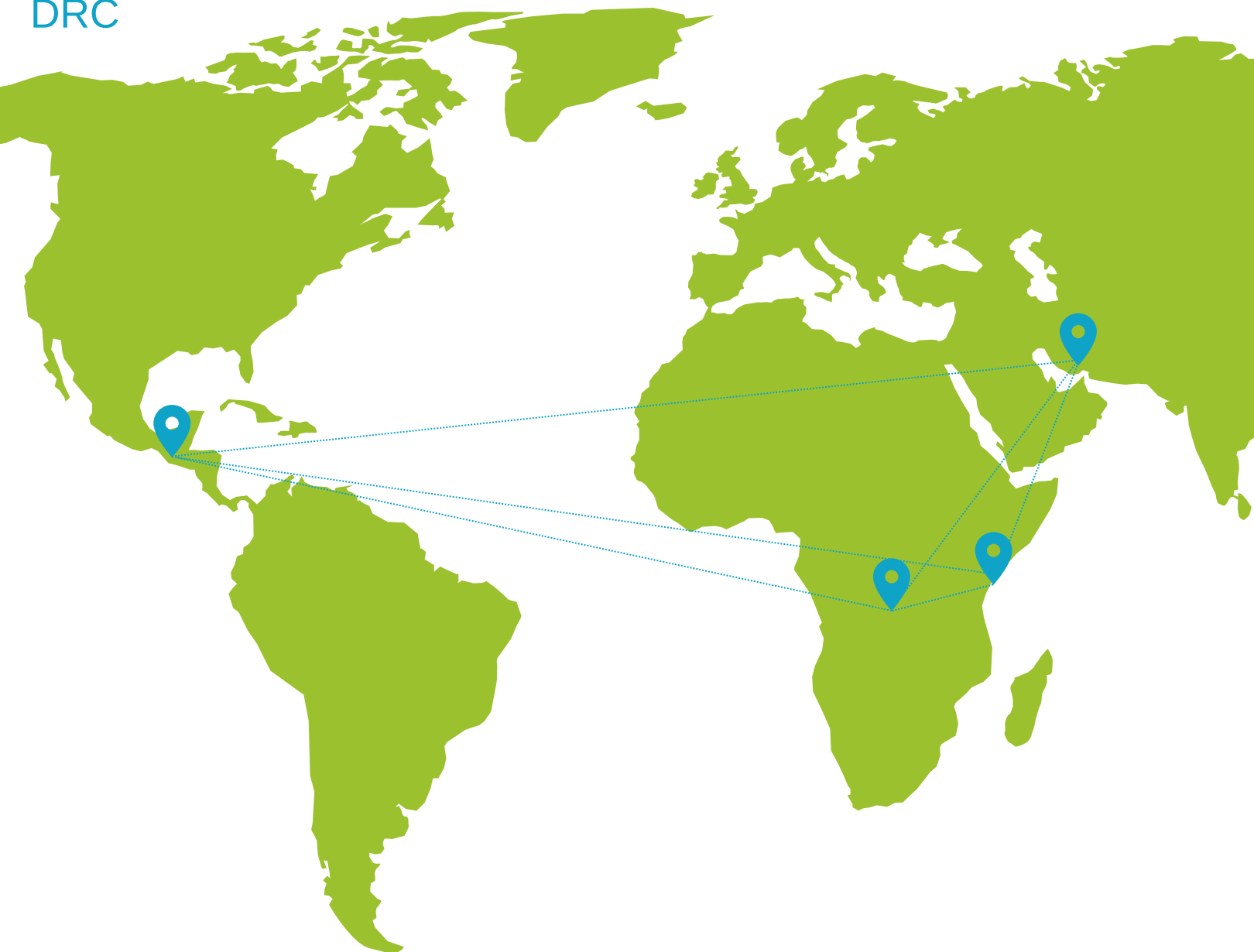




INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION IN YOUTH ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES: IDENTITIES, OPPORTUNITIES, AND BARRIERS

A meta-synthesis of lessons learned from youth-led research on youth economic opportunities in Kenya, Guatemala, and the DRC





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A meta-synthesis of localized and universal lessons learned
from youth-led research on youth economic opportunities in
Kenya, Guatemala, and the DRC

MAY 5, 2022

"Young people are the backbone of Kisumu county"

"Youth spaces are increasing and they are more hopeful for a better future."

"From the findings...gender equity helps in creating unity, understanding, peaceful coexistence...and ease of management."

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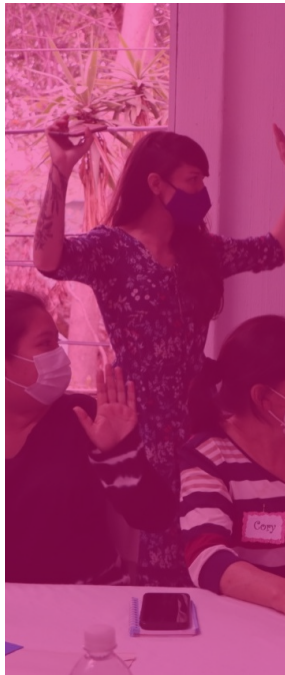
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: SIX KEY TAKEAWAYS

CERTAIN IDENTITY GROUPS FACE ADDITIONAL BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT

Identity groups that face additional barriers to employment include: **women, sexual orientation minorities, people with disabilities, Indigenous people, people who live in rural areas.** The intersection of marginalized identity groups compounds economic exclusion which are rooted and upheld by structural barriers



REPRESENTATION MATTERS

Representation of certain groups of people influences decision-making, which can lead to more effective programming. Representation can also improve the dissemination of information increasing awareness of existing programming. Equal representation is unlikely without effective dissemination of information

COLLABORATION IS CRITICAL IN OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO ECONOMIC INCLUSION

Because individual facets of identity do not alone define a person, targeting multiple facets in organizational, policy, or developmental programming is important. Collaboration among ICON participants who target different groups is important in tackling issues from multiple perspectives.

A REFRAMING OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP MAY BE NECESSARY

Entrepreneurial activities, especially from women, are not all motivated by empowerment. Rather they may represent an illusion of choice, or a last-resort option for those who can find no other source of economic opportunity.



OPPORTUNITIES ABOUND

for policy makers, program developers, and ICON participants to support individuals and identity groups in their search for economic opportunity



IMPLEMENTATION RESEARCH RESULTS ARE LIKELY BIASED

Certain populations are underrepresented in IR findings (those with low levels of education, women, people with disabilities). Programs strive for inclusivity, but at the same must create a comfortable environment for participants (i.e., women are more comfortable talking to women)



INTRODUCTION

IREX

The International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) is a nonprofit organization committed to global development and education. IREX has worked internationally with people and communities since 1968 to create geopolitical bridges and foster the exchange of scholars, teachers, students, and ideas. IREX's work is made possible with the collaboration of partners around the world with a focus on four essential areas: empowering youth, cultivating leaders, strengthening institutions, and extending access to quality education and information.

YOUTH EXCEL & ICONS

Youth Excel is a global USAID-funded program that empowers young people and youth organizations to use implementation research to strengthen local, national, and global development solutions. It supports young leaders and youth-led and youth-serving organizations around the globe to use research and data to improve their own positive youth development programs and to leverage the research and data that they produce to strengthen local, national, and global development outcomes.

Issue-Based Collaborative Networks (ICONS) are a flagship Youth Excel program model. ICONs are place-based, whole-system-in-the-room collaboratives, convened to collaboratively tackle a shared problem and goal and leverage members' work and assets. Each ICON works iteratively to address a shared cross-sectoral issue. Youth Excel's ICONs model convenes a diverse group of youth-led and youth-serving organizations (including unregistered groups), called ICON participants, and relevant adult 'allies', or stakeholders, to form a place-based collaborative.

THIS META-SYNTHESIS

This report is a meta-synthesis of the Implementation Research (IR) performed by four different ICON sites in Guatemala, Kenya, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). This meta-learning activity is centered around the themes of inclusion and exclusion in youth economic opportunities, themes identified by Youth Excel as areas of interest. This report highlights commonalities and differences across ICON groups as well as identifies contextualized learnings that are specific to certain ICON groups. The meta-learning activity focuses on technical learnings as well as process learnings within and across ICON groups.

It is important to make it clear that the content of this report is **completely intersectional**. We are using intersectionality here as described by Crenshaw (1989) in "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex" where she argues how race, class, gender, and other individual characteristics "intersect" with one another and overlap and influence how society sees an individual and reacts to them. We also present the findings in this report using a positive youth development framework, which acknowledges that youth who hold certain identities are not at a deficit, but that societal institutions and structures have different impacts on different youth.

REPORT STRUCTURE

The first section highlights findings which are split into five main sections: structural barriers, identity barriers, opportunities for support and collaboration, entrepreneurship, and IR process learning. Findings are heavily focused on the intersectional barriers to economic inclusion rather than proposed solutions. Findings are followed by proposed next steps.

FINDINGS

Findings, which were determined through a qualitative document review, are divided into seven (7) parts: Regional and Thematic Focuses, Intersectionality, Structural Barriers, Identity Barriers, Collaboration and Support, Entrepreneurship, and IR Process Learning.

REGIONAL AND TOPICAL FOCUS

This report compiles findings from ICON participants in Kenya, Guatemala, and the DRC. While the ICON groups in these three locations share a common interest in improving economic opportunities for youth and including youth voices in local policy, different ICONs have varying thematic focuses, with ICON participants generally working with one or two identity groups.

- **Kenya:** Enhancing youth work-readiness by promoting engagement between youth, HEIs, Public and Private Sector (Kisumu County)
- **Guatemala:** Economic empowerment for young indigenous women. Subthemes: local economic development and preventing gender-based violence
- **DRC:** strengthening inclusion of marginalized and vulnerable youth in workforce programming.

This report highlights five ideas: **structural barriers**, **identity-based barriers**, **collaboration and support**, **entrepreneurship**, and **implementation research process learnings** while simultaneously showing how they are influenced by and influence other themes. The intention of this report is to understand inclusion and exclusion criteria for youth economic participation, thus, the opportunities and empowerment themes were lower priorities and should be areas for future study.

There are themes that cross borders and ICONs, but human experiences are unique and the generalizability of findings presented here is limited as they are based on specific ICON contexts. As seen in **Figure 1**, which shows research themes by country, ICON IR in Guatemala was focused on themes related to gender, sexual orientation, and disability status, while in Kenya, IR addressed themes related to savings and finance, skills gaps, and unemployment. Other themes were common across ICONs, such as entrepreneurship and gender-based challenges. Themes with an asterisk, such as incarceration and addiction, were mentioned less often in the data and thus do not have designated sub-sections within this report.

Several ICON participants in Guatemala and DRC target specific populations that are at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities (for example lesbian women, indigenous women, and women with disabilities in Guatemala and deaf and hard of hearing women in DRC), whereas ICON partner organizations in Kenya tend to target broader populations (i.e., all youth with disabilities)

Findings are generally presented in a way that synthesizes findings from the three locations. However, there are instances where findings are separated by country to show that although there are cross-cutting themes in each location, there are contextualized particularities in each place that must be highlighted.

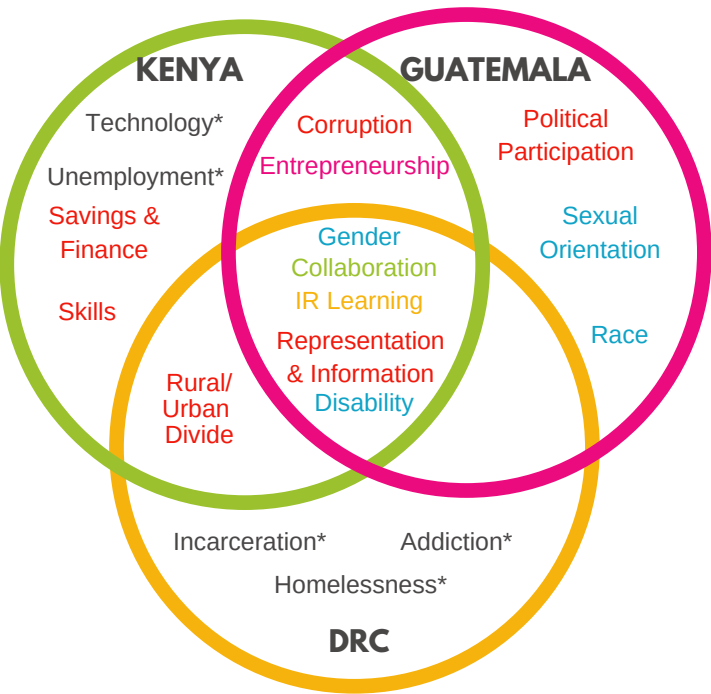


Figure 1. Research themes per region

INTERSECTIONALITY

The following two sections discuss structural barriers (financial barriers, information and representation barriers, skills barriers, and corruption), and identity-based barriers (gender, disability, and LGBTQI+). Societal structures, deeply rooted in institutions, politics, and culture, create pathways to employment for some and barriers for others. People's perceptions of and interactions with structures vary, however, those with marginalized facets of positionality experience additional barriers when interacting with structures built for those with powerful identities. For example, people with disabilities are exposed to a more significant level of difficulty in accessing funding and loans than people without disabilities. Furthermore, structural barriers also impose a stratification effect based on different identity groups. Within the community of people with disabilities, women with disabilities don't acquire the same access and resources as men with disabilities. This stratification result complicates as the participant's identification complicates; as someone possesses more societally-determined inferior positions, they are more likely to encounter accumulated barriers in accessing resources and opportunities. Thus, the development of empowerment strategies for ICON participants must be drawn from multiple perspectives to comprehend the complicated context for inclusion.

Figure 2, drawn from Sylvia Duckworth's Wheel of Power and Privilege and Kimberlé Crenshaw's study in intersectionality, represents the complexity of the intersectionality present in these findings. The spectrum of marginalization depicts people at the center as those with powerful positionalities (white, cis, male, able-bodied, urban, etc) and those at the edge with more marginalized positionalities. The identity groups wheel represents facets of identity present in this study. Finally, interconnectivity shows how every facet of identity is interrelated and crosses through various levels of marginalization and power. The combination of the three wheels demonstrates the overlapping and interconnected relationships present in this study. It does not show the true complexity of the intersections, however, it does demonstrate the many moving parts.

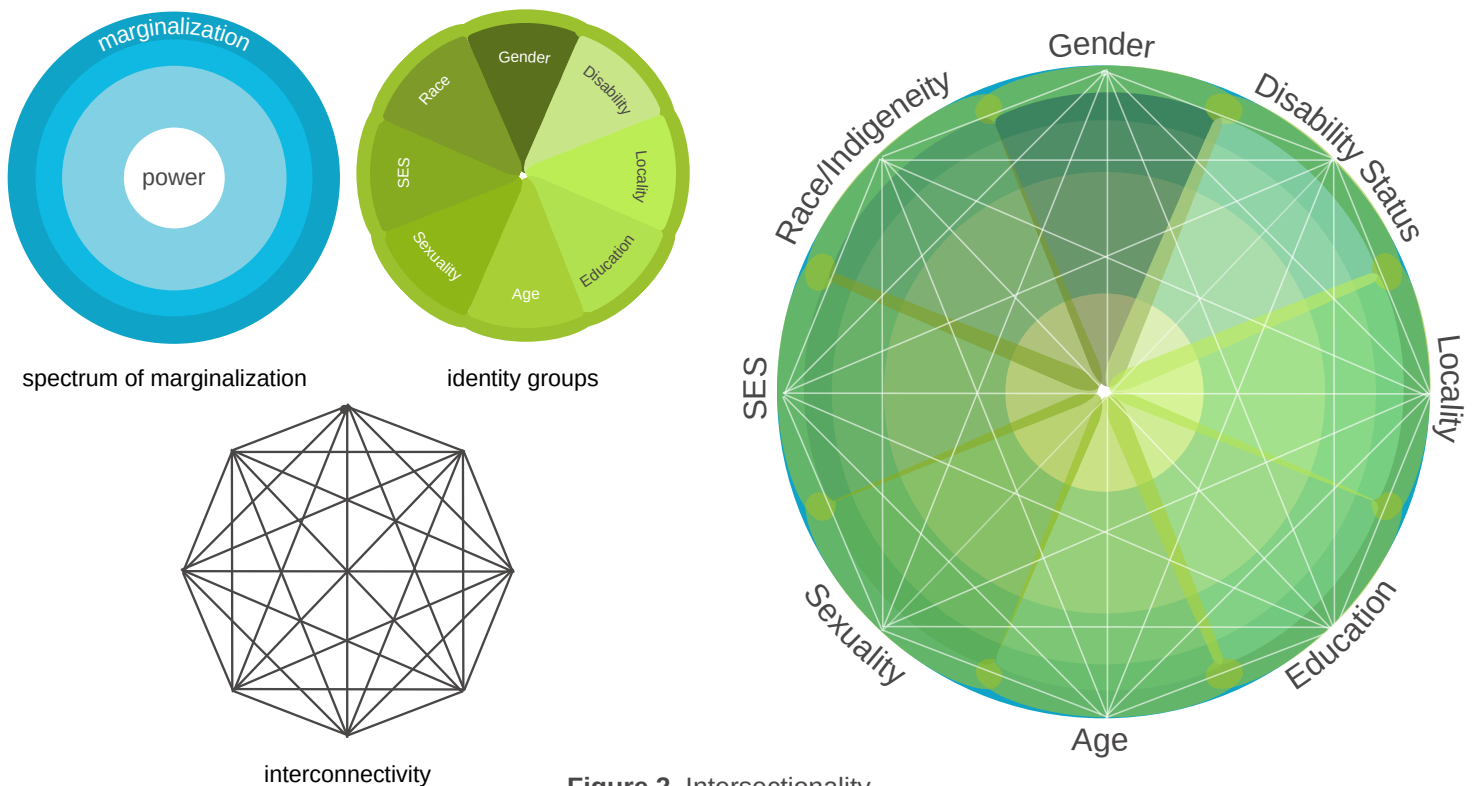


Figure 2. Intersectionality

STRUCTURAL BARRIERS

This section highlights institutional barriers: finances, information, representation, corruption, and skills

REPRESENTATION

Visión Legislativa (Guatemala) found a link between access to finances, education, and participation in politics, and that rural populations are less represented than urban populations. They also found that **Guatemalan women are less politically represented than men** and too few mechanisms exist to motivate them to participate. In Kenya, Youth Alive noted there is a misconception among more powerful groups that equal representation exists.

Participation in politics or public events is not a priority among youth in Kenya or Guatemala. APAZ, in Guatemala, noted youth are disillusioned or unmotivated to participate due to stigmatization by institutions or feel their views are not represented regardless of attempts to participate.

In Kenya, **older adults do not believe youth have political or leadership skills and do not involve them in decision-making**, even decisions about youth policies (Youth Alive and Bread Power), Technical and Vocational Education and Training programming (Sustainable Rural Initiatives), budget, or project design and identification (IGRA Kisumu). Youth are just there to “rubber stamp the existing document.” In both Kenya and Guatemala older adults refuse to “let go of the baton” (Visión Legislativa, Guatemala). This has led to ineffective programs (for PWDs) that waste government funds because programs ignored youth opinions in earlier stages (Youth Alive Kenya & Bread Power, Kenya).

“Youth are not part of VET decision making locally.”

— Sustainable Rural Initiatives, Kenya

los jóvenes no participan en espacios políticos porque se les considera con falta de aptitudes y experiencia.”

(youth do not participate in political spaces because they are considered to be lacking in aptitudes and experience.)

— Visión Legislativa, Guatemala

KEY FINDING #1: REPRESENTATION MATTERS

Equitable representation influences decision-making, which can lead to effective programming. Representation can also improve the dissemination of information increasing awareness of existing programming. Equal representation is unlikely without effective dissemination of information

INFORMATION

Equitably distributed information on resources, support, and programs for youth is limited. In Kenya and Guatemala, **programs for women, PWDs, sexual orientation minorities, rural populations, unemployed/ underemployed youth, and loan seekers exist, but youth do not know** about the policies, laws, or programs.

Sources of information are not public knowledge, only shared with specific groups, not consistently maintained or shared, or disconnected from potential beneficiaries. For example, women have less access to information spread technologically. In Kenya, Bread Power and Youth Alive surveyed for recommendations on how policies could support increased youth employability, and respondents answered with increased awareness. Even advocacy organizations do not share information across projects. Arise and Shine in Kenya said, “the different categories...are not in collaboration. Every stage...works on their own groups.”

Many organizations aim to disseminate information more effectively, systematize/digitize the spread of information, or build capacity to share information.

“Information...does not reach the masses”

-Youth Alive!Kenya

“la mayoría de familias no tiene conocimiento de cómo la municipalidad puede apoyarles como familia”

(the majority of families do not have knowledge on how the municipality can support them as a family)

-Enseñame a Volar, Guatemala

STRUCTURAL BARRIERS

FINANCIAL

In Kenya, ICON partners, including YWCA, Tinada, and SRI found that youth, in general, don't have enough capital assets to support them through education and civic participation. Strict terms and high-interest rates of microfinance institutions also discourage youth from getting loans while deficient information availability limits their access to microfinance support. For the public sector in Kenya, there is rarely government financial assistance for empowerment programs that were already undertaking an unfriendly economic environment.

PWDs, youth in rural areas, women, and those in the LGBTQIA+ community face additional challenges in accessing funds. PWDs are at a higher risk of falling into debt (Njema Disability Self-Help Group), and there is mistrust of women to handle finances (Kisumu IRGA).

In Guatemala, bureaucratic processes prevent youth from accessing formal jobs, leading to informal jobs that are underpaid instead. (Acción Social Maíz) Current empowerment policies not only fail to address the financial barriers, but are also deficient in developing clear budget allocation, and some even lack adequate funds to be fully implemented.

"79% of youth in...small, and medium enterprises have difficulties accessing loans and grants."

— Tinada, Kenya

"Women...in rural centers lag behind in accessing financial resources...spend more time in domestic work...does not generate revenue... husband becomes entitled to loans/financial facilities which denies female population opportunities..."

— Kisumu IRGA, Kenya

SKILLS

The lack of marketable, digital, and soft skills among youth is a common concern. There is a discrepancy between skills taught to students versus skills desired by employers, as well as training offered to different identity groups.

AMUDIQ, in Guatemala, found women often have skills, but do not know the name of those skills and thus cannot market their capabilities. Acción Social Maíz in Guatemala and Bread Power in Kenya found employed youth often do not work in the same sectors in which they were trained or acquired education. Youth also struggle to write CVs, talk about their experiences and skills during interviews, prepare themselves emotionally, and build confidence before interviewing. Benefance Congo and Ajalsi **noted there is a gap of skills training opportunities for single mothers, women with disabilities, and incarcerated individuals.** In Kenya, youth struggle in finding useful training or any training at all, and developing digital and soft skills. **Women and youth in rural areas, in particular, lack training opportunities and digital skills (IRGA Kisumu)** and may view them as unnecessary (Dala Spaces)

"...more than half of young single mothers find it difficult to access the desired job due to a lack of skills and knowledge"

— BENEFANCE CONGO, DRC

"...female youth from rural areas have a negative perception that digital skills are a domain for men, thus are reluctant in becoming digitally literate."

— Dala Spaces, Kenya

CORRUPTION

In Kisumu County, corruption is a barrier to economic inclusion. Youth have been asked for bribes when job seeking instead of being evaluated based on their competence. Often, nepotism, tribalism, and cronyism appear under the guises of "connections" and "networks", which contributes to an unfair selection of talent.

"...close to 50% of the respondent graduates talked about...encounters with extensive corruption in the form of unfairness, bad governance, and tribalism in their search for jobs..."

— Kisumu IRGA, Kenya

IDENTITY

Different identity groups experience institutional structures differently. Positionality affects youths' inclusion in economic participation due to societal structures in place. This section explores the barriers different identity groups, gender (with a focus on women and girls), people with disabilities, and members of the LGBTQI+ community, encounter when seeking economic participation.

GENDER

KENYA

Women lack opportunities to **build skills, including basic skills such as digital skills**, that would allow them to enter the labor market. It is also believed that certain skills, like technical skills, are not suitable for women. A survey from SRI in Kenya shows that up to 60% of female respondents have linked their low enrollment in technical courses to negative community perceptions of girls taking technical courses.

When women seek job opportunities, **they are restricted by cultural norms that stigmatize their social identities**. On top of that, women encounter gender-based discrimination and gender gaps in the workplace when they are exposed to fewer opportunities than their male colleagues (IRGA of Kisumu). Additionally, Steve Wonder found that **sexual favors and demands often appear** when women are seeking resources and opportunities.

DRC

The most salient issue for women in DRC is their limited opportunities in labor fields outside of cutting, sewing, trading, and baking/cooking due to the perpetuation of stigma and societal gender norms. (AJALSI & Benenfance Congo)

Young single mothers particularly stand out in gender empowerment programs in DRC. Other than needed training for entrepreneurship, the group faces social stigma. Gender discrimination is also reflected in underprivileged groups. For example, homeless men are more easily employed than homeless women (IGNITUS).

"...more than half of young single mothers no longer live at home...are humiliated and chased away after they become pregnant. This shows...these young single mothers are marginalized and stigmatized."

— BENENFANCE CONGO, DRC

GUATEMALA

Gender-based violence, sexual violence, gender roles & norms, barriers imposed by these norms were discussed by participants. Kajib Kawoq found gendered barriers are present among the **LGBTQIA community and imposed by structural barriers** (i.e., homophobia causing limited access to jobs and information). Discussion on **masculinity among rural communities is still taboo**. Gender barriers are strongest in rural areas and men are unable to express themselves and participate in gender-related discussions. Women who have behaviors considered "masculine" are ostracized in their communities. The majority of interviewed men by Oxlaju'j Noj acknowledged gender violence is mostly against women despite not recognizing that men who perpetrate it.

"Regardless of the innumerable and progressive labor policies, legal and governance frameworks in place today by the government, men still participate and are compensated more in the labor force and have increased opportunities for participation in the political and economic spheres."

— Kisumu IRGA, Kenya

DISABILITY

People with disabilities (PWDs) face discrimination in Guatemala, Kenya, and DRC. Not all PWDs face equal discrimination, however. **In both Kenya and Guatemala, youth with physical disabilities or disabilities that are not noticeable are treated better by society and are more likely to be supported and to get employment than youth with visual and auditory disabilities.** People with severe and multiple disabilities suffer worse discrimination.

Discrimination makes it difficult for PWDs to compete for formal jobs because **employers often don't believe that PWDs can perform as well as able-bodied youth.** When PWDs are able to get employment opportunities, they often take on invisible tasks such as dishwashing. In Guatemala, the organization AMUDIQ also found that discrimination is worse for female PWDs and is the main cause of unemployment for female PWDs in the region.

Along with discrimination, PWDs face structural barriers associated with inaccessible public infrastructure. Workspaces are often designed without the interests and needs of PWDs in mind and lack assistive devices. Structural barriers within education also make it difficult for PWDs to stay in school and get higher education degrees, which makes it even more difficult for PWDs to compete for formal work opportunities.

While most of the research focuses on disability barriers, one group in Guatemala found that the female PWDs that they interviewed had high self-esteem and were comfortable with themselves even though they face societal discrimination. **They don't see their disability as a problem. To them, society is the real barrier.**

"PWDs with physical/mobility disabilities have greater ability to access employment opportunities as opposed to those with other forms of disabilities."

- Tinada Youth Organization,
Kenya

"La oportunidad de empleo en las personas en condición de discapacidad es escasa, la mayoría de patronos tienen el pensamiento que una persona en condición de discapacidad no podrá cubrir las necesidades que exige el puesto vacante"

(The opportunity of employment for people with disabilities is scarce, most employers think that a person with a disability will not be able to cover the needs required by the vacant position)

- AMUDIQ, Guatemala

“ casi todos concordaron en que al final es una barrera que la sociedad llega a formar con la actitud con la que interactúa con una persona con discapacidad, "es una barrera es una barrera tanto actitudinal, una barrera en cuanto a la arquitectura, una barrera en cuanto a oportunidades para muchas situaciones de la vida de las personas" ”

(Almost everyone agreed that in the end it is a barrier that society forms with the attitude with which it interacts with a person with a disability, "it is a barrier, it is an attitudinal barrier, a barrier in terms of architecture, a barrier in terms of opportunities for many situations in people's lives")

- Enseñame a Volar, Guatemala

LGBTQIA

Findings on barriers to economic inclusion rooted in sexual orientation were only mentioned in Guatemala. Sexual orientation was often mentioned in the same excerpts as stigma, more so than with other identity groups. Vidas Paralelas noted that the **lesbian and bisexual women** they conducted focus groups with in Guatemala feel comfortable and happy with themselves, however, society is less accepting. The women share their sexual orientation with very few people, many of whom are supportive, but inevitably face bullying, isolation, and silencing while the discussion of (their) sexuality is taboo. Societal ideas and stigma, thus, influence lesbian and bisexual women in their search for economic inclusion.

This contributes to and is contributed to by society's perception of homosexuality and limited information about sexuality in the general public. Thus, when someone's sexuality is known, their job opportunities are limited, as well as their rights. They are also often ridiculed and physically attacked.

Notably, sexual orientation minority status was *never* mentioned in documents from Kenya and DRC. Statistically, sexual minority people live in communities where the Kenyan and Congolese ICONS are located, however, which lead us to conclude that this topic is likely *highly stigmatized* in these locations, so much so that ICON groups have not yet approached the subject.

"Guatemala aún no esta listo para manejarse bajo el respeto hacia las personas de la diversidad, lo cual provoca que existan exclusiones en el ámbito laboral, al ser un país muy machista y conservador"

(Guatemala is not yet ready to manage itself/ behave with respect for people of diversity, which causes exclusions in the workplace, as it is a very macho and conservative country)

— employer interviewed by Vidas Paralelas asked whether workplaces accept sexual orientation minorities

"...me han ofrecido hasta golpes incluso me han golpeado tuve una mala experiencia"

(they have even offered me blows, they have even beaten me, I had a bad experience)

— Kajib Kawoq, Guatemala

"El punto de vista de una persona heterosexual de esta manera tener penquna idea de como realmente ve la sociedad a la poblacion LGBTQIA"

(the point of view of a heterosexual person in this way to get a little idea of how society really sees the LGBTQIA+ population)

— Vidas Paralelas, Guatemala

KEY FINDING #2: CERTAIN IDENTITY GROUPS FACE ADDITIONAL BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT

Identity groups that face additional barriers to employment include:

- **women**
- **sexual orientation minorities**
- **people with disabilities**
- **Indigenous people**
- **people who live in rural areas.**

The intersection of marginalized identity groups compounds economic exclusion which are rooted and upheld by structural barriers

RACE

There were limited findings related to race in ICON documentation. However, indigeneity was briefly mentioned as a barrier in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala among women as an added barrier to economic inclusion. One organization, RIDER, found Indigenous women who spoke Mayan rather than Spanish did not have the same access to information. Vision Legislativa noted illiteracy is an issue. According to ASOGTURC, indigenous women feel discriminated against and have experienced physical and verbal violence while attempting to work at markets in Quetzaltenango.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND GENDER

In Kenya, every time entrepreneurship was mentioned alongside gender, **the need for more support opportunities for ventures led by young women** became evident (Bread Power, Kenya).

In Guatemala, the **lack of resources** directed to women's enterprises was obvious. In addition, the lack of physical safety (and safety nets) for women to run their businesses. According to ASOGTURC, **women are at risk and are psychologically and physically abused** by men at their points of sale.

In the DRC, IR focused on young women's **opportunities to learn and create their own businesses**, particularly single mothers (BENENFANCE CONGO).

ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND DISABILITIES

In Kenya, when entrepreneurship was related to any kind of disability, access to funding and opportunities for this population to thrive were key concerns. A factor that influenced the lack of funding for disabled Kenyans that were interviewed was the lack of knowledge in accessing funding options. It is not that they are not interested in improving their soft and hard skills and going after better opportunities, **they just didn't know how to do it** (YWCA and Bread Power).

ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND OPPORTUNITIES

In both Kenya and Guatemala, entrepreneurship and opportunities were discussed as **job types, opportunities, and as an escape from unemployment** (Kajib Kawok, Bread Power, and Youth Alive Kenya). Kajib Kawok found the importance of funding opportunities to invest in self-owned businesses and the barriers youth encounter in accessing those funds. **Public policies to support new ventures** guided by community participation was also seen as essential in supporting entrepreneurs (RIDER). In the DRC, mentioned opportunities were related to capacity building for arts, crafts, and entrepreneurship (Peace Building Team).

KEY FINDING #3: A REFRAMING OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP MAY BE NECESSARY

Entrepreneurial activities are not all motivated by empowerment, rather they may represent an illusion of choice or a last-resort option for those who can find no other source of economic opportunity. When envisioning support, this mindset may be more helpful for those working for themselves.



ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN DEVELOPING CONTEXTS

To be able to understand the ICONs perspectives on entrepreneurship we need to take into account the political, social, economic, and cultural background of the analyzed situations and experiences. When it comes to entrepreneurship applications in the DRC, Kenya, and Guatemala, entrepreneurship represents their last chance and not one of their options to thrive in life. Essentially, to understand what they understand by entrepreneurship, we need to understand the choices these people have access to.

COLLABORATION

IR findings show that collaboration has many benefits, like helping to **build trust** and to **disseminate and share information** (Nyalenda Bread Power, Kenya); to **create networks of mutual support** between already existing groups (Arise and Shine, Kenya) and people with shared interests, skills, and capabilities (RIDER, Guatemala); and to **create public awareness** around different issues (Wise Kenya). RIDER in Guatemala also notes that collaboration can help with **sustainability** and **efficiency**, something they are hoping to leverage through the creation of female entrepreneur cooperatives.

ICON partner organizations state the importance of collaboration in overcoming challenges and addressing larger issues together. In Kenya, Tinada Youth Organization and the Njema Disabled Self-Help Group used their IR findings to create a call to action for government and private sector actors to work together to improve inclusion of PWDs in economic opportunities. In Guatemala, Red Las Niñas found that local leaders think that collaboration is crucial in order to intervene in cases of gender-based violence and raise awareness around the issue. In the DRC, Ignitus found that collaboration can help to lighten the weight of challenges and barriers faced by any one individual organization.

Overall, organizations can accomplish more when they work together to tackle larger issues holistically. Because individual facets of identity do not alone define a person, targeting multiple facets in organizational, policy, or developmental programming is important. Collaboration among ICON participants who target different groups is important in tackling issues from multiple perspectives.

KEY FINDING #4: COLLABORATION IS CRITICAL IN OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO ECONOMIC INCLUSION

Because individual facets of identity do not alone define a person, targeting multiple facets in organizational, policy, or developmental programming is important. Collaboration among ICON participants who target different groups is important in tackling issues from multiple perspectives.

PARTNERSHIP & SUPPORT

ICON organizations in **Kenya** were very incisive about the need for support for employment. Another important topic that was brought up was their demand for the government to develop skill training programs for the youth in order to facilitate them with job opportunities.

For ICON organizations in **Guatemala**, the discussions were around the availability of financial and emotional support for women, training, and access to policies and opportunities that would give them this

For ICONS in the **DRC**, support for homeless and incarcerated youth, the need for training centers, and access to technical and financial resources were appeals made for youth support.

KEY FINDING #5: OPPORTUNITIES ABOUND

for policy makers, program developers, and ICON participants to support individuals and identity groups in their search for economic opportunity

IR LEARNINGS

The findings presented on the next two pages focus on IR process learnings – what the ICON participants learned from engaging in the IR process itself.

BIAS

ICON participants make decisions about who they select to participate in their surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions. These decisions can create biases in the information that ICON participants collect, analyze, and report. For example, one of the ICON groups in Guatemala, Vidas Paralelas, interviewed mostly people with higher education degrees on themes related to sexual orientation, so the information they collected may not be generalizable to the broader public.

Some ICON group participants noticed their data was biased and proposed solutions to correct for these biases. ICON group participants in Kenya, for example, noticed that they did not have equal gender representation in their initial round of interviews and focus group discussions and decided to deliberately seek out women so that they could have more gender equality (Tinada). Likewise, in Guatemala Vision Legislativa noticed that their research had mostly involved urban youth, so in their second round of IR they were intentional about incorporating rural respondents.

How focus group discussions are designed can also produce bias. In Guatemala, Oxlaju'j Noj' found that men are more comfortable talking about gender, self-care, and sexuality when they are around women than when they are around men due to stigma and stereotypes associated with these topics. In Kenya, YWCA found that women tend to contribute less when there are male participants present compared to when there are only female participants. **Overall, if IR respondents are not comfortable during the IR process, that will affect the information that is generated and can bias the IR results.**

OWNERSHIP

Acción Social Maíz in Guatemala, trained 18 youth as data collectors who were then able to survey five people each, giving a total of 120 survey respondents. This inclusive approach was a great way for ICON participants to share their knowledge and engage more youth in research, data collection, and survey methods. This sort of approach could be replicated in other ICONS as well to expose more youth to the IR process, but compensation should also be considered.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONNECTIVITY

LakeHub, an anchor partner in Kenya, notes that the ICON activity allows participants to be teachers and learners at the same time and that everyone learns from each other and finds solutions for their problems. Data from Kenya suggests, however, that organizations generally focus on their own IR work and do not always understand what other ICON organizations are doing. This presents an opportunity for more connectivity within the ICON activity itself. A group feedback session in Kenya also recommended that ICON participants could follow up and report back on their IR activities to their communities.

KEY FINDING #6: IMPLEMENTATION RESEARCH RESULTS ARE LIKELY BIASED

Certain populations are underrepresented in IR findings (those with low levels of education, women, people with disabilities). Programs strive for inclusivity, but at the same must create a comfortable environment for participants (i.e., women are more comfortable talking to women)

IR LESSONS LEARNED FROM KENYA

COMMON IR CHALLENGES



- Participants expecting some form of compensation for their participation

- Raising unrealistic expectations - participants think that their participation will lead to future opportunities



- Scheduling difficulties
 - Key informants and many of the youth work during the day
 - Harder to get female respondents due to their daily routine schedules

- Participants show up late to interviews or don't show up at all



- Suspicion among participants - participants wonder how the research will be used

- Participants want to know what the result of the IR process will be



PROPOSED SOLUTIONS



Have letters of permission from local government administrators on hand during data collection



Clarify the purpose of the ICON group, explain the IR process, and address unrealistic expectations with participants before participation



Be flexible and schedule around participants' availabilities



Schedule more interviews than your targeted goal - that way you still meet your target even if some participants don't show up

FUTURE STEPS



Read & Analyze

1

Read and qualitatively analyze documents from Iraq and DRC using outlined methodology



Common Themes

2

Find common themes in Iraq and DRC documents



Synthesize

3

Synthesize findings with those from Kenya and Guatemala presented in this report



Reframing

5

Reframe analysis to focus on collaboration and opportunities, and pathways forward



Primary Data

6

Continue research through primary data collection

Methods:

This was a document review qualitative study using 350+ documents including Youth Excel ICONs annual reports, quarterly reports, programmatic one-pagers, shareback presentations and reports, and qualitative and quantitative raw data from Kenya, Guatemala, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The purpose of this activity was to find common and repeated themes in ICON participants' implementation research on youth economic inclusion and exclusion.

Resources:

Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989(1), 139-167.