



care Creating Impact through Youth Skills & Workforce Development

Globally, an estimated 282 million young people (aged 15-24) are not employed, in education, or in training (defined as NEET),¹ and young people are three times as likely as adults to be unemployed.² Nearly 75% of the world’s 1.8 billion young people lack the skills needed for the labor market.³ Strong economies hinge upon youth having the skills to secure meaningful, well-paid work. CARE’s programs help young people succeed in jobs, entrepreneurship, and ongoing career learning. CARE provides comprehensive strategies that support and collaborate with national governments, employers, educators, parents, and youth to develop the workforce for today and tomorrow. We build our programs to connect young people with mentors, training providers, and employers. We train youth in soft skills (such as critical thinking, time management, decision making, self-confidence, and others), financial literacy, and market-demanded technical-vocational skills to meet the needs of the labor market.

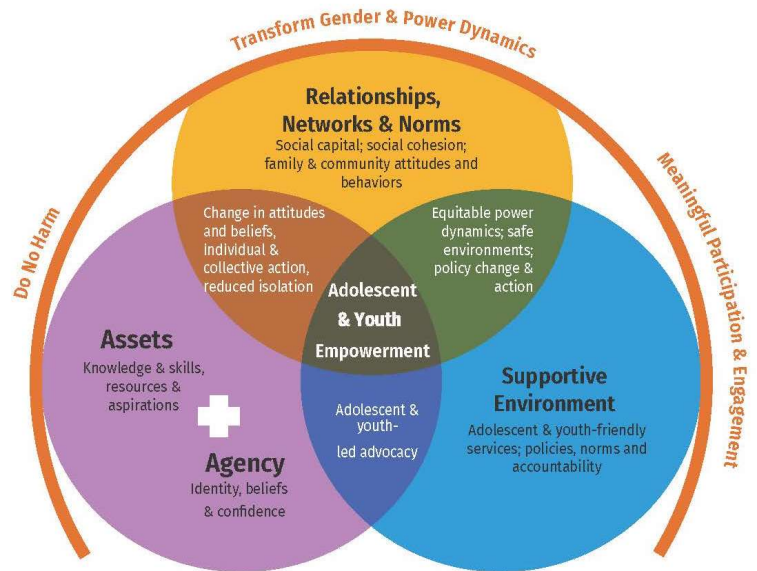
Decent work & economic growth **22m**
 People in 67 countries increased their economic empowerment and dignified work

17.1m people supported to join community savings groups – 78% women

CARE’s youth skills & workforce development programs primarily support Sustainable Development Goal 8 - Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth. Since 2020, **CARE’s programs have supported 22 million people in increasing their economic empowerment** and participation in dignified work in 67 countries.

CARE’s Adolescent & Youth Empowerment Framework

Guided by the Positive Youth Development (PYD) principles, we work to improve quality education and inclusive skills development using gender transformative and inclusive approaches. To do so, we strengthen capacity at the individual, community, and systems levels, partnering with governments and the private sector. Our approach is designed to create multiple pathways for young people as they transition into adulthood. It empowers young people to launch, lead, or scale microenterprises and engage in employment opportunities.



CARE's Adolescent and Youth Empowerment Framework

¹ ILO (2022) *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2022*, pg.27

² [World Economic Forum, 2021](#), accessed on April 11, 2024

³ [UNICEF, 2022](#), accessed on April 11, 2024

What drives positive skill development outcomes in developing contexts?

Over its 75-year history, CARE has learned that the following factors are critical in driving improved outcomes in skill development:

Improve Education and Learning Outcomes

Strong education systems where children and youth learn foundational skills are critical for equipping young people with the skills needed for and transition to self- or wage employment. We facilitate strategic partnerships between education systems, the private sector, and community groups to improve early grade reading, numeracy skills, and primary and secondary school retention. In **India**, CARE works with state Departments of Education and the private sector to boost equitable acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills in 212,128 primary schools through the USAID-funded [India Partnership for Early Learning \(IPEL\)](#). In **Somalia**, CARE supported Ministries of Education at federal and state levels to strengthen teacher training and coaching systems, increasing adolescent girls' reading comprehension skills by 18 percentage points and numeracy scores by 21 percentage points.⁴ In **Ghana**, CARE's USAID-funded [Strengthening Accountability in Ghana's Education System \(SAGES\)](#) is providing technical assistance to the Ministry of Education to roll out its Education Accountability Framework at institutional and school levels, boosting learning outcomes, attendance, and retention. In **Rwanda**, CARE's Start Small program worked with the Ministries of Education and Gender to [connect 72,079 students to mentors](#) to increase retention and incorporate financial literacy and youth savings in lower secondary school, reaching 68% of the students in targeted areas.



Foundational literacy class in India

Expand Training in Critical Soft Skills and Hard Skills

Employers worldwide struggle with job seekers lacking soft skills such as critical thinking, decision-making, problem-solving, communication, leadership, and workplace etiquette. According to a LinkedIn survey in 2019, 92% of employers say soft skills are as important as or more important than hard skills. Young entrepreneurs also often lack the vision and planning skills to set up businesses, soft skills to attract and retain customers, and higher-order skills to solve problems and engage in lifelong learning. Recognizing this need, we support market-driven holistic training that includes both 'hard' and 'soft' skills, equipping young people with the varied skills needed to excel.



Non-formal education in Somalia

In **Somalia**, the USAID and FCDO-funded [Adolescent Girls' Education in Somalia](#) (AGES) program provided a non-formal education course to 54,233 vulnerable female youth ages 15-25 in conflict-affected urban areas. The course combined **foundational skills** in literacy, numeracy, and financial literacy; **social-emotional skills development** to develop their vision, organization, self-confidence, voice, decision-making, and ability to plan and conduct civic action; and linked participants to **economic empowerment and workforce development** opportunities, including savings groups, financial institutions, and apprenticeships. AGES linked 1,577 youth graduates from non-formal education courses to apprenticeships with local businesses. These interventions have contributed to 29% of the female youth graduates being

⁴ Consilient (2023) *Adolescent Girls' Education in Somalia: Midline Evaluation, Round 2*, pg.130; pg.135

employed/self-employed within six months of completion **and increased their average monthly income from \$15 to \$24 (60% increase)**.⁵ Among female youth who were already employed, their average monthly income has increased from \$41 to \$171 (317% increase).⁶

In **Egypt**, CARE partnered with Microsoft, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, and the Ministry of Communications to train 18,662 youth on digital skills, including 17,452 obtaining a formal certificate. The training enabled 2,648 youth to obtain employment within six months of completion.



A young SHOUHARDO III entrepreneur in Bangladesh

CARE's USAID-funded **SHOUHARDO III** program in **Bangladesh** trained 9,500 youth (50% female) from poor and vulnerable households through **vocational training and apprenticeships**. Training areas included mobile servicing, electrical wiring, welding, mechanics, plumbing, masonry, carpentry, computer operation, beautician, handicraft, tailoring, farming, livestock rearing, vaccination, industry-based garment making, driving, and hotel management. SHOUHARDO III also supported these young people with **soft skills training**, building their self-confidence, voice, and negotiation skills, emphasizing female youth needs. As a result, evaluation findings indicate that **93% of the youth were employed in the areas they had received training on**.⁷ Among employed participants, 84% were self-employed and 16% received a wage.⁸ The average monthly income of trained youth who engaged in trade-related employment was 258% higher than those who were not working in the trades they had received training on.⁹ A study on the return on investment indicated that in the first 12 months post-training, **an investment of \$230 per youth participant had already resulted in a return of \$300 per youth participant**.¹⁰ SHOUHARDO III also built the capacity of 65,767 youth (48,239 female and 17,528 male) to expand their agricultural and non-agricultural income through field crop and fish production, livestock rearing, and non-farm activities through Farmer Field and Business Schools (FFBS).

In **Malawi**, CARE's USAID-funded **Titukulane Activity** provided vocational training to 2,260 youth (1,312 female) in off-farm trades. Following the vocational training, **Titukulane** facilitated Entrepreneurship and Business Management Training for 284 youth business groups comprised of 987 youth (597 female) that focused on starting and growing their business. This was paired with start-up funds. As a result, 27% of the groups positively impacted job creation in their communities by recruiting fellow youth and mentoring others to start their businesses. **Titukulane** also had an impact on on-farm livelihoods for youth: verall, 6,181 youth smallholder farmers have adopted improved practices. Youth farmers cultivating soybeans – a high-value commodity and a climate-resilient crop – have **increased their productivity from 1.9MT to 85MT, increasing their sales from \$1.1K to \$40.5K in 2023**.



Skills training participants, Malawi

⁵ Consilient (2023) *Adolescent Girls' Education in Somalia: Midline Evaluation, Round 2*, pg.148; pg.175

⁶ Ibid, pg.176

⁷ CARE (2019) *Strengthening Household Ability to Respond to Development Opportunities - Report on the Return on Investment Study*, pg.8

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid, pg. 9

¹⁰ Ibid, pg.14

In **Zimbabwe**, CARE's USAID-funded *Takunda Resilience and Food Security Activity* provides life skills and adapted upskilling in center-based technical-vocational education and training (TVET) institutes, including public institutions and private community-based providers. The program was informed by youth assessments and a gendered labor market analysis to determine upskilling and employment opportunities in on-farm and off-farm sectors. The TVET curriculum integrates basic numeracy and life skills, work readiness, and financial and entrepreneurship competencies. This holistic approach to youth skilling improves their chance of securing employment in formal jobs, informal self-employment, and microenterprise development. *Takunda* targets 2,500 youth for upskilling, of which 20% will be supported through apprenticeships and placement in formal enterprises.

Strengthening System Capacity for Skills Development

Market-driven systems for skilling, through education and training, are key priorities for governments, employers, and other system actors. However, education systems often struggle to resource and supervise TVET, and to align skills training with market demands. CARE has served as a trusted partner to strengthen the capacity and quality of the system itself.

In **Somalia**, CARE's EU-funded *Education Is Light* program supported the state Ministry of Education of Puntland to strengthen its TVET Department, including developing TVET policies, quality standards, and quality assurance tools. Also, in Somalia, CARE's USAID-funded AGES program provides technical assistance to the Federal Ministry of Education, Culture and Higher Education (MOECHE) to build partnerships with the private sector to incorporate career talks and skills demonstrations in schools. To date, AGES has supported the MOECHE in training 99 local business owners (92% female) as crucial resource persons for school-based workforce readiness training in three states of Somalia, reaching 12,731 female students.



National Education Learning Event, Mogadishu

In **Bangladesh**, CARE's USAID-funded *Bijoyee Activity* works with the Department for Youth Development (DYD) and local youth-led organizations to expand access to gender-responsive soft skills development grounded on Positive Youth Development principles. Informed by a comprehensive Gender Equity and Social Inclusion (GESI) Analysis, *Bijoyee* is supporting the DYD to develop a market-aligned soft skills training package to boost workforce readiness for over 250,000 disadvantaged urban youth, including girls, non-binary individuals, and youth living with disabilities. *Bijoyee* targets youth not in employment, education, or training (82%), women (60%), youth with disabilities, indigenous youth, Dalit youth, and those with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. To ensure responsiveness to diverse youth needs, *Bijoyee* is supporting the DYD to incorporate youth inputs in its planning and monitoring processes, and engaging youth in the development of soft skills training packages.

In **Mali**, CARE's DEGE project supported the Ministry of Education to revise the national curriculum for vocational education. At Centers for Education for Development (CED), youth acquire vocational and foundational skills and are linked to apprenticeships and youth-led civic action. CARE also provided technical assistance to the Ministry to strengthen gender-focused components in vocational education. The model reached a 96% completion rate, including 94% for girls,¹¹ whose mobility and time is highly restricted in the Malian context.

¹¹ Jones, R. and Chabott, C. (2015) *CARE Mali – Patsy Collins Trust Fund Initiative, Final Evaluation Report*, pg.27

Gender Responsive Skills Development

Gender inequality is a significant barrier to workforce development and to inclusive economic growth. By supporting women's economic participation, we elevate women's work by making it more visible, productive, and rewarding – with significant benefits for women, employers, and the private sector, and promoting inclusive growth. CARE's skills development programs are grounded on gender and social inclusion analyses. Skills training processes consider how youth's time and mobility may differ due to gender and how early marriage and motherhood affect access to skills development and employment. CARE works with youth systems to build supportive relationships, strengthen gender-responsive policies and systems, and facilitate gender norm change to increase women's access to non-traditional sectors/ jobs, thus mitigating barriers and maximizing success.



CARE's key domains for gender-responsive skills training

In **Somalia**, CARE facilitates access to workforce readiness training for married and divorced girls. CARE's USAID/FCDO-funded AGES program worked with the Ministry of Education's Gender Unit to **enroll 11,206 married girls and 5,095 divorced female youth in non-formal education** courses focusing on financial literacy, savings, and social-emotional skills development in addition to linking them to additional training and employment opportunities.

"At first, I used to stay at home, but now I am working, I have become self-dependent and also a person who can cover her own expenses like education fees for the children and sometimes family bills, so there is a big change."

Married girl participating in AGES, 2022

AGES also worked with state Ministries of Education's Gender Units to train and coach 849 **Girls' Empowerment Forums**. The Forums bring together 8,490 female youth who conduct girl-led civic action in their communities, disseminating information on education and skill development opportunities to female youth across 18 districts, facilitating access to Ministry of Youth's Youth Training Centers, and working with Justice Committees to raise awareness on gender-based violence and gender rights. Participation in Girls' Empowerment Forums **predicts an increase of 10 percentage points in the likelihood of female youth transitioning into employment or further education**, highlighting

the importance of gender-responsive skills development.¹²

In **Afghanistan**, where girls' access to skills training and mobility have historically been extremely limited, CARE worked with communities to build support for female youth's engagement in health and education careers. CARE's DFAT-funded *Empowerment through Education III* project developed an integrated lower secondary community-based education program for older adolescent girls, incorporating paraprofessional training on health and education. *Empowerment through Education III* trained 2,186 older adolescent girls as health workers and community-based education teachers. The training enabled them to provide critical support to remote communities and to obtain an income, while also shifting traditional gender norms restricting women to working at home.

Increased Access to Financial Products & Services

Youth who participate in skills training often struggle to obtain adequate funds to start income-generation activities, and women and girls usually face additional challenges due to traditional social and gender norms. In response, in 2023 alone, CARE supported **507,152 youth to participate in Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs)**. Participation in VSLAs enables youth to access capital to start/ expand small businesses and develop financial capability. Youth who participated in skills training often struggle to obtain funds to start income-generation activities; women and girls

¹² Consilient (2023) *Adolescent Girls' Education in Somalia: Midline Evaluation -2*, pg.72

usually face additional challenges due to traditional gender norms. VSLAs also serve as a platform for women and girls to build solidarity, engage in civic action, and engage with financial institutions to obtain credit.

Under CARE's USAID-funded SHOUHARDO III in **Bangladesh** program, 382 male and 18,536 female youth members joined VSLAs. Participants explained that they were able to increase their savings due to improved financial management skills, which also enhanced the youth's ability to apply for loans through VSLAs. By improving access to savings, loans, and interest-based profits, participation in VSLAs contributed to livelihood diversification and increased income. Participants reported using the end-of-year interest-based profits to purchase inputs for small business activities (seeds, livestock feed, sewing machines, etc.) or add to their savings.



Female youth part of a VSLA in Bangladesh

In **Malawi**, CARE's USAID-funded *Titukulane* supported 17,730 youth to engage in VSLAs. In 2022, the overall average return on savings for *Titukulane* VSLA members was 34%. Participation in VSLAs provided members with a critical safety net during Cyclone

Freddy, enabling them to access social funds to support affected survivors and rebuild livelihoods. Additionally, *Titukulane* provided \$361,939 in start-up funds to 284 youth business groups, with a maximum value of USD 2,192 per group. These funds enabled groups to expand into larger-scale businesses. Monitoring results show that 85% of the groups that received start-up funds recorded a profit, with cumulative sales of USD 151,498 and an average profit margin of 30%. Entrepreneurs reported re-investing their profits in additional equipment, and 27% of the groups positively impacted job creation in their communities by recruiting fellow youth and mentoring others to start their businesses.

In **Somalia**, CARE's USAID/FCDO-funded AGES program supported 10,651 vulnerable female youth to form 576 VSLAs in conflict-affected urban areas. AGES also partnered with local banks to open branches in underserved areas, including displacement camps, and provided training on financial literacy and financial products to youth participating in VSLAs. Through these partnerships, AGES supported 64% of the youth VSLAs to open bank accounts and access formal financial services. After 12 months, **participating VSLAs had an average of \$195 in their bank accounts.**



Installing solar panels in Somalia

Skills for a Green Future

Climate change represents both a threat and an opportunity for new livelihoods. Enhancing youth capacity to engage in emerging climate-responsive trades contributes to boosting national readiness for climate change and to future-proof skills training efforts.

In **Somalia**, electricity is costly and largely dependent on generators, contributing to environmental degradation. Somalia's untapped potential for solar-powered energy is hindered by the limited availability of service providers to assemble and maintain solar panel systems. CARE's EU-funded THE BRIDGES project partnered with state Ministries of Education and the Eindhoven University of Technology to develop a vocational training course on installing **solar energy systems**, setting quality standards and monitoring tools for 'green' TVET, and training providers on course delivery. CARE has also partnered with 13 private sector companies to enable students to access internships in green energy provision.

In **Bangladesh**, high arsenic levels in drinking water hinder children's development. Seasonal floods destroy conventional latrines, contaminating water sources. CARE's USAID-funded SHOUHARDO III project trained 4,833 youth as local service providers (LSPs), including in **green jobs such as water testing and building flood-resistant sanitation infrastructure**. Additionally, SHOUHARDO III trained youth LSPs in climate-resilient agriculture techniques to support producer groups in their communities in diversifying crops and improving yields.

Levers of Change in Skills Development

The following act as levers of change in skill development and should be prioritized:

- **Strengthen financial literacy in formal and non-formal education:** Limited numeracy and financial literacy skills pose a significant challenge and need for youth to succeed in self- or wage employment. Financial literacy assessments conducted by CARE with in-school adolescents in Kenya, Rwanda, and Somalia show average scores of just 34% in Kenya, 38% in Rwanda, and 25% in Somalia.¹³ Incorporating financial literacy, savings skills, and business planning in school curricula will ease youth's transition into economic activities and boost the profit of small businesses.
- **Expand opportunities for non-formal education coupled with economic empowerment components**, allowing youth who dropped out of school or who never attended school to catch up with foundational skills and maximize the likelihood of positive transitions into jobs or entrepreneurship. Accelerated education programs should also link graduates to technical, vocational, and entrepreneurial pathways.
- **Align skilling programs with government and private sector priorities and policies** to ensure programs are market driven. This includes partnering with Ministries of Education, Youth, Labor, etc., Skills Councils, Chambers of Commerce, and other industry bodies to continually assess and improve skilling initiatives.
- **Leverage private sector partnerships for market driven skilling systems.** Programs should work with employers to inform and resource (through in-kind and monetary contributions) training; partner with businesses for internships, apprenticeships, on-the-job training and job placements; strengthen market linkages for entrepreneurs/farmers/service providers; and connect with formal financial institutions for financial literacy and access to formal financial products and services.
- **Strengthen system capacity to incorporate soft skills training into workforce readiness programs**, informed by market and gender analyses. This includes the development of soft skills training guidelines, systems for training trainers, and quality assurance mechanisms for soft skills.
- **Develop gender-responsive and inclusive skilling programs** that consider the varying needs of young women, people with disabilities, and minority groups.
- Provide targeted training and support to ensure more **equitable access to technology-focused skills training**, addressing gender and inclusion disparities. Additionally, ensure that **technology-based skills training** responds to diverse youth needs, enhancing access and use.
- **Invest in green skills training** linked to market demands and contextualized to local needs, including on-farm and off-farm skills training opportunities. This includes supporting the development of green skills training guidelines co-designed with private sector actors, quality assurance tools, and linkages between graduates and private companies for access to green inputs and marketing linkages.

¹³ Consilient (2021) *Endline Evaluation – Adolescent Empowerment Project*, pg.46; Laterite (2021) *Endline Evaluation of the SS4G Program in Rwanda*, pg.36; Consilient (2022) *Somali Girls' Education Promotion Project – Transition: Endline Evaluation Report*, pg.56



CARE's impact in youth skills and workforce development highlights the potential of all young people – and the critical importance of investing in them. When enhanced agency and assets are coupled with supportive relationships and strong systems, CARE's programming has demonstrated that youth workforce development can be impactful and cost-effective. Young people can shape the future in powerful ways that benefit everyone.

For more information on CARE's programs in youth skill development, visit care.org/our-work/education-and-work or contact Rachel Hartgen, Rachel.Hartgen@care.org

