

YETA LEARNING QUESTION RESEARCH
BRIEF SERIES:

HOW DO YOUTH DEVELOP AND USE SOCIAL CAPITAL THROUGH THEIR GROUPS?



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 as well as project data collected since 2015 (see 'Methodology'), this paper documents the experiences and learnings from YETA's work in Uganda and specifically how social capital contributes to youth empowerment.

WHAT IS SOCIAL CAPITAL?

Social capital is an investment in social relations with expected returns in the market place.¹ The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) defines social capital as networks together with shared norms, values, and understanding that facilitates cooperation within or among groups.² It enables individuals and groups to trust each other and work together. The YETA model categorizes social capital in three forms: bonding, bridging, and linking social capital.³ Bonding capital is within groups, bridging capital is between groups, and linking social capital is connecting to people or groups in positions of power and influence.

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 areas of intervention 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 higher yields and invest wisely. 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 money for their individual and group businesses. Groups functioned as a means for empowering youth with low self-esteem and for demonstrating that change and better livelihoods are possible. Additionally, 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.

YETA youth benefited economically and socially from their social networks and relationships but this did not happen by chance. Creating bonds among youth starts with how they are mobilized and screened. YETA started with mobilizing youth ages 15 - 24 that are from the same community (parish)⁴, out of school, unemployed/underemployed, and have an interest in engaging in agriculture as a business. These criteria joined youth with common ambitions and challenges together to form a group of 30 members, select their leaders, and define a group mission and constitution that outlines rules and expectations for members. Thereafter, these associations pursued business opportunities both on and off-the-farm. The infographic below illustrates the positive unintended outcomes of YETA interventions and the benefits of social capital.



1 Lin, N. (2001) Social Capital: A Theory of Social Structure and Action. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

2 OECD (2001) The Well-Being of Nations: The Role of Human and Social Capital. Paris: Office of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

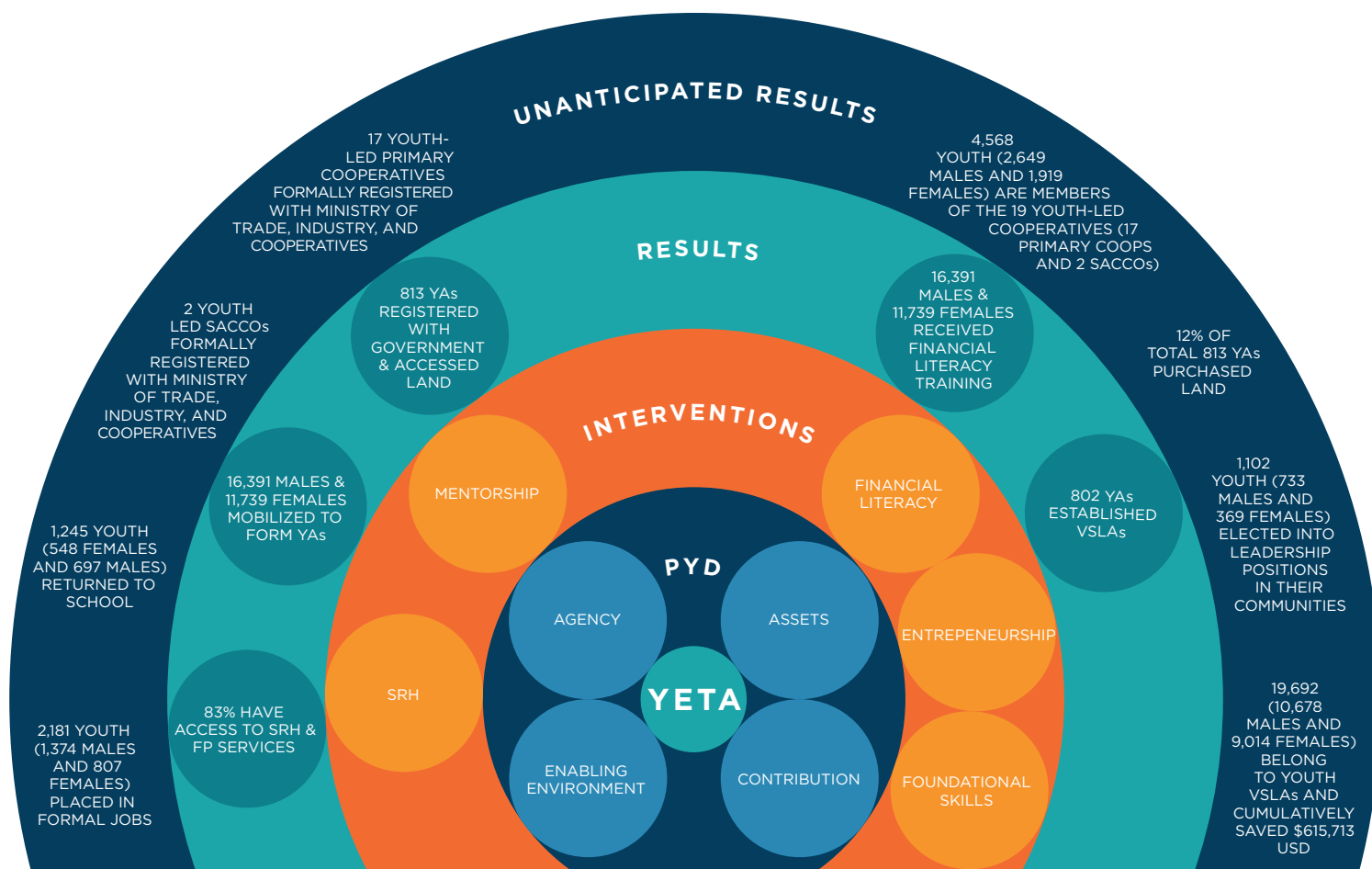
3 USAID Resilience Evidence Forum Report, April 18, 2018

4 A parish is an administrative unit that consists of a number of villages.

THE BENEFITS OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

The success of the YETA program and its group-based approach has been premised on leveraging social capital in all three forms to empower youth. Youth associations provide opportunities for youth to learn from each other, work together, and solve problems (bonding social capital). They help young people gain legitimacy and trust from their communities so they can work with producer organizations and other youth groups (bridging social capital). And, they link youth with buyers, universities, and other influential market actors that can provide them resources, transfer knowledge, and propel them to success (linking social capital). Social capital helps youth become resilient against shocks and stresses, such as sudden shifts in market conditions, drought, unforeseen medical issues, or other setbacks. It allows them to become positive change agents and have a voice in their communities.

After the trainings and YETA-facilitated learning exchanges with buyers, university students, and other youth associations and producer organizations, YETA youth became a hub of knowledge for each other as well as their communities. They provided technical advice to adults in their communities on best agronomic practices, market access, seed multiplication, and conservation farming. These changes in behavior are dramatically impacting how communities perceive youth. Adults and youth are viewing each other more positively, and establishing mutual trust and respect for each other. This allowed youth to engage and negotiate with adults for access to resources such as land. All 813 YETA youth groups secured land to farm, in large part because adults now have more confidence that youth can manage the land productively.



Furthermore, social capital within associations afforded YETA youth:



DEEPER PEER TO PEER NETWORKS. Youth built new friendships, creating a network of mutual support. Youth rely on their fellow YA members in times of sadness, disappointment, and grief. These bonds are also important in happier seasons when members get married, have children, and celebrate birthdays. Youth reported that it is easier for them to give and receive advice from one another after they have established a shared vision and worked together in their groups. Mutual support also extends to financial safety nets through their VSLAs.⁵

ACCESS TO TRAINING AND RESOURCES. YETA helped YAs and youth-led cooperatives register with the relevant government authorities. Registered groups and cooperatives are better organized and therefore attract extension workers from the private sector, government, and other development partners that provide them with training and access to new technologies (e.g. seeds, sprayers, agrochemicals, and fertilizers). YETA youth received inputs cumulatively worth UGX 97,600,000 (USD 25,562.20) from private sector actors. The Ugandan Government prefers supporting youth in group form (versus working with them individually). Government programs such as Operation Wealth Creation (OWC), the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF III), and the Youth Livelihood Program (YLP) have given YETA registered groups and cooperatives a cumulative total of UGX 499,650,400 (USD 130,862) in the form of grants and loans. Jesus Heals Youth Group in Kigulya Division in Masindi for example reported accessing UGX 8.5 million (2,291.03 USD) from YLP; they used this to purchase a grinding mill.

ACCESS TO MARKETS. Because YETA YAs are organized, registered, and have enough members to bulk large volumes of agricultural products, they can connect with market and other resource partners to build even more social capital. Youth in Kole and Dokolo districts for example have MOUs with the international organization World Vision as well as the large commercial off-taker Ngetta Holdings Limited to buy sunflower. World Vision contracted YETA youth led cooperative Akalo Youth Joint Cooperative to supply their

⁵ For more details, refer to YETA's Learning Question Learning Brief 'How is financial inclusion supporting youth empowerment?'

program beneficiaries with potato vines under a project that promotes orange flesh sweet potatoes. Akalo Youth Joint Cooperative reported earning UGX 6,500,000 (USD 1,702.40) per season from that arrangement.

ACCESS TO LABOR SAVING EFFICIENCIES. In Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIs), youth reported that working together promoted teamwork and reduced the burden and drudgery associated with farming alone. In groups, young people combined their efforts and supported one another in garden work. Previously idle youth became productive farmers because they were supported by their friends in opening and ploughing land and weeding. YETA taught youth to use land tilling schedules to more effectively allocate their labor across pieces of land, resulting in more efficient production. The benefits are seen by youth, which encourages even more youth participation.

TECHNICAL EXPERTISE AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP. Youth continue learning life and technical skills from fellow YA members. Youth reported gaining new skills such as knitting, hairdressing, marketing, and brickmaking in their groups. A youth member from Kiryandongo for example reported learning brickmaking from a friend that helped him earn UGX 1,500,000 (USD 404) last year. In total, YETA helped 26,856 youth launch their on and off farm businesses. By working on their group enterprise together, youth learned good agronomic practices (i.e. spacing, using improved seeds, spraying, and conservation farming) that they then applied to their individual farms. This helped youth increase yields which helped them get better prices and ultimately, increase their incomes.

INCREASED VOICE AND DEMOCRATIC CHOICE. YA members elected their group leaders (Chairpersons, Treasures and Secretaries) which engendered a sense of ownership, compelling youth to invest their time, energy, and resources in collective action. Cooperative principles and good governance are key elements to deepening these groups' social capital. Democratic practices in YAs create trust, unity, and mutual respect which are necessary elements for youth to pool their savings, invest in their enterprises, and reduce conflict.

EMPOWERED WOMEN AND GIRLS. Out of the 27,130 youth reached, 43% were young women and girls. YETA intentionally encouraged young women and girls' participation by employing the following strategies: 1) YETA delivered clear information about its objectives during sensitization meetings and had husbands and parents of female youth sign consent forms to make them feel comfortable in allowing them to freely participate in the program; 2) groups were mandated to elect at least one female into its leadership (i.e. 1 peer educator, 1 YA leader, and 1 VSLA leader); 3) trainings did not go beyond two hours so female youth could return home and tend to their other responsibilities; 5) young mothers were encouraged to bring their children's caretakers to the trainings so they could fully participate; 6) community leaders were sensitized on the importance of young females accessing land; and 7) young husbands and wives that fit YETA's selection criteria were encouraged to join a group together.

LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES. YETA provided youth with a myriad of opportunities to step into leadership roles either within their associations or in their communities at large. YAs built youth's confidence to become leaders in their communities and as a result, 1,102 (733 males and 369 females) were elected as Local Council (LC)⁶ and Council Representatives. YA leaders are regarded by their peers as informed, solution providers with authority. These leaders built informal networks among themselves for information sharing on where to secure good prices, access markets, and solve problems. Specifically, YA leaders:

- **PROVIDED COACHING AND GUIDANCE:** Leaders guided other leaders and members on how to address group conflicts and improve group dynamics. They also helped form reflection circles, a peer to peer mentoring approach, where 5 – 7 youth come together and shared their challenges to explore solutions in a smaller group setting.⁷
- **LINKED YOUTH TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT:** Leaders arranged visits with local government officials (i.e. Assistant Chief Administrator Officer and District Community Development Officer)

⁶ Local Council (LC) 1 is the lowest political administrative unit in Uganda.

⁷ Refer to YETA's 'How Mentorship Empowers Youth' Learning Question Research Brief for more information on this model.

to provide information on topics such as pest and disease control, financial literacy, and other extension services. Once these relationships were formed, youth were no longer afraid to directly approach District officials themselves for support and guidance.

- **FACILITATED MARKET ACCESS:** Leaders helped their members sell their produce. In Lira region, for example, one leader linked a YA to the prominent Dokolo Area Cooperative Enterprise (ACE) which bought sunflower from them at better-than-market price.
- **PROVIDED MARKETING SERVICES:** Leaders represented their YAs at community meetings and gatherings to market their groups' services. This increased demand for services such as weeding, spraying, and ploughing.

BENEFITS OF SOCIAL CAPITAL IN THE COMMUNITY

Youth are giving back to their communities and this can be contributed to YETA interventions. Using their social capital, youth have influenced and contributed to the development of their communities through:



INCREASED FOOD SECURITY. Youth farm businesses contributed to increased access to food across households. According to YETA's Year 5 Quarter 2 YMEL Leaders' report,⁸ some youth reported that previously they only had one meal a day without any surplus for sale; now their families eat at least two meals a day with surplus for sale. During a recent drought period, Note Enteko YA in Dokolo for example decided to sell their maize within the community instead of selling to external buyers.

CONCERN FOR COMMUNITY. As bonds between youth, adults, and community leaders matures and grows, youth increasingly are volunteering to better their communities. Youth are responding to community concerns in their free time – including helping the elderly with their gardens and other household chores; cleaning community health centers, water collection points, community pit latrines, and roads; and slashing grass and sweeping church compounds. In Kiryandongo for example, YAs helped LC1s clean roads and boreholes. These efforts encouraged young people to play more prominent roles in their communities and eventually become elected LC1 representatives, members of government Village Health Teams,⁹ and church leaders. Note Enteko YA and Rwot Kisa YA and Akek YA helped three catechists¹⁰ from St. Paul Catholic Church, St. Daniel Komboni Catholic Church, and St. Luke Eucharist Catholic Church rent and open-up land for farming. Each YA member contributed UGX 2,000 (.53 USD) in appreciation for the catechists' role in the community.

TRANSFERRING KNOWLEDGE. YETA's interventions positively influenced youth and communities alike. Community members adopted agronomic practices they learned from YETA youth including timely planting, conservation farming, and post-harvest handling. In Kiryandongo, when YETA

⁸ YMEL (Youth Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning) Leaders' reports are generated by YMEL leaders. YMEL leaders are youth leaders elected 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.

⁹ Government Village Health Team (VHT) are members of the community tasked with mobilizing communities to promote primary health care including disease prevention and referrals to trained health workers.

¹⁰ Catechists are volunteer teachers of Christianity; they catechise (teach) the faith by both word and example.

hosted Makerere University agriculture students through an internship program, intern students reported that other community members asked them to replicate the trainings they did for YETA youth and share best practices around planting crops and controlling pests.

IMPROVED INTERGENERATIONAL DYNAMICS. Prior to YETA, youth reported not being very open with adults, including their own parents. Unemployed, out of school youth were associated with theft, idleness, and gambling. As youth came together and started engaging in YETA activities, their behavior began to change. And adults reported changing their perceptions of them as well. Youth focused on developing their businesses – constructing piggery pens, planting crops, establishing milling stations – and volunteered their time to address social challenges in their communities. Young people selected champion adults, parents, and community leaders as their mentors. These mentors were critical in their success; they linked young people to resources (e.g. land, inputs, and buyers) and gave advice on how to grow their businesses.

THREATS TO GROUP COHESION AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

Youth associations' social capital is largely threatened by group attrition. YETA's average attrition is relatively low, 17%. When members leave their group, it affects group cohesion and their power to influence and work together in large numbers. Youth reported leaving their groups for a number of reasons:

- **INTERNAL CONFLICT:** Group conflicts are commonly caused by some members' reluctance to participate in group activities, asset mismanagement, not paying fines, and poor accountability/oversight of leaders. If conflicts are not resolved quickly, they can push some members out of the group.
- **ADHERING TO GROUP STANDARDS AND RULES:** In a few cases, members that failed to abide by group norms and rules were asked to leave the group.
- **POOR GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP:** Sometimes success can create problems within

groups. As group businesses grew, some YA leaders and members could not agree on how earnings should be split. There were instances of stubborn leaders who bullied other members into taking the lion share of profits. Others defaulted on loan payments entirely.

- **LOSS OF INTEREST:** Some youth simply lost interest in continuing group activities. And sometimes, husbands advised spouses to drop out of groups.
- **PERSONAL MATTERS:** Not all group attrition is due to negative reasons. Some leave their groups for life altering, positive reasons: relocation to other villages or districts after getting married; returning to their ancestral homes (especially in Kiryandongo and Masindi); a renewed interest in school, using profits from their businesses to re-enroll; and leaving groups to pursue employment in neighboring districts or in the town center.

YETA addressed attrition by:

- **STRENGTHENING GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP:** Leadership and group/cooperative governance trainings played a key role in helping leaders maintain their group membership and instill a sense of ownership, unity, and purpose.
- **MENTORSHIP:** Each group was assigned a mentor who acts as a patron to the group and is responsible for helping young people achieve their aspirations. Mentors help youth access knowledge and resources and arbitrate group conflicts. Peer-to-peer mentoring and exchange visits – where newly formed YAs meet and learn from more experienced ones – has been another vehicle for helping groups maintain their membership and preserve their cohesion.
- **ENCOURAGING VSLA FORMATION:** Engaging in joint activities more regularly contributed to reducing attrition. Agriculture production only requires group activity at certain times during the crop cycle. Saving within VSLAs however can be done year-round.

VSLA meetings are frequent, typically weekly. This means members interact more and make decisions together, regularly. Even some of those who migrate elsewhere because of marriage,

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school, or employment continue to save in their VSLAs. Though they're unable to physically attend meetings regularly, they send their contributions through other members.

When young people work together and use their social capital, they can access resources and ready markets, reduce labor costs, pursue leadership opportunities, exchange best practices, and grow their businesses. As youth demonstrate their commitment to each other and positively contribute to their communities, their relationships with parents and other adults, also changes for the better. Good governance and strong mentors are also foundational in helping youth realize the benefits of social capital. These elements in aggregate will help young people realize their aspirations and sustain their businesses long after the program ends.

Qualitative methods were largely used for this study. Data collection took a period of several weeks in July 2019, 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 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.

ABOUT THE PARTNERS



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



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.



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."



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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