



Boosting Decent Employment for Africa's Youth

Request for Concept Notes

Submission deadline: October 8, 2018



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1. About the partner organizations

IDRC

The International Development Research Centre (IDRC) is a Canadian Crown corporation funding research in developing countries to advance knowledge and solve practical development problems. Part of Canada's foreign affairs and development efforts, IDRC invests in knowledge, innovation, and solutions to improve lives and livelihoods in the developing world. IDRC works with many stakeholders including civil society organisations, think tanks, regional organisations, and government departments in the developing world to drive large-scale positive change. Through its [Employment and Growth program](#), IDRC seeks to enhance the employment and economic opportunities of vulnerable groups, particularly women and youth, and foster a more inclusive economy.

INCLUDE

[INCLUDE](#), the Knowledge Platform on Inclusive Development Policies, promotes evidence-based policymaking on inclusive development in Africa through research, knowledge sharing and policy dialogue. INCLUDE brings together researchers from African countries and the Netherlands who work with the private sector, NGOs and governments to exchange knowledge and ideas on how to achieve better research-policy linkages on inclusive development in Africa. Thematically, INCLUDE specifically focusses on productive employment, social protection and strategic action for inclusive development. The research, knowledge sharing and policy dialogue activities on productive employment focus particularly on productive employment for women and youth. The INCLUDE platform is initiated by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

ILO

The International Labour Organization ([ILO](#)) is the United Nations agency for the world of work. It sets international labour standards, promotes rights at work and encourages decent employment opportunities, the enhancement of social protection and the strengthening of dialogue on work-related issues. The ILO has a unique structure, bringing together governments, employers' and workers' representatives. The ILO has a long-standing commitment to promoting decent work for youth through advocacy, knowledge development and dissemination, policy and technical advice and capacity building.

The ILO has a leading role in the [Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth](#) that brings together an alliance of committed partners, including governments, social partners, youth and civil society, foundations, academia, the UN system, the private sector and beyond, to take action at country and regional level across thematic priorities, share knowledge and leverage resources for more and better jobs for youth.

2. Background and rationale

Youth employment remains one of the most urgent challenges for policy makers. In Africa, an estimated 122 million young people will join the labour force in the next decade—nearly three times more than the rate at which stable wage paying jobs are expected to be created. Millions of young people work in insecure, low-income and often unsafe informal-sector jobs or in family farms with little or no pay (Fox, Senbet & Simbanegavi 2016). The effect of technological change on the quality and quantity of employment is uncertain.

Harnessing the potential of Africa's youth continues to be at the forefront of government and donor agendas. While this has galvanized political commitment and resources across the region, the youth employment challenge suggests that progress has been fragmented and slow. Innovative and inclusive approaches are needed to find lasting solutions that can be scaled, including approaches that generate new jobs and economic opportunities for youth, and that prepare them for the future of work.

A number of pressing questions remain: What are the most effective interventions – or mix of interventions – for boosting productive employment for marginalized youth in both rural and urban settings? Which successful interventions can be scaled-up and what works for youth in fragile settings? How to move from small-scale pilots to large-scale interventions? Lack of empirical evidence to guide policies and interventions is a key barrier to addressing the continent's youth employment challenge. Research can play a key role in addressing this critical gap.

Youth is not a homogeneous group. Gender, socio-economic status, and locality shape young people's experiences in important ways. Rural youth with little education require different interventions than educated youth in urban areas who are in search of a formal wage job. Likewise, gender norms shape the experiences and challenges young people face in accessing finance, making transition from school to work, or running a business. Contextually grounded evidence that takes account of this intersectionality and identifies proven solutions that work for different categories of youth is needed.

3. Objectives and scope

This Call is part a multi-funder research initiative on Boosting Decent Employment for Africa's Youth, aimed at providing key insights, practical guidance, and tools to policy makers and practitioners to help realize aspirations for large-scale positive change. The research initiative is positioned within the [Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth](#), the overarching and inclusive effort endorsed by the UN Chief Executives Board for Coordination to scale up country-level action and impact on youth employment under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

This Call aims to:

- **Strengthen the evidence base** on sustainable and effective learning, skills development and market linkages, and active labour market measures to boost economic opportunities that facilitate the transition of youth into decent work.
- **Foster learning and sharing of experiences** through multi-stakeholder dialogue within and across countries.
- **Provide opportunities for young people to actively engage** in knowledge generation, policy dialogue, and initiatives that enhance their employability.

It is part of a series of calls envisaged over the next two years to help governments, civil society, and private sector actors to design effective and innovative interventions that boost economic opportunities for Africa’s youth.

With a focus on sub-Saharan Africa, this initiative will support cutting edge research projects that address either one of the priority research themes outlined below. We are seeking for proposals that are: systems oriented; innovative; grounded in practice; engage directly with key stakeholders; and have the potential to inform action in one or more countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

The focus will be on applied research, embedded in or linked to practice, and provides on-going learning to inform program design and/or scale up. This approach will deepen policy dialogue with directly relevant evidence on the “how to” question and will provide learning loops in the policy and program implementation. The work will be grounded in specific contexts – including in fragile contexts. The results are expected to have wider relevance and feed into pan African discussions on youth employment.

4. Priority research themes

The current call focuses on two themes:

- **Theme 1:** Soft skills and digital jobs for youth
- **Theme 2:** Effective approaches to foster work-based learning programs and mentorship.

Tackling gender constraints that hold young women back from improving their economic prospects and accessing decent work is a crucial aspect to be considered across themes.

Theme 1: Soft skills and digital jobs for youth

Young women and men in Africa experience substantial and unprecedented changes in the world of work, driven by technology, demography, climate change and globalization. Education and skills development systems need innovative and sustainable solutions to promptly anticipate and address changing skills needs to prepare Africa’s youth for 21st century jobs.

Basic and foundational skills as well as the core work skills are critical for young people to adapt to changing needs of the labour market and to embrace new technological opportunities. Research has shown that core work skills (often known as soft skills) not only boost employability but can also contribute to a wide range of positive youth development outcomes, from conflict and violence prevention, to active and responsible citizenship, and improved health, including reproductive health (YEFG 2017). Skills training, including technical and vocational education programs aimed at preparing young people for the labour market focus primarily on technical competencies. Yet, it is now widely recognized that soft skills are crucial for young people to get jobs or to run successful businesses (see for example Montalvao et. al. 2017; YEFG 2017). There is a need to find successful gender-sensitive models for imparting soft skills as well as ways of integrating such skills into formal education systems and work-based learning programs for large-scale impact.

In the wake of technological advances rapidly transforming the world of work, there is also an urgent need to ensure that Africa prepares its youth for the 21st century jobs. Creating opportunities in the digital economy through basic, mid-level and advanced digital skills training requires rigorous evidence on what works and what doesn't and for whom, as well as a close examination of the demand for digital skills. Efforts to prepare Africa's youth for the 21st century jobs need to go hand in hand with job-rich policies and strategies that boost the demand for youth labour in the digital economy. There is need to better understand Africa's political economies and growth patterns, key enablers and the role of economic and employment policies in fostering digital jobs for youth.

Proposals submitted under this theme can address research questions related to soft skills or digital jobs or a combination of the two.

Theme 2: Effective approaches to foster work-based learning programmes and mentorship

Limited work-based learning and mentorship opportunities is one of the key barriers young Africans face when transiting from school to work. Despite the recent interest in apprenticeships and their demand-driven model, there is still much to learn about their effectiveness in Africa and factors that trigger success – from employers up-take and quality standards to their costs and benefits for youth, education and training systems, and employers. The same is true for mentorship initiatives, where there is a global knowledge gap about what works and their impact on labour market outcomes of youth, including of young women.

Proposals submitted under this theme can address research questions related to work-based learning programmes or mentorship or a combination of both.

5. Project activities

Projects eligible for support by the research initiative are expected to focus on at least one of the following inter-related activities:

- **Action-oriented research** on interventions that address key constraints that hold young women and men back from improving their economic prospects and access to decent work;

- **Identification of effective policies and interventions** that promote employment-intensive and sustainable growth.

6. Project timeline and budget

Projects are expected to commence in the first quarter of 2019 and should be scheduled to be completed within a timeframe not exceeding 24 months, including all research, dissemination and brokering activities and final reporting.

Applicants must provide a preliminary budget summary. The total budget should not exceed CA\$ 500,000.

7. Who can apply

An institution or a consortium of institutions that have a strong presence in sub-Saharan Africa, and with the following qualifications are invited to submit a concept note:

- **Type of organization:** Proposed research can be carried out by a research institution, research consortia or an NGO/implementing partner with strong research capacity. Donors, UN entities, multilateral organizations and independent research teams are not eligible to apply for this call.
- **Collaboration:** Research consortia not based in sub-Saharan Africa should have a demonstrable South-South or North-South collaboration, whichever the case may be. Priority will be given to consortia with a Southern institution lead. Partnerships between research organizations or consortia and implementing agencies are strongly encouraged.
- **Countries of research focus:** Proposed research must be carried out in one or more countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Priority will be given to those with a focus on low-income countries.

8. Application guidelines

Applications should contain the following:

- A completed Concept Note, to be submitted using the online application form in FluidReview (Guidelines included below).
- One (1) sample of work to demonstrate capacity to carry out rigorous research on the proposed topic, including capacity to integrate gender based analysis.
- An estimated budget, with a cost breakdown for different budget categories.
- CVs of research team (each CV should not exceed 2 pages).

9. Selection criteria

Applications will be evaluated based on the following evaluation criteria.

Assessment criteria	Weighting (%)
Relevance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alignment of the proposal to the objectives and scope of the call. • Clear approach to address gender constraints, integrated in research design and analysis. • Clear demonstration that the proposed work addresses critical issues of policy/program concern/interest. • Potential for scale. 	25
Quality and rigour <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear research questions and objectives. • Methodological rigour and appropriateness. • Innovativeness (eg. in approach, partnership, or output). 	25
Uptake strategy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrated plans for uptake and capacity to generate policy-relevant outputs in line with context of the country of study. • Quality of stakeholder analysis and feasibility of the proposed approach for knowledge sharing with and utilization by a broader group of stakeholders. • Clear plans to engage relevant stakeholders, including implementing partners. 	25
Quality of Research team <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Track record of research team including internationally acknowledged research outputs (e.g. peer-reviewed publications in relevant area) and capacity for implementation research. • Strength of team composition, including capacity to integrate a range of relevant disciplines. • Clear implementation strategy and shared ownership between research partners. 	25
Total	100%

10. Application process and timeline

Applications should be submitted online by 5:00 PM (EST) on October 8, 2018. Applications can be submitted in English or French. Only completed applications will be considered. Applications received after the deadline will not be considered. Shortlisted applicants will be invited to attend a research workshop. The date and venue will be confirmed upon announcement of shortlisted candidates.

The application process includes the following stages:

- Launch of Request for Concept Notes
- Screening eligible applications
- Selection of shortlisted applications by selection committee and feedback to applicants
- Research workshop
- Submission of full proposals based on feedback from the workshop
- Final selection of projects by selection committee

11. Guidelines for concept note

Concept note template (available online in FluidReview)

Project information:

Project title

Country(ies) of research focus

Project duration (in months)

Total budget requested (in CAD)

Theme: [Theme 1: Soft skills and/or digital jobs for youth; Theme 2: Effective approaches to foster work-based learning programs and mentorship].

Project Abstract (Max 500 words, including information on objectives, expected outcome and impact).

Applicant information

Lead institution and contact details of principal investigator (name, title, email address, phone),

Type of institution

Partner institution(s) and contact (if applicable)

Background and Rationale (Max 750 words)

- Describe specific issues or challenges the proposed project seeks to address in relation to broader goals of the Call.
- Clearly articulate the research questions and objectives.
- Describe how proposed work will add to existing knowledge.

Relevance (Max 500 words)

- Describe the overall importance of the proposed research, what difference will it make and how, with a view to contributing to large-scale impact

Methodology/Approach (Max 1000 words)

- Describe the broad methodological approach, including a brief explanation and justification of specific methods and implementation approach to be used.
- Describe how your research will integrate a gender analysis.

Outputs and outcomes (Max 500 words)

- Describe concrete outputs, outcomes, and applicability of research results. This should describe a clear impact pathway.

Research uptake (Max 750 words)

- Demonstrate clear research uptake strategy including, identification of the target audience, engagement with key stakeholders, level of engagement during research cycle and approaches to knowledge sharing.
- Outline proposed approach to monitor progress and measure impact.

Project team (Max 500 words)

- Provide information about the composition of the project team and the distribution of responsibilities.

Challenges and risks (Max 500 words)

- Describe the main challenges and risks you anticipate in carrying out the work and how these will be mitigated.
- Highlight any needs/areas for capacity building.

12. Attachments

- CVs of research team (each CV should not exceed 2 pages).
- A sample of work to demonstrate capacity to carry out rigorous research on the proposed topic, including capacity to integrate gender based analysis.
- An estimated budget, with a cost breakdown for different budget categories. Indicate any existing in-kind support or co-funding for this project.