cohort 1 and 12 months, for youth in Cohort 2, the study found 70% of youth in Cohorts 1 and 2 were still operating their microenterprises, with 64% of these as self-employed. In addition, 83% of these Cohort 1 youth and 85% of Cohort 2 youth reported an increase in their profits.**

In addition to impacting the lives of rural youth, the project offered unemployed university and professional school graduates the opportunity to serve their community and at the same time gain valuable experience and competencies as community development agents. Most of the volunteers were recent graduates with no professional experience outside internships. The multiple technical trainings on literacy instruction, entrepreneurship and establishing savings and internal lending groups they received, along with the practical skills they learned in terms of planning, monitoring and accompaniment and the job preparation training they received (computer skills, creation and management of business and CV writing and job search skills) equipped them with marketable skills that better positioned them in the search for employment.

With each new cohort, project staff fine-tuned on the model making adjustments that improved results. In addition, building on the lessons learned from all three cohorts, we have made recommendations for further improvements that will enable increased retention, success and sustainability.

The basic education modules and supporting materials developed, produced and used under the project have been officially validated by the Ministry of National Education as appropriate for the target audience and a valuable resource for the Ministry and other structures, partners and NGOs working with similar populations. The technical training modules and supporting materials for 14 IGAs were validated by the Ministry of Employment, Professional Training, Youth and Citizenship, and likewise are a valuable resource for the Ministry and its structures along with other interested partners and organizations.

As African leaders, donors, international and national organizations seek to stem the rising tides of migration and violent extremism in Africa, they would be well served to examine the Mali Out of School Youth Project model as a possible solution, particularly for uneducated or poorly educated youth in rural areas. Project interventions in the Timbuktu region were evaluated in 2015 as part of a multi-country study that looked at US Government funded development programs operating in at-risk countries. The report concluded: “As a multi-faceted and holistic approach to countering violent extremism, Out-of-School Youth’s integrated empowerment approach to deprived, out-of-school, uneducated, and largely unemployed youth should be replicated elsewhere in northern Mali and in other countries of the Sahel.

We could not end this report without expressing our gratitude to the leadership and staff of USAID-Mali, in particular the Director of USAID-Mali, the Director of the Acquisitions and Assistance office, and the Education, Economic Growth and Democracy and Governance offices for their unfailing guidance, collaboration and support throughout the life of the project. We also thank our implementing partners Swisscontact, Catholic Relief Services, Association Jeunesse Action and Association Malienne pour la Survie au Sahel for their technical expertise, consistent dedication and invaluable partnership. Together, we successfully implemented a project that has forever changed the lives of thousands of out of school youth in Mali.



USAID’s Eric Postel, Assistant Administrator for the Bureau of Economic Growth, Education and Environment, Gary Juste, Director of USAID-Mali and EDC’s Thelma Khelghati, OSYP Chief of Party stand with project staff during a visit to the OSYP.