

# Public-Private Dialogue

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## Rwanda / Education and Employment Opportunities for Youth

by

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### Background and Context

EDC's workforce development programs seek to successfully transition youth into jobs through targeted support that helps them apply their work readiness skills and experiences. To ensure youth get the marketable skills they need, there are two key sets of partners we work with: Government (by ensuring market-driven skills training and work readiness learning are embedded in public education institutions) and the Private Sector (by providing work-based learning opportunities, mentorship and employment to youth). Only through bringing civil society and public training providers together with private institutions and actors are we able to ensure private sector needs are informing school curricula and programming at the secondary and TVET levels. Without this coordination between the government, educational institutions (public and private) and the private sector, there is often a gap between supply and demand of relevant job skills.

In Rwanda, since 2009 EDC has connected improved work readiness training to employment opportunities in the private sector through funding from USAID, and the MasterCard Foundation. The **Rwanda Akazi Kanoze (AK) projects** provide youth with market-relevant life and work readiness training and support, hands-on learning opportunities and links to formal and self-employment. EDC uses a networked collaborative approach that brings together public, private, and civil society partners with education and training providers and youth themselves to strengthen the ecosystem for youth workforce development in Rwanda. EDC's Work Readiness Curriculum has been embedded in the entrepreneurship curriculum at General Secondary and TVET schools around the country, enabling the approach to reach significantly larger numbers of youth, while continuing to build the capacity of the local government agencies with the goal of achieving scale and sustainability. EDC has worked with the Rwandan Education Board (REB) and the Workforce Development Authority (WDA) to integrate the work readiness curriculum, as well as with private sector partners, to ensure learning is aligned with current employer needs.

In addition to bringing together a cross-section of actors in government, the private sector and civil society to adapt the work readiness curriculum, EDC has established District Steering Committees (DSCs) to bring together district authorities (and the employment programs they manage), private companies, and schools, particularly in rural areas, to support the national rollout of the new curriculum and school-to-work transition services.

## Youth and Inclusion dimension

EDC's work in Rwanda supports youth 15-24 years of age to more effectively link to the job market by better ensuring that educational and other institutions provide youth with the skills current employers need. Projects have targeted youth that are in-school and out-of-school, but even those who are in-school often do not learn the skills employers are looking for, adding to the unemployment rate. By engaging stakeholders across government, the private sector and civil society, youth employment-related challenges are discussed, solutions are found, and opportunities for formal and entrepreneurial work are enhanced.

## Partnership, Structure and Processes

EDC brought together government, private sector and civil society representatives in a series of consultative workshops to adapt EDC's Work Readiness Curriculum and align learning goals with the specific skills demanded by private sector companies. In addition, District Steering Committees (DSCs) were formed through local implementing partners (IPs) in targeted districts to get local players linked to skills development and to support school-to-work transition and work readiness for youth. IPs identified the local players, met them and shared the project vision and how it fits within their mandate, identified areas of leverage, developed TORs for DSCs, established meetings schedule and frequency, developed meeting agendas and helped chair the meetings. Each DSC's governance structure is decided by the DSC, so it differs across districts; but in many instances they have a chair and co-chair mainly comprising of a District Education Director or National Employment Program (NEP) District Coordinator and a representative from the Private Sector Federation or an Employer/Company. Beyond discussing and advocating for youth employment opportunities more generally, DSCs help to identify opportunities for school-to-work transition opportunities as well as advocate to address issue of training materials needed for such opportunities.

AK also worked with a highly-engaged network of more than 300 private employers and 50 local implementing partners across Rwanda. A key to success was that the project found various ways to engage these private sector partners. AK developed a variety of effective strategies to ensure their interest and continued participation, and guarantee that program activities aligned with private sector needs and demands.

These strategies became known as AK's networked collaborative approach and included:

- **Labor Market Assessments.** These were designed to ensure that AK programs were relevant and responsive to private sector requirements. This critical "intel" from the field

formed the basis of collaborative planning and program design, eventually aiding in the selection of effective implementing partners.

- **Pairing of Technical and Work Readiness Skills.** This pairing led to high levels of employer satisfaction and demand for AK graduates. At its core, the AK training program exposes youth to essential work-related skills such as leadership, interpersonal communication, teamwork, ethics, and more. These attributes prepare youth for the challenging process of seeking –and keeping – a job.
- **Localized Curriculum Design.** AK organized a series of consultative workshops that included private sector companies, international and local education and workforce experts, government officials, and other stakeholders. Through this process, AK was able to localize the curriculum and align learning goals with the specific skills demanded by private sector companies.
- **Employer Satisfaction Surveys.** These surveys completed by employers enabled AK to learn about youth’s performance and to identify skill gaps to be addressed in AK’s training package. Feedback from these surveys over the lifetime of the projects informed AK about the need for additional training in English, IT skills and gender sensitivity.
- **Capacity Building.** AK built capacity through economic sector-specific workshops, an Internship Management Training Tool, and other strategies that improved both implementation and employment outcomes for youth.

## Results so far

As a result of the success of its approach, AK became widely known and associated with high quality workforce development and it has also had significant policy influence.

A true measure of the project’s success is the creation in 2015 of a new NGO in Rwanda to continue the progress. With the support of USAID and the Government of Rwanda, EDC has launched Akazi Kanoze Access (AKA) as a new locally-run NGO in the hopes of creating a permanent advocate and catalyst for developing employment and livelihood skills for Rwanda’s youth. AKA has adopted many of AK’s successful and well-recognized approaches and has not only continued to consistently satisfy clients, but also provide continuity and sustainability of AK’s youth and workforce development efforts. AKA has begun the process, also, working with REB and the WDA, to formally certify its work readiness training to ensure that graduates’ skills are verifiable to employers.

The AK program has achieved great success in leading high quality work readiness programming, improving livelihood opportunities for youth, and assisting the business communities who employ them. AK forged strategic public-private partnerships to be sure its activities were aligned with labor market needs and local government to prepare youth entering the workforce with the right combination of technical and work readiness skills to be successful. Through its strategic engagement with employers, AK has helped create an environment that encourages private sector partnerships and facilitates collaboration for sustainability. A few statistical results of EDC’s work in Rwanda include:

- 20,000+ youth trained in work readiness;

- 8,500+ (66%) of its graduates have found employment within six months of program completion, either running their own business or employed by a Rwandan business;
- 2,700 new businesses have launched in sectors ranging from agro-processing to computer repair;
- An evaluation of rural Akazi Kanoze program participants found that they were more likely to be employed after graduation and to have achieved significant gains in work readiness skills development and financial management than those who had not taken part in the project;
- Work Readiness curriculum has been embedded in secondary and TVET schools, reaching a broader number of students;
- A network of over 1,500 SMEs and large companies now offer Work-Based Learning (WBL) opportunities to youth through internships, job shadowing, etc.

## Expected Results

- Greater reach through further support of curriculum reforms that benefit all secondary school and TVET graduates;
- Reach 16,500 youth with work readiness, technical training and entrepreneurial skills;
- Train 600 teachers to deliver the Work Ready Now! Curriculum;
- Under a new USAID-funded project that further builds on the initial two Akazi Kanoze projects, 40,000 out-of-school youth will be impacted with work readiness and entrepreneurship training and support.

## Challenges

One challenge encountered has been scaling linkage of youth to work-based learning and employment opportunities in contexts where most employment is through small and medium enterprises (SMEs) rather than large companies. This means that only a few youth might be placed with each employer, creating issues when trying to provide thousands of youth with work-based and employment opportunities. EDC in Rwanda has a network of 1,500 small, medium and large enterprises that youth are placed with through local partner organizations for internships, job shadowing, other work-based learning opportunities or employment. Scaling requires diversifying the number of organizations involved in supporting youth for work-based learning and employment opportunities (including governmental employment agencies), as well as developing a strong tracking and information management system to effectively capture successes achieved and be able to continue support to youth.

Another challenge is ensuring that a strong market assessment and mapping are done from the beginning with all relevant actors, and that non-traditional actors, such as women's associations of entrepreneurs and similar actors, are involved. If the right representatives from across ministries are not involved, if there is not sufficient representation from the private

sector across trade areas, and if influential civil society actors (such as from associations) are not included, resulting project interventions and public-private linkages will be weaker.

## **Biography of the Author**

### **Mrs. Laura Dillon-Binkley**

International Technical Advisor, Youth Team

Mrs. Dillon-Binkley currently provides support to youth work readiness and entrepreneurship programs with the Education Development Center (EDC). Most recently she was the deputy head of a \$40M USAID-funded Alternative Basic Education (ABE) project in Liberia that provided literacy, numeracy, work readiness and life skills as well as livelihoods training to youth ages 13-35 with no or minimal levels of education. The project worked through Ministry of Education schools and teachers, provided ABE classes to employees of large multi-national companies, and linked youth to internships in the private sector. County Alliances were organized to bring together government, private sector and civil society actors to further support advancing youth opportunities. Prior to that, Mrs. Dillon-Binkley has worked on or supported activities in agriculture, food security, community development, governance and anti-corruption, and demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants. She has a Master of Business Administration and a Master of Arts in International Peace and Conflict Resolution.