

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT PROJECT

Narrative Progress Report

1 January to 31 December, 2017



This project is funded by the European Union

List of Abbreviations

ASPA	Agribusiness Services and Producers Associations
ASSET	Association of Small Scale Enterprises in Tourism
EIF	Enhanced Integrated Framework
EOI	Expression of Interest
EU	The European Union
DOA	Description of Action
GCCI	The Gambia Chamber of Commerce and Industry
GHP	Good Hygienic Practices
GIEPA	The Gambia Investment & Export Promotion Agency
GTHI	Gambia Tourism and Hospitality Institute
GTMI	Gambia Telecommunications and Multimedia Institute
GTTI	Gambia Technical Training Institute
GYCC	The Gambia Youth Chamber of Commerce
GYIN Gambia	Global Youth Innovation Network Gambia Chapter
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
ITC	International Trade Centre
ITTOG	Institute of Travel and Tourism of the Gambia
MDI	Management Development Institute
MOBSE	Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education
MOHERST	Ministry of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology
MOTIE	Ministry of Trade Industry and Employment
MOYS	Ministry of Youth and Sports
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MSME	Micro, Small and Medium Sized Enterprise
NAOSU	National Authorising Officer Support Unit (NAOSU)
NEDI	National Enterprise Development Initiative
NACCUG	The National Association Of Co-operative Credit Unions Of The Gambia
NAQAA	National Accreditation and Quality Assurance Authority
NYC	National Youth Council
PIA	President's International Awards
PSC	Project Steering Committee
SIG	Startup Incubator Gambia
TORs	Terms of Reference
UNCDF	United Nations Capital Development Fund
UTG	University of the Gambia
VDCs	Village Development Committees

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Introduction

The Youth Empowerment Project (YEP) is a four year project with a budget of EUR 11 million funded by the European Union (EU) Trust Fund for Africa and implemented by the International Trade Centre in collaboration with the Ministry of Trade, Industry, Regional Integration and Employment (MOTIE) and the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MOYS) of the Republic of The Gambia. The project started in January 2017 and was officially launched on 9 February in a high-level event in the presence of Mr. Neven Mimica, EU Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development.

YEP directly supports the development of the local economy by (i) enhancing employability and self-employment opportunities of youth, with a focus on vocational training and the creation of micro and small-sized enterprises, and by (ii) creating and improving employment opportunities in selected sectors through value addition and internationalization.

The project takes a market-driven approach and focuses on traditional sectors such as agriculture and tourism while also helping to diversify the Gambian economy by supporting “new” promising sectors including the creative and digital services industries.

This report covers the first year of project implementation including the acceleration phase (February - May 2017) and the subsequent implementation period until 31 December. It should be noted that it was initially foreseen to have a 6-month acceleration phase, but ITC, in agreement with the project partners, agreed to shorten the duration as much as possible and was able to validate the work plans by the end of May.

1. Overview of the Project

Context

The Gambia remains on the list of least developed countries. It has a small economy that relies primarily on agriculture, tourism, and remittances. While about 60% of the population is under the age of 25 years, there are high levels of youth unemployment and underemployment. Poverty and a lack of employment opportunities are among the major reasons driving an increasing number of people to leave the country.

Irregular migration flows to Europe – commonly known as ‘taking the backway’ – are putting Gambians at risk and harming the country’s social cohesion and economy. In spite of its comparatively small population of 1.9 million people, The Gambia is among the countries with the highest numbers of irregular migrants and tops the list on a per-capita basis. To address the migration movement, more jobs and opportunities need to be created at home. The Youth Empowerment Project aims to contribute to the inclusiveness of the Gambian society and to reduce migration pressures by improving the employability of youth, especially potential and returning migrants, and by creating more employment and income opportunities.

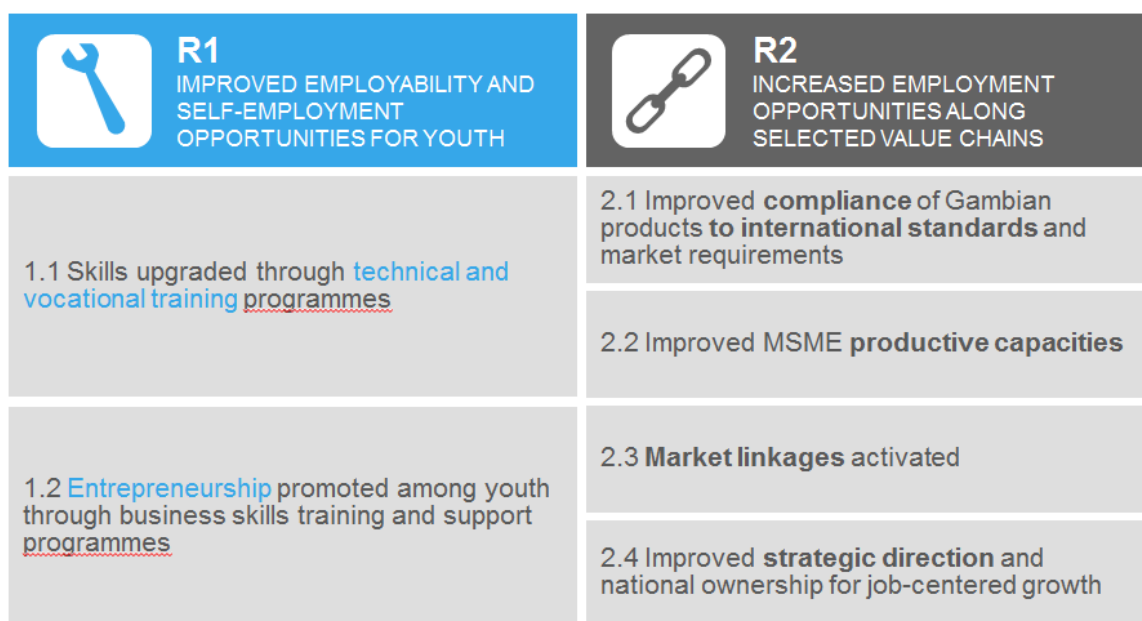
In the December 2016 elections the opposition coalition defeated long-term incumbent Yahya Jammeh in a shock-result. Jammeh initially accepted defeat but retracted his concession giving rise to a period commonly referred to as the “political impasse”. With strong international pressure and the threat of a military intervention by ECOWAS forces Mr. Jammeh accepted his election defeat and went into exile. The political dispensation under President Adama Barrow promised to reinstate the rule of law and to address the many development challenges including the unemployment crisis which is disproportionately affecting the Gambian youth.

It is difficult to determine the impact of the political change on irregular migration. While it is too early to assess the effect, the enthusiasm and positive spirit around the “The New Gambia” has brought hope for a better future to many young Gambians. A significant number of Gambians have returned to the country with the support of IOM. In 2017, close to 3000 irregular migrants have been repatriated from Libya and Niger. In addition to the growing number of backway returnees, there is an increased engagement with the Gambian diaspora which has been identified as a critical enabler in The Gambia National Development Plan (NDP 2018-2021). The diaspora accounts for seven percent of the population and contributes one quarter of Gross Domestic Product through official remittances flows alone.

YEP in a nutshell

The Gambia Youth Empowerment Project addresses the economic root causes of irregular migration by supporting youth employment and entrepreneurship. YEP is a four-year project funded by the European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa. It started in January 2017 and has a total budget of EUR 11 million.

The project takes a market-led approach to improving the skills and employability of potential and returning migrants according to demands of the job market while simultaneously creating employment opportunities along value chains. The project is structured around two results areas as illustrated below:



Implementation principles of YEP

To create synergies, effectiveness, and sustainability, ITC agreed with the country stakeholders that the implementation of the Youth Empowerment Project be premised on the following basic principles:

Market-led approach: YEP works in close partnership with the private sector and involves businesses as an advocate for change, a partner in implementation and beneficiary of technical assistance, particularly at the level of MSMEs. The market-led approach ensures that the enhancement of the skills development offering through TVETs, etc. is in line with demand-side requirements. It also ensures that the improvement of productive capacities in the target sectors is met by demand in local, regional and international markets.

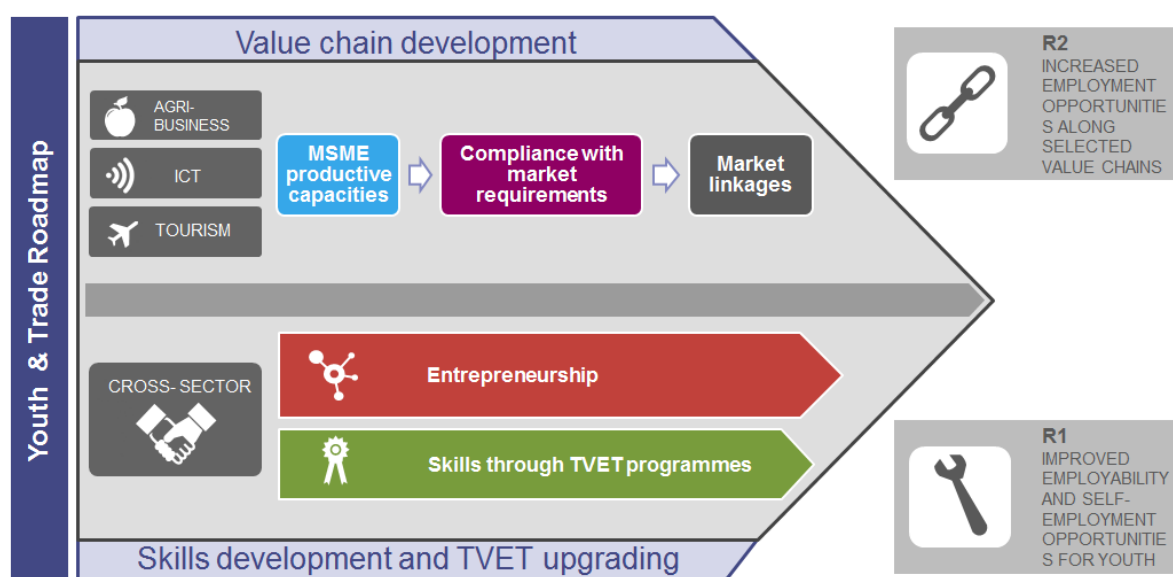
Build on existing structures: YEP seeks to leverage existing youth development systems, structures, and services and to deploy technical assistance through national institutions and human resources wherever possible. In the same vein, YEP seeks to maximize knowledge transfer and building of local capacities by involving national institutions and authorities in project activities. Therefore, the project works through a large number of implementing partners.

Youth-centred and youth-led: YEP is not only a project for youth but also by youth. As such, youth actors are empowered and encouraged to participate in the implementation and decision-making bodies of the project – whether at the level of the steering committee, in technical working groups or in general consultations.

Short-term gains and long-term benefits: In view of the specific Gambian context and given the objectives of the EU Emergency Trust Fund it matters to show quick results. This helps to create momentum but also addresses the vast expectations of the project. It is evident, however, that many of

the root causes of irregular migration, including youth unemployment, stem from structural deficiencies in the economy. Addressing these requires a long-term development approach and some of the related support measures will only show visible results several years into project implementation.

The project works simultaneously with demand and supply-side issues. On the supply side, it improves productive capacities and strengthens the soft and hard infrastructure for skills development. On the demand side, the project identifies potential, creates linkages and channels back the requirements to producers and service providers. The value chain approach helps identify economic activities which are of interest to youth and which hold market potential. The technical support extended in these value chains is complemented by the skills development and entrepreneurship work. The two work streams summarized as R1 and R2 are complementary and are expected to mutually reinforce the development gains. The graph below illustrates this logic.



2. Summary of key achievements under the various technical components

By the end of 2017, YEP has gathered momentum and is on track to achieve its objectives of creating 4000 jobs, upskilling 4000 youths and helping another 4000 youths to get access to finance. So far, the project has engaged more than 20 implementing partners in line with ITC's promise to build on existing structures and deploy expertise available in the country.

YEP finalized and circulated the drafts of the Youth and Trade Roadmap, including the Sector Roadmaps for ICT, Tourism and Agribusiness. The documents are currently being reviewed and validated by the respective sector core teams. The roadmaps include a skill gap analysis, an SME competitiveness assessment and a blueprint on how jobs can be created for youths in these sectors through a market-oriented approach.

The most recent Project Steering Committee (PSC) meeting approved the access-to-finance schemes, including the mini-grant scheme. Following a competitive bidding process NACCUG was selected as the service provider.

YEP continues to engage returnees in all training programmes. In addition, re-orientation session for 300 returnees have been completed. The project will build on these results to continue to offer services for returnees.



R1.1 Skills Development

A total number of 313 youth were trained through programmes conducted with selected technical and vocational education training (TVET) institutions as part of rolling-out skills development and training of trainers (ToT) programmes in the areas of:

- Repairing of mobile phones, laptops and satellite installations (Gambia Telecommunication and Multimedia Institute);
- Solar, satellite and CCTV installation (Sterling Consortium);
- Life skills, such as business English, mathematics, sciences and ICTs (YMCA Computer Training Centre);
- Entrepreneurship and leadership (YMCA Computer Training Centre); and
- Agribusiness, including soil preparation, animal and crop production, post-harvest handling, food processing and maintenance of tools (The Gambia Songhai Initiative).

In the tourism sector, YEP trained 30 trainers on High Impact Tourism Training focusing on hospitality delivered to GTHI and ITTOG covering topics such as customer care/service excellence, housekeeping, waiting, and kitchen practice.

The capacities of various institutions were strengthened: A Performance Improvement Roadmap (PIRM) was developed for and with the *Gambia Investment and Export Promotion Agency (GIEPA)* outlining key actions to be undertaken towards strengthening the institution and ensuring its effective service delivery. The PIRM has been endorsed by the GIEPA board. A tracer study to measure the labour market outcomes of *Gambia Technical Training Institute (GTTI)* graduates and the effectiveness of its training programmes has been designed together with GTTI staff.



In the tourism sector, YEP supported the development of a new curriculum and content manuals for 12 subjects for the Gambia Tourism and Hospitality Institute (GTHI) in collaboration with a UN-WTO consultant. The curriculum has been developed in close consultation with industry stakeholders and has been validated by the National Accreditation and Quality Assurance Authority and has been launched for the new school year at the end of 2017.

ITC also assessed the skill gaps and constraints of the textiles and garment industry and embarked on a curriculum review exercise. A new standardised curriculum has been developed. It will be tested, validated and rolled out in 2018 alongside investments in training and production equipment.

YEP developed training materials for the Gambia Entrepreneurship Academy and a pilot online training was concluded in December 2017. 203 Gambian youth enrolled in the course through ITC's e-learning platform. The "Empowered for Life" training programme on ICTs at the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) is now complemented with an entrepreneurship and leadership course and a showcase forum where potential young entrepreneurs will exhibit their business ideas. The programme targeted 50 youth.



R1.2: Entrepreneurship Promotion

The entrepreneurship component is cross-sectoral. It aims at developing the entrepreneurship support ecosystem in The Gambia in general and at supporting the sector-based initiatives of YEP.

YEP, through a Grant Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with GIEPA trained 259 youth (including 94 female) from across the country on entrepreneurship, based on the Empretec Model. The training was delivered through seven workshops (including one in a local language and one on agriculture) in all regions of the Gambia between August and December 2017.

Three regional Entrepreneurship Boot Camps including Pitching Contests were held in collaboration with Start-up Incubator Gambia from 27 November to 2 December in Basse, Soma and Bansang. A total of 77 youth participated and 22 business ideas stood out as the most innovative, commercially viable and supportive of development in their communities.

In collaboration with the National Enterprise Development Initiative (NEDI), the project organized a TOT for 10 business mentors and subsequently trained 40 youths from the provinces on “starting a business” and provided business plane clinics for another 40 youths. ITC conducted a five-day training of trainers of 15 youth on Design Thinking from 4 to 8 December, which also helped participants to develop their critical thinking, communication and presentation skills. In addition, participants developed a platform for knowledge sharing and networking.



Through the grant MOU between YEP and GIEPA, 35 Empretec Business Development Services (BDS) Advisers were trained on Financial Management and Marketing for MSMEs. YEP contracted 35 BDS Advisers through GIEPA to provide 6 months of advisory services to 150 young entrepreneurs across the country. In partnership with bridging Gaps Advisory, 15 young women are being supported through a mentoring scheme. And, under the MOU with the Gambia Chapter of the Global Youth Innovation Network (GYIN), 25 young entrepreneurs started a three-month one-to-one mentorship programme in October 2017 to improve the management of their enterprises. This was preceded by training on entrepreneurship and orientation on the programme. Improvements have already shown include registration, opening of accounts, proper bookkeeping and increase in sales.



YEP has setup a mini-grant scheme to facilitate access to finance for rural youth entrepreneurs and it is creating youth friendly products and services together with selected credit unions. The National Association of Co-operative Credit Unions of The Gambia (NACCUG) was selected as the local partner for the implementation of these initiatives. The mini-grant scheme was launched on 17 December by the Secretary General and Head of the Civil Service on behalf of H.E. President Adama Barrow during the opening of the National Youth Conference in Basse, URR.

YEP has prepared the Terms of Reference (TORs) for a mini-loan scheme to be launched in 2018.

As part of its awareness-raising work on migration and economic opportunities for youth in The Gambia, the focus of 2017 has been on returning migrants. 25 new counsellors were trained in collaboration with the National Youth Council (NYC) in serving the returning migrants and sensitizing them on available opportunities. Returnees went through a reorientation programme in six batches facilitated by NYC from October to November 2017. A weekly radio programme on entrepreneurship and migration was facilitated by the MOTIE and the project provided support to the annual May Day Sports and National Youth Conference in December 2017.



R2.1: Quality and market compliance

This component aims to address quality and food safety issues related to products and services offered by youth entrepreneurs and MSMEs. A consultative mission was conducted from 13 to 17 March 2017. Based on the consultations held with different institutions, a number of activities focusing on sensitization and training related to Quality, Food Safety and production of farm inputs were identified. These activities are being implemented jointly with three main institutions, namely The Gambia Standards Bureau (TGSB), the Food Safety and Quality Authority (FSQA) and the National Agricultural Research Institute (NARI). The approach adopted for Quality and Food Safety has been to start with a training of trainers who are being coached to conduct training for youth in the different provinces.

With the aim of sensitizing enterprises on quality issues related business opportunities, a Quality Handbook for Young Gambian Entrepreneurs and related training materials and presentations were developed by October 2017. An initial team of 20 youth trainers were trained on the basics of quality management. Four of the trained trainers were involved in subsequent roll outs. 21 trainers, including 11 young women were trained on food safety and a food safety and GHP Handbook for Young Gambian Entrepreneurs, as well as associated training materials were developed.



A National Quality Award for Young Entrepreneurs was launched. 44 youth, including 17 women, were sensitized on quality in the Central River Region and in the North Bank Region in July and October respectively. A poster and video competition on Quality were launched and a contract for production of drama on aflatoxin issues in groundnuts was awarded to a local company (Vinasha Productions). 26 youth from beach bars and restaurants, and fruit juice pressers were trained on food safety in December 2017.



R2.2: MSME productive capacities

Through stakeholder consultations and preliminary assessments the project identified a number of opportunities and income-generating activities that meet both market attractiveness criteria and relevance/suitability criteria for the youth. These include: (1) Processed Groundnut (GN) and Cashew; (2) Backyard Poultry Farming (egg and meat); (3) Local Building Materials (Compressed and Stabilized Earth Blocks/CSEB); and (4) Information and Communications Technology (ICT).

In addition, the project organized a youth pavilion at the Gambia Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GCCCI) annual trade fair which was complemented by a Youth Pitching Contest and customized coaching and mentorship support.

In order to facilitate investment, transfer of knowhow, and to support the adoption of new technologies, YEP has completed the economic and financial analyses of groundnut and cashew processing and further downstream value addition in The Gambia. Product-market combinations were selected (decorticated peanut, peanut paste, peanut snacks and candies, peanut shell briquettes, flours made from local cereals, and cashew candies and snacks targeting home consumption and the domestic market); and potential in terms of job creation was assessed. Five groundnut decorticating machines



have already been ordered and are to be imported before the end of the upcoming processing season.

Economic and financial analysis of poultry farming in The Gambia has been completed. The most viable product-market combinations were selected (live birds and eggs); key parameters to ensure viability of poultry farming in The Gambia and potential in terms of job creation were assessed.

A Technical Working Group (TWG) on Compressed Stabilized Earth Blocks production and use was set-up and a partnership was established with the Auroville Earth Institute, a renowned training institute for earth building and construction located in India. The TWG provides technical advice and support to YEP for the design of an action plan. In December 2017, 14 TWG members, including young entrepreneurs, youth groups, brick makers, engineers and architects, and contractors, participated in an intensive ten-day training programme on soil testing and CSEB production and use in India.

YEP is conducting an ICT service and access gap analysis on a national level in order to identify and quantify latent key entrepreneurship and job creation opportunities for the youth and to offer a strategic blueprint for further action by YEP in the area of ICT in The Gambia.

In terms of supporting the development a new tourism destinations up-river, the village Janjanbureh has been selected given its geographical proximity to various cultural and natural sites, existence of tourism services and youth aspiration to work in the tourism sector. YEP strengthened Hospitality services in Janjanbureh in collaboration with GTHI through training of hotels and lodges on housekeeping, bar and restaurant service. 12 youth were trained in November 2017 on guiding tours in Janjanbureh. YEP also strengthened Community-Based Tourism (CBT) services in December 2017 by training 5 youth in a Pilot master training programme on CBT.



ITC reviewed the skills and technology gaps and related constraints of the textiles and garment industry as well as the cotton sector. The analysis identified several challenges and growth constrains including access to material inputs that meet the expected standards for product development and quality; level



of available skills and provision of adequate training services, as well as relevant and quality equipment including for skills training. As a result, the project prioritized the curriculum development mentioned above. In addition, YEP has started working with industry to have a common vision with regards to training, improving the skill required and technology upgrading. In order for the Gambian textiles and apparel manufacturing industry to leap forward, there is an urgent need to enhance the adoption of up-to-date technology. At present, the technology used by training institutions in particular is

outdated and limits the range of training required to prepare the youth with the range of skills needed in the industry. To this end, ITC has initiated the procurement of a variety of sewing machines for its partner training institution President's International Awards (PIA). The equipment is expected to arrive in The Gambia early February 2018. PIA trainers will be trained on the use and maintenance of the equipment.



R2.3: Market linkages

YEP completed a rapid market study aiming at identifying key Senegalese buyers of processed groundnut and cashew, including their buying requirements and readiness to source raw products from The Gambia.

The project organized a four-day buyer/seller meeting for stakeholders of groundnut, cashew and cereal value chains at the Jenoi Agricultural Training Centre in the Lower River Region to bring together all the stakeholders (producers, traders, processors and exporters) in the relevant value chains to discuss the opportunities and challenges in post-harvest handling (including processing) and marketing of the products in The Gambia and beyond. Moreover, the event was a platform to sensitize the key stakeholders on how to maintain quality



within the various stages of the value chain, so as to meet market requirements and to create market linkages between farmers, traders/buyers, processors, and exporters.

Under the MOU with the Gambia Youth Chamber of Commerce (GYCC), YEP supported the development of the website of the institution to improve its membership drive and serve as a market linkage for its members as well as to generate income for GYCC through online marketing services.

An exhibition was held in Jarra Soma, Lower River Region in October with 43 youth exhibitors promoting their products and services, at which business linkages between them were encouraged. The exhibition was preceded by a training attended by 33 exhibitors on preparation for trade fairs on 21 October. Another capacity building workshop on Product Development for 40 exhibitors was held on 29 October.



R2.4: Strategic direction and national ownership for job-centred growth

ITC has initiated the development of the Youth and Trade Roadmap which aims to assess business opportunities to foster youth employment and to identify potential skill gaps. The roadmap design process is being developed around a series of public-private-youth consultations to bring together all stakeholders to identify the main development issues and market opportunities across the most dynamic sectors. This analytical process has also included the identification of competitiveness constraints at the MSME level through a business survey and the assessment of the main training institutions' capacities. The first part of the consultative process has resulted in the definition of a detailed list of opportunities along different value-chains which present economic sustainability, market growth opportunities and high potential for youth integration. Three priority sectors including tourism, agriculture and ICT were thus identified and validated by the PSC.

Sector development action plans for these three selected priority sectors were elaborated with a specific focus on skills gaps and requirements for youth integration into the value chains. In parallel, ITC has initiated the creation of sector core teams to reinforce project ownership and strengthen sector coordination.

In February and March 2017, YEP held a Youth and Employment Forum (100 participants, including 50 youths from various regions) and sector consultations (30 participants from public, private and youth organisations) to identify the constraints and opportunities for youth economic empowerment. In July and November 2017, three sector core teams were organized (15 participants for each consultation). The Core Team members include representatives of public and private sector, TVET and youth. The objectives of the core teams are to ensure that the interests of sector stakeholders are represented in the roadmaps and to act as a consultative and technical advisory body to the YEP Steering Committee, the MOTIE and to other national stakeholders.

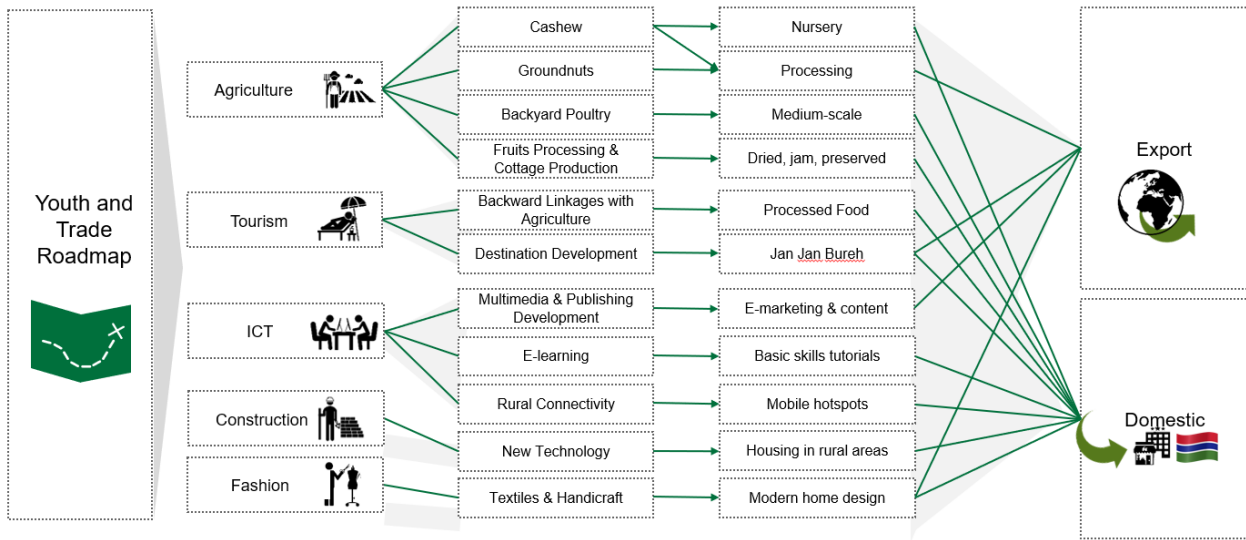


The design of the **Strategic Youth and Trade Roadmap (SYTDR)** took place during the inception phase of the project between March and October 2017. Within the context of the project, the objective of the SYTDR is to assess business opportunities, to foster youth employment and to identify potential skill gaps. The SYTDR encompasses four documents, which integrate the results of the SME Competitiveness Survey and TVET mapping. The SYTDR provides a (i) strategic implementation framework for the duration of the YEP project. The document contains the overarching national-level analysis. It serves to assess all key crosscutting national themes for youth empowerment, namely MSME competitiveness, TVET effectiveness, policies' relevance and implementation, and institutional capacities. In addition, (ii) three sector-specific roadmaps stem from this SYTDR and assess key selected sectors: agro and agro processing, tourism, and ICT. These three sector roadmaps also integrate a set of sector-specific actions plan.

The selection of criteria used in the Roadmap exercise has been done in collaboration with stakeholders and includes a number of quantitative and qualitative analytical parameters. Although the key focus of the roadmap is to support sectors that have important youth integration potential, they also need to be

economically viable to benefit the country in the long term. This is why a preliminary economic sustainability check is required, as well as youth integration criteria are employed.

Figure 1: Sector and opportunities' selection



3. Results against targets

The following table provides an overview of the principal performance indicators of the Youth Empowerment Project and the aggregate results achieved in 2017. Results capturing and monitoring at the outcome level will start at the end of 2018. For all training activities and other forms of technical and financial assistance carried out under the project, YEP assess the baseline data for income and other key variables at the level of individual beneficiaries. A midterm evaluation is planned at the end of 2018 to inform the second half of the project implementation (2019-2020).

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	Project TARGET	% ACCOMPLISHED	2017 TARGET	% ACCOMPLISHED	PERFORMANCE TRACKING			
					2017	2018	2019	2020
SO: Tackle the root causes of irregular migration through increased job opportunities and income prospects for youth								
% of TVET graduates that are employed	50	0	50	0	0			
% change income of youth supported directly and indirectly by YEP	25	0	20	0	0			
# of sustainable jobs created / jobs consolidated for youths directly and indirectly through business ventures (disaggregated by sex, age groups and location)	4000	0	1000	0	0			
R1.1 Skills upgraded through technical and vocational training programmes								
# of institutions that improved training programmes and/or operational performance	10	40%	4	200%	4			
# of youths completing a project funded technical and/or vocational training programme or apprenticeship	4000	7%	1000	26%	263			
R1.2 Entrepreneurship promoted among youth through business skills training and support programmes								
# of youths benefitting from entrepreneurship services and business advisory support incl. access to financial services	4000	18%	1000	73%	733			
# of female youths benefitting from entrepreneurship services and business advisory support incl. access to financial services	1000	20%	250	80%	201			
# of youths benefitting from awareness raising, skills development and training under project	100000	38%	25000	152%	38098			
R2.1 Improved compliance of Gambian products to international standards and market requirements								
# MSMEs sensitized on programmes on quality improvement and food safety	200	53%	50	212%	106			
# of trainers trained in quality related programmes	30	137%	7	586%	41			
# MSMEs certified in quality related programmes (2.1)	20	0	5	0	0			
R2.2 Improve MSME productive capacities								
# MSMEs demonstrating improved business practices (e.g. sales / production volumes etc.)	500	0%	125	0%	0			
R2.3 Market linkages activated								
# enterprises participating on market linkage activities	250	54%	60	227%	136			
# women owned enterprises participating on market linkage activities	100	11%	25	44	11			
R2.4 Foster strategic direction and national ownership for job-centred growth								
# stakeholders participating in sector development initiatives	80	202%	20	810%	162			
# strategic trade development action plans developed	3	133%	1	133%	4			
# of public-private youth platforms created / strengthened	3	133%	1	133%	4			

4. Selection of implementing partners

During the inception phase and during field consultations that were undertaken since the launch of the project in February 2017, the ITC team took stock of ongoing and upcoming initiatives that could fit the objective of the project. In order to have a better understanding of the capacities of potential implementing partners, 19 institutions underwent a capacity and risk assessment based on ITC's CUBED methodology. The results of the assessment inform the kinds of partnership that ITC would enter into with potential implementing partners, as well as provide an overview of the related risks and needs for capacity building support to be provided under the project.

The CUBED approach uses a comprehensive questionnaire consisting of 65 questions covering six attributes (*committed, capable and connected (C³) and resourced, relevant and recognized (R³)*), which are weighted to give scores. The assessment is supplemented by observation and desk-based research (for instance, review of website accessibility and content). The assessment questionnaires were adapted to address specific project needs including the level of connection to youth and understanding of barriers young people face in finding sustainable income and employment, level of outreach (particularly upcountry, beyond urban areas), and, for TVETs, the relevance of the curriculum and appropriateness of resources to prepare young people for employment or business.

The overriding question is whether the institutions selected to support YEP have the required level of capacity to be effective implementation partners. The answer is a qualified 'yes' – there are enough institutions of sufficient capacity to help implement this project, and, further, there is a healthy number of institutions that, with appropriate support and guidance, can form an effective network to support the objectives of YEP. The assessment identified three distinct categories of institutional capacity, in terms of readiness or maturity to deliver for YEP. Based on their scores across the six CUBED attributes, these are Ready (strong performers generally), Some Concerns (fair, but with areas of weakness that should be recognized and managed), and Challenged (at least one significant area of weakness that needs to be addressed).

Those implementing partners, which submitted robust proposals with clear rationale, objectives, KPIs matching the project objectives, as well as sustainability were given priority in the first year of the project. Implementing partners engaged under YEP providing youth-oriented support include:

1. GIEPA – Gambia Investment and Export Promotion Agency
2. NACCUG – National Association of Cooperative Credit Unions in Gambia
3. NARI – The Gambia National Agricultural Research Institute
4. FSQA – Food Safety And Quality Authority
5. TGSB – The Gambia Standards Bureau
6. GCCI – The Gambia Chamber of Commerce and Industry
7. SIG – Start-up Incubator Gambia
8. NEDI – The National Enterprise Development Initiative
9. GYCC – The Gambia Youth Chamber of Commerce
10. GYIN – Global Youth Innovation Network (Gambia Chapter)
11. NYC – National Youth Council
12. YMCA – Young Men's Christian Association Computer Training Centre and Digital Studio
13. GTMI – Gambia Telecommunications and Multimedia Institute
14. GTHI – Gambia Tourism and Hospitality Institute
15. GTTI – Gambia Technical Training Institute
16. Sterling Consortium
17. GTB- Gambia Tourism Board
18. NCAC – National Centre of Arts and Culture
19. ITTOG - Institute of Travel and Tourism of the Gambia
20. GSI – Gambia Songhai Initiative
21. ASSET - Association of Small Scale Enterprises in Tourism

In view of some delays in operationalizing some partnership arrangements, most Grant MOUs have been extended until the end of February to allow for the implementation of all activities.

Subject to the final performance assessment, the project plans to continue the engagements with a large number of existing partners in 2018. However, ITC will adopt a more transparent and competitive selection process based on priorities identified in the youth and trade roadmaps. In addition to the due diligence assessment, there will structured expression of interests in areas where multiple IPs can be considered. In the TVET sector, the project plans the establishment of a skills fund which will be the primary mechanism to identify and select partners.

5. Geographic focus

YEP identified the North Bank Region (NBR), the Central River Region (CRR), and the Greater Banjul Area (GBA) as the 2017 geographic priority regions (see illustration below). The geographic selection is based on a number of factors including the prevalence of poverty, identified economic opportunities, as well as preliminary information about areas most affected by the rural exodus. Many youth are believed to first seek employment in the capital before leaving the country through “the backway”. For obvious reasons, it is extremely difficult to get evidence and reliable figures concerning irregular migration. The work with returnees and the collection of related data is expected to help determine the question of origins to some extent. The selection of target regions in 2017 should therefore be seen as the result of pragmatic decisions rather than a profound scientific exercise. Moreover, as the project has a national scope and is expected to extend its reach to other regions as implementation progresses.

A number of activities such as sensitization efforts, business training, and access to finance will target the whole country. In NBR, the focus in 2018 will be to build ICT capacities, an entrepreneurship hub, and to strengthen agribusiness initiatives. For CRR, the focus will be on tourism and ICT while the work in the West Coast region (WCR), which is adjacent to GBA, and in GBA will target the textiles/fashion industry, as well as tourism. The aim is to continue the services and activities already on-going in the focus regions and reinforcing the offering for youth. The regional youth centres will serve as platforms for activities and their functioning will be ensured through upgrading of their structures, ICT communication tools, and of the services offered. Revenue generating activities will also be established in each target youth centre to ensure sustainability of the centres.

