



**Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children / Columbia University**  
**Vocational Training and Market Demand in Northern Uganda**  
*Preliminary Research Findings*

**Executive Summary**

This joint project between the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children and the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University aims to support vocational training (VT) providers to offer programs for youth in Northern Uganda that promote sustainable livelihoods and match market demands in the current early recovery context. The Women's Commission May 2007 report *Listening to Youth: The Experiences of Young People in Northern Uganda* identifies education and the opportunity to earn a safe and dignified income as central priorities of youth. This second report is predicated on an understanding that vocational training programs for youth can be part of a broader strategy of economic reconstruction and social restoration in Northern Uganda. Twenty years of conflict have destroyed the livelihoods of more than two million people, decimated social structures and limited youth's access to both formal and informal education. As the region transitions from an emergency situation to an early recovery environment livelihoods programming is gaining increasing attention in Northern Uganda. For many youth, vocational training is at the crossroads of livelihoods support, economic recovery, education, and rehabilitation and reintegration.

Our report (forthcoming May 2008) will aim to provide program planners with relevant tools and concrete recommendations for incorporating economic planning into vocational training through market analysis, pre- and post-training market linkages and integration with the private sector and thoughtful engagement of youth in decision-making about vocational training. Additionally, this report will highlight best practices within the VT field and categorize the various types of VT programs to enable actors to engage more effectively in this field and suggest how these programs and other skill development initiatives can interact most efficiently.

**I. Initial Research Aims**

This project aims to support VT providers in Northern Uganda to offer programs that promote sustainable livelihoods for youth and match market demands for skills and labor in the early recovery context. Our research examines the broad spectrum of VT programs run by NGOs, private and government actors and lasting from one-week to three-years. While we recognize that VT can make an important contribution to psychosocial rehabilitation, community reintegration, protection and educational enhancement, youth have specifically asked for expanded access to sustainable livelihood opportunities to better support themselves, their families and their communities. This research aims to show that livelihoods and psychosocial objectives can be better served by more fully integrating market analysis and an economic development perspective into vocational training program planning.

**II. Methodology**

The preliminary findings listed below are informed by a combination of desk research in New York and field research conducted in Kampala, and Gulu and Kitgum districts in Northern Uganda. From January 1-21,

2008 our team conducted 107 interviews and six focus groups with the following stakeholder groups: youth (30), NGOs (international and local) and UN Bodies (49), Vocational Training Centers (6), Places of Employment (6), Government Officials (6), Donor Organizations (3), Financial Institutions (3), and others (4). The team will return to Uganda from March 8-22 to conduct additional research, share initial findings and elicit feedback on tools and preliminary recommendations with stakeholders in Kampala and in the North. In addition to an analysis of primary data, our research will include a synthesis of existing market analysis in order to document best practices and adapt lessons learned to meet current and emerging market needs in Northern Uganda.

### **III. Vocational Training in Uganda**

#### *A. Key Actors Engaged in Vocational Training*

Key actors in the vocational training sector include: **Government ministries** engaged in curriculum development, registration of VT centers, testing and certification of graduates, instructor training, and education policy reform; International and local **NGOs** running VT Institutes (VTIs), sponsoring participants and offering other support/complimentary training programs; **Individuals and religious organizations** running private VTIs and participating in networks such as the **UGAPRIVI**, a national network of privately-run VTIs; **VTI staff and instructors**; **Youth** participants; **District Government officials** engaged in coordination; and **Donors**. Donor demands and organizations' mandates substantially influence the structure of VT programming. However, in practice, program planning is shaped, and limited, by a wide array of structural factors, including Uganda's national curriculum for VT, instructor availability, access to machinery and training equipment and career guidance, or the lack thereof, for youth. The result of this combination of factors has been the homogenization of skills offered by VT programs, which visibly and significantly impact the labor market and economy.

#### *B. Role of the Government*

Interviews with various government officials indicate commitment to improving VT programming and coordination with donors and NGOs engaged in the sector. There is a shared understanding that VT is an important means of increasing Uganda's skilled labor pool, considered essential to the country's long-term economic growth and poverty reduction. The primary Ministry responsible for VT in Uganda is the Ministry of Education and Sport (MoES), though many other Ministries play significant roles in both policy and programming. PEVOT – the Promotion of Employment Oriented Vocational and Technical Training – has been the Government's main partner in VT since 1999 and has played a critical role in the reform, development and popularization of skills training programs. Though VT remains a lesser priority than either primary or secondary education for the Government and donors as shown by funding levels, a number of current policy initiatives are targeting the need for expanded and improved VT throughout the country. These include the development of the Business and Technical Vocational Education Training Systems (BTVET) and the Uganda Vocational Qualifications Framework (UVQF), which seek to standardize training programs and to address the division between labor market demand and VT programs. Additionally, VT is now almost systematically included in strategic plans for poverty reduction and MoES plans.

Non-governmental partners, private individuals, donors and businesses continue to play an important supporting role for government engagement in VT. GTZ, JICA are key partners in the standardization and development of market linkages, and instructor training. USAID, ECHO, the United States Department of Labor alongside many other private and bilateral donors supply the bulk of funding for VT. The reliance of VT programs on such support creates a tenuous situation for youth, as external funding is subject to the changing mandates and timelines of donors

### *C. Perceptions of Vocational Training*

Perceptions often differ between Kampala and the North. In the South, VT tends to be viewed negatively and considered a subordinate choice for those who cannot access higher education. In comparison, communities in the North seem to view VT as a considerable opportunity. Particularly for older youth, many of whom have been severely affected by the war, vocational training may be their only prospect for further education and/or the potential for economic self-sufficiency.

A related disconnect appears in some youths' perspectives of "employment." When asked to describe their activities prior to training, many youth interviewees responded "nothing." Yet when further probed they often listed one or more income generating activities in which they were involved, including gathering wood, doing laundry, selling produce or charcoal, making local brew, or peeling cassava. These examples highlight the complicated factors and diverse perceptions which influence programs and employment/self-employment opportunities.

In 2007, the Government took part in a public relations campaign to improve the image of VT across the country. Advertisements, including comics, were placed in local newspapers. A soap opera entitled "Hand-in-Hand" was produced to erode stereotypes and to show the benefits of vocational training. Furthermore, a radio program conducted interviews with key stakeholders and role models about the benefits of training. While it is difficult to measure the impact of this campaign, it is clear that the many government officials and affiliated technical advisors involved recognize the value of VT and the importance of developing and improving design and implementation.

## **IV. Key Challenges to Effective Livelihoods Development**

### *A. The Spectrum of Vocational Training*

"Vocational training" refers to a broad and diverse spectrum of programs. Programs vary tremendously in length – ranging from one week to three years – and in the quality and the comprehensiveness of skills taught. The term encompasses trainings aimed at equipping graduates to engage in income generating activities (IGAs) as well as government-sponsored programs that are considered alternatives to secondary and even tertiary school. Rehabilitation-focused programs, common to humanitarian assistance contexts, often offer short-term training courses as part of a broader psychosocial agenda in which emphasis on skill mastery is limited and the primary goal may be emergency relief. In contrast, longer-term programs are more responsive to the early recovery and post-conflict context due to a more sustained focus on enduring livelihoods and reconstruction. Such programs focus on skill mastery and often provide a range of support services and complementary trainings; more comprehensive programs sometimes offer government certification, apprenticeship opportunities (often called 'industrial training') and links with potential employers. They may also include classes in literacy, numeracy, basic English, business skills, morals and ethics, as well as agriculture. The co-existence of programs at various points along this spectrum leads to variance in the competitiveness of graduates as they attempt to enter the labor market post-training as graduates of longer-term programs are often better equipped to access labor opportunities.

### *B. Program Objectives and Community Expectations*

The broad scope of program goals - from rehabilitation and reintegration to income generation or attainment of sustainable livelihoods - can lead to a disconnect between program objectives and youth and community expectations. While VT programs may believe their objectives to be clear to participants, our research shows that most participants expect to have improved livelihoods and expanded access to employment/self-employment opportunities upon completion of a training program. When this expectation does not align

with program intention or design, the trained youth is often left disappointed, wanting more assistance and less able to sustain a livelihood in comparison with graduates of more rigorous market-driven programs.

### *C. Vulnerability and Extended Support*

For program implementers, a tension exists between targeting the most vulnerable in a post-conflict setting, and making economically-based choices that reflect market realities. Whereas many agricultural livelihoods support programs target the ‘early adapters,’ or risk-takers of a community who are best suited to compete in the market because of access to appropriate skills, capital and social networks, many VT programs in Gulu and Kitgum tend to target the most vulnerable populations. At the same time, however, those who are deemed the most vulnerable are often only able to access short-term programming emphasizing protection, rehabilitation, and basic education. Often these programs do not include post-training support or links to jobs, financing or other market-based opportunities. Northern Uganda’s long-running conflict means that ever more innovative programming is needed to ensure the provision of dynamic and responsive services for the most vulnerable.

Furthermore, there is a lack of career counseling and/or exposure to diverse job options for youth. Participatory program planning often results in youth choosing to learn skills they see others doing, hear are profitable and think are easy to operate. It is necessary to note that consulting youth about which skills course to choose without an analysis of employment opportunities and potential market linkages can incite high expectations and frustration when training does not lead to work. Several viable tools have been developed at the national and organizational levels; however, none have been rolled out to a broad audience.

### *D. Lack of Market Analysis*

The majority of VT programs in Kitgum and Gulu offer carpentry and joinery (CJ) and bricklaying and concrete practice (BCP) for men and tailoring and catering for women. Other skills trainings frequently mentioned include mechanics, bead making, hairdressing and baking. Though there may be a market for these skills, careful economic analysis of local, national and regional markets is often lacking, as is careful consideration of how youth will utilize new skills through available employment/self-employment opportunities. In addition, programming around gender-specific activities may overlook the capabilities of each trainee as an individual and entrench income and social inequality across gender lines. Many program managers highlighted the need for a market survey, but few had actually engaged in this research. Only one major INGO that we interviewed has an economic development unit that is looking comprehensively at market development. Managers of organizations that had hired a consultant to do a labor study or market survey often commented that the survey had either not been very robust or had not been able to concretely put the findings into a strategic action plan that the organization could effectively implement.

### *E. Lack of Private Sector Linkages*

Access to financing for VT graduates presents an additional struggle for participants and program planners alike. Some programs give ‘tool kits’ or start up capital to graduates. One donor reported, however, that a group given toolkits and capital funding had *worse* outcomes than groups that were not given such materials. The officer hypothesized that the lack of equipment and capital forced creativity and self-reliance. Furthermore, numerous program officers reported that many toolkits (sewing machines, etc) were quickly sold or remained unused. This example points to a further disconnect between some program manager’s negative perception of toolkits and graduates who consistently expect to be provided with post-program tools, capital and follow-up by the training provider. Our research shows that private sector linkages, including apprenticeships or on-the-job training are extremely helpful in creating post-training employment.

However, these opportunities are not offered consistently across the spectrum of VT programming. Furthermore, some businesses managers in the North noted that due to the lack of standardization among VT programs, they often prefer to train prospective employees themselves rather than recruiting from VT programs. A number of key informants also pointed to the importance of social networks as a mechanism for securing employment.

## **V. Key Opportunities for Effective Livelihoods Development**

### *A. Pre and Post Training Linkages*

The careful development of pre and post-training opportunities and the maintenance of ongoing support and thoughtful involvement on the part of VT providers are pivotal to the establishment of a successful training model for all youth across the vulnerability spectrum. When and where appropriate, apprenticeships, start-up capital, toolkits, and entrepreneurship training to facilitate graduates' entry into the labor market may help to link VT graduates more successfully to the labor market. Support for post-training services and monitoring graduates' progress requires donor commitment to long term funding, which, as one NGO officer noted, is lacking in the current "humanitarian crisis" context.

Several VT programs make efforts to have their students undergo industrial training (apprenticeship) with potential employers. In each case, however, such links stemmed from the training programs and institutes. While businesses need employees, it did not seem common practice for the businesses to approach the VT programs to find skilled labor

### *B. Career Counseling and Youth Engagement in Decision Making*

In order to mitigate the market saturation resulting from a lack of market analysis programs should incorporate more structured guidance for youth during the skill selection phase alongside deeper market analysis. This will allow youth to make more informed livelihood choices. This can be done on a micro-level by program staff through focus groups with potential students, or at a macro-level through radio programming or role-modeling broadcast in local languages throughout the Northern region. Participatory tools that encourage youth to assess and match their own skills and resources to income-earning opportunities in the market are another possible means of conducting participatory market analysis. This would entail training by program managers/instructors to effectively engage youth in these processes.

### *C. Improved Market Analysis for Vocational Training Programs*

Critical dimensions of market analysis and the development of market linkages include: assessing sectors for signs of market saturation; investigating regional and/or international markets for gaps in goods or service provision; promoting innovative and dynamic products based on consumer demand; creating or updating guidelines of skills and experience necessary to compete in a given sector; and supporting the development of long term relationships with private sector institutions and thereby improving employment opportunities for graduates. Overall, there is a need to utilize innovative partnerships and information technology to help graduates achieve sustainable livelihoods either in the formal sector or through self-employment opportunities. We are in the process of documenting examples of programs that are successfully engaged these activities, and drafting recommendations and tools intended to facilitate market analysis and the development of market linkages.

### *D. Private Sector Linkages*

In addition to clearer program objectives and more robust market analysis there is a need for broader private sector engagement for program participants during and after the training. Several innovative examples of

private sector linkages in agricultural livelihood programs provide potential models for VT programs to strengthen their market linkages. Successful agricultural livelihood programs engage with local actors in a way that moves beyond NGO service delivery and beneficiary dependency, to sustainably build upon Northern Uganda's growing private sector. Similarly, they facilitate farmer access to knowledge about new markets, fluctuating commodity prices and regional/international trade standards in a cost-effective culturally sensitive manner. Perhaps most importantly, they help to engage private sector players all along a particular value chain. Since many practitioners recognize that agriculture will be the engine of economic growth in the North, it follows that the most effective market linkages have been made in this sector. However there is room for non-agricultural livelihoods programs to engage in more forward-thinking programming.

In addition to, or instead of tool kits, some NGOs and VT programs may encourage graduates to form groups and begin small businesses. Very few, however, make direct linkages with private sector financing mechanisms. Village savings and loans associations (VSLA) present an exciting opportunity for post-VT start up capital. The success of VSLAs in the camps is remarkable; however, the programs tend to target adult members of the community, are self-selecting and therefore often exclude youth and extremely vulnerable persons, and are rarely linked directly to VT programs. The Parish Approach, a transition strategy designed to provide services to communities in a way that minimizes the pull factors of camps, is a potential mitigation strategy to ensure that group formation and/or tool kit distribution is more sustainable.

## **VI. Ways Forward**

The next stage of our research seeks to develop usable tools and recommendations to assist VT providers to incorporate market analysis into program planning and post-training support. To this end, we plan to develop the following:

- A report that analyzes the major issues and implications of VT programs in the North;
- A map that identifies the breadth of vocational training programs currently operating in Kitgum and Gulu districts;
- A set of tools for vocational training program managers to analyze the market by talking to businesses, the government, microfinance institutions and donors;
- A set of tools for youth to assess their own skill set and aspirations as well as think realistically about the market;
- Case studies to highlight best practices within the vocational training field:
  - \* VT program business linkages and post-program follow-up;
  - \* VT program linkages with microfinance institutions;
  - \* Innovations in program design that incorporate analysis of new markets.

### *Final Report*

These findings will continue to be expanded, analyzed and researched in the coming months, culminating in a final report to be completed and disseminated in May 2008. We look forward to continued dialogue with you and to receiving any suggestions you have to make this project more relevant for your organization's work.