Final Evaluation Report

Impact Assessment – Linking Learning to Earning Approach

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Executive Summary

Introduction
This Final Evaluation Report is hereby presented to Finn Church Aid (FCA) by Ms Halcyon Louis, international development consultant, for the contracted consultancy assignment: ***Impact Assessment – Linking Learning to Earning Approach (LL2E)***, which is hereafter referred to as an evaluation. The purpose of the evaluation was to explore to what extent, and how, LL2E activities in two countries of focus, Nepal and Uganda brought about changes in BTVET quality and the lives of rights-holders, and created actual linkages with employment and/ or entrepreneurship. In line with the terms of reference (ToR), the scope of the evaluation covered LL2E implementation from 2015 to 2017 in both countries.

Description of the Intervention: LL2E
The LL2E Approach uses market analyses and partnerships with the private sector, to facilitate BTVET delivery for youth from vulnerable communities, and establish effective linkages between trainings and the world of work. This approach is designed primarily for youth and women from the target communities, to provide them with an accessible skill set for use in earning a decent living through wage employment or entrepreneurship. Based on a funded timeframe of January 2015 to December 2017, elements of the LL2E Approach have been systematically tested in Nepal and Uganda through the Skills Training and Technical Education for Employment Programme (STEP) Nepal, and the Rwamwanja BTVET Project for Congolese refugee youth and youth from the host community in Uganda. As a follow-up to the testing of project component in both countries, as well as developing nations, FCA has developed an indicative Theory of Change for the LL2E Approach, which covers the entire programmatic cycle, from quality BTVET to gainful employment, and includes post-graduation support from the private sector for wage employment and entrepreneurship.

Methodology

Overview
The technical approach to the consultancy was participatory, and was supported by the use of utilisation-focused principles and mixed methods. All evaluation activity was also guided by a client-approved, evaluation matrix. In lieu of an impact assessment, which concentrates on outcomes achievement only, the piloted components the LL2E Approach were subjected to a comprehensive evaluation that incorporated summative (backward-looking) and formative (forward-looking) elements.

Participatory Approach
The application of a participatory approach to the evaluation was appropriate on two levels. First, evaluations that use a participatory approach to data collection and analysis are pragmatic; they allow evaluators to identify and seek input for the design and implementation the of evaluation from the main project partners, as key informants. The contribution of key informants increases the possibility for better quality data; a better understanding of collated data; more appropriate recommendations; and a better uptake of evaluation findings. Second, from an ethical perspective, key informants have a right to be involved in decision-making that affects them. A participatory approach was therefore used to conduct an evaluation that is useful; ethical; and of high quality.

Utilisation Focused Evaluation Principles
Utilisation-focused evaluation principles use participatory methods to determine what the end-users want from the evaluation, and thereby support ownership of the evaluation by its intended users. To ensure that the evaluation is owned by its intended end-users, all categories of project stakeholders who were involved in LL2E activities were engaged during the implementation of the evaluation. The intention, here, was to capture the unique experience and perspectives of all project stakeholders, who were recognised as key informants on the effects and workings of the LL2E Approach. The evaluation maintained its independence

and impartiality, however, as the consultant was responsible for the final analysis of data; the interpretation of results; and the synthesis of findings.

Mixed Methods
Mixed-methods, entailing qualitative and quantitative techniques, were used, where applicable, to ensure that: i) the methodological techniques were suitable for collecting and analysing the type of data that was required; ii) data was triangulated from multiple sources, to increase the credibility of the results generated during data analysis, to inform the development of the main evaluation findings; and iii) the results of data analysis can be used to identify lessons and develop recommendations that can be used to inform future project activities, as applicable.

Evaluation Matrix
In accordance with the ToR, including the specific evaluation questions that were suggested, the main evaluation issues were categorised under seven dimensions, which were aligned to OECD-DAC definitions; the Paris Declaration, and the Accra Agenda for Action. Based on the emphasis placed on learning within the ToR, as well as the formative element of the evaluation, two additional dimensions were incorporated into the evaluation matrix, namely lessons learned; and recommendations. The evaluation matrix was finalised in collaboration with FCA during the Inception Phase, and was included in the final Inception Report and Work Plan, as a guide for all evaluation activity

Sampling
Purposeful sampling based on a sequential approach was used to select target groups and activities for inclusion in data collection activity. The rationale for this approach was two-fold. First, one of the main limitations to the evaluation was resource scarcity (human; time; financial) which acted as a constraint to the engagement of all persons who were involved in LL2E activities in the focus countries. Second, in order to achieve the level of rigour required for a robust evaluation process, purposeful sampling was structured around the main evaluation issues, to support the generation of accurate responses to the key evaluation questions. The application of a sequential approach had the further advantage of allowing data collection to evolve in tandem with emergent findings, by creating the flexibility for additional data collection at any given stage of the evaluation. The approach to sampling placed the evaluation questions at the forefront of the sampling process, and focused on pre-defined, strategic criteria and categories, to increase the quality and accuracy of collated responses.

Methods
The evaluation was implemented over five distinct, but overlapping phases: Phase 1: Inception; Phase 2: Data collection; Phase 3: Data analysis and synthesis; Phase 4: Reporting; and Phase 5: Assignment management. The main deliverable of the Inception Phase of the evaluation was the Inception Report and Work Plan, comprising the approved evaluation methodology. Data collection involved an in-depth desk review of relevant documents, guided by the approved evaluation matrix. Key informant consultations were conducted by interview and focus group discussion, including during country missions to Nepal and Uganda. Data analysis involved cross-referencing and triangulation from multiple data sources, using descriptive, content, quantitative and comparative analyses, following which, preliminary observations and findings were shared with key informants during validation sessions. Feedback from the discussions informed further data collection, where required, and report development. Assignment management occurred throughout the evaluation, and adhered to the quality assurance procedures that have been established by OECD-DAC and UNEG.

Limitations
At the level of project design, the evaluation was challenged by resource scarcity of, in terms of the availability of human and financial resources, and the designated timeframe. Purposeful sampling based on a sequential approach was used to mitigate this limitation. At the level of evaluation implementation, data collection was challenged by the unavailability of some stakeholders for consultation. By way of mitigation,

consultations were held with key informants who were accessible during the evaluation, and document review was used to triangulate collected data.

Main Findings

Impact
Finding 1: The LL2E Approach has contributed strongly to intended behavioural and attitudinal change among graduates of LL2E project activities. Central to this development has been the facilitation of access by the target groups of youths to BTVET opportunities and follow-up support.
By creating increased opportunities for youths from vulnerable and socially marginalised communities, to access opportunities for skill-building and decent work, the LL2E Approach has contributed, in great measure, to changes in behaviour and attitudes among the target group of young persons

Finding 2: Notwithstanding the 'trickle-down effect' of the LL2E Approach on the families and communities of LL2E project graduates, the intended impact of forging effective linkages with the private sector is a work in progress.
As a direct result of facilitating increased livelihood opportunities through improved skillsets, the LL2E Approach can be seen to generate a 'trickle-down effect' on the communities where youths live as they apply their newly-acquired skills. Importantly, however, there is evidence of inadequate use of supportive resources that may be accessible through the private sector in both countries.

Relevance
Finding 3: Given its aim to link vulnerable young persons to opportunities for improved livelihoods, through BTVET and decent work, the LL2E Approach has strategic global- and country-level relevance, to complement its alignment with the FCA institutional mandate.
LL2E further directly aligns with two FCA strategic priorities, namely, R2QE and the R2L. In light of this strategic focus, LL2E can be positioned within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and national plans for sustainable social sector development in Nepal and Uganda

Finding 4: From a conceptual standpoint, the proposed LL2E programmatic design responds to the situation of unemployed youth from vulnerable/ marginalised communities. Piloted components have not, however, established adequate linkages between the trainings and the private sector for the employment of graduates/ ex-trainees.
The LL2E Approach has been designed to address the unique circumstances of the target groups of youths in each country. Evidence points, however, to the under-utilisation of private sector partnerships to support the acquisition of relevant skills and opportunities for sustainable employment by youths.

Effectiveness
Finding 5: By combining classroom training with practical application and opportunities for certification, the LL2E Approach has increased access by HKK women and youths to quality BTVET services. There is room, however, for further enhancement of trainings to increase individual marketability and improve livelihood (STEP Nepal, Outcome 1.1).
The LL2E Approach has been instrumental in the progress made by the STEP Nepal project towards results achievement. Of concern to graduates and key actors in the private sector, however, is the level of training that is provided, as LL2E project activities provide CTEVT Level I certification, which equates to basic training.

Finding 6: The need to systematically document and disseminate knowledge and experiences at project-level may conflict with the underlying objectives of LL2E. There is an equal possibility for misalignment between the approach to capacity-strengthening for BTVET delivery and the scope of LL2E (STEP Nepal, Outcomes 1.2; 1.3)
The application of the LL2E Approach to project activities has involved: i) the facilitation of a systematic process for documenting and disseminating knowledge and experiences to all concerned; and ii)

strengthened capacity of public and private TVET service providers for quality service delivery. If the objectives of LL2E is to facilitate increased access to quality BTEVT and employment opportunities, there is a question as to whether project outcomes that aim to build the capacity of TVET institutions in the country (by national seminar or other modality) are too ambitious in scope for LL2E project activities.

Finding 7: LL2E project activities have equipped Congolese youths with marketable vocational skills and opportunities for industrial training. Access to opportunities for employment and apprenticeship are highly dependent, however, on vocational specialisation (Rwamwanja BTVET Project, Outcomes 1.1; 1.2) Youths have gained access to vocational and entrepreneurial skills, industrial training and certification of training based on the use of LL2E for the implementation of project activities. There was need to re-visit the project design, however, in response to challenges faced by graduates from certain specialisations in finding work upon completion of the trainings.

Efficiency
Finding 8: The LL2E Approach is strongly supported by standard procedures for the management of results, risk and financial resources. Efficient project implementation is contingent, however, on resource availability. At the level of project management, the LL2E Approach is built on strong supportive systems for the management of risk and financial resources. The capacity of the LL2E Approach to facilitate results achievement is lacking in the area of high project staff capabilities in monitoring and evaluation.

Finding 9: The LL2E Approach provides some value for money (VfM) from a theoretical perspective. There is potential for increased VfM, however, through greater private sector engagement and increased capacity-building for implementing agencies.
The LL2E Approach demonstrates some value-for-money, in as far as resources available for LL2E project implementation have contributed to development results. There is scope to increase LL2E value-for-money, however, through closer collaboration between individual projects and the private sector, and the institutional strengthening of the LL2E project implementing agencies.

Cross-cutting theme: Gender
Finding 10: While the application of the LL2E Approach has allowed for the integration of gender considerations at project-level, participation by young women in the trainings is, at times, challenged by domestic commitments.
The emphasis placed on gender, through LL2E Approach application, draws on the FCA human rights-based approach. In spite of the fixation of LL2E on integrating gender considerations into project activities, participation by young women in the trainings is largely challenged by their family commitments.

Participation and Ownership
Finding 11: The full national ownership of the LL2E Approach through policy uptake and programme planning is a work in progress. Discussion and collaboration between government and LL2E project implementing agencies is ongoing.
Uptake of the LL2E Approach by national policy is indicative of, and of necessity, required for its long-term integration into social sector investment programming in Nepal and Uganda. The process requires ongoing efforts at collaboration between government and the project implementing agencies, in the interest of country ownership of the Approach and its related project activities.

Finding 12: The use of advocacy as a core element of LL2E has been actively pursued as a mechanism for awareness-raising within project communities. It is debatable, however, whether the potential contribution of advocacy to LL2E has been fully explored. Significantly, advocacy has been central to the implementation of LL2E activities in both project countries, given its role in awareness-raising for BTVET at community-level. While the importance of policy uptake, and advocacy in support of uptake is noted, the implementation of the LL2E Approach in Nepal and Uganda has not focused on this activity.

Sustainability

Finding 13: BTVET 'skilling' acquired through LL2E lends itself to results sustainability into the medium-term. Results sustainability into the long-term is conditional, however, on the establishment of support structures for the marketability of acquired skills

The proposed LL2E programme includes a timeline of six to twelve months of post-graduation support involving mentorship, coaching, facilitation of networks, etc. The question that emerges though, is whether the LL2E Approach is able to incorporate supportive mechanisms, to address the post-graduation needs of graduates who require additional assistance beyond the support timeframe.

Finding 14: Based on initial steps taken during project planning and implementation, there is potential for the programmatic sustainability of LL2E beyond its funding cycle. The sustainability of the approach is highly reliant, however, on policy uptake by government and/ or the private sector.

From a financial, policy and practical perspective, the sustainability of the LL2E Approach is highly dependent on intervention by government and/ or the private sector. While uptake by government and/ or private sector enterprises has the potential to sustain project activities, the re-visiting of wholly subsidised trainings is a possibility.

Conclusions, Lessons learned and Recommendations

Conclusions

Youths who participated in LL2E project activities in Nepal and Uganda gained BTEVT and inter-personal skills, and were empowered to become change-makers by setting, pursuing and achieving personal goals for improved livelihoods. The effectiveness and efficiency of the LL2E Approach into the medium to long-term, however, requires inter-sectoral collaboration that aligns with the need for the strategic linking of theoretical and practical learning to workplace earning.

Lessons learned

- The under-estimation of the role of the private sector in LL2E project design and implementation is counter-productive to outcomes achievement, including the process of linking learning to earning.
- While it is important to facilitate access to BTEVT training to individuals and communities where there is considerable lack of marketable skills to secure gainful employment, access to decent work is determined by the extent of skill marketability.
- The capacity for LL2E to support the achievement of development outcomes is increased through the strategic alignment of project-level development targets with the objectives of LL2E.
- Inadequate assessment of the needs of the labour market can lead to labour market saturation in an identified vocational specialty or situation where there are insufficient support structures to facilitate employment.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: There is need to re-visit the role of the private sector in facilitating LL2E, with a focus on the early engagement of private sector enterprises in the LL2E programmatic cycle, and the re-working of the partnership for industrial placement. (Related to Finding #2; #4; #5; #9; #11; #12; #13; #14)

Evaluation findings on the application of the LL2E Approach to development interventions have indicated that the role of the private sector is being largely underutilised. Importantly, however, private sector enterprises have emphasised that they have the potential to make a viable contribution to LL2E implementation, by providing guidance for trainee selection and facilitating on-the-job-training that responds to existing labour market needs.

Recommendation 2: The LL2E implementing agency should re-visit its approach to advocacy to incorporate the lobbying of government, or as applicable, private sector enterprises, for LL2E uptake by government policy or private sector programming. (Related to Finding #11; #12; #14)

Further to the foreseen role of the private sector (Recommendation 1), it would be essential to ensure alignment between the objectives of the programming and the mandate of the Ministry to which responsibility for oversight would be transferred. This process has added advantage for the sustainability of programming and results, into the medium to long-term.

Recommendation 3: In order to better support the participation of young women during LL2E programming, project implementing agencies should explore the establishment of child-caring facilities. (Related to Finding #10)

Young women continue to face constraints to their participation in the trainings, which arise from their domestic responsibilities, and in particular, the need to look after young children. This challenge can be addressed through the establishment of child-care facilities to accommodate the children of young mothers who are enrolled/ wish to enrol for training.

Recommendation 4: The project implementing agency, with support from the project donor, where applicable, should invest in capacity-building at the level of project management, coordination and implementation to support the establishment of efficient supportive structures for results achievement. (Related to Finding #6; #7; #8; #9)

To better enable the use of LL2E in managing for development results, it would be worthwhile for the implementing agencies, in collaboration with the project donor or oversight agency, to invest in capacity-strengthening activities in: professional development for BTVET instructors; knowledge exchange through communities of practice; M&E training for project staff; and the assessment of labour market needs. The combination of trainings/ guidance has the potential to strengthen the capacity of the implementing agency for enhanced oversight at the level of management, coordination and implementation; and the achievement of LL2E objectives.