

YETA LEARNING QUESTION  
RESEARCH BRIEF SERIES:

# HOW CAN MENTORSHIP EMPOWER YOUTH?



**NCBA** CLUSA  
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# INTRODUCTION



In partnership with The Mastercard Foundation, NCBA CLUSA implemented the five-year Youth Empowerment Through Agriculture (YETA) program in Northern and Midwestern Uganda in the districts of Dokolo, Kole, Masindi, and Kiryandongo. Along with its partners Youth Alive Uganda (YAU), Reproductive Health Uganda (RHU) and the Youth Forward Learning Partnership (Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and Development Research and Training (DRT)), YETA focused on four objective areas: 1) forming and strengthening youth associations (YAs) 2) improving the well-being and confidence of YA members through enhanced foundational skills 3) increasing access to financial services for YA members and 4) developing the technical and entrepreneurial skills of YA members so they can launch their businesses.

After reaching 27,130 youth (exceeding our target of 26,250), YETA is now publishing a series of Learning Question Research Briefs to galvanize discussion among youth, policymakers, and practitioners and advance the Mastercard Foundation's Youth Forward Initiative learning agenda. Through focus group discussions and other interviews (see 'Methodology'), this paper documents the experiences and learnings from YETA's work in Uganda and specifically how mentorship can empower young people in agriculture.

# THE YETA APPROACH

The YETA consortium addressed challenges faced by youth in agriculture – such as low levels of productivity, access to resources, and low skill levels – by facilitating the creation of a network of youth associations and cooperatives. Before participating in the YETA program, the majority of rural youth in YETA intervention areas worked on small pieces of land provided by their parents or communities, without the necessary skills or finance to farm productively. Many youth did not effectively manage the little income they generated and often did not know how to best invest their surpluses.

YETA's youth associations acted as a vehicle to address these obstacles by providing access to formal training and mentorship so that young people had the skills to produce more and invest better. Once formed, groups were encouraged to choose a mentor to support their group endeavors and form a village savings and loans association (VSLA) so they could save for their individual goals and group projects. Groups functioned as a means for empowering youth who have low levels of self-esteem and for demonstrating that change and better livelihoods are possible. Finally, it was easier for groups to access resources – including land, information, and concessionary loans – provided by government or other NGOs than it is for individuals.

# WHAT IS MENTORSHIP?

Within the context of YETA, mentorship is defined as a relationship between youth and caring, responsible adults and is a partnership cultivated through mutual learning and development. Mentoring and coaching are sometimes used interchangeably but in YETA, there is a distinction and the project did both. Mentorship is less prescriptive. Mentors do not give youth the answers; they help them come up with their own solutions. They encourage free thinking, without fear of making mistakes. Coaching remedies a specific problem and tends to be more technical in nature. The two can overlap and mentoring tactics can be employed while coaching, but it is important to note the difference. There is also a distinction between a naturally occurring adult-youth relationship and a structured one where the mentor is assigned or matched. There is less research available for informal mentor relationships (i.e. with family members, relatives, religious leaders) than there is for formal ones, but the research indicates that benefits exist for both the mentor and mentee, particularly in formal settings.<sup>1</sup> Research also shows that mentorship benefits mentees, mentors, and communities alike.<sup>2</sup> For mentees, the relationship helps them realize their career and livelihood ambitions, discover their passion, and have a positive role model to look up to. For mentors, the relationship can produce collegiality and collaboration, improved interpersonal skills, and present opportunities for self-reflection. And for communities, more empowered youth create productive, informed citizens who can make positive contributions to society at large.

1 From "The benefits associated with youth mentoring relationships," by Blinn-Pike, L. and T. Allen & L. Eby (Eds.), 2007, *The Blackwell handbook of mentoring: A multiple perspectives approach* (pp. 165-187). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

2 From "Formal Mentoring Programs in Education and Other Professions: A Review of the Literature" by Hansford et al 2003.





# THE BENEFITS OF MENTORSHIP

In its Results Framework, the Uganda National Strategy for Youth Employment in Agriculture emphasizes mentorship as an important ingredient to achieving its objective of ‘...promoting an enabling environment for youth employment in agriculture.’<sup>3</sup> YETA also observed the transformative nature mentorship played in young people’s lives in Northern Uganda. It improved their life skills and entrepreneurial pursuits and helped change their perception around work in agriculture, a main livelihood source in Uganda. According to the Uganda National Household Survey (UNHS) 2016/2017, 65% of Uganda’s working population are engaged in agriculture, forestry, and fishing.<sup>4</sup> The country also has the world’s youngest population with over 78% under 30<sup>5</sup> so mentored, empowered, entrepreneurial youth in agriculture can be the dividend the country needs to transform its economy. Mentors were key in all of YETA’s interventions, from mobilization, sensitization and group formation to the launching of youth group and individual businesses.

3 <https://www.agriculture.go.ug/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/National-Strategy-for-Youth-Employment-in-Agriculture-NSYEA.pdf>

4 <https://www.agriculture.go.ug/>; Uganda’s Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF)

5 <https://www.youthpolicy.org/factsheets/country/uganda/>; Uganda Youth Policy Factsheet



## YETA MENTORS CONTRIBUTED TO:



**Improved inter-personal and inter-gender relationships which contributed to a reduction in aggressiveness among youth**



**Access to land**



**Linkages with other actors for further support including government extension and private sector input and output dealers**



**Youth’s mindset-change, embracing farming as a business**



**Improved assertiveness, self-esteem, and self-discovery**



**Youth setting realistic goals**

When groups went through their storming stage,<sup>6</sup> mentors helped association members clarify their roles and responsibilities within their group businesses; they were key in maintaining group cohesion, managing group conflicts, and minimizing attrition. Most youth needed land as their businesses were largely production-based. Mentors negotiated fair prices on youth's behalf so they could rent and even buy land to start their agricultural enterprises. Mentors convinced parents to give youth access to family land. Some directly rented land to youth under very flexible conditions and only expected payment after harvest or sale of crops. Others were generous enough to give youth land for free. Mentors strongly advocated

**“OUR MENTOR HELPED US TO ACQUIRE LAND FOR GROUP BUSINESS. HE NEGOTIATED ON OUR BEHALF. IT WOULD HAVE BEEN EXPENSIVE FOR US TO GET LAND.”**

—BLESSED YOUTH GROUP KIBYAMA MEMBER, MASINDI DISTRICT

for their mentees. As a result, all 813 YETA Youth Associations accessed land either through their parents or renting at reasonable rates and 3,248 (552 females and 2,696 males) youth actually purchased land.

Most YETA mentors were experienced farmers. Many

established demonstration gardens on their own farms to teach youth best agronomic and animal management practices such as conservation farming and regular vaccinations. Prominent farmer and Kisonga Youth Group's mentor Mr. Alex Asiimwe in Masindi District for example, invited YETA youth to his farm to help strengthen their piggery, passion fruits, and horticulture businesses. Mentors helped young farmers increase and bulk their production to access better markets. Some were members of Area Cooperative Enterprises (ACE)<sup>7</sup> and linked youth directly to these enterprises as direct buyers and sellers; Nyamahasa ACE in Kiryandongo, Dokolo ACE, and Masindi District Farmers Association bought youth produce at better-than-market prices because youth sold in groups. In Kiryandongo, Blessed Youth and Youth Ascending youth groups reported that their mentors looked for markets while maize was still in their gardens; Nyamahasa ACE bought youth's maize at UGX 1,100 per kilogram, compared to

a market price of UGX 900. Similarly, in Masindi district, Victory Youth Group reported that their mentor brought a maize buyer right to their farm to avoid transportation costs.

YETA mentors built stronger entrepreneurs and better farmers. 26,856 YETA youth (15,001 males and 11,855 females) started and maintained their on and off-farm businesses<sup>8</sup> largely because of YETA's interventions and their mentors' support. On average, each youth managed at least two businesses. Mentors helped youth improve their marketing and customer care skills. In Masindi district, a Pamoja Youth Group member said he initially was very shy, but his mentor built up his confidence and presentation skills to help him better manage his retail shop customers. When nearly 4,568 youth decided to formalize their businesses and transition into 17 primary cooperatives and 2 SACCOs (Savings and Credit Cooperative Organizations), mentors were integral.

Mentors helped youth register associations with the Local District Government<sup>9</sup> and their cooperatives and SACCOs with the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Cooperatives<sup>10</sup> and then connected them to private sector actors like banks and input dealers. In Kole District, Rwot Amio Youth Association's Mentor Mrs. Anna Agom lent the group UGX 35,000 with no interest so that they could register their YA with Ayer Town Council; they were able to reimburse their mentor afterwards.

Mentors encouraged young people to save diligently and helped 802 Youth Associations start and manage

<sup>8</sup> YETA defines a business as an on or off farm agricultural enterprise that youth run consistently for at least 3 months if it is a crop-related business and a year for livestock related businesses.

<sup>9</sup> When youth register their Youth Associations with local government, their gatherings are recognized as lawful and therefore can legally run their businesses. Their registration ensures that youth are considered in local government plans for all forms of technical support such as extension services and funding from the Youth Livelihood Program (YLP), Operation Wealth Creation (OWC), Uganda Women Empowerment Program (UWEP), and Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF).

<sup>10</sup> To legally operate, cooperatives and SACCOs must register their businesses with Uganda's Ministry of Trade, Industry and Cooperatives (MTIC). The registration process is rigorous. Cooperatives require a minimum of 30 members. They then need to purchase a copy of the MTIC's standardized national bylaws for 10,000 UGX. The District level government then audits the cooperative's accounts and based on that provides recommendation for registration to MTIC, at the national level. After receipt of that recommendation, the cooperative's files are taken to MTIC and there, youth are required to pay another 50,000 UGX.

<sup>6</sup> Storming stage refers to a time when groups/associations experience their highest levels of conflict and issues related to cohesion. This occurred most frequently when groups begin earning profits from their businesses.

<sup>7</sup> In Uganda, an Area Cooperative Enterprise (ACE) consists of at least two primary cooperatives.

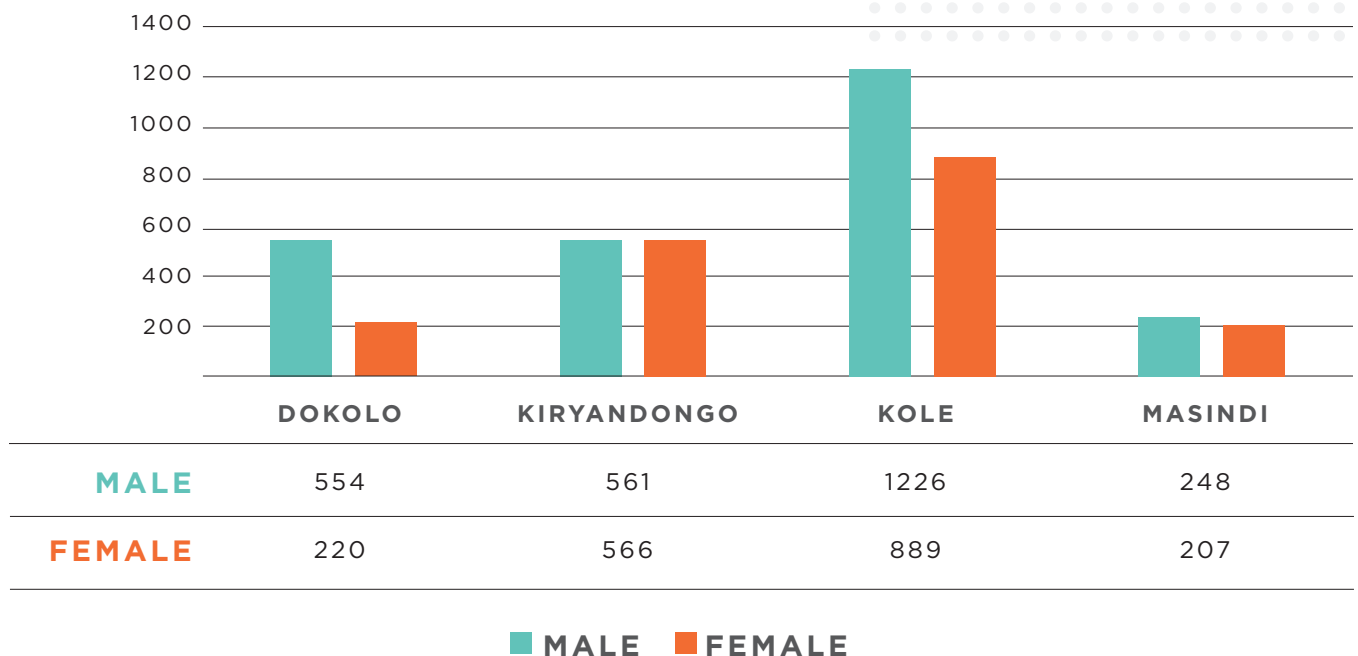
VSLAs. Of the total 27,130 YETA youth, 19,692 (10,678 males and 9,014 females) belong to these VSLAs and cumulatively saved USD \$615,713. Mentors were very active and shared VSLA best management practices with youth. Mentors helped VSLAs set realistic saving goals and many even joined weekly VSLA savings meetings as observers. Mentors were particularly supportive during the critical stages of the VSLA lifecycle – managing share-outs and setting investment and saving goals. At the end of a cycle, VSLAs conduct an audit to assess how much members saved, and the interest earned; mentors guided groups on how to determine share-out amounts for their members after this process. They also discouraged VSLAs from timing their share-outs around holidays like Christmas and Easter; initially, many did this and spent most of their money on frivolous, holiday-related purchases. Mentors encouraged members to repay loans timely so others can benefit from the same funds and they helped VSLAs recover debts from those that borrowed and failed to pay. In Masindi district for example, Isagara Young Stars Youth Group reported that their mentor was instrumental in helping their VSLA recover money when they discovered that their Treasurer mismanaged funds.

Mentors inspired once idle youth to adapt positive behaviors and become productive members of their communities. YETA's 2019 Annual Survey indicated that 90.6% of youth were able to identify and understand the risky effects of negative behaviors after YETA interventions, and mentors played a large role in this. Youth were compelled by their mentors to begin volunteering their time and resources to respond to community needs; they cleaned water and health centers, helped the elderly in their gardens, and excavated pit latrines. Youth also confided in their mentors about private matters. Mentors mediated family disputes on their behalf and addressed sensitive issues like domestic violence and family planning/sexual reproductive health within youth couples.

**“I USED TO WASTE A LOT OF MONEY WITHOUT ACCOUNTABILITY, BUT (MY) MENTOR ADVISED ME TO BUY A SIM CARD, GIVE IT TO SOMEONE FAR AND SAVE MONEY ON IT. I HAVE MANAGED TO SAVE ABOUT UGX 450,000 SO FAR ON IT.”**

—SAM OJOK, YOUTH FROM DOKOLO

## COOPERATIVE MEMBERSHIP



# YETA MENTORSHIP MODELS

YETA employed several mentorship models to help youth vision and achieve their goals, improve decision-making, challenge their assumptions, and build their self-confidence. These models included reflection circles (small groups of 5-7 youth) as well as peer to peer and traditional adult-youth mentorship. Youth Associations were a formal platform for youth to explore business opportunities and pilot new ideas and from that emanated informal, organic peer to peer exchanges and mentoring. Reflection circles were also a form of peer to peer mentoring but were more formally organized. Adult mentors did not participate in the circles; these small groups were youth-led, self-selected subsets of Youth Associations that addressed personal challenges and concerns youth otherwise would not feel comfortable sharing at the larger group level. Youth typically organized themselves based on their interests, geographic location, gender, age group, and enterprise type. The circles were safe spaces for youth to come together and find solutions to each other's problems; they discussed challenges around their businesses as well as relational issues they may have with their spouses, friends, or parents. Challenges that could not be resolved at the circle level were elevated to the larger group, an adult mentor, or YETA staff for additional support.

Reflection circles met once a month and were led by a chairperson. In every session, a new chairperson was nominated to lead the next circle to give every youth an opportunity to lead.

YETA's adult-youth mentorship model was a formal 6-month relationship between a mentor and youth association that began after youth completed their technical and foundational skills trainings. Although some mentors and mentees kept in touch after the 6-month period, it is important to note that the relationship had a beginning and an end. The graph below illustrates the model's multiple phases:

## YETA MENTORSHIP PROCESS: A PATHWAY TO INDEPENDENT YOUTH



**STEP 1**  
**Develop Selection Criteria**



**STEP 2**  
**Sensitize Youth and Adults**



**STEP 3**  
**Select Mentor**



**STEP 4**  
**Establish Rapport**



**STEP 5**  
**Set Goals**

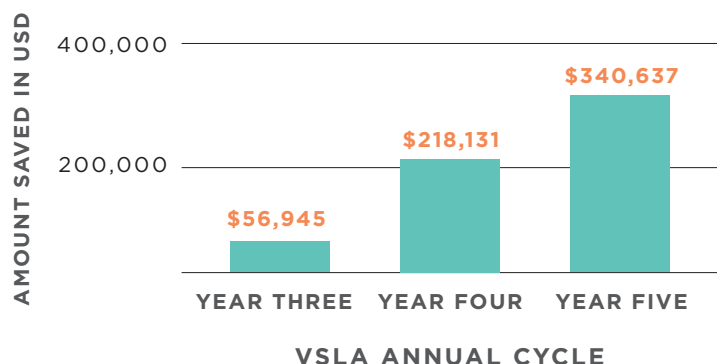


**STEP 6**  
**Assess Progress**



**STEP 7**  
**Conclude Relationship**

## YOUTHS' CUMULATIVE VSLA SAVINGS





Together with prospective mentors (i.e. community elders and opinion leaders, parents, retired civil servants, private sector, local government) and youth, YETA developed criteria on how to select a good mentor. YETA then sensitized both youth and adults on that criteria and trained them on how to be productive mentors and mentees. Each of the 813 Youth Associations selected a mentor by voting. In their signed MOUs with mentees, mentors committed to doing the following:

1. Support mobilization of youth and establishment of Youth Associations
2. Meet with Youth Associations at least three times a month to:
  - a. Help youth access land
  - b. Help youth register their groups as a community-based organization or cooperative with the government
  - c. Mentor youth on the start-up and management of their businesses and monitor business performance
  - d. Encourage youth to self - reflect
  - e. Facilitate linkages between youth and markets for inputs and buyers
  - f. Facilitate linkages between youth and financial institutions
  - g. Help youth groups start and manage successful VSLAs
  - h. Link youth to other parents, experienced farmers, associations or cooperatives, and other community development resources for additional support, as needed

YETA organized a one-day sensitization meeting for mentors so they were aware of their aforementioned roles and responsibilities.

Although mentoring was mandated to occur at least three times a month, the exercise was also needs-based so meeting times, dates, and venues varied across Youth Associations. Mentors for example typically supported youth VSLAs once a week for an hour and the visits could occur on saving days in a member's home. Technical mentoring and coaching around YETA-distributed demonstration

kits<sup>11</sup> occurred twice a week for three hours and mentors would visit the piece of land where the kit was distributed. Mentors and mentees established goals for both the mentorship relationship and the Youth Association itself. Throughout the 6-month period, mentors and mentees assessed the health of the relationship and adapted their interventions accordingly. YETA staff also conducted monthly follow up meetings with mentors to ensure quality assurance and that mentors were helping young people achieve their goals. And when the relationship concluded, mentees gave mentors formal feedback. Qualitative data showed that the relationship was mutually beneficial and improved intergenerational dialogue between youth and adults in the community.

<sup>11</sup> YETA distributed demonstration kits to youth associations based on the value chain businesses they selected. The kits consisted of farm inputs for youth to apply what they learned from the trainings to the farm. For example, if an association selected maize their kit included improved seeds, fertilizers, herbicides, and post-harvest handling tools such as hermetic bags. Note, the kits were not handouts but rather demonstration-sized kits to do hands-on, experiential learning. Kits were not large enough to see profits.



# MENTORSHIP CHALLENGES

# METHODOLOGY

1. YETA mentors were disproportionately men. It was difficult to attract women mentors because:
  - a. Of their availability as they had home responsibilities.
  - b. Their limited connectedness to private sector and financial institutions as compared to their male counterparts.
2. Once 'bad mentors' (as identified by both youth and YETA staff) were re-oriented in their roles and responsibilities they were typically able to resume their role again. Those that could not, were replaced (i.e. youth voted on this).
3. Some parents influenced youth to select them as mentors and at times, this resulted in parents dominating the group rather than helping youth realize their goals. YETA intervened; they easily convinced parents to step down and encouraged youth to vote for another mentor. A youth group in Kiryandongo for example engaged in piggery at their mentor's home farm. The parent mentor was particularly controlling and as a result, the group abandoned their business altogether. YETA intervened and looked for another piece of land for the group to manage their business; they also helped the group select a new mentor.

Qualitative methods were largely used for this study. Data collection took a period of three weeks, across the four districts. In each district, two Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were held with sampled youth from the YETA program; each FGD was comprised of five female and five male youth. In addition to FGDs, YETA conducted four Key Informant Interviews (KII), one per district. Depending on the district and learning question topic, KIIs were conducted with Community Development Officers, Agricultural Officers, Sub County Chiefs, Parish Chiefs, Local Council 1 Chairpersons, mentors, and private sector actors. Findings from these interviews were triangulated with YETA program quarterly reports, monthly regional reports, Youth Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning (YMEL) Leaders<sup>12</sup> reports, partners' (Youth Alive Uganda and Reproductive Health Uganda) reports, as well as YETA staff's reflections and experiences. It should be noted that some of the outcomes reported in this study were unintended and as a result, baseline information was not originally collected. Though the study documents these outcomes, it was difficult to quantify some changes without baseline data.

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<sup>12</sup> YMEL leaders are youth leaders selected by their peers to collect and record day to day activities of their association. They document the YA's general progress and then on a monthly basis, YMELs collate that information and provide it in report form to YETA staff.

## ABOUT THE PARTNERS

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The Mastercard Foundation works with visionary organizations to enable young people in Africa and in Indigenous communities in Canada to access dignified and fulfilling work. It is one of the largest, private foundations in the world with a mission to advance learning and promote

financial inclusion to create an inclusive and equitable world. The Foundation was created by Mastercard in 2006 as an independent organization with its own Board of Directors and management. For more information on the Foundation, please visit: [www.mastercardfdn.org](http://www.mastercardfdn.org)

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The National Cooperative Business Association CLUSA International (NCBA CLUSA) is the apex association for cooperative businesses in the United States and an international development organization. Founded in 1916, NCBA CLUSA strives to advance, promote and protect cooperative enterprises through cross-sector advocacy, education and public awareness that help co-ops thrive, highlighting the impact that cooperatives have in bettering the lives of individuals and families.

Internationally, NCBA CLUSA has worked in over 100 countries building sustainable communities, creating economic opportunities and strengthening cooperatives. Our work focuses on an approach that empowers smallholder farmers, women, and youth in the areas of food security, agricultural development, strengthening of communities and farmer organizations, community-based health and natural resources management.

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The Overseas Development Institute (ODI) is an independent think tank on international development and humanitarian issues, founded in 1960. Based in London, its mission is "to inspire and inform policy and practice which lead to the reduction of poverty,

the alleviation of suffering and the achievement of sustainable livelihoods in developing countries." It does this by "locking together high-quality applied research, practical policy advice, and policy-focused dissemination and debate."

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Development Research and Training (DRT) is a national non-government and non-profit organization whose core work is to conduct policy focused research and analysis and institutional

capacity building and development. The overarching aim of our work is to influence change in policy and practice that responds to the needs of chronically poor people in Uganda.



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