



Creating opportunities for young women in Ghana's construction sector

What works?

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Key messages

- Until social norms change, young women in male-dominated sectors will continue to face discrimination and harassment. Changes to social norms will only happen if more women choose to work in those sectors, but the price may be high for pioneering women. Training and employment projects should not push young women into male-dominated sectors but should instead focus their efforts on supporting those who want to take up opportunities in construction.
- When women contravene social norms, they are often subject to sexual harassment and teasing. Programming should include sensitisation for men to broaden their expectations of women's work. For women, the focus should be on teaching confidence and strategies for dealing with all forms of harassment.
- Training for women in construction needs to focus on financial stability and transferable skills. Currently, many women ultimately decide to move out of the sector and this transition can be assisted by focusing on transferable – as well as technical – skills. Women also value the financial skills necessary for making their own arrangements for maternity leave and childcare.
- Perhaps above all else, young women need role models and mentors. Female mentors and role models are ideal, but where this is not possible, additional support and mentoring from men who are knowledgeable in their sector and committed to opening up opportunities for women can help build confidence.



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Introduction

Many youth employment programmes have struggled to achieve gender parity in enrolment rates. This is especially true for programmes that have focused on teaching skills associated with male-dominated sectors, such as construction. The Youth Inclusive Entrepreneurial Development Initiative for Employment (YIEDIE) consortium, which forms part of the Youth Forward initiative, provides training opportunities for young people in Ghana's construction sector (see Box 1 for more information on YIEDIE). It has invested considerable effort into attracting young women, but female participation in training courses such as painting, masonry, tiling or electricals remains low: only between 2% and 6% of female trainees chose these types of courses. This is not unusual, as involving young women in sectors traditionally reserved for men is a complex process. It requires change in social norms,

which is always difficult to achieve and usually outside the control of employment programmes. Vocational training programmes in Kenya, for example, have struggled to attract young women to trades such as car mechanics (Hicks et al., 2016), and in the UK Balfour Beatty plc has described its struggles to attract female trainees and employees (Balfour Beatty, 2018).

The aim of this brief is threefold. Firstly, it provides an overview of experience and best practice from employment and training initiatives that have sought to encourage young women to take up work in male-dominated sectors. Secondly, it describes YIEDIE's efforts in this area and to determine which have been the most useful for its young female participants. Finally, the brief draws out some elements for future programming.

It begins with a brief look at methodology, before turning its attention to the challenges faced by young women who choose male-dominated professions. The second half of the brief outlines best practices for supporting women

Box 1 YIEDIE – Youth Inclusive Entrepreneurial Development Initiative for Employment

The YIEDIE consortium is one of four consortia that make up the Mastercard Foundation's Youth Forward initiative. It aims to create employment and entrepreneurship opportunities in the construction sector for disadvantaged young people. The consortium (led by Global Communities and also including Artisans Association of Ghana (AAG), African Aurora Business Network (AABN), Opportunities Industrialization Centre Ghana (OICG) and Republic Bofo) aims to provide technical, construction-relevant training or entrepreneurship training to 23,700 young people, as well as life skills. The programme will consider the entirety of the construction value chain, so young people are qualified to participate in all its aspects.

The project has two primary aims: the first is to increase the employment of economically disadvantaged youth in the construction sector, with an increased income, new or better employment and increased savings for 90% of these young people. The second is to create an improved enabling environment for all construction sector stakeholders. Participants can choose from one of two pathways – technical or entrepreneurial. Technical skills are taught over a period of six months at vocational training centres and through apprenticeship schemes. The entrepreneurial track is for those who already have technical skills and wish to complement these with three months of entrepreneurship training. The consortium also works with financial institutions to provide financial education and to refine a range of financial services and products for youth. Collaboration with the National Vocational Training Institute ensures that training courses delivered are in line with national standards.

YIEDIE offers training in a wide range of skills relevant to the construction sector, including plumbing, painting, masonry and carpentry. In addition, training for surveyors' assistants and in draughtsmanship is also offered. In order to increase female participation, a course in interior design was also set up. Please see below for a full list.

in non-traditional sectors before considering YIEDIE's experience. Finally, we draw out conclusions and lessons for future programming.

Methodology

This learning brief is based on several pieces of work by the Youth Forward Learning Partnership and brings together learning around young women's participation in the construction sector from disparate bodies of evidence. The main sources of data are focus group discussions held with YIEDIE participants as part of the fieldwork for our report on young people's aspirations in rural and urban Ghana in December 2017. During our fieldwork, we held six focus group discussions with young women from the YIEDIE programme and a further three with young women not involved in the construction sector. Each focus group discussion involved between 10 and 15 participants (Boateng and Löwe, 2018). During focus group discussions we took extensive notes of the discussions and photos of the pictures drawn by young people. These were then reviewed, coded and analysed to draw out patterns and similarities of experiences from which we drew the main findings of this report. The case studies by five female YIEDIE participants developed as part of the Constructing Futures participatory photography project provided further details. Our primary research was complemented by the reports and evaluations of other youth employment programmes, which have attempted to engage young women in non-traditional sectors, both in low- and high-income countries. Finally, we also gathered information on the involvement of young women in YIEDIE, from programme staff and through quarterly reports to the Mastercard Foundation.

Limitations

Only a small number of young women have taken up construction trades through YIEDIE's training programmes, and for most of these follow-up data is not yet available. This means that we cannot provide a quantitative analysis of 'what works'. Instead we have relied on the first-hand experience of young women who have trained as tilers, electricians, plumbers and welders.

The challenges

When I told my family I wanted to enter construction, at first my mum would say, 'why did you choose this? It is men's work and is too hard and risky'.

I work alongside men and women at my workshop. There is teasing and sometimes us women are mocked when we do a piece of work that does not turn out right.

I have not experienced it personally, but you do hear of sexual harassment in the workplace. The most common thing you hear of is that when a female construction worker approaches a company looking for employment, she may be asked to do 'something' before she gets the job.

Ghana's construction sector is expanding at a rate that exceeds national economic growth rates. Simultaneously, the sector remains labour intensive and is expected to continue to be an important employer of the nation's workforce (Darko and Löwe, 2016). At the time of the last Ghana Living Standards Survey, 2% of young people who had worked in the previous week had worked in construction. For out of school youth this percentage rose to 2.5% (GSS, 2013). Within construction, the informal sector provides the greatest number of opportunities for youth employment. This is driven largely by the need for low-cost housing in urban areas, which generates lucrative employment for skilled artisans (Darko and Löwe, 2016).

Despite the opportunities available in the sector, encouraging women to take advantage of them is a formidable challenge that entails overcoming both general and gendered perceptions of the sector. Some perceptions of the construction sector apply to both genders, including the narrative that the construction sector is dirty and dangerous. These perceptions

are not entirely wrong: construction work is dirtier than the ‘office jobs’ that many young Ghanaians aspire to and, more worryingly, the construction sector in Ghana is dangerous as basic health and safety regulations are commonly flouted (Darko and Löwe, 2016). However, young men have readily taken up the training offered by YIEDIE when they are provided with risk mitigation measures and information on the economic opportunities in the sector.

The same cannot be said for young women. Since its inception, only between 2% and 7% of the young women trained by YIEDIE have taken up the offer of training in traditional construction trades, such as tiling, electrical engineering, welding or masonry. It is worth noting that this represents an achievement by YIEDIE staff, as the number of women in male-dominated trades increased each year.

Table 1 represents the female enrolment rates for YIEDIE in 2016, 2017 and 2018. It shows how low enrolment rates have been for all training courses in male-dominated construction trades. Young women showed considerable

interest in entrepreneurship, as this is a skill that can be transferred to other sectors, and in interior design, which is not considered a typically male profession.

However, before we can support young women to take up employment in the sector, we need to understand their reluctance. In the course of our research, young women raised a number of equally pressing concerns about working in the construction sector:

- **Health and safety:** young women have not been raised to take the same physical risks as their male peers. Similarly, many do not believe that they have the physical strength for construction work. As a result of these beliefs and experiences, the possibility of injury or long-term physical health effects appears to be of greater concern to women than it is to their male peers.
- **Self-perception and confidence:** linked to the above, young women frequently did not think that they were capable of acquiring technical skills, which they deemed to be ‘too

Table 1 YIEDIE female enrolment rates, 2016–2018

	Number of female participants			Percent (%)		
	2016	2017	2018	2016	2017	2018
Carpentry	0	2	0	0.00	0.15	0.00
Draughtsmanship	0	1	4	0.00	0.07	0.30
Electricals	2	1	10	0.13	0.07	0.75
Entrepreneurship	918	436	1,240	61.78	32.63	93.30
Fibreglass and aluminium fabrication	1	0	2	0.07	0.00	0.15
Interior design	546	869	0	36.74	65.04	0.00
Machine operations	8	14	11	0.54	1.05	0.83
Masonry	0	0	0	0.00	0.00	0.00
Metal fabrication	6	7	4	0.40	0.52	0.30
Painting	1	0	49	0.07	0.00	3.69
Plumbing	0	1	0	0.00	0.07	0.00
Steel bending	2	5	2	0.13	0.37	0.15
Tiling	2	0	6	0.13	0.00	0.45
Survey technical assistant	0	0	1	0.00	0.00	0.08
Total	1,486	1,336	1,329	100.00	100.00	100.00
Total in technical training	22	31	89	1.47	2.30	6.60

Source: YIEDIE monitoring data.

difficult', or to require skills they had not been taught previously, such as measuring or using basic tools.

- **Sexual harassment:** young women (whether they worked in construction or other sectors) raised concerns about the power relationships inherent in the employer–employee relationship, which employers can abuse to sexually harass or assault women.¹ While young men reported frequently having to bribe potential employers in order to be given a job, young women are frequently asked for sexual favours in exchange for employment when they are not protected by a programme such as YIEDIE. This appears to happen in many sectors, but young women perceive it to be more common where there are fewer other female colleagues. Unsurprisingly, they prefer work that allows them to avoid these gendered power relationships, such as petty trading which is mobile and means they are not beholden to anyone, even though this can expose them to other risks. An apprenticeship or job in the construction sector, on the other hand, does not afford such freedom.
- **Teasing and mockery:** young women often reported being teased or mocked by their male employers and co-workers. While young women had many disparate stories to tell about this experience, the mockery they experienced always had at its core that they were not competent at or suited to the work that they had chosen. Thus, it served to highlight that they were transgressing against established gender norms around what women and men can and should do – something that made many young women feel uncomfortable. This behaviour does not come as a surprise: young women expect to be mocked or teased in the construction sector and so many choose other professions.
- **Fertility and physical appearance:** it is a common belief, among both men and women, that women who work in construction will lose their feminine appearance. Primarily, the concern was that they would become

muscular and lose their 'curves' and that this outward physical change would be accompanied by a reduction in their fertility. Many believed that their appearance and supposed infertility would make it harder to find a husband. To a lesser degree, this was accompanied by a worry about being seen in dirty and unflattering clothes.

- **Perceptions of peers, family and wider society:** young women worry that their families, friends and community will not accept them if they choose to work in construction. Many of the young women who have taken up YIEDIE's opportunities talk about having to overcome their family's reluctance, and even sabotage. While many spoke of their parents learning to understand and, eventually, being proud of their choices, very few had supportive parents from the outset.
- **Cost of education:** some young women lamented that their families were unwilling to invest in their education and even to forego their income while they were in training. The attitude that young women need to earn their keep was not limited to construction, but was more pronounced when women wanted to train in trades perceived as male.

Strikingly, the concerns voiced in our focus group discussions are much narrower than the barriers to female participation reported in the evaluations of other youth employment programmes. For example, Perezniето et al. (2018) discuss the obstacles young women encounter when accessing training programmes in a variety of sectors. They list lower levels of education, caring responsibilities, barriers to key assets and discriminatory norms as key obstacles to women's participation in the workforce. In construction, on the other hand, the focus of young women's concerns is almost solely on social norms and, relatedly, issues of self-esteem. Young women also struggled to find the financial means to invest in their training, but this was secondary to their concerns about social perceptions and norms.

¹ This is not a concern unique to Ghana's young women. Filmer and Fox (2014) report that a number of studies have found similar concerns among young women in Liberia, Rwanda and Tanzania. Campos et al. (2015) find that women in male-dominated sectors face greater risk of sexual harassment.

It is worth noting that Ghana is not a unique case. Here, in the UK – a country that is not atypical in the European context – only 1% of workers on construction sites are female, while 13% of construction sector employees are female (Balfour Beatty, 2018). In Canada, these figures are only slightly higher at 4% and 12.6%, despite industry efforts (CSC, 2010). Again, as in Ghana, the evidence points towards this being almost entirely the result of social norms and attitudes towards women working on building sites. In the UK, this is borne out by the fact that many more women train or study construction-related subjects than end up working in the sector, mainly because of the culture on building sites and broader social norms (Balfour Beatty, 2018). In Canada, the very low rates of training completion for female apprentices also suggest that social norms and discrimination are an issue (CSC, 2010).

We can conclude from this that the decision to work in construction poses a real challenge to young women's social roles and, in some cases, their psychosocial wellbeing. Many anticipate that this issue will continue throughout their careers. Undoubtedly, they will face male prejudice when it comes to marriage, an institution many rely on for its ability to provide economic safety and social status. Young men in our focus group discussions frequently said that they would prefer a wife who did not work in construction, even where they were happily employed in the sector themselves. Similarly, families and communities represent an important safety net for young people, and to lose their respect and support has potentially significant costs and consequences (Lund and Agyei-Mensah, 2008).

As societies change and women are able to take on and succeed in new roles, these norms may gradually change and become less of a constraint on opportunities. However, women who pave the way for social change may pay a significant price. Some young women in our focus groups considered this worthwhile in order to earn a higher income or to demonstrate their capabilities to their communities, but the majority did not.

Encouraging female participation

Unfortunately, there have been no systematic evaluations of what works best for encouraging young women to work in the construction sector; as in other parts of the world, large construction companies remain at a loss as to how to attract female talent. Instead, we must rely on the experiences of other projects, which have shared their attempts to address these challenges. Approaches that appear to have had some success fall into a number of categories: making participation possible, creating safe spaces and focusing on soft and transferable skills.

The practicalities of participation

Given the self-confidence and courage required for a young woman to take the first steps towards an apprenticeship in a non-traditional sector, it is particularly important that she is not discouraged by basic questions of project design. Best practices for the fundamentals of project design are well established (Pereznieto et al., 2018) and include:

- **Financial support:** as young women often face higher financial constraints than their male counterparts to access and attend training (Cho et al., 2015), providing stipends to meet basic participation, transport and food costs is essential to facilitate participation and to make young women feel that they are valued participants (e.g. Maitra and Mani, 2017).
- **Care responsibilities:** young women have considerable household responsibilities, such as childcare and cooking, and training must provide or support childcare as well as being held at hours that suit the workload of young women. Where necessary the hours of training should be reduced or spread over longer periods to make female participation possible (Attanasio et al., 2011).
- **Mentors and role models:** they can provide support and help to normalise the presence of young women in sectors that are typically male dominated, which can build or strengthen women's confidence (Campos et al., 2015). In addition, more experienced women can provide advice on how to deal with

harassment, bullying and discriminatory social norms. In some cases, construction-related companies have built their business models around being female-owned and led, which has helped women who work in male-dominated trades find the support necessary and access business opportunities. These companies trade on the fact that many women prefer having another woman in their homes for repairs. However, this has not yet resulted in broader changes in social norms (e.g. BBC, 2011).

- **Family and community mobilisation:** involving parents and community leaders significantly increases the likelihood that young women will be supported in their decision to take up employment opportunities otherwise reserved for men. Given the difficulties inherent in social norm change, this may not convince everyone. However, it will signal to young women that the challenges that they are likely to face will be understood by the initiative and its staff. In addition, such interventions have been shown to improve the outcomes for female participants (Edmeades, 2016).
- **Anti-harassment policies:** it is essential that anti-harassment policies are in place from the very start so that young women are aware of their rights and can be supported when problems arise (McLaughlin, 2018).
- **Life and soft skills:** young women may not have acquired the key life skills that are taken for granted in male participants, and so may not qualify to participate in programmes (for example, where there are entry requirements or exams). It is worth considering whether these can be waived for women, or whether these necessary skills can be taught. Life and soft skills also need to be a greater focus for young women during training for the reasons discussed below.
- **Provision of additional information:** there is some evidence to suggest that, in some circumstances, young women will choose to take up non-traditional work where they are provided with convincing information that these professions are more lucrative. However, it is possible that this effect will be greater for more educated women (Hicks et al., 2016; Campos et al., 2015).

Creating safe spaces

Once young women have decided to enrol to learn a construction sector trade, creating a sense of safety – literally and metaphorically – is a priority. Threats to their physical safety will depend on the cultural context, but questions such as the location of training centres, transport options and physical infrastructure (such as toilets and other facilities) must all be considered (McLaughlin, 2018).

Creating a space in which women feel safe to express themselves and learn is a more complex challenge and one that is also context specific. The employment of women recruiters and trainers is universally accepted as good practice, and gender training for anyone working with young women is necessary (whether they are male or female) (McLaughlin, 2018). Beyond that, it is for the programme to decide whether it is necessary or desirable to offer female-only spaces, classrooms or training programmes. In some instances, this might help young women to learn, while in others this might reinforce the impression that they are not suited to the skills being taught. Whatever choice is made, it is essential for trainers to actively counteract the tendency for girls to be underestimated (Youth Work, 2012).

Many youth employment programmes are targeted at a very wide age range, with some spanning almost two decades. Younger women who are at risk of feeling intimidated may feel overwhelmed if they are also training with other participants who are considerably older (Stavropoulou, 2018). In addition, a safe space for a 20-year-old woman may look quite different to a safe space for a 35-year-old who has considerably more life experience.

Ensuring that young women feel psychologically safe also means that projects need to be careful when applying quotas. In situations where a project decides to limit the number of women it will accept on certain courses, women may find themselves in a situation where they have to choose between a male-dominated course and not receiving any training at all. This might result in women choosing training courses that can be detrimental to their psychosocial wellbeing.

Soft and transferable skills

Soft and transferable skills are of great importance to all young people, but require additional thought for programmes that actively seek to encourage young women to take up non-traditional employment opportunities, for a number of reasons. These are likely to include communication and interpersonal skills, decision-making and problem solving, and creative or critical thinking (WHO, 1999; YEFG, 2018). In addition, they may require gender-specific skills training, for example in assertiveness and dealing with sexual harassment (Stavropoulou, 2018).

First, as a result of restrictive norms and related stigma, some participants may not find employment after completing the training programme. Others may opt out of the sector if they become tired of being a novelty or are unable to overcome obstacles in gaining relevant employment, unless there are support structures, such as female-only companies or other supportive associations. The teaching of transferable skills – such as good communication skills, financial management, business and

entrepreneurship skills – prepares young women for such an eventuality and increases their chances of finding work opportunities in other sectors. There is evidence to demonstrate that employment interventions have many positive benefits for young women, including better education levels, health, their ability to exercise autonomy and agency, and their psychosocial wellbeing (Stavropoulou, 2018). With additional focus on transferable skills, these can be further reinforced and will serve young women well.

Second, it is possible that young women will find the transition into work particularly difficult, as they often have less social capital and smaller social networks than their male peers. Therefore, they need additional support with job hunting and networking skills or to build a client-base if they wish to be self-employed. In many instances, it is worth acknowledging from the start that young women are unlikely to find employment in certain sectors and that they will need to plan for self-employment.

Third, the soft and transferable skills that women are lacking will vary from context to

Box 2 Leticia Turkson's experience in the construction sector

Leticia is 23-years old and completed her six-month training apprenticeship as an electrician in September 2018. Leticia plans to continue training and apply for the National Vocational and Technical Institute (NVTI) certification before starting her own electrics business.

Below is an extract from her photo story that illustrates the challenges of being a woman in the construction sector:

My older siblings have typical jobs – a medic, a driver and a seamstress – and so when I told my mother that I would like to enter into construction, she told me that I was too small to do a man's job and that the labour-intensive work would damage my body as a woman and as a future mother. Like many people in Ghana she really believed this, and so forbade me from pursuing the trade. As a result, she did not support me with the transport money I needed to attend the training.

Even with this, I felt determined and so I would walk 3.5 miles to the Master Artisan's workshop each day for my placement – it was only when I arrived there that we would drive to the client's house. I faced teasing from my family during my training and at some points they would tell me to leave home and find a more suitable job – 'Stop this and go and occupy yourself with baking,' they told me.



Read her full story about becoming an electrician at:
www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/12339.pdf.

context and their support needs will, therefore, be very different. In some cases, it may be exceptionally difficult for women to access markets for their products, in others they may struggle to open bank accounts. These sorts of skills need to be considered during programme design.

YIEDIE's support for female construction workers

YIEDIE's work with young women has evolved since the programme started training young people in 2015, as the challenges involved in their recruitment became clearer. It is important to say that, from the outset, YIEDIE followed good practice for recruiting female participants, through a number of mechanisms:

- **Flexibility:** with regard to eligibility criteria, including skills or education levels, income, and unemployment, as well as training hours.
- **Waiving** of enrolment fees for young women and, in some cases, waiving examination fees (for example in heavy machinery operation).
- **Collaboration with employers** who were training apprentices to identify problems in the workplace, ranging from access to toilets to harassment.
- **Publicising opportunities for women** on the radio and by reaching out to female leaders, teachers and mothers at markets and in schools.
- **Female recruiters** attended all recruitment events.
- **Mentorship programmes** were put in place and all field officers were trained to recognise stereotypes and unconscious bias.
- **Childcare** costs were covered for female trainees, and when female participants became pregnant they were encouraged to defer their training.

Despite these efforts, only a very small number (between 2% and 7%) were drawn to learning a construction trade. It was only once YIEDIE decided to add a training programme on interior design to its portfolio that it was able to recruit significant numbers of women. In the second year, 41% of those learning technical skills were female and 94% of these women were

enrolled in the interior design course. Notably, women who were enrolled in interior design had a slightly higher completion rate than male YIEDIE participants. A number of young women mentioned that they had received a great deal of support from trainers while attending these courses, and these had gone out of their way to create safe and supportive training spaces. These young women felt that the course had built their confidence, allowing them to take advantage of business opportunities in their community, including – but not limited to – interior design. It is possible that these completion rates were also a result of less positive forces, such as limited alternative opportunities for women. Also, men may have experienced stigma linked to transcending established gender norms when they enrolled on this course, resulting in their dropping out, potentially to take up other courses offered by YIEDIE.

In the second year, YIEDIE also trialled an increase in monetary incentives for women in non-traditional training courses or apprenticeships. An incentives package worth approximately \$22 was made available, which could be put towards day care, health insurance, travel expenses or micro-insurance against accidents. In addition, female craftspeople attended YIEDIE's recruitment events, female alumni in male-dominated fields were employed as mentors and efforts at community engagement were intensified. Nevertheless, uptake of non-traditional courses by young women remained very low.

In its second year, YIEDIE also established youth advisory councils to provide guidance on a number of issues, among them the issue of recruiting more women. They recommended the following additional interventions:

- Employing women who have completed their training to pass their skills on to the next generation of YIEDIE participants. This has multiple benefits: it provides young women with the chance to reinforce their knowledge by mentoring/teaching and means that new recruits have role models to normalise the presence of women in their chosen careers.
- Increasing the length of training courses to allow for more flexible hours.

- Teaching career-planning modules (résumé writing, interviewing techniques and time management) on all training programmes.

Towards the end of its third year, YIEDIE capped the numbers it was accepting onto its interior design programme as the market had become saturated. Where these programmes continued to run, a focus on painting and decorating was added to diversify the skills set taught to participants on the courses. It was also hoped that, as the YIEDIE programme was now better known in communities, this would encourage more women to move into those areas with largest demand (male-dominated areas). A small increase in the number of young women between 2016 and 2017 and a larger increase between 2017 and 2018 suggest that this is gradually happening.

Once the decision had been made to limit places on the interior design programme, additional incentives were put in place to interest young women in heavy machinery operation, a skill that is in very high demand. YIEDIE covers the full cost of obtaining a licence – approximately \$300 – for young women. The combination of several years of awareness raising, becoming known in the community and an increase in monetary incentives appears to have contributed to significant increases, although overall numbers remain relatively small (see Table 1).

Finally, YIEDIE held its first ‘boot camp’ for young women in the second half of 2018. This brought 48 young female artisans together to complete a building under the supervision of master craftspeople. The boot camp was accompanied by additional skills-building activities, including résumé writing and job hunting and, importantly, providing young women with male and female mentors to help them transition into working in the sector.

What worked?

YIEDIE has made significant efforts to involve young women in the construction training they have provided, continuously adapting their programme to remove any barriers identified and to trial new methods for increasing interest among female unemployed youth. It is clear from the enrolment data, that YIEDIE’s

significant efforts have had an impact on female participation and retention, even though female trainees continue to make up a small percentage of participants in many trades. This does suggest that the problem is not one of programme design, but rather one that has much deeper roots. This raises two questions: why were not more young women attracted to the construction sector? What worked for the young women who were?

It is clear from the stories told both by women who chose to participate in the sector and those who did not that it takes remarkable strength of character to work in the construction trade as a young Ghanaian woman. The women we spoke to who had decided to take up welding, tiling, electrical work or any of the other male-dominated courses on offer at YIEDIE, were without exception unusually strong characters who felt empowered enough to go against their parents’ and community’s express wishes. Many faced parental sanctions or disapproval, and all reported that it took a long time for their families to be persuaded that their choices would not cause them harm. All reported some form of discrimination at work, whether that was teasing or being undervalued. It is therefore not surprising that many young women chose the much easier path leading to more traditional forms of work.

These pioneering young women were able to articulate clearly what supported them through their training once they had made their career choice:

- A mentor (of any gender) who could help them strategise and find solutions for the problems they were facing, whether that was being mocked or undervalued. In some cases, young women had found it helpful to talk to another woman about how they could protect themselves against the advances of bosses, co-workers or potential customers.
- Counselling and advice when they were unsure whether they could continue the course because they were facing challenges in their personal lives, whether financial or family disapproval.
- Family resistance was greatly reduced once they saw that their daughters benefitted from the training, were treated with respect by their employers and were earning money.

Female role models were, therefore, not just important for participants, but for reducing negative preconceptions in communities and families, too.

- Role models were particularly inspiring for some, who found it a relief to see that other women were succeeding in challenging environments. Though very rare, being employed by another woman in construction made female participants feel both more confident and safer.
- Financial assistance to overcome the daily challenges of getting to work or paying for childcare.

Conclusion

Assisting young women to access opportunities in male-dominated sectors is first and foremost about changing social norms and attitudes about the types of work that women, and men, can and should do. However, these are largely outside the control of youth employment programmes. As we have seen, there are well-established best practices for ensuring that women are well supported when training in male-dominated sectors. However, these strategies have only been able to register modest success when it comes to increasing the number of female participants. As the YIEDIE experience corroborated, best practice appears to reduce female attrition, but does not encourage large numbers of young women into male-dominated sectors, at least in the short run. Given the high price associated with breaking social norms, this is not surprising, and it would be unrealistic to expect an initiative focused on a male-dominated sector to achieve gender parity in its enrolment rates.

When it comes to supporting young women, YIEDIE's experience can provide clear lessons for employment programmes in a context like Ghana. Young women appreciate contact with role models, as well as the mentorship that they received as YIEDIE beneficiaries. They found the advice on dealing with co-workers and bosses who did not have faith in their abilities particularly useful. Similarly, it was valuable to know that they had someone to turn to should they encounter inappropriate behaviour. In that process, they felt able to develop assertiveness

and strategies for dealing with difficult customers or employers. In other words, they were able to achieve a level of agency and autonomy by building their confidence and determination. This may well be as important as their technical skills.

The challenges experienced by YIEDIE and similar programmes do raise some difficult questions for youth employment programming: how can young women best be supported to access meaningful employment opportunities? Are resources best allocated to programmes that provide additional support to the few young women who choose to train in male-dominated sectors? Or should programmes focus on providing young women with better skills and higher-earning opportunities in sectors typically associated with women?

Lessons for future initiatives

- It is not surprising that the issue of providing opportunities for young women in male-dominated sectors has not been solved. Young women have very good reasons for choosing to work in more traditional sectors and, until social norms change, only exceptional young women will choose certain professions.
- Donors need to be clear about the level of change they wish to see – is training a few female plumbers enough? Or is the aim to achieve parity and a change in gender norms?
- It takes time to change social norms, and donors interested in achieving such changes will need to fund long-term programmes. Ones that last only a few years are likely to result in only a temporary increase in female participation in the sector, before women gradually return to other professions. It could even result in a backlash, where the return of women to 'traditional' professions is seen as confirmation that women should not venture into male-dominated sectors.
- Longer-term programmes that include social norm change as an explicit goal must engage policy-makers interested in women's economic empowerment and inclusive growth. In addition, longer programmes allow staff to create trust with community members where they work, making it easier for young women to choose careers to push beyond gender norms. Longer-term

programmes would also allow cohorts of young women to gain skills, train others and to become role models, thereby building a critical mass of young female entrepreneurs in the chosen sector.

- As such, donors need to consider certain trade-offs: do they wish to invest in supporting a small number of women to promote a norm change? Or do they want to provide a greater number of opportunities for women in related, typically more female, sectors or industries?
- Where support is being provided for young women to move into new sectors, programmes need to plan for the issues that young women may face, including:
 - women may choose to leave the sector further down the line, and it is important that they have transferable skills
 - many young women worry about not being able to work when they become pregnant and while they recover from giving birth – at the very least, they require the financial planning skills to be able to save up for motherhood
 - young women will need help thinking through how they can combine their chosen careers with their caring and social responsibilities.
- Given the challenges young women face when working alone as master craftspeople, it is worth pairing them with at least one other young woman in the same trade so that they can explore the possibility of collaborating or even starting a business together. This would ensure their safety when going to clients' houses, for example, and could attract clients from women-owned businesses in other sectors.
- Address the issue of sexual harassment and discrimination openly by providing gender and anti-harassment training at

work to male co-workers and employers. In addition, teach young women strategies for dealing with sexual harassment in situations outside the employer's control, ranging from assertiveness to avoidance. Include these skills as part of the formal training programme.

- In some cases, it might be appropriate to run separate courses for women so that they have a safe space within which to learn their trade before being subject to the teasing or harassment that comes with working with male colleagues. These women-only courses should also focus on building confidence along with technical skills.
- Where a sector is growing and offers employment opportunities, but is male dominated, efforts should be made to find professions in the sector's supply chains that offer viable careers without falling far outside the social norms. An example in the construction sector would be draughtsmanship or surveying. These courses require greater levels of literacy and numeracy, which could prevent young women from pursuing them. Therefore, courses that start by teaching adequate literacy and numeracy are needed, even if this means offering longer (and more expensive) courses. Again, it is worth considering keeping these courses only available to young women.

Supporting young women to access the career opportunities and higher incomes available in male-dominated sectors is a worthwhile pursuit, even if progress is slow and piecemeal. Given the difficulties young women are likely to encounter working in construction and similar sectors, the absolute priority for donors must be to do no harm. This means designing projects that are sensitive to the local context, involve male as well as female mentors and that allow enough time for social norms to change.

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