National Youth Service, Employability, Entrepreneurship and Sustainable Livelihoods

Promising Practices from Sub-Saharan Africa

17 November 2013

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1.   Executive summary

This study of 17 youth service programmes in Sub-Saharan Africa and youth service programmes in five countries outside of the region was conducted in 2013 in the face of massive levels of youth unemployment in the African continent. Young people who are faced with limited opportunities become discouraged work seekers and may find themselves amongst the chronically unemployed. This has been identified as a key factor in the intergenerational transmission of poverty and unemployment.

There are major constraints on the supply side of the labour market. Rapid economic growth in African countries has largely not been driven by labour-intensive production and thus does not necessarily produce jobs. Some argue that international competition is resulting in the informalisation of employment, which leads to greater income insecurity, lower wages and the economic exclusion of large sections of the population. On the demand side, the labour market increasingly requires high skills levels, which are not found among the many young people emerging from schooling systems. This suggests that there is a need to consider alternative sources of livelihoods such as self-employment as options for young people.

This study takes as its starting point the concept of transitions through pathways that enable young people to navigate towards a particular goal. Where young people have access to positive pathways that encourage their independence, skills building, confidence and leadership, these are likely to lead to positive outcomes. Where such pathways are absent or not readily accessible, or where they compete with negative pull factors, such gangsterism, young people are less likely to be able to navigate a pathway of resilience. Youth service may act as a pathway to employment in that it can provide young people with skills, experience and opportunities to access employment or self-employment once the period of service is completed.

This study uses a youth development approach to analyse the data collected in the scan. It is rooted in the capabilities perspective that looks at the ways in which assets (individual strengths and talent, social capital, education and material assets) and opportunities interact to create capabilities in the young people. Youth service can create opportunities for the participants to enhance and practise their assets in order to develop their capability, which is a key factor in increasing their employability or their prospects of successful self-employment.

National Youth Service (NYS) programmes in African countries represent a major state investment in young people. But how intentional are the NYS programmes in approaching their task of developing young people's capabilities for employment and self-employment? And what value does National Youth Service add to young people's ability to transition into pathways that enable them to develop sustainable livelihoods?

Twelve promising practices emerge from this study. They are indicative in that they are based on the information provided by NYS respondents about their programme goals and experience in the different countries. No data was available from evaluations or longitudinal studies to track the effectiveness of the programmes or their impact on the employment and self-employment prospects

of the NYS participants. Consequently it is not possible to state definitively that these practices do produce these outcomes and more research is needed to assess their efficacy.

The promising practices are:

1. Focus explicitly on developing young people as citizens with productive capability.
2. Align human resource development in NYS with economic growth priorities.
3. Flexible targeted recruitment strategies can produce explicit transition outcomes for different groups of young people.
4. Effective partnerships need to be structured at the highest level.
5. National Youth Service is particularly suitable for building character, connectedness, confidence and competence in youth.
6. The stipends paid by NYS programmes can introduce youth to asset accumulation through savings.
7. The service experience can produce well-rounded work seekers.
8. NYS can enhance youth employability by addressing the skills mismatch that employers complain about.
9. NYS programmes can provide three types of training to young people excluded from other opportunities.
10. Introduce practical training for self-employment in the NYS curriculum.
11. NYS programmes can prepare and filter candidates to increase their access to financial and mentorship support for self-employment.
12. NYS programmes can actively assist young people to find exit opportunities as they approach the end of their service period.

Each of these is outlined in more detail below with examples from selected countries to illustrate their manifestation.

1. Focus explicitly on developing young people as citizens with productive capability

NYS can be explicitly framed as a programmatic response that seeks to provide young people with more pathways to citizenship and better economic transition outcomes. Those NYS programmes that are expressly intended to prepare young citizens for better transitions into productive livelihoods, need to direct resources at the development of the young people themselves. In the process NYS needs to groom the youth as productive citizens able to connect with economic opportunities emerging within national development priorities. **Zambia** provides a good example of how, over the years, the NYS Programme has changed its focus from military discipline to meeting the needs of street children as a particularly vulnerable group of young people. In 2009 the focus changed again when a new system was introduced to reshape the national service and train a wider range of youth to help them in their day-to-day lives.

2. Align human resource development in NYS with economic growth priorities

While some of the NYS programmes focus on placing their participants in the development and civil society sectors (e.g. Burkina Faso) many of the youth service programmes surveyed say they are designed to prepare the young people for sectors that their countries have earmarked for economic

growth. This positions NYS as an institution that can contribute to the development of the human resources required to meet the country's need for certain skills and capacity. To maximise this potential, however, the NYS needs to ***become one of the players in the post-school education and training landscape*** that can respond to labour market needs to channel the youth into institutions that can provide more advanced training in specific skills or connect them to jobs or self-employment opportunities.

As a national programme, youth service is uniquely able to ***target specific cohorts for human resource development***. For example, it may recruit youth with incomplete schooling and help them overcome educational deficits in preparation for entry to other education and training programmes post-service. Alternatively it may provide graduates with opportunities to apply their knowledge in community-based programmes, thereby increasing their practical experience. This helps to confirm or alter their chosen career paths by introducing them to areas in which they could potentially find work or create self-employment.

In **Nigeria** the youth service programme is explicitly framed around young people meeting national development priorities in education, health and infrastructure development. In **South Africa** the National Rural Youth Service Corps (NARYSEC) Programme operates through the Department of Rural Development and provides young people with skills in infrastructure development and agriculture – two areas identified as future growth paths necessary for South Africa's economic development. In **Ghana**, the policy framework directs the NSS to deploy personnel to economic sectors aligned with national priorities and critical areas of need – agriculture, education, and health. Although **Zambia**'s economic base lies in copper production, agriculture is viewed as an additional area of growth and the government has focused on deploying young people in this sector within the NYS Programme.

3.   Flexible targeted recruitment strategies can produce explicit transition outcomes for different groups of young people

Unlike other post-school institutions, NYS programmes have the flexibility to target specific types of youth according to national youth development priorities. NYS programmes are thus able to provide education and training pathways for those who would not otherwise have a chance to transition into further education, employment or self-employment. They also amplify the experiential learning opportunities of graduates whose knowledge may be largely theoretical in nature.

There are a variety of approaches to targeting young servers, depending on what the programme is intended to achieve. In some cases the NYS is designed as a programme that is supplementary to traditional education and training institutions. In other cases the NYS is intended to produce a pathway for young people who were/are unable to gain skills and experience through the formal post-school system. Still other programmes target particularly vulnerable groups, which is notably promising in the context of young people struggling to complete their education or access post-school education and training.

Ghana and **Nigeria** provide examples of countries that choose to place those who have already accessed post-secondary education into a period of service. **Namibia** recruits youth who find themselves outside the formal education system for social or economic reasons or because they

couldn't be absorbed through tertiary institutions. In **Zambia** the government re-shaped the youth service programme bearing in mind that the number of colleges and universities in the country could not absorb all of the school leavers. In particular it targets those who cannot access post-secondary education, as well as particularly vulnerable groups. In **Liberia** the NYS Programme is designed to cater for youth at any level of education.

4.   Effective partnerships need to be structured at the highest level

In most of the NYS programmes surveyed, a range of partnerships are constructed between the NYS and different external players such as government departments, companies, civil society organisations or international agencies. The NYS can also form multi-stakeholder partnerships or forums to draw in top leadership from universities, polytechnics, government departments, the army, the police, employer organisations, employment agencies, loan funds, and regional representatives into the NYS governance or advisory structures.

No evidence was available of the extent to which these partnerships help the youth service participants find employment or self-employment. Nevertheless, such structures do create the opportunity for the NYS to (re)design its programme in response to the needs of employers (public and private), other players active in the economy, and further education and training institutions. Investing in such mutually beneficial partnerships is likely to produce the following benefits:
*   increase the possibility of the NYS Programme better meeting employers' skills needs in different sectors
*   focus on relevant and accredited training
*   facilitate placement in entry-level positions
*   enable suitably qualified youth service graduates access to loans or grants to start businesses post-service
*   enable the young people to make their career choices and channel them into the post-secondary education system for further training.

In **Ghana t**he NSS has showed its commitment to receiving independent feedback on its operations by convening a first stakeholder forum in 2010. This provided an opportunity for channeling constructive feedback to the NSS and created the space for the NSS to dialogue with other agencies and stakeholders about future collaboration. **Nigeria** established a NYSC National Governing Board, which draws on and brings together committees of vice-chancellors and rectors of polytechnics as well as the army, the police, the Nigerian Employers Consultative Association and representatives from the geo-political zones. In this way the NYSC ensures that collaboration starts from the very top and not just at the implementation phase.

5.   National youth service is particularly suitable for building character, connectedness, confidence and competence in youth

Employability starts by building the personal attributes of young people for work and adulthood. Youth service programmes are unique in that they provide the spaces, time and practical opportunities through which young people can develop their character, confidence, connectedness and competence through service. While virtually all the NYS programmes surveyed aim to achieve these outcomes, only

a few demonstrate careful thought about how to develop this aspect of work preparation. They show that through the service experience, programmes are able to develop participants' health awareness, ethics, interpersonal relations, time management, intergenerational engagement, self-esteem and conflict management, to name but a few outcomes. These all contribute to leadership development and are indispensable to work-readiness training. More research is needed to demonstrate whether service does in fact result in such outcomes in different contexts, but the experience of some of the NYS programmes surveyed suggests that these are promising outcomes.

The **AU Youth Volunteer Corps** reports that volunteers say "We didn't know what we can do". **Nigeria** aspires to "achieve the ultimate goal within their programmes which is to produce future leadership with positive national ethos". In **Namibia** self-esteem is promoted by way of an award system that incentivises the young people to involve themselves in activities other than those that benefit them. The award recognises their participation during the service, and those with outstanding performance are given State Honours Award. The **ECOWAS** Programme aims to provide youth with "an experience of volunteering, and some leadership skills plus the ability to adapt to different social and cultural environments."

6.   **The stipends paid by NYS programmes can introduce youth to asset accumulation through savings**

Evidence from Africa and elsewhere suggests that accumulation of financial assets amongst the poor, and for young people in particular, has significant effects on a range of outcomes. These include increased savings behaviour, more positive sexual and reproductive health outcomes, a stronger sense of future, and greater likeliness of accessing and completing post-secondary education.

Most NYS programmes pay stipends and incorporate a savings education module in their curriculum. This means that young NYS participants are in an ideal situation to develop financial capability: they can refer to the knowledge of how to save and the stipend gives them the opportunity to save. NYS programmes that incorporate both these elements are therefore in a position to equip young people with a core skill that will give them greater control over their financial future. The capability to accumulate financial assets, which could lead to a range of positive outcomes related both to their own development and their future livelihoods.

In the **Gambia** NYSS participants are given a stipend of 200 Dalasi and are trained on saving and financial management, using the stipends they are given. Banks or other financial institutions are invited to provide this training or to support it. Lessons on savings are also given during the entrepreneurship training. In **Nigeria** all participants receive an allowance and are taught that they should save something and go back home with the money they save. In some cases employers who have accepted NYS participants retain part of what they are paid and this money is saved for the young people by the employer. In **Zimbabwe** saving forms part of the civic education training and participants are introduced to global macroeconomics. The **Burkina Faso** Programme, at national level, keeps 10 000 FCFA per month (about US$ 240 per year) per volunteer and gives these funds to the youth at the end of service. The funds are intended to help to pay for school or exam fees or to launch a small business.

7.   The service experience can produce well-rounded work seekers

The survey shows that a core focus of many of the youth service programmes is the development of a sense of citizenship, which is a critical part of preparing young people for adulthood, employment and self-employment. Service programmes tend to combine life skills training with citizenship by placing young people in situations where they work and socialise with people whom they would not otherwise meet.

By giving young people a chance to discover what they can do to help solve development challenges, the youth service programme can build a sense of responsibility in the young servers. The focus on citizenship also drives investments in the development of competence, character, confidence and connectedness. These attributes are attractive to prospective employers and are essential in enabling young people make better transitions to a productive adulthood. Once again, impact assessments are needed to determine whether this is the case.

In **Nigeria** the Youth Service Corps youth participants work with local communities to identify challenges and then play a leadership role alongside community members to put in place strategies to address the identified challenges. The intention is to enhance national understanding and integration as well as develop a sense of unity regardless of difference. In **Kenya** NYS participants are sent to various NYS field units spread all over Kenya to take part in the national service after their training. This takes one to two years, during which the young men and women give service to the nation by working on NYS farms and participating in construction of infrastructure such as roads, building of dams and dykes. In **Cape Verde** a planting trees campaign in the neighbourhood of Ponta d'Agua was designed to raise awareness about environmental issues and involved CNV in partnership with the Scouts of Cape Verde-Section of Vila Nova and Ponta d'Agua. The **Ghana** NSS's focus on agriculture as a viable livelihood source also straddles the interface between skills-building and civic service. The current personnel in the sample were all deployed in the city, but as part of their programme are required to render farm visits and agriculture project work on a weekly basis. This exposes them to a different side of life.

8.   NYS can enhance youth employability by addressing the skills mismatch that employers complain about

The strategic alignment of technical training offered by NYS programmes with the skills required by sectors targeted for economic growth could enhance the employability of young servers. However, this depends on four factors:
- the training should be designed with input from employers and possibly offered with their assistance
- the training should ideally be certificated by nationally recognised training authorities and sanctioned by employer associations
- the training must be relevant and of high quality
- within the priority sectors, the NYS needs to tailor its technical skills training options to respond to the interests and aptitude of the young participants.

The Namibia Programme is deliberately set up as a stepping stone towards further education and training for participants. The programme does the research about which institutions are reputable, presents information to the young people and covers the costs of tuition for selected participants. The **Liberia** Peace Corps conscripts youth interested in education and trains them to be teachers through certificated courses and continuous training. **Ghana** also provides participants, post-service, to enter the teaching profession. In **Cote d'Ivoire** and the **Gambia** participants have the opportunity to be trained in a wide range of fields. In **Zambia**, the youth are encouraged to select programmes in which they are interested.

9. NYS programmes can provide three types of training to young people excluded from other opportunities

Depending on how they are structured and the partnerships created, youth service programmes are able to provide marginalised or vulnerable young people with *access to **formal qualifications***, which could start them on career paths that contribute to their employability, or equip them with various skills for self-employment. A further promising feature of many NYS programmes is that they ***combine both technical skills training with experiential learning***, which ensures that young people are able to not only practice skills, but also experience what it is like to be in a working environment, and build confidence in their abilities. Besides training, most service programmes also focus on aspects of *citizenship*. This enables young servers to exit youth service with additional skills that may make them attractive to prospective employers, or to better create their options for self-employment.

In **Namibia** the NYS uses the Namibia Training Authority (NTA) curriculum, which was accredited in 2013 by the Namibia Qualification Authority (NQA). In the **Gambia**, the youth service programme has also partnered with the qualification authority to offer accredited certificates. In **South Africa** the NYS ensures that technical training is provided by bodies that are accredited by Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) to ensure that all technical training is completed according to industry standards and that all participants receive a recognised qualification. In 2013 **Cape Verde** introduced a 'volunteer passport', which is "an essential complement of the CV of young volunteers looking for their first job by certifying skills acquired" (Volunteer law n. 42/2010). In **Nigeria**, the certificate of national service is a prerequisite for employment while in **Zambia** youth get accredited certificates that are accepted by most government institutions and by some private institutions.

10. Introduce practical training for self-employment in the NYS curriculum

A number of the NYS programmes include a short training component on how to start a small business, focusing on basic business principles. However, this is often run towards the end of the youth service programme and, given its short duration, is likely to be largely theoretical in nature. Some of the other programmes (**Ghana** being a case in point) run income-generating operations that could provide the young servers with practical experience of producing goods for sale, positioning these in the market, packaging and pricing the commodities, and marketing and selling them to communities or other customers. Combining such practical activities with basic training for self-employment would give the servers a stronger foundation for accessing other forms of support post-service, such as formulating a business idea, applying for loans, looking for small business mentors or partners, etc.

At the end of the **ECOWAS** Programme a component is offered focusing on tools for auto-employment (methods on how to launch an income generating activity) while the **Burkina Faso** Programme includes a component on how to launch a business, provided by the National Agency for Employment (ANPE). The **Nigeria** Programme has established a Skills and Entrepreneurship Development Centre where "participants are taught to be job creators, self-reliant and not just job seekers when they cannot find employment". In **Lesotho**, successful trainees with entrepreneurial skills, acumen and interest are given 10 000 Loti (about US$1 000) to start up their project. In **Namibia**, the NYS has a Youth in Business Credit Scheme, which is intended to assist all young people who want to go into business.

11. NYS programmes can prepare and filter candidates to increase their access to financial and mentorship support for self-employment

Financial and mentorship support are critical in helping young people make their business ideas come to life and building these into sustainable livelihoods. Examples from **Zambia**, **Lesotho**, **Namibia**, **Nigeria** and **Zimbabwe** demonstrate how the NYS programmes can, directly or indirectly, facilitate access to financial resources in the form of grants or loans, to young servers. In these cases the funds are accessed through government facilities or facilities within the NYS itself. Facilitating this pathway is an important promising practice, particularly in those contexts where young people are unlikely to be able to access loans from banking institutions. At the same time, NYS programmes need to focus more attention on striking the partnerships for mentoring and coaching support to young people trying to start their own businesses.

In **Kenya** a self-employment promotion unit (SEPU) has been suggested to serve as an exit strategy for NYS graduates who opt for informal employment. Under this scheme, a revolving fund is proposed to offer soft loans to service graduates who start small-scale business enterprises. In **Burkino Faso** youth service participants who are launching businesses receive priority support from the National Youth Fund with support ranging from 2 to 5M FCFA (US$ 4 000 to 10 000). In **South Africa** the National Youth Development Agency, in which the NYS is located, provides grants for survivalist enterprise and co-operatives and has links to other state agencies that provide loans to entrepreneurs.

12. NYS programmes can actively assist young people to find exit opportunities as they approach the end of their service period

The study shows that NYS programmes have taken various steps to help young people transition effectively out of service and into jobs or further training opportunities**.**

- *Partnering with local or national placement agencies* may be a good option. In **Mali** for instance, the young participants are referred to various national placement agencies, which provide support for finding a job.
- Another option, although more costly, is to develop a *job placement officer post*. In **South Africa** the *job developer* position that was created as part of a YouthBuild project was viewed very positively by participants. However, the high costs of employing such a person ultimately led to this being removed from the programme.

- A further option may be to link participants to ***further education and training*** opportunities. In **Namibia**, selected successful candidates are provided with a bursary and assistance to apply for tertiary training at a university in the SADC region.

The **Namibia** NYS has developed a good reputation in the public domain, which is helping to position it positively with employers. The **Ghana** NSS is also well-positioned within the country, a factor that facilitates its access to companies for discussion about placement opportunities for participants who have completed their service. In **Liberia**, Chevron provides opportunities for the youth to get six weeks of training in the form of an internship. The NYS in **Kenya** has developed a strong reputation for producing highly disciplined and well-groomed individuals with an outstanding work ethic. NYS-trained drivers, for instance, are much sought after by private individuals and by companies.

All of the above demonstrate the various ways in which NYS programmes can actively assist young people to transition out of the service programme and assist them to find and apply for jobs, loans for small business development, or further training opportunities.

2.   Introduction

This study emerges out of recognition of the challenge facing the African continent with regards to youth unemployment. Global and regional bodies such as the ILO (2005, 2012a, 2012b), World Bank (2009), and the AU (AfDB 2012, ADBG u.d., African Union 2006) are recognising that young men and women in many developing countries, and in Africa particularly, are disproportionately affected by unemployment (Coenjaerts et al. 2009, Matsumoto and Elder 2010, ILO 2012a) resulting in high levels of poverty and social and economic exclusion (Bynner and Parsons 2002).

Young people who are faced with limited opportunities become discouraged work seekers and may find themselves amongst the chronically unemployed. This has been identified as a key factor in the intergenerational transmission of poverty and unemployment that is closely associated with a lack of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986) so crucial in making the transition to employment (Seekings 2012). Despite progress in increasing access to primary and secondary education for disadvantaged young people in Africa (AfDB 2013), a disproportionate number of young people who do not complete their secondary schooling move into the poverty trap, with limited means of accessing post-school educational and employment opportunities that could be the stepping stones out of poverty. For those who do complete high school, many do not have the financial means to access tertiary education or the requisite level of achievement. Young women are often affected to a greater extent, due to social expectations regarding the gendered division of work, and particularly if they bear children early on during this transition phase.

One of the main reasons for this struggle that young people have to find work is the limited growth in jobs across the continent, despite increased economic growth. From 2000 onwards, Africa's economies have grown consistently faster than those of almost any other region in the world. A report issued by the International Monetary Fund in October 2013 said that "strong investment demand continues to support growth in most of the [Sub-Saharan Africa] region, while output is projected to expand by 5 percent in 2013 and 6 percent in 2014" (IMF 2013). However economic growth has largely

not been driven by labour-intensive production (Mbeki 2009) and thus does not necessarily produce jobs.

Unemployment – particularly amongst the youth – therefore remains a serious problem across the continent. Some also argue that the pressure to compete in international markets often results in the informalisation of employment, which leads to greater income insecurity, lower wages and the economic exclusion of large sections of the population (Chen 2012; Webster, Lambert and Bezuidenhout 2008; Mosoetsa 2011).

There are therefore major constraints on the supply side of the labour market in terms of absorbing growing numbers of young people into jobs. This suggests that there is a need to consider alternative sources of livelihoods such as self-employment as options for all people, and young people in particular. But there are also demand-side issues when it comes to the labour market. With a rapidly changing and globalised economy, many jobs that are available in the formal economy are those that require high levels of skills. With so many young people emerging from the schooling system with limited skills, and very few pathways into higher education and training, they risk being amongst a growing pool of unskilled labourers who are in low demand, confined to earning low wages and face precarious employment. Many young people lack the knowledge of how to go about seeking work, particularly if they have grown up in households with unemployed parents. They therefore lack the cultural and social capital that is a large part of job seeking (Seekings 2012) and being prepared for the work place. This points to major gaps that exist between the workplace (whether formal or informal) and the situation in which millions of young people find themselves.

With this in mind, it seems possible that one strategy to address high levels of youth unemployment in the region is to ensure that they have a range of pathways to employment and self-employment. This requires an enabling policy environment that supports focused, carefully designed and integrated programmatic interventions, which are accessible to young people and are intended to help them take the steps they need to take towards employment or self-employment. Such pathways include broadening access to post-secondary education, opening up apprenticeship and internship opportunities, improving the quality of education, and using youth service as a way of helping young people take these steps (Mbithi 1972, Moleni and Gallagher 2007).

This study is aimed at assessing the ways in which current National Youth Service programmes in Sub-Saharan Africa may or may not act as pathways to employability for young people, and to identify promising practices that can be developed to create more effective pathways that make young people more employable, enhance their prospects for successful entrepreneurship, and increase their ability to create sustainable livelihoods. The paper is one of the products of the research funded by The MasterCard Foundation in 2013 of National Youth Service programmes in 15 Sub-Saharan Africa countries: Burkino Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Mali, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, The Gambia, Zambia and Zimbabwe (ICP and VOSESA 2013). The study also examined National Youth Service programmes in Brazil, Chile, France, Jamaica and the USA for comparative purposes.[1]

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[1] The research was conducted by Innovations in Civic Participation in partnership with Volunteer and Service Enquiry Southern Africa.

3.   Conceptualising service as a pathway to youth employability

In order to frame this study a number of key concepts need to be considered and defined. These include the concept of youth, which is differently defined depending on the country or region in which a young person is located. Secondly the concept of transitions needs to be discussed, alongside a discussion of what is meant by pathways. Lastly the key concepts informing this study – service and employability – need to be defined and problematised. This section of the report outlines how these key concepts have been conceptualised for the purposes of this study and concludes with the conceptual framework guiding the study.

3.1   Defining youth and youth transitions in the African context

The concept of youth is one that is culturally specific and changeable over time (Ansell 2005). While the United Nations (UN) defines youth as those between the ages of 15 and 24 years, age ranges might be more contracted or expanded depending on the cultural, social and economic conditions of the country in question. In Africa for instance, age ranges for youth, at least politically, are often defined much more broadly than the UN definition allows, largely because of the constraints that young people face in accessing many of the commonly held markers of adulthood, such as employment. While these wider age ranges might be recognised politically, according to Ansell (2005) they do not always resonate with cultural notions of youth, which may assume a far more contracted period. Where young women are encouraged to take on adult responsibilities of child care and have children themselves relatively early on, the period of youth may in fact be relatively limited. Because this study focuses on nationally instituted programmes of youth service, the definitions of youth used are those that align with how states themselves define youth.

While conceptions of youth may differ across cultural and social contexts, what is common is that the period of youth is seen as one of major changes. It is commonly understood as a stage through which individuals must negotiate a number of transitions as they seek markers of adulthood (Henderson et al. 2007). Transition includes all or some (depending on the social circumstances of the young person) of the following experiences: entering secondary school, leaving school, entering further education or training, working or developing a livelihood strategy, moving away from the childhood family, entering marriage or a similar cultural construct, having children, and voting. The idea that young people all over the world are beginning to face an extended period of transition seems to have gathered some momentum over the years (Arnett 2004, Furlong and Cartmel 2007, Henderson et al. 2007). This has led to the emergence of different terms to describe this period such as emerging adulthood (Arnett 2004), young adulthood (EGRIS 2001) and post-adolescence (Cote 2000). As Furlong, Cartmel, Biggart, Sweeting and West (2003:24) note:

> *Over the last couple of decades, youth transitions have become increasingly protracted and, seemingly, more complex. Routes between school and work which were once viewed as linear and predictable are seen as having been replaced by a set of movements which are less predictable and involve frequent breaks, backtracking and the blending of statuses.*

Reasons for this extended transition are numerous. In developed country contexts the recognition that higher level skills are necessary in the workplace has led to far more young people seeking post-secondary education and training opportunities and delaying work seeking (Furlong and Cartmel 2007). For some the reason may be driven by the wider range of opportunities that are available to explore before deciding on career and family obligations, which will close doors (Arnett 2004).

In the African context, the extended transition experience is driven far more by structural factors than individual choice. As discussed above, high levels of youth unemployment and few pathways to develop the skills and social capital so necessary to transition to work limit the opportunities for young people to achieve many of the markers commonly associated with autonomous adulthood. This means that previously young people would have had fairly structured and predetermined pathways to adulthood – for example completing school, entering an apprenticeship and working, or obtaining some school education and working on the family farm, possibly beginning to accumulate livestock. However, extended transitions mean that the connections between systems that enable young people to transition to autonomous adulthood are disjointed, with many young people experiencing exclusion and marginalisation (Bynner and Parsons 2002) as they fall outside of the cultural and state systems that are intended to enable their transition. A key example is when young people exit the schooling system (whether through school completion or early exit), are unable to access post-secondary education, and struggle to access the labour market. In this situation they exist outside of the educational and labour systems that are intended to link them into progression to work, and usually outside of the welfare system which could act as a safety net whilst they seek work. This situation of extended transitions therefore calls for new pathways along which young people can effectively transition to be created, sustained, and made more widely accessible.

3.2   Youth transitions and pathways

The concept of pathways refers to formal and informal expectations and opportunities that exist for young people to navigate towards a particular goal (Heinz 2009). The terminology arises from the Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework (Pittman et al. 2003, Catalano et al. 2004), which argues that young people may navigate along pathways towards negative or positive outcomes depending on the opportunities and social expectations that surround them. Where young people have access to positive pathways that encourage their independence, skills building, confidence and leadership, these are likely to lead to positive outcomes. Where these pathways are absent or not readily accessible, or where they compete with negative pull factors or pathways (such as in the case of gangsterism) young people are less likely to be able to navigate a pathway of resilience.

Pathways may take the form of expectations that are socially or culturally embedded. For instance, in rural areas a young man may be expected to work to accumulate livestock that will serve to identify his standing as an adult male in the community. In certain communities, initiation ceremonies are pathways to learning about adult responsibilities and expectations and being recognised as an adult within the community. Communities will have particular social expectations about whether and at what age young people should begin to get married and when they should take on parenting responsibilities. These informal pathways shape the ways in which young people navigate transitions to adulthood. More formal pathways include post-secondary education and training opportunities, access to bursaries, or opportunities to be absorbed into the labour market. They could also include

health facilities such as family planning units or adolescent friendly clinics that can educate young people about their choices in sexual and reproductive health. A range of services offered both by the state and civil society sectors play a role in generating pathways for young people. A key challenge is often that such pathways are not integrated, making it difficult for young people to navigate them; alternatively they may be difficult to access at the local level where the reality of growing up and transitioning is located.

3.2.1 Youth service as a pathway

Youth service can be conceptualised as one pathway amongst many that young people can choose to navigate a series of transitions. Spera, Ghertner, Nerino and DiTommaso (2013:5) provide useful insights on the issue of volunteering as a pathway to employment. They argue that volunteering can serve as a "pathway to employment through increases in one's social capital and human capital". Service for instance may act as a pathway to employment (Patel 2009) in that it can provide young people with skills, experience and opportunities to access employers once the period of service is completed. In fact, according to Simonet (2009) young people involved in service in France and America became involved in service programmes after looking for a job, and saw it primarily as a stepping stone towards employment. Research on the impacts of youth service are limited (McBride 2009) but the research that does exist seems to suggest that service does enhance employability (loveLife 2008), largely because it is associated with increased work skills and advanced educational achievement (Sherraden and Eberly 1982, loveLife 2008).

Because service programmes focus specifically on "doing good" and making a contribution to communities (Lough and Sherraden 2012), it is intended to build a sense of citizenship. In fact, many service programmes are primarily set up with the goals of cross-cultural competence, enhancing citizenship, and contributing to nation building as primary objectives, with employability being seen as an additional potential outcome. By focusing on these citizenship goals, service programmes also offer a range of other outcomes that are associated with another of the key transitions that young people go through – that of taking on responsibilities as citizens of a community, nation or region. Outcomes thus may include an enhanced sense of civic responsibility, increased social integration, and cross-cultural competence (Mohan 1994, Wilson and Musick 1999).

Interestingly, these outcomes along with others such as improved mental health, higher self-esteem, sense of leadership and confidence (Eberly and Sherraden, 1990, Flanagan et al. 1998, Funk 1998, Perry and Katula 2001, loveLife 2008) may in turn be associated with employability. This feature of service programmes is another aspect that sets them apart from other youth workforce development programmes such as internships.

However, as McBride (2009) argues, these outcomes are a feature of the ways in which youth service programmes are structured. Youth service programmes are typically formalised and longer term, and incorporate a strong element of learning in the form of actual training (in life skills and often technical skills) as well as practical learning. In the case of service-learning – a period of learning through service, usually run through educational institutions at the primary, secondary or tertiary levels (McBride

2009) – focus is placed on preparing young people for the world of work and instilling a sense of civic responsibility (Pritzker and McBride 2005). Thus, in service programmes there tends to be a strong focus on skills development and learning. In this way, youth service can act as a pathway to employment for young people who cannot or may not want to access other forms of post-secondary training and skills development (Perry and Thomson 2004), or as a programme that is complementary to existing educational pathways. However, we know little about the ways in which programmes could best be structured to ensure that the pathway function of service is maximised. This research seeks to address this gap in the African context.

3.3   Defining service and employability in the African context

Service is one of many pathway options for young people as they transition. As mentioned above, service can be defined as a structured, usually mid to long-term period of voluntary activity, accompanied by training, in an organisation (McBride et al. 2004). It is distinguished from informal forms of volunteering characteristic of many African contexts, which might include mutual aid and support (Leigh et al. 2011), and other forms of volunteering conducted through volunteer involving organisations, which may be short term, ad hoc, or infrequent. The key defining feature of service as opposed to volunteering is its highly structured nature through a formalised programme. It is also distinguished from apprenticeships and internships in that it involves a component of contributing to the betterment of society or "doing good" in the community (Lough and Sherraden 2012). The definition of service employed by this study is "an organized period of substantial engagement and contribution to the local, national, or world community, recognized and valued by society, with minimal monetary compensation to the participant" (Sherraden 2001:2).

The concept of service may however be complicated in particular contexts where the lines between service and employment are somewhat blurred. While service may or may not be accompanied by some kind of stipend, in contexts of poverty young people are unlikely to be able to commit to a long-term period of service without some guarantee of money that will enable them to survive and cover the costs associated with their service commitments (Lough and Sherraden 2012). In the context of volunteering more generally, as more formal programmes that pay stipends emerge, and in a context of poverty and unemployment, there is evidence of increasing expectations of payment for volunteering in formal programmes (Russell and Wilkinson-Maposa 2011). For many volunteers, some form of income in the form of stipends or reciprocal giving is expected given these realities (VSO-RAISA and VOSESA 2011). This situation is not unique to Africa. Simonet (2009) argues that amongst low-income youth in America and France, the stipends they received for participating in the service programmes were a key source of income and opened up the opportunity to serve in a context where they would otherwise have had to go and earn an income. Thus, stipends do act as both an incentive and a necessary component of service programmes that allow young people, particularly poor young people, to begin to earn a small amount of money that can therefore allow them to stay within the programme (Lough and Sherraden 2012). Nevertheless, where the expectation of payment becomes the primary incentive for young people, this raises questions about the line between employment and service. Some may argue that the relatively small stipends are not equivalent to salaries earned in the labour market. But in contexts where low wages are commonplace, particularly amongst the helping professions, the distinction between service and employment is again very blurred. Evidence in South Africa suggests that in certain circumstances, stipends for volunteers are often of very similar value to

wages in the same sectors, and that volunteers feel that they should be receiving stipends which are of the same value as workers in the sector, given the similarities of their tasks (Russell and Schneider 2000). Such nuances and debates need to be borne in mind when assessing National Youth Service models in the African context.

Within the context of Africa, the links between service and employment must also be placed in perspective. While employment may be the desired outcome for those engaging in service programmes (Patel 2009, Simonet 2009), the realities of high levels of unemployment, particularly youth unemployment, and low job growth discussed above, mean that these direct linkages or pathways to employment may not always be possible. Rather, young people may need to learn the skills not only to seek formal employment, but also to engage in other livelihood strategies such as informal employment and self-employment; and to be prepared to manage and navigate the precariousness and vulnerability that such livelihood strategies are likely to lead to such as irregular income (Chen 2012). Thus service programmes should be assessed in terms of their relevance for changing labour markets in the global era.

Therefore, skills related to employability, as well as other skills associated with innovation and independence are likely to be important aspects of youth service programmes going forward. Employability refers to character traits and skills associated with enhancing a young person's ability to access the labour market and to be attractive to employers. These might include confidence, leadership, enhanced numeracy and literacy, self-discipline, an awareness of work culture, as well as skills related to job searching. Other skills that may be beneficial in the wider informal labour market or for self-employment might include thinking innovatively, assessing local markets, stock management, and saving. Self-employment as a term in this report is preferred to entrepreneurship, which often refers to more stable start-up businesses with potential for growth. Self-employment on the other hand refers to a range of income generating activities that might include micro or survivalist enterprises, and co-operatives amongst other efforts at generating a sustainable income. While entrepreneurship activities should be encouraged, in reality starting up sustainable, growing businesses that employ others is a far less likely possibility than developing micro-enterprises and the like.

3.4   Emerging conceptual framework

Having defined many of the concepts that pertain to this study, this section moves on to outline the conceptual approach used in the analysis of the data generated. First and foremost this study applies a youth development approach to service programmes. A youth development approach is rooted within the capabilities perspective (Sen 1999, Nussbaum 2001), which seeks to understand the ways in which assets and opportunities interact to create capabilities. Assets are the underlying individual strengths of a young person, as well as any other assets such as social capital, education, and material assets. All young people have assets of varying kinds and at varying levels. Too often research on young people focuses on their problems and inadequacies rather than on assets. The capabilities approach is primarily interested in assets. However, these assets may not always be leveraged for better capabilities, particularly where opportunities to exercise them (the pathways discussed above) are not available, ill-integrated, or inaccessible. Thus a young person with innovative ideas may not have the educational opportunity to put their ideas into practice, leaving them without a pathway. What Sen

(1999) and Nussbaum (2001) argue is that the work of development is to ensure that unfreedoms are removed or that opportunities are created for people to use their individual and communal assets in ways that enhance outcomes. Similarly, from a youth perspective, creating pathways is about creating integrated opportunities for young people to develop and put their assets into practice to enhance their capabilities for their future outcomes as they navigate the multiple transitions towards autonomous adulthood.

As mentioned above, within this conceptual approach service may be one pathway that can facilitate the development of capabilities, by recognising the assets that young people have, and creating the opportunities for them to enhance and practice these assets for various outcomes. Such outcomes can be conceptualised in relation to the various transitions. However, for the purposes of this paper, focus is placed on those outcomes that relate to enhanced employability and self-employability, including access to further education, and the development of a range of skills – both technical and soft skills. The following conceptual framework is helpful in analysing the data.

Figure 1: Conceptualising service as a pathway to youth transitions
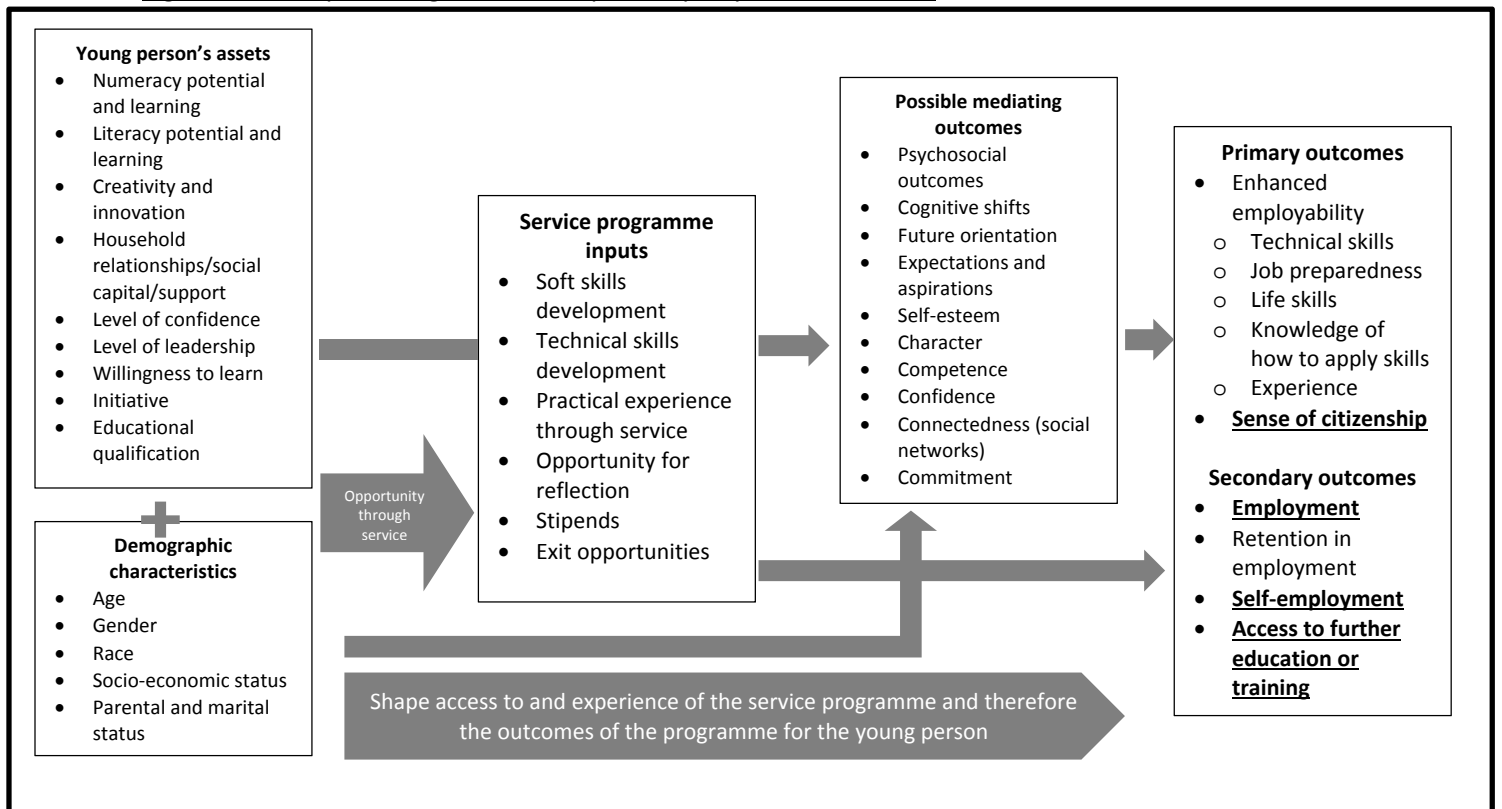
Source: Adapted from Graham et al. (2013)

What the diagram above illustrates is the various aspects that shape service programme outcomes for young people. On the far left are the assets that young people already have in place. These alongside demographic characteristics will shape various outcomes for them regardless of their access to an opportunity such as a youth service programme. The introduction of a service programme offers young people an opportunity through which to practice and develop their assets, and thus enhance a range of capabilities (mediating factors). These capabilities in turn will shape the outcomes that a young person will experience in terms of employability and ultimately their access to employment or

self-employment opportunities. In this way service acts as a pathway towards other institutions of growth and transition including the labour market and the post-secondary education space.

With this conceptual framework in mind, the report now turns to analysing the data collected regarding the structure of National Youth Service programmes in Africa, and draws out lessons from other countries that demonstrate promising practices.

4.   Findings

4.1   Youth service as a pathway to citizenship and productive work

As has been discussed, service programmes may act as one of many potential pathways that young people can use to enhance and develop their assets, to increase their capabilities, and in turn such programmes may enable young people to better make the transitions to citizenship and either employment or self-employment. However, as McBride (2009) argues, such outcomes are dependent on how service programmes are designed. Thus, in order to assess whether service programmes have the potential to contribute to such outcomes in Africa, two key features of service programmes need to be considered: 1) the intention of the programme as expressed by programme directors and in policy documents, and 2) how programmes are implemented in terms of targeting, accessibility, partnerships, and accreditation, to facilitate access to other institutions that enable further pathways to be travelled such as post-secondary education and employment or self-employment opportunities. In essence, whether service programmes act as pathways to enable young people to more effectively make key transitions is a matter of how the programme is intentioned and implemented.

In order to assess these aspects of service programmes the research team considered the ways in which service programmes are institutionally located, the policy framework for service, the targeting and recruitment strategies of programmes, the partnerships these programmes engage in, and how they handle exit opportunities for participants.

4.1.1 The design of National Youth Service programmes

The intentions of a National Youth Service programme, as expressed through policy and programme documents, play a key role in shaping whether the programme acts as a pathway for young people to transition, and if so, what transitions it is primarily concerned with. It may indicate whether such programmes have been set up within a wider framework of services available to young people, whether they are viewed as complementary or alternative options for young people, or whether they are seen as standalone programmes.

In **South Africa**, the NYS programme was intentionally set up to counter the legacy of apartheid that denied many young people an adequate education and excluded them from the mainstream economy. One of the many steps taken to ensure that this challenge was addressed was to "put in place a number of policies and initiatives aimed at increasing the participation of young people in the economy and society, with varying degrees of success. These initiatives are moored on basic economic principles of supply and demand – from improving skills (supply) to providing opportunities to enter

the world of work (demand)." The NYS programme is thus explicitly understood as an institution that is intended to help young people to transition more effectively into citizenship and involvement in the economy (South Africa Country Profile 2013).

It was also set up to replace or counter one of the institutions that, under the apartheid regime, had been a mandatory transitioning programme for young men – military service. Prior to 1994 the term 'national service' had been used to refer to the conscription of young white men into a repressive military under the apartheid government. For many this conscription acted as a pathway to a particular kind of citizenship and was associated with making boys men – that is, enabling them to transition to a particular kind of adult masculinity. The Reconstruction and Development Programme – the key policy document guiding government post-1994 – advocated a non-military, primarily voluntary NYS initiative as a means of engaging young people in bringing about transformation and reconciliation in the newly democratic South Africa (South Africa Country Profile 2013). Further, in the National Youth Policy of South Africa (Republic of South Africa 2009), National Youth Service is formulated as one of six priority intervention areas with a role to play in strengthening social cohesion and bringing excluded youth into the social and economic mainstream. In this way it is seen as a complementary service to other youth development programmes, and is expressly formulated as a key programme that contributes to enabling young people to make the transition towards active citizenship as well

> **Comparative experience: France**
>
> The policy document for France's national volunteer programme, *Service Civique,* was passed by the National Assembly and Senate, and signed into law on 10 March 2010. Article 7 - Art. L. 313-8 states that:
>
> > *For lifelong guidance and all organizations that participate in it on a regional and local level, the public service agrees to enable all young people aged between 16 and 18, without initial training diplomas or employment, to enroll in a training course, to assist or to exercise an activity such as community work enabling him/her to prepare their professional career.*
>
> This statement demonstrates that the programme is intentionally set up to assist young people who have not been able to access training and employment to participate in a skills development course. In this way the programme is intentioned to be an alternative and complementary programme to other further skills training, and is seen as a programme that will enable young people to transition into employment and further their careers.
>
> (Desk Review 2013)

as involvement in the economy. In this way the NYS Programme in South Africa was explicitly envisaged as a pathway to citizenship and economic participation.

Can youth development become the central focus of NYS?

Most countries surveyed do not say that the main aim of their youth service programmes is to assist the development of young people. Very often they prefer to define the programme as using young people to contribute to wider national or regional goals. Does this mean that NYS programmes primarily use young people as cheap labour to meet national priorities? Could the NYS rather focus on

young people's development so as to prepare them to become productive citizens who will contribute to the country's development in the long term?

In this study the goals that inform the design and implementation of the programmes assessed were mostly geared toward rural development, nation building, peace and development. The programmes were most commonly designed to be responsive to the political and socio-economic changes taking place in the country.

In **Ghana** for instance, the national service programme is viewed primarily in relation to the wider national goals it can meet. As one of the board members of the Ghana NSS stated:

> *The policy framework provides many possibilities for connecting national service to the broad vision of those running the country and what they see as key issues. Particular challenges at particular times can be addressed whether it's vaccinations, sanitation, or agriculture.* (Ghana Country Profile 2013)

So for example, the National Service Scheme and VSO have jointly created the National Volunteer Service to provide NSS Personnel (the young participants) with an additional one-year voluntary teaching placement in rural and deprived communities. The National Volunteer Service absorbs a sizeable number of service personnel post-service and provides training and hands-on experience to further a career in teaching, and ensures that adequate numbers of teachers are made available across the country (Ghana Country Profile 2013).

Nigeria uses a mixed approach that is geared primarily towards citizenship and nation building through youth service. As the Nigerian respondent explained, the graduates called up for service undertake a preliminary three-week orientation course after which they are deployed to various communities throughout the country's 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory. During the mandatory one-year service, corps members live among and within the host communities, the intention being to facilitate unity and integration as well as championing community development by executing projects jointly with the people of their host communities. Essentially, the primary objectives of the NYSC are nation building, unity and citizenship rather than employability of the participants. The programme was originally set up as a way of ensuring a readily available workforce to rebuild the country, rather than as a programme that would assist young people to transition effectively to employment or self-employment:

> *The NYSC scheme was created in a bid to reconstruct, reconcile and rebuild the country after the Nigerian Civil war and vested with the task of mobilizing and grooming Nigerian Youths for the promotion of National Unity, sustainable development, self-reliance and prepare them for the challenges of leadership. Thus it became expedient for the youth of the nation to be mandatorily mobilized to achieve these objectives.* (Nigeria Respondent 2013)

The scale and intentions of youth service programmes can change over time. Regardless of how they are framed in policy, legislation or institutionally, new directions and goals may be shaped by political considerations or leadership changes.

One example of a rapid change in NYS programme design comes from **Kenya** where, following the most recent election in 2013, the government passed legislation compelling all high school graduates to sign up for a compulsory NYS Programme expected to be rolled out in each of the 47 counties across the country by January 2014.

These massive changes can have positive as well as negative consequences. **Zambia**'s youth service programme shows how the intentions of youth service programmes can shift over time. At independence in 1964, Zambia introduced a para-military system of national service. At that time the aim of the training was to enforce discipline among school leavers. After some time, national service became a stand-alone programme that was entirely under the management of the Ministry of Defense. In 2003, a presidential directive tasked the Ministry of Youth and Sport with finding a lasting solution to the protection of street children, which led to a partnership between the ministry and the Zambia National Service. Together they embarked on a programme of rehabilitation and integration of street children. This fundamentally changed the objectives of the national service programme from a focus on discipline and ensuring a pool of military personnel to a focus on meeting the needs of a particularly vulnerable group of young people. In 2009 the focus changed again when a new system was introduced to reshape the national service system and train the youth to help them in their day-to-day lives (Zambia Respondent 2013). This clearly shows how the intentions of the programme have again changed, this time towards developing youth more explicitly in response to high levels of youth unemployment.

While the transformation of Zambia's service programme is a positive one in terms of youth transition outcomes, the **Zimbabwe** story is less encouraging. In Zimbabwe, the National Youth Service Programme, originally intended to instill values of service and citizenship (Shumba 2008), was quickly co-opted to serve the political ends of the ruling party, including intimidating members of the opposition.

This demonstrates that even when service programmes are established in response to policy that aims to facilitate productive transitions for young people, they can easily change course according to decisions taken by the country's top leadership. In some instances this can lead to positive outcomes for youth, particularly where the programme is more closely aligned to transition outcomes; in other cases the consequences may be negative as in the cases where National Youth Service programmes have been co-opted to serve narrow party-political ends.

All of these cases demonstrate how national priorities at a particular point in time can influence the intentions and design of youth service programmes. As youth unemployment becomes a more pressing issue, there may be more cases in which programmes strengthen their intention of making the young participants more employable and change the way they operate to meet these new goals.

Promising practice 1: Focus explicitly on developing young people as citizens with productive capability

NYS can be explicitly framed as a programmatic response that seeks to provide young people with more pathways to citizenship and better economic transition outcomes. Those NYS programmes that are expressly intended to prepare young citizens for better transitions into productive livelihoods, need to direct resources at the development of the young people themselves. In the process NYS needs to groom the youth as productive citizens able to connect with economic opportunities emerging within national development priorities. However, whether a NYS programme actually acts as a transition pathway is not simply a matter of how it is strategically and politically understood. NYS needs to be designed and implemented so as to focus on the youth themselves as a basis for achieving the training, employment and self-employment outcomes, and position itself within the post-school landscape so as to provide complementary or alternative routes into post-school education and training institutions and employment or self-employment opportunities.

4.1.2 National Youth Service programme implementation

Alignment with national priorities

Youth service programmes are often shaped to meet particular goals within countries. In some cases the programmes may be co-opted for party political ends, in which case they are unlikely to promote transition pathways except through patronage. However, where NYS programmes provide young people with opportunities to contribute to nation building and to become involved in sectors identified as national priorities, this holds the potential for developing a strong sense of citizenship and engaging the youth in skills development that is likely to prepare them for employment or self-employment opportunities at a later stage.

For instance, in **Nigeria** the youth service programme is explicitly framed around young people meeting national development priorities in education, health and infrastructure development. As the Nigerian respondent explained,

> *What we aim to do in the NYSC is linked with what the federal government is trying to do in education, health and infrastructure. The youth are then posted to different areas to serve in construction, building of schools, community development projects and agriculture projects. The role of the youth is to be part of mobilising and working together with communities in the projects that are aimed in developing those respective communities. We develop our curriculums together with different experts in the fields we want train our youth in … The varied education components get input from experts in the various fields e.g. representatives from banks give input in the entrepreneurship and savings component. Therefore our education curriculum aims to build the capital of the youth for national development (Nigeria Respondent 2013).*

Here it is clear that young people receive general training such as on savings and also gain practical experience in working with people. They develop technical skills in key areas that are identified as national priorities, and are therefore likely to be areas of growth with opportunities for later employment or business development.

Similarly, in **South Africa** the National Youth Service Programme works through government departments to ensure that young people are placed in identified areas of strategic priorities. The National Rural Youth Service Corps (NARYSEC) Programme operates through the Department of Rural Development and provides young people with skills in infrastructure development and agriculture – two areas identified as future growth paths necessary for South Africa's economic development. In **Ghana**, the policy framework directs the NSS to deploy personnel to certain sectors of the economy that are aligned with Ghana's national priorities and critical areas of need. These include agriculture, education and health. While **Zambia**'s economic base lies in copper production, agriculture is viewed as an additional area of growth and the government has focused on deploying young people in this sector within the NYS Programme. Thus activities created within the programme are in line with that country's national development priorities and aim to equip young people to operate in areas of growth. The Zambian respondent states,

> **Comparative experience: Jamaica**
>
> In Jamaica, participant activities are aligned with the national development priorities (NDPs), which are the growth sectors of the economy. The Jamaica NYS is in the process of redeveloping its programmes to align them more closely with labour market needs and growing industry sectors.
>
> The port in Kingston is being developed as a logistics hub in response to the expansion of the Panama Canal and, according to the Jamaica respondent, the NYS is "in dialogue with various ministries that are dealing with the expansion of the port at Kingston". The discussions also focus on emerging economic needs and opportunities over the next three to five years, so that the NYS can try to incorporate relevant training that prepares participants for opportunities in these fields.
>
> There are also other plans to increase NYS activities in line with productivity and socio-economic development in Jamaica, as explained:
>
> > *In the North Coast of Jamaica, the main commercial operation is tourism. Some programmes might be developed around the tourism industry, preparing participants for careers in hotels, food, site-seeing industries, etc. In other areas, there is a heavy reliance on agriculture. In these parishes [sic], programmes might soon focus on entrepreneurship for agriculture, organic farming, etc.*
>
> (Jamaica Respondent 2013)

Our national development plan focuses on moving into agriculture by creating youth programmes that focus on youth empowerment and the creation of employment in the agricultural sector. There are high expectations of the programme for the general development of the country; hence the level of benefit of this is also to the country. (Zambia Respondent 2013)

Promising practice 2: Align human resource development in NYS with economic growth priorities

While some of the NYS programmes focus on placing their participants in the development and civil society sectors (e.g. Burkina Faso) many of the youth service programmes surveyed say they are designed to prepare the young people for sectors that their countries have earmarked for economic growth. This positions NYS as an institution that can contribute to the development of the human resources required to meet the country's need for certain skills and capacity. To maximise this potential, however, the NYS needs to *become one of the players in the post-school education and training landscape* that can respond to labour market needs so as to channel them into institutions that can provide more advanced training in specific skills or connect them to jobs or self-employment opportunities.

As a national programme, youth service is uniquely able to *target specific cohorts for human resource development*. For example, it may recruit youth with incomplete schooling and help them overcome educational deficits in preparation for entry into other education and training programmes post-service. Alternatively it may provide graduates with opportunities to apply their knowledge in community-based programmes, thereby increasing their practical experience. This helps to confirm or alter their chosen career paths by introducing them to areas in which they could potentially find work or create self-employment.

However, unless the NYS training is adequately aligned with labour market needs in the growth areas, it is unlikely to foster youth employability. Close consultation with the private sector and other players is required to design the appropriate training for economic growth areas. Impact assessments are needed to determine whether the young people do find employment or self-employment in these or other sectors, and for how long. This research can help track the value of state and private sector investment in the NYS.

Targeting and recruitment strategies

Whom do NYS programmes target for recruitment? The targeting and recruitment strategies are likely to shape the transition outcomes for particular groups of young people, depending on how the programmes are designed to respond to their needs. Some service programmes deliberately target young people who do not have access to pathways out of poverty – such as out-of-school youth, homeless youth, or rural youth. Others target graduates who have already had access to post-school learning opportunities, but who then benefit from the NYS in gaining experience that may be relevant to the workplace. Targeting and recruitment strategies are thus instrumental in shaping the outcomes for particular groups of people.

The study shows that all the youth service programmes assessed consider a number of factors in their targeting strategies. Depending on the legislation that governs the NYS and purpose of the programme at a certain time, targeting strategies may consider age, gender representation and areas of origin within the country or region. In certain countries there are no criteria for selection beyond the age range. In other countries criteria are set to ensure equity and representivity.

For example, some of the programmes assessed have **gender quotas** to ensure that young women and men have equal opportunities to participate. An analysis of the programmes assessed in the study shows some stark gender differences with regards to recruitment into the programmes. In **Ghana**, the gender divide stands at 69 per cent male and 31 per cent female, reflecting the gender gap at the university level (Ghana Country Profile 2013). In **Zambia**, the current intake involves 198 girls (36 per cent) and 348 boys (64 per cent) (Zambia Country Profile 2013). **Mali** shows a somewhat more equal spread of participants – 65 (52 per cent) of the 126 participants are women (Mali Respondent 2013). These gender disparities in numbers seem to be a consequence of the socio-economic and cultural context (in homes and schools) within the different countries surveyed. For instance, the Ghana NSS recruits

> **Comparative experience: NYS recruitment in France**
>
> The French national volunteer programme, *Service Civique,* takes an inclusive approach to recruiting participants:
>
> > *All French youth, or young people from a Member State of the European Union, or who justify legal residence in France of more than one year, aged 16 to 25, are eligible. It does not require a certain education level, and the programme is trying to gather young people from all educational backgrounds. The distribution of volunteers between girls and boys is 57 per cent and 43 per cent and the average age is 22.*
>
> (French Respondent 2013)

graduates, but the pool of young women they can draw from is already smaller than the pool of young men due to inequalities in the education system.

> *The key is education ... because if you don't get into tertiary education you cannot join us. There's an imbalance at the university level.* (Ghana Respondent 2013)

While these cultural and institutional challenges to equity must be acknowledged, it must also be noted that service programmes can play a key role in challenging inequalities, whether as a result of ethnicity, religion or gender, by ensuring that targeting and recruitment policies and procedures actively counter inequalities experienced in the wider socio-economic contexts, particularly the labour market. In Africa, young women are particularly affected by unemployment. Service programmes could thus be used to challenge and at least in part, begin to rectify the gender imbalances rather than reinforce gender inequalities in the society.

Ghana provides an example of a programme that is beginning to address gender inequality. Although the pool of young female graduates from which to draw is much smaller than that of young men, the mandatory nature of the scheme means that all graduates have access, regardless of gender. "Deployment is also gender-blind with women and men deployed equally across rural and urban settings" (Ghana Country Profile 2013). However, gender-blind recruitment strategies are only part of the answer. The Ghana NSS administration has recently created the Gender, HIV and AIDS and Inclusion Services Desk, aimed at ensuring that the NSS experience is not only accessible for young women, but that the women are also protected from sexual harassment. What began as a department dedicated to raise awareness around HIV and AIDS, thus later grew to incorporate a mechanism for ensuring gender equality in practice.

In addition to gender considerations, some countries surveyed seek to have *geographic spread* in the youth recruited, and in others quotas are allocated according to the national demographic statistics in terms of *ethnicity* and *location*. For example in **Zambia** and **Namibia**, recruitment quotas are spread equally across each of the different geographic regions of the country. This gives equal opportunities for the selection of youth across all ethnic groups in all the geographic boundaries. Demographic targeting may be used to ensure inclusivity, but can also be used to ensure that the programme targets particular groups and excludes others. In some cases this may be a positive design component, such as when the programme is used to facilitate greater access for young women, who might otherwise by excluded; or when the programme targets particularly vulnerable groups to the exclusion of those who already have access to other opportunities. However, it can also be used to promote political ends, where certain ethnic or religious groups are excluded to the benefit of one particular favoured group.

In addition to demographic targets, many of the programmes incorporate additional *academic qualifications* and *personal characteristics* into targeting strategies. In **Zambia,** for instance, the programme considers personality and character traits of the young people. According to the respondent, the recruits should be "mentally fit, of good character and should not have any pending criminal proceeding or have a criminal record." Most NYS institutions in the study also set academic benchmarks for the young people recruited into the programmes. While some programmes only recruit graduates, others target young people who could not continue with formal education in post-secondary institutions, or who could not complete their secondary education. From this study, **Ghana** and **Nigeria** emerge as two countries that target tertiary education graduates within a specific age range in their mandatory recruitment NYS Programme:

> *The Ghana National Service Scheme (NSS) targets all tertiary-level graduates of 18 years and above from university and polytechnic institutions. There is no upper age limit although exemptions are made for those over 40 years old. Graduate numbers are on the increase with the NSS estimating the 2013 intake at 80 000, up on the previous year at 70 000.* (Ghana Country Profile 2013)

In **Nigeria**, the NYSC recruits "Nigerian graduates of universities and polytechnics who are thirty years and below" (Nigeria Respondent 2013). Similarly, the regional **ECOWAS** youth service programme targets graduates and skilled young people. The pilot programme involves three countries in the region (Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone) and deploys young citizens from all 15 ECOWAS member states as volunteers primarily to strengthen government institutions in areas such as education, health and support to non-governmental organisations (Perold and Graham 2013).

While Ghana and Nigeria are examples of countries that choose to place those who have already accessed post-secondary education into a period of service, other NYS programmes ensure that they reach young people who have not been able to access the formal post-secondary education system, thus offering them an alternative pathway to secure skills training and education. **Namibia** recruits youth who find themselves outside the formal education system for social or economic reasons or because they couldn't be absorbed through tertiary institutions. As explained,

> *We're not competing with the formal education system. What we do is assist the youth with jobs and the vocational qualifications.* (Namibia Respondent 2013)

Other countries also indicated that their programmes were designed specifically to address issues of socio-economic exclusion and target young people who were poor and lacked opportunity. In Gambia, the respondent reported that the needs of the young people with regard to being unemployed determine the programme design and targeting. Similarly, the Zimbabwean respondent reports that the economic circumstances in the country affecting young people determine the nature of the NYS Programme. These programmes are thus complementary to other post-secondary options for young people.

In some countries youth service programmes have multiple approaches and recruitment strategies. They may target those who have not been able to access post-secondary education; those who have accessed post-secondary education, thus acting as a supplementary programme to other skills development opportunities; and in some cases those who are particularly vulnerable. In **Liberia** the National Youth Service Programme is designed to cater for youth at any level of education. For this reason the programme has multiple approaches. Besides the Liberia National Youth Empowerment Programme, which targets graduates, there is also the Liberia Youth Support Programme, which targets those who have not been able to complete their education and who despite having some skills, do not qualify to be selected in the National Youth Empowerment Programme. In **South Africa** the NYS also has multiple approaches. Category One activities are intended to target young people who have not had access to post-secondary opportunities, including those who have not completed school, whilst Category Two activities target young people who are already in tertiary education.

In **Zambia** the government re-shaped the youth service programme bearing in mind that the number of colleges and universities in the country could not absorb all of the school leavers. The government also realised that there were a high number of vulnerable young people living on the streets. The Zambian programme thus targets those who cannot access post-secondary education, as well as particularly vulnerable groups and intends to ensure that they can also acquire essential skills for transition (Zambia Respondent 2013). **Lesotho** has five different youth projects, each of which target different young people with varied academic qualifications, capabilities, age rages and socio-economic background. The programmes also differ in their approaches to addressing issues and challenges youth have to deal with for work readiness and self-sustainability. One of these, the Lesotho National Youth Volunteer Corps Project (LYVCP), is designed for graduates only – from universities and those graduating from technical training. Servers are orientated for four weeks and are then placed in the different fields they were trained for (Lesotho Respondent 2013).

Promising practice 3: Flexible targeted recruitment strategies can produce explicit transition outcomes for different groups of young people

Unlike other post-school institutions, NYS programmes have the flexibility to target specific types of youth according to national youth development priorities. NYS programmes are thus able to provide education and training pathways for those who would not otherwise have a chance to transition into further education, employment or self-employment. They also amplify the experiential learning opportunities of graduates whose knowledge may be largely theoretical in nature.

There are a variety of approaches to targeting young servers, depending on what the programme is intended to achieve. In some cases the NYS is designed as a programme that is supplementary to traditional education and training institutions. In other cases the NYS is intended to produce a pathway for young people who were/are unable to gain skills and experience through the formal post-school system. Still other programmes target particularly vulnerable groups, which is particularly promising in the context of young people struggling to complete their education or access post-school education and training.

To fulfill the developmental potential of youth service, particularly for traditionally marginalised groups (such as young women or youth from different ethnic, faith-based or geographic groupings), targeting and programme strategies need to take account of and seek to actively remedy socio-economic and labour market inequalities. This means building into the recruitment process strategies to overcome social divides, among other factors. Affording opportunities to young people who might otherwise not have any options for transitioning into employment is an important consideration for youth service programmes seeking to enhance youth employability.

Partnerships

How youth service programmes are set up in relation to other programmes and institutions is a key point to consider when assessing their potential to meet youth development objectives and provide pathways to citizenship and employment or self-employment. Where youth service programmes are strategically located in relation to post-secondary training institutions, learnership programmes, or partners that could provide employment opportunities, these relationships may or may not contribute to the ability of service programmes to create stepping stones for young people from service to other opportunities and to employment or self-employment. Promoting service as a pathway to employment depends on well-considered, strategic and deliberate partnerships that connect servers with future opportunities. Some of the NYS programmes surveyed demonstrated evidence of having done this. However, in other cases partnerships were ad hoc, or not constructed in ways that facilitate youth transition along defined pathways. It appears that such partnerships were entered into primarily to enhance the sustainability of the service programme itself.

The evidence from the countries surveyed demonstrates that all of the service programmes were engaged in a wide range of partnerships: local and national government partnerships, partnerships with civil society organisations, partnerships with international organisations, and to a lesser extent with the private sector. In **Nigeria**, corps members were posted to serve their primary assignment in

all fields of endeavor relevant to their area of specialisation in both the public and private sectors such as government ministries and departments, schools, hospitals, local governments, agricultural concerns, and farms. The programme also collaborates with various international, national, regional and local agencies in many areas of human development to meet national and global challenges (Nigeria Respondent 2013). In the **Gambia**, the NYS works with skills training centers, international organisations and the private sector (The Gambia Respondent 2013). And in **Liberia**, the programme collaborates with YWCA, Boys Scouts, UNFPA, vocational institutions, Peace Corps, and NGOs like *Right to Play*. They also work with partners in the region such as **Ghana**, who support them through capacity development and strategic planning.

However, simply engaging in a wide range of partnerships is not a promising practice in and of itself. The key question is what these partnerships are intended to achieve and whether they are conceptualised as partnerships that can enhance citizenship and employability outcomes for young people. Partnerships that enhance youth transition outcomes would be those that facilitate the servers' acquisition of formalised training and connect them to later opportunities for work or self-employment.

Many of the programmes surveyed indicated that they have strong partnerships with international organisations such as the UNDP, UNICEF, VSO and other large international volunteer and development organisations. For the most part these partnerships provide financial support and sustainability to the youth service programmes, as well as technical assistance. These may be important for the sustainability of the service programmes, but are not assessed in-depth in this report, the focus being on what partnerships can do to enhance transition outcomes for young people.

Private sector partnerships

Several of the countries surveyed revealed strong networks with a range of organisations and some had developed good partnerships with private sector organisations. The most common reasons given for such connections include: providing practical skills training opportunities (such as internship) for young people, providing access to employment opportunities, and providing funding for young people who would like to start up their businesses or projects. In **Lesotho**, some volunteers in the Lesotho National Youth Volunteer Corps Project (LYVCP) are placed in private institutions such as banks and accounting companies, where they serve for a year to get work experience and exposure in the world of work and nation building (Lesotho Respondent 2013). In **Mali**, two volunteers out of the 26 mobilised in 2013 are serving in a private business launched by an international organisation in the field of car-mechanics. In some training courses, the NYS also engages the services of private consulting and training firms to conduct formal and accredited training programmes (Mali Respondent 2013). **Liberia** also has strong private sector partnerships with multinational companies such as Chevron, which provides opportunities for the youth to get six weeks' training in the form of an internship. In 2012, there were also 112 agriculture interns placed in private sector organisations within the country (Liberia Respondent 2013).

While in some countries the NYS programmes had weak partnerships with the private sector, there was a clear recognition of the need to establish partnerships with organisations that could provide

training and absorb servers once their service period is complete. **Zambia,** for instance, is currently revising its programme and sees engaging with private sector partners as a key aim in order to

> *… see how best they [the private sector] can provide advice in developing especially, the business-related components of the programme and also the sustainability of the programme … For instance, private sector organisations can be assets in implementing the entrepreneurship components of the training the youth get, by providing internships/trainee opportunities to selected youth.* (Zambia Respondent 2013)

The NYS in **Kenya** also has weak links with the private sector. Although the private sector has the potential to employ more young people than it currently absorbs, most business leaders interviewed in Kenya shared a major concern that institutions are not producing the skills required in the workplace. Significantly, employers are looking for technical skills <u>as well as</u> confidence, flexibility and initiative:

Comparative experience: USA

Private sector involvement in AmeriCorps is focused on providing funding. As a principle, all organisations that receive AmeriCorps members have to provide cash or in-kind "matches". The match pays for a portion of the living allowance and health insurance for AmeriCorps members.

Many of these organisations have large corporate sponsors or investors who provide the matching funds. "Most major corporations in the USA are represented on the list of AmeriCorps funders."

AmeriCorps participants cannot serve with the private for-profit sector; private sector involvement is limited to making financial donations. However, this financial partnership means that certain businesses make an effort to hire former AmeriCorps members, because as explained by the AmeriCorps respondent, "people who serve make better employees [because they have a] broader understanding of issues [and] can address them better". So a general understanding in the private sector now is that companies should value service as a way of developing young people and prioritise employees who have served.

(AmeriCorps Respondent and Desk Review 2013)

> *There is a huge mismatch between the skills that are coming out of our training institutions, our academic institutions and what the private sector actually needs … the skills may not necessarily be hard skills … the employers are looking for … young people who are confident, who understand the business the company is in, who are able to adapt to new changes without hesitation, so they are looking for flexible people who can seize opportunities, who are innovative who can imagine beyond their boundaries, their horizons and bring in new business lines, bring in new client base and all that.* (Kenya Country Profile 2013)

While youth service programmes may not be able to develop specific business skills, they can certainly develop the so-called 'soft skills' required by employers and should engage private sector partners far more in order to ensure greater alignment of skills training with employer needs.

Civil society organisations

Many of the youth service programmes surveyed were implemented through local civil society organisations and partners. Such partnerships not only provide valuable sources of human resource support to organisations that are often under-resourced, but also supply opportunities for young people to understand local community needs and identify opportunities for employment or self-employment. Such organisations may also provide training to young people about key social issues that they may later want to get involved in as professionals. For instance, in **Cape Verde** local partners in the drug rehabilitation sector were used to run a training programme that empowered volunteers to promote awareness of addressing drug addiction and the role of rehabilitation centres in communities. In **South Africa** a national NGO called loveLife is an NYS partner that runs a youth service programme in a range of community-based organisations and schools. Youth servers are placed in these organisations and tasked with running programmes for school-going youth, including sports and cultural programmes. Through this programme the servers gain invaluable experience in project planning and management and develop leadership skills. A study on this programme concluded that such servers are more likely to be employed than the national average for young people (loveLife 2008).

Government

Government partners are engaged with in various ways by NYS programmes and may also offer pathways for transitions. A scan of NYS programmes in this study shows that their dominant connections are with other government institutions rather than partnerships with the private sector, local organisations, civil society and external or international bodies. Government partners may play a role in training as well. In **Nigeria**, for instance, government partners such as the Citizenship and Leadership Unit of government, the National Emergency Management Agency, Road Safety Members, Red Cross Fire Services and the Police, to name a few, provide young servers with training. In **South Africa**, most of the NYS programmes are conducted through national government departments, which place servers into programmes the departments run. Thus government departments are often used to provide training or to act as placement agencies for young servers.

The effects of such partnerships on the youth service participants are unclear. One result from these partnerships is that they may introduce young people to possible employment prospects within the public system, which may not have been a viable prospect prior to commencing their period of service. However, there is no evidence to suggest that government partnerships enhance youth employment prospects and the extent to which young people actually benefit in terms of transitions is yet to be investigated.

Nigeria demonstrates a good approach to ensuring that partnerships are effective in enhancing youth transitions post-service. They have established a NYSC National Governing Board, which draws on and brings together committees of vice-chancellors and rectors of polytechnics as well as the army, the police, the Nigerian Employers Consultative Association and representatives from the geo-political zones. In this way the NYSC ensures that collaboration starts from the very top and not just at the implementation phase. Such partnerships enable the NYSC to frame the programme in relation to higher education and employer needs. They also have local partners they have engaged for curriculum development and training.

In **Ghana t**he NSS has showed its commitment to receiving independent feedback on its operations by convening a first stakeholder forum in 2010. This provided an opportunity for channeling constructive feedback to the NSS and created the space for the NSS to dialogue with other agencies and stakeholders about future collaboration. Funds permitting, this is set to be a regular event.

Promising practice 4: Effective partnerships need to be structured at the highest level

In most of the NYS programmes surveyed, a range of partnerships are constructed between the NYS and different external players such as government departments, companies, civil society organisations or international agencies. The NYS can also form multi-stakeholder partnerships or forums to draw in top leadership from universities, polytechnics, government departments, the army, the police, employer organisations, employment agencies, loan funds, and regional representatives, into the NYS governance or advisory structures.

No evidence was available of the extent to which these partnerships help the youth service participants find employment or self-employment. Nevertheless, such structures do create the opportunity for the NYS to (re) design its programme in response to the needs of employers (public and private), other players active in the economy, and further education and training institutions. Investing in such mutually beneficial partnerships is likely to produce the following benefits:

- increase the possibility of the NYS programme better meeting employers' skills needs in different sectors
- focus on relevant and accredited training
- facilitate placement in entry-level positions
- enable suitably qualified youth service graduates to access loans or grants to start businesses post-service
- enable the young people to make their career choices and channel them into the post-secondary education system for further training.

The above sections of this report have considered the ways in which service programmes are intentioned and designed to facilitate youth transitions in terms of citizenship as well as employability. The section has highlighted potential promising practices in terms of how service programmes stand in relation to other youth-focused institutions such as post-secondary education; how targeting and recruitment help shape positive outcomes for youth service participants; and the partnerships that can facilitate the prospect of finding work or becoming self-employed.

Returning to the conceptual framework discussed above, the following section moves on to provide specific features of NYS programmes that are directly related to the development of outcomes that can mediate the transitions young people make post-service. It examines how service programmes act as a pathway to citizenship, as well as how they contribute to employability, employment and self-employment.

4.2 Youth service – preparing youth for citizenship and productive work

Most programmes serving young people have youth development as a goal, no matter how they define the concept. In this study, as discussed above, youth development has a specific meaning. It refers to:

- recognising the assets that young people have
- enhancing opportunities for them to develop their assets by addressing their socio-economic, socio-cultural, and psycho-social needs (Hamilton et al. 2004)
- focusing on developing capabilities in the youth that will support them as they navigate their adult future.

The Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework (Pittman et al. 2003) promotes the development of a range of outcomes for young people that will prepare them better to transition to adulthood. These include **competence** (sense of control over actions and decisions), **confidence** (self-esteem and leadership), **character** (sense of self and independence in relation to others), **connectedness** (having strong connections with close family and friends, as well as wider social networks), and **citizenship** (having

> *Employers are looking for young people who are confident, who understand the business the company is in, who are able to adapt to new changes without hesitation – flexible people who can seize opportunities, who are innovative, who can imagine beyond their boundaries, their horizons and bring in new business lines, a new client base and all that.*
>
> (Kenya Country Profile 2013)

a sense of responsibility towards community). The five C's of positive youth development can also be considered to be mediators for other outcomes such as employability, since they are understood to be factors that contribute to the preparedness of young people. Preparedness suggests that young people need to develop these competencies and skills to ready themselves for overall wellness, work and adult life (Pittman et al. 2003).

> *Most youth service programmes report that participants develop 'soft skills' in the areas of communication, team-building, creativity, and critical thinking, all of which help prepare them for participation in the workplace. Participants at the International Association of National Youth Service (IANYS) conference thus called on employers to consider participation in youth service and the 'soft skills' acquired in that process when making decisions about hiring young recruits.*
>
> (9th Global Conference on National Youth Service. Alexandria, Egypt, 2010)

Not all youth programmes focus on all the development aspects that the PYD framework advocates. Some may focus more on some outcomes than on others; some programmes may not find certain outcomes relevant at all. Depending on how youth service programmes are set up with regard to their goals and aims, these outcomes may be either explicitly developed, developed through the service component implicitly, or completely ignored. In this study these outcomes are considered to be mediating factors that can produce other transition outcomes such as enhanced employability, we consider the ways in which programmes either implicitly or explicitly develop these outcomes, and comment on promising practices emerging from the case examples.

Service programmes have been conceptualised with wider youth development outcomes in mind. For instance in the **Gambia**, "they aim to provide requisite skills for self-employment and creating employment opportunities, in addition to helping the acquisition of disciplined minds, morally strong and development-oriented young people". And in **Zimbabwe** the aim of the youth service programme is to "orient all Zimbabwean youth to appreciate and accept realities of life as they graduate into adulthood. It is considered as one of the effective strategies for youth development in areas of social, economic and political development". Thus, many youth service programmes seek to achieve a range of positive youth development outcomes in terms of preparing young people to make effective transitions to adulthood.

4.2.1 Character

Character is perhaps the aspect of positive youth development that most youth service programmes articulate as a core goal. Character refers to having a strong sense of who one is and the values that one stands for. Most of the youth service programmes assessed expressly discuss discipline, responsibility and morality when discussing the outcomes that they hope to achieve amongst their participants. Of course, discipline and morality are terms that can be interpreted in various ways. In some cases these concepts may refer to instilling a sense of self-discipline and positive values, whereas in others discipline and morality may refer to military discipline or the extent to which people ascribe to the values that a particular political party favours. How such concepts are interpreted within the context of particular service programmes is beyond the scope of this study.

Nevertheless, such ideas were firmly entrenched in the planned outcomes of service programmes. In **Zimbabwe** for instance, the respondent explained that the programme focuses on:

> *Looking after yourself as a young man or woman, having an identity that is admirable, personal, community health, sanitation, HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention, reproductive health, first aid and the importance of sustainable livelihoods in light of difficult economic circumstances.* (Zimbabwe Respondent 2013)

The first phase of the **Namibia** programme lasts for three months and involves civic training that aims to "uplift the general level of discipline among recruits". And in **Nigeria**, the interviewee spoke of the importance of raising the moral tone of the Nigerian youth by giving them the opportunity to learn about higher ideals of national achievement, social and cultural improvement.

> By being challenged to find solutions within communities, participants learn about their capacity to lead and gain a sense of accomplishment and recognition which in turn enhances their self-esteem.
>
> (NYS Study Finding 2013)

In **Cape Verde**, participants go through training programmes regarding risk and protective factors for substance use and abuse, sexual and reproductive health, and youth violence. In so doing they not only gain skills, but are encouraged to mirror responsible behaviour and demonstrate integrity in relation to these issues as leaders within communities. The youth in **Namibia** are said to be "mostly disciplined, they have a different mindset, know their citizenship, are good at time-keeping and have

a sense of respect". Evidence is lacking as to how exactly programmes are designed to ensure the development of character within the programme. In **Nigeria**, paramilitary training is intended to provide participants with a sense of perseverance and discipline, but in other countries this outcome is likely to happen through a combination of life skills training and the experience of service and being seen as a leader within communities.

4.2.2 Confidence

Developing confidence refers to instilling in young people a sense of their own self-worth, enhancing their self-esteem and promoting leadership qualities amongst them. Most of the countries indicated that they aim to develop these qualities amongst their participants. The AU Youth Volunteer Corps respondent noted the feedback she had received from volunteers who had participated in the programme.

> *Volunteers themselves – they thank us for the opportunity to participate in development, because [they say] "We didn't know what we can do". That is also a success because you value your knowledge, skills, competence, availability and energy and make them think I'm somebody and I can be part of the development process.* (AU Respondent 2013)

Nigeria aspires to "achieve the ultimate goal within their programmes which is to produce future leadership with positive national ethos – leadership that is vibrant, proud and committed to the unity and even development of the Nigeria state" (Nigeria Respondent 2013). In Nigeria, there is a designated project for promoting leadership amongst the young participants:

> *Corps members are expected to identify the needs of their host communities and mobilise members*

Developing youth as visionaries and leaders

The African Leadership Academy enrols disadvantaged youth all across Africa for a two-year pre-university training with the specific aim of bringing out the leader in the young men and women they train. This is a promising example of a model for youth development training. The academy uses the principle of harnessing youth ideas and assisting the youth to develop their innovative ideas to deal with the community problems where they come from. In a recent television interview the director of the academy, Fred Swaniker, spoke highly of the visionary ideas from the youth who come from very disadvantaged circumstances.

The African Leadership Academy is filling a gap by providing channels for the youth to develop their skills, make their business ideas come to life and act as motivators for other youth in similar backgrounds. Participants spend two years at the academy. The administration then assists the youth by placing them at universities. They can study anywhere in the world as long as they return to their country to work or start a business after university. The model that the African Leadership Academy has been running shows that there is a wealth of intellectual resource that the youth possess, and with the appropriate mentoring, they can improve their livelihoods, that of their families, and also develop ideas and practices that improve the lives of their communities both on a small and large scale.

(NYS Study 2013)

of their host communities to embark on developmental self-help projects. Through this programme, many Corps members were able to construct bridges, health care centres,

classroom blocks, market stalls, culverts etc. They had also carried out projects like HIV sensitisation, adult literacy campaign, extra-mural classes for students, road safety campaign etc. (Nigeria Country Profile 2013)

By being challenged to find solutions within communities, participants learn about their capacity to lead and gain a sense of accomplishment and recognition which in turn enhances their self-esteem. In **Namibia**, self-esteem is promoted by way of an award system. As a way to incentivise the young people to involve themselves in activities other than those that benefit them, and more generally to recognise their participation during the service, those with outstanding performance during the service year are given a State Honours Award.

Although the issue of developing youth leadership skills emerged as a key goal of most service programmes surveyed, our analysis showed that there is little evidence of specific strategies that the different country programmes are using to develop youth leadership skills. This is a major risk for all programmes – to state an objective but not have strategies or evidence of how this is to be achieved. In the **ECOWAS** Programme, one of the objectives is that "the youth need to have an experience of volunteering, and some leadership skills plus the ability to adapt to different social and cultural environments". However, there was insufficient information of how this is happening for the young men and women who get enrolled in the programme.

For the **Namibian** and **Zimbabwe** programmes, the issue of youth leadership was emphasised especially in relation to the entrepreneurship aspect of the training that young people received. However, they do not have standalone leadership programmes for the youth. What might be useful for NYS programmes is borrowing from models of leadership training for the youth that are used by institutions such as the African Leadership Academy in South Africa (see box above).

Confidence, self-esteem and leadership are core values of youth service programmes that are achieved primarily through the service activities themselves rather than through formal training.

(NYS Study Finding 2013)

Evidently therefore, while confidence, self-esteem and leadership are core values of youth service programmes, it seems that such learning occurs primarily through the service activities themselves rather than through formal training mechanisms. This is indicative of the power of service programmes to instil confidence in young people by providing them with opportunities to demonstrate their assets and skills in local communities.

4.2.3 Competence

Competence refers to developing a sense of control over one's decisions and actions, and mastery of particular skills. All of the youth service programmes indicated wanting to develop the competence of young people through the transfer of technical or hard skills training and experience in particular areas of service. These are dealt with in more detail in the following section on employability.

In addition to technical training, the youth service programmes surveyed were also interested in enhancing the competence of young people in a wide range of more general skills. For this reason all

of the youth service programmes incorporate a period of life skills training in addition to the technical training and experience that the participants undergo. Much of the life skills training is focused around job preparedness, also discussed in more detail in the section on employability. But some life skills training goes beyond job preparedness, leadership and discipline to include general skills that will provide young people with a sense of competence to navigate the uncertainty of adult life. One such example is financial management and savings.

4.2.4 Connectedness

Connectedness in the lives of young people is about more than just interpersonal relationships. While school connectedness, family connectedness and peer connectedness are important aspects of belonging, connectedness also refers to a sense of community belonging which points to a sense of support, safety, and a wider sense of belonging, and impacts on young people's identity. Many of the youth service programmes assessed in this study have an explicit aim of ensuring that participants develop a feeling of belonging and being part of a nation or region; and some also include a focus on diversity and belonging.

In **Nigeria**, for instance, corps members live among and within the host communities, facilitating unity and integration as well as championing community development by executing projects jointly with the people of their host communities. The programme thus aims to develop common ties among the Nigerian youth and promote national unity and integration. The NYSC scheme was created in a bid to reconstruct, reconcile and rebuild the country after the Nigerian civil war. It was vested with the task of mobilising

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Comparative experience: Brazil

Through its three strategies, which are basic education, professional qualification and civic participation, and its six approaches that focus on the issues that affect youth in Brazil the most, the programme is capable of creating strategies that can respond to specific demands of youth, respecting the background of the participants and extracting the best of their perspectives about what they really need and what should be done, leading them therefore to have autonomy and be able to express their own thoughts and design their own solutions to national and local problems.

(Brazil Respondent 2013)

Comparative experience: France

In France the youth service programme places a major focus on diversity. One of the objectives of *Service Civique* is to reinforce national cohesion and social diversity nationally and internationally. In *Service Civique* the notion of successful diversity is understood as "ensuring that the volunteers represent an image of the French youth in all its diversity, be it age, sex, social origins, level of education, place of residence and that they can meet around common projects and share their experiences".

> *59 per cent of the young volunteers in "Service Civique" have an education level equivalent to or lower than the baccalaureate (A levels). This rate is strictly comparable with that of young people in the whole of the French population. The distribution of volunteers between girls and boys is 57 per cent and 43 per cent and the average age is 22. This distribution underlines the fact that "Service Civique" arouses interest in young people having had very varied types of schooling (France Youth Service information).*

(France Desk Review 2013)

and grooming Nigerian youth for the promotion of national unity, sustainable development, self-reliance and preparing participants for the challenges of leadership. These aims have been achieved by efforts towards removing prejudices, eliminating ignorance and confirming at first hand the many similarities among Nigerians of all ethnic groups during the orientation and interaction with service corps at all levels of the programme. The Nigerian respondent also explained:

> In the orientation stage, for three weeks, the youth are given lectures in history, culture, languages, security, patriotism, training on the MDGs, volunteerism and self-motivation.

In view of the above, promoting such cohesion also serves to develop a deep sense of corporation, co-existence and common destiny of the people of Nigeria.

The Nigerian and the French experience demonstrates how the design of the programme can enhance a wider sense of connectedness for young people, both in terms of their sense of belonging to a nation, as well as in forging acquaintanceships and friendships across divides that they may not have in the absence of participating in such programmes.

Promising practice 5: National youth service is particularly suitable for building character, connectedness, confidence and competence in youth

Employability starts by building the personal attributes of young people for work and adulthood. Youth service programmes are unique in that they provide the spaces, time and practical opportunities through which young people can develop their character, confidence, connectedness and competence through service. While virtually all the NYS programmes surveyed aim to achieve these outcomes, only a few demonstrate careful thought about how to develop this aspect of work preparation. They show that through the service experience, programmes are able to develop participants' health awareness, ethics, interpersonal relations, time management, intergenerational engagement, self-esteem and conflict management, to name but a few outcomes. These all contribute to leadership development and are indispensable to work-readiness training.

More research is needed to demonstrate whether service does in fact result in such outcomes in different contexts, but the experience of some of the NYS programmes surveyed suggests that these are promising outcomes.

Financial capability and asset building

Although none of the NYS programmes specifically reflected on building financial assets as a key aim of the programme, many included the payment of stipends and some form of financial literacy training. This in fact emerges as a key promising practice that could be further developed and more intentionally engaged with. Evidence from Africa and other parts of the world suggests that building financial assets has multiple positive effects, such as growth in fixed assets (such as houses), access to productive assets (equipment for business purposes), and other financial assets (such as mortgages and stocks) (Sherraden 1991). Ownership of assets can reduce the volatility of earnings when earnings are derived solely from labour income, and/or when this income is low (Banerjee and Duflo 2007). Other positive outcomes have been recorded in human capital development (such as education and

health). Asset building strategies are also associated with altering young people's sense of future prospects (Destin and Oyserman 2009) and have been found to be a significant predictor of college enrolment and progress in the United States (Elliott and Friedline 2013). Young people's saving habits are also good predictors of future savings habits (Friedline, Elliott and Chowa 2013) and are associated with a greater sense of control amongst young people (Elliott, Destin and Friedline 2011).

Given these positive outcomes, there is potential for youth service programmes to actively incorporate and develop financial inclusion training, particularly since many also include the payment of a stipend, which would allow young servers, when appropriately trained, to begin to develop financial assets. Lough and Sherraden (2012) argue that service programmes that include stipends may offer young people the additional advantage of building up financial assets in addition to the skills development and citizenship outcomes that they are likely to achieve. However, they note that thus far stipend models do not necessarily result in increased financial assets, unless also paired with financial education and access to savings products.

Comparative experience: Jamaica
In the Jamaica NYS, the training workshop component includes an element called Financial Literacy, which also covers financial management.
The workshop addresses topics such as saving and making sacrifices on short-term gratification for long-term investments. NYS gets partners in financial and banking institutions to make these presentations.
(Jamaica Respondent 2013)

Most of the countries surveyed give their participants *stipends* during their time with the NYS. When the **Gambia** NYSS sends young people to vocational training centres to get the requisite training, the participants are given a stipend of 200 Dalasi. They are also trained on saving and financial management, using the stipends they are given. Banks or other financial institutions are invited to provide this training or to support it (Gambia Respondent 2013). Similarly, in **Nigeria** all participants receive an allowance and are taught that they should save something and go back home with the money they save. Some of the participants who are placed with employers have part of what they are paid retained and saved for them by the employer. Lessons on savings are also given during the entrepreneurship training as in the case of the **Gambia**. In **Zimbabwe**, the NYS official who was interviewed for the research said that:

> *Saving is part of the civic education training that we give them (NYS participants). We also discuss with them global macro-economics to help them to broadly understand the concepts around saving and economics. This is a complicated process, but what we have done from the beginning of our training is that we make it known to our participants that if they want to achieve, they have to work hard. We are critically orienting the young men and women to understand life positively and* aim *to be a person who strives and is capable to do things for themselves and add value.* (Zimbabwe Respondent 2013)

The above examples show evidence of prioritising training on savings – a core skill that will enable young people to have greater control over their financial future.

Promising practice 6: The stipends paid by NYS programmes can introduce youth to asset accumulation through savings

Evidence from Africa and elsewhere suggests that accumulation of financial assets amongst the poor, and for young people in particular, has significant effects on a range of outcomes. These include increased savings behaviour, more positive sexual and reproductive health outcomes, a stronger sense of future, and greater likeliness of accessing and completing post-secondary education.

Most NYS programmes pay stipends and incorporate a savings education module in their curriculum. This means that young NYS participants are in an ideal situation to develop financial capability: they can refer to the knowledge of how to save, and the stipend gives them the opportunity to save. NYS programmes that incorporate both these elements are therefore in a position to equip young people with the capability to accumulate financial assets, which could lead to a range of positive outcomes related both to their own development and their future livelihoods.

However, in order to understand whether or not NYS programmes are in fact assisting young people to develop financial assets, and whether these in turn are leading to the desired outcomes, evaluation of these programme features should be considered.

4.3   Service as a pathway to citizenship

Citizenship may be conceptualised in relation to local community, nation, region or world in particular service programmes, depending on the stated aims and objectives of the programme.

In the African countries all programmes expressly aimed to develop a sense of responsibility for development challenges facing the country or region. Secondly, many of these programmes framed the experience around the concept of nation building.

In France *Service Civique* aims to promote "Francophone and European citizenship".

(NYS Study 2013)

In addition to the four C's discussed above, a further feature of preparedness is citizenship, defined by Linklater (2002) as a continuum based on conception of belonging to and responsibility for a political, economic and social community as well as a wider moral community that includes all humankind. This is a broader definition of citizenship than simply formal citizenship of a country. Citizenship may be conceptualised in relation to local community, nation, region or world in particular service programmes, depending on the stated aims and objectives of the programme.

Interestingly, in the NYS programmes surveyed the four C's of competence, character, confidence and connectedness, were most often mentioned in relation to citizenship suggesting that the primary purpose of focusing on these youth development outcomes is to enhance participants' sense of citizenship. Certainly, most youth service programmes articulated a core goal as being one of nation building, patriotism or citizenship and spoke about youth development outcomes in relation to this. For the **Gambia**, the aim of the programme was to produce "development-oriented young people"; in **Zimbabwe** "national achievement" was a feature of the training; in **Namibia**, young participants were seen to "know their

citizenship", an outcome of the programme which aims to "encourage patriotism, a sense of nationhood and commitment to Namibia's development". Similarly **Cote d'Ivoire** aimed to "educate young people in civic responsibility and citizenship" and in **Mali** it was key to "promote and valorise youth volunteering and civic values". One of the main goals of the **ECOWAS** Programme is to mobilise young people to contribute to development, peace and regional integration in the 15 ECOWAS countries. It is therefore evident that citizenship is a core aim of all of the service programmes assessed. But how is citizenship facilitated through the programmes? Two main features of promoting citizenship were identified in the analysis. Firstly, all programmes expressly aimed to develop a sense of responsibility for development challenges facing the country or region. Secondly, many of the programmes framed the experience around the concept of "nation building" and in the case of the **AU-YVC**, around regional awareness.

4.3.1 Instilling a sense of responsibility for development challenges

As mentioned above, a defining feature of service programmes is that they involve participants in "doing good" within communities (Lough and Sherraden 2012). A core aspect of developing a sense of citizenship therefore was to ensure that young participants understand the ways in which their service work contributes to meeting development challenges in the countries or regions in which they worked:

> So the word volunteer must appear in the programme: you come on a voluntary basis and you want to give yourself and your skills to contribute to the development of your continent, community, etc. In 2008 when we started, I insisted on the word 'corps' because in French it means 'body'. The arms, etc. all play a role and belong to the same body. We need values and definitions to be together. Each word has a full meaning in the AU youth volunteer programme. (AU Youth Volunteer Corps Respondent 2013)

Some of the programmes in part ensured that this took place by aligning their content and activities with national priorities as discussed above. But they were also conscious of making the participants themselves aware of how they could make a contribution to development. For instance, many of the NYS programmes included a component on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in their orientation or training, and made participants aware of the main development challenges facing their countries, such as HIV and AIDS. In other NYS programmes, the young people themselves are tasked with identifying pressing local development challenges and coming up with strategies to address these.

The **Nigeria** Youth Service Corps uses a model in which youth participants have to work with local communities to identify challenges and then play a leadership role in communities as they put in place strategies to address the identified challenges alongside community members. Corps members are encouraged to be agents of change by contributing towards the development of their host communities. During the mandatory one-year service, corps members live among and within the host communities facilitating unity and integration as well as championing community development by executing projects jointly with the people of their host communities.

Zimbabwe's Youth Volunteer Corps mobilises youth, registers and trains them, and links them to development partners who provide opportunities for the youth to undertake voluntary activities. Members of the Youth Volunteer Corps are deployed as volunteers in areas of need.

In **Kenya**, NYS participants after their training are sent to various NYS field units spread all over Kenya to take part in the national service. This takes one year to a maximum of two years, depending on the availability of space at the various training institutions. During this period, the young men and women give service to the nation by undertaking various forms of assigned duties and responsibilities, including working on NYS farms, participating in construction of infrastructure such as roads, building of dams and dykes. Some young men and women take part in crowd control duties during major national engagements such as national celebrations. Some of the recruits are also involved in security duties at government buildings during this time. The recruits are also called upon during national disasters such as the rockslide that killed several people in Nairobi in 2012. During a catastrophic slum fire in Nairobi in 2011, the NYS Fire Fighting Unit was the first emergency unit to arrive on the scene and many of the servicemen and women were integral to the rescue operation thereafter.

Comparative experience: Chile

In Chile the *Servicio Pais* Programme enrols on average 460 university graduates. The interventions which *Servicio Pais* participants organise relate to their diagnosis of the community needs. Volunteers and communities identify the problems that they will address to benefit the community. Volunteers then help the community to resolve problems partially or completely by the end of the year of service.

Firstly, volunteers help communities to activate their own resources to address the problem – they help the community to empower itself. They train communities to improve their capacity to deal with identified problems.

Secondly, they improve organisation and level of association within the community. Then, they connect the community with available services in their area. Finally, they help communities to gain recognition from others because of how they dealt with the problems.

(NYS Study 2013)

Another area of development is in preserving the environment in order to make productive use of its resources. Some of the countries surveyed teach environmental management issues related to agriculture and farming, although this is on a limited scale. **Zimbabwe** recently included environmental management in the sustainable livelihoods component of the NYS. In **Kenya**, the recruits participate in environmental protection and rehabilitation exercises such as tree planting and cleaning. A recent example of such environmental rehabilitation work is the cleaning of the Nairobi River. In **Cape Verde** a tree planting campaign in the neighborhood of Ponta d'Agua was designed to raise awareness about environmental issues and involved CNV in partnership with the Scouts of Cape Verde-Section of Vila Nova and Ponta d'Agua. Although in the case of Cape Verde these were once-off events, training youth service participants in environmental management may strengthen a sense of responsibility for the global environment.

The **Ghana** NSS's focus on agriculture as a viable livelihood also straddles the interface between skills-building and civic service. The current personnel in the sample were all deployed in the city, but as part of their programme were required to render farm visits and agriculture project work on a weekly

basis. This exposed them to a different side of life. As one of the current service personnel cohort explained:

> *For me I would say the farming aspect [is what I like most about the NSS]. This is because the produce from the farms are used to feed secondary school pupils and other organisations which cannot afford to feed their people. This makes me feel happy because I am in a way contributing to my nation's development.* (Ghana Country Profile 2013)

NYS programmes thus have the opportunity to make youth service participants aware of how they can contribute to national development through good orientation and active engagement in service work.

In some of the NYS programmes, the young people themselves are tasked with identifying pressing local development challenges and coming up with strategies to address these. This provides opportunities to take initiative, work in partnership with communities, and gain experience of solving problems on the ground. In so doing they gain valuable experience, become aware of their ability to contribute to the wider good, and take responsibility for contributing to solving local development challenges. This is likely to instil a sense of citizenship that will help the young people develop as rounded individuals connected to the wider society in which they live and hope to work.

The opportunity to reflect these active service experiences provides an important learning experience for the young people involved. Not only does this instil an understanding of citizenship, but it may also open up pathways to careers in the development sector or stimulate their longer-term involvement in community-based voluntary work.

4.3.2 Service for nation building and peace

National Youth Service programmes introduce young servers to the realities of their country. They get to know people from different parts of the country, which facilitates integration and social cohesion by giving the youth practical experience of diversity in society. NYS also develops better understanding of the country's history, or the history of a region, and its priorities. In **Ghana** for instance, there is a strong sentiment that the youth should play a role in nation building through service. Through such civic engagement, the Ghana NSS also seeks to foster national integration, providing tertiary-level graduates with a window into a different Ghanaian reality:

> *... a person who has just gone through primary, secondary school and university, what is such a person going to know about Ghana? Now if you take him out of his community to areas he would normally not have gone, he gets to see real life. Then it changes his mindset so that when he comes and is employed, he knows what is at stake in the country.* (Ghana Respondent 2013)

In the case of **Zimbabwe**, nation building is a core component of the training goals. The background information provided by the Zimbabwe NYS Volunteer Corps cites the following objectives:
* advocate for the creation in youth a sense of belonging, patriotism and responsible citizenship
* establish and enhance national unity in the country
* instil self-discipline and vigilance against crime in the nation's youth

- promote the concept of voluntarism.

In the **Gambia** NYS Programme the service period and the training that precedes it is meant to produce "patriotic and loyal youth who serve the Gambia in any situation they may find themselves in" (The Gambia Respondent 2013). In **South Africa** the YouthBuild NYS training programme contains a curriculum component on leadership, service and citizenship as one of five components. Many of the programmes have a core component of enhancing diversity and integration (discussed under connectedness above). Thus, in **Nigeria**, young servers are sent to different parts of the country to encourage awareness of how 'the other' lives, meet new acquaintances, and ensure that friendships are made across the divisions that may traditionally exist between people. This is intended to enhance national understanding and integration as well as develop a sense of unity regardless of difference.

The **ECOWAS** Programme, although still relatively small in scale, is also intended to facilitate unity, peace and integration at a regional level. According to an interview with one top official from the ECOWAS Programme,

> *Employment is apparently not a focus of the programme. It is more peace building and bringing skills to post-conflict countries. I would say therefore that the training is based more on the placements needs. The programme is about bringing qualified youth to countries in need.* (ECOWAS Respondent 2013)

The ECOWAS Programme started in 2009 and it was aimed at supporting peace initiatives in **Liberia**. The programme involves college graduates in the fields of agriculture, nursing and education who are deployed in communities for one year of service to that community.

Promising practice 7: The service experience can produce well-rounded work seekers

The survey shows that a core focus of many of the youth service programmes is the development of a sense of citizenship, which is a critical part of preparing young people for adulthood, employment and self-employment. Service programmes tend to combine life skills training with citizenship by placing young people in situations where they work and socialise with people whom they would not otherwise meet. By giving young people a chance to discover what they can do to help solve development challenges, the youth service programme can build a sense of responsibility in the young servers. The focus on citizenship also drives investments in the development of competence, character, confidence and connectedness. These attributes are attractive to prospective employers and are essential in enabling young people make better transitions to a productive adulthood. Once again, impact assessments are needed to determine whether this is the case.


4.4 National Youth Service as a pathway to employability

As shown in the conceptual framework below, citizenship outcomes of service programmes may contribute to employability outcomes. Service programmes may also concentrate specifically on developing employability outcomes in addition to citizenship outcomes. Employability in this study is defined as individual features and skills that are attractive to potential employers in the labour market – "a set of skills, knowledge and personal attributes that make an individual more likely to secure and be successful [occupation or career] to the benefit of

Defining employability

Employability in this study is defined as individual features and skills that are attractive to potential employers in the labour market – "a set of skills, knowledge and personal attributes that make an individual more likely to secure and be successful [occupation or career] to the benefit of themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy". (Yorke 2006:10)

themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy" (Yorke 2006:10). Employability is thus different from actual employment outcomes.

Figure 2: Citizen outcomes of service programmes contribute to employability outcomes
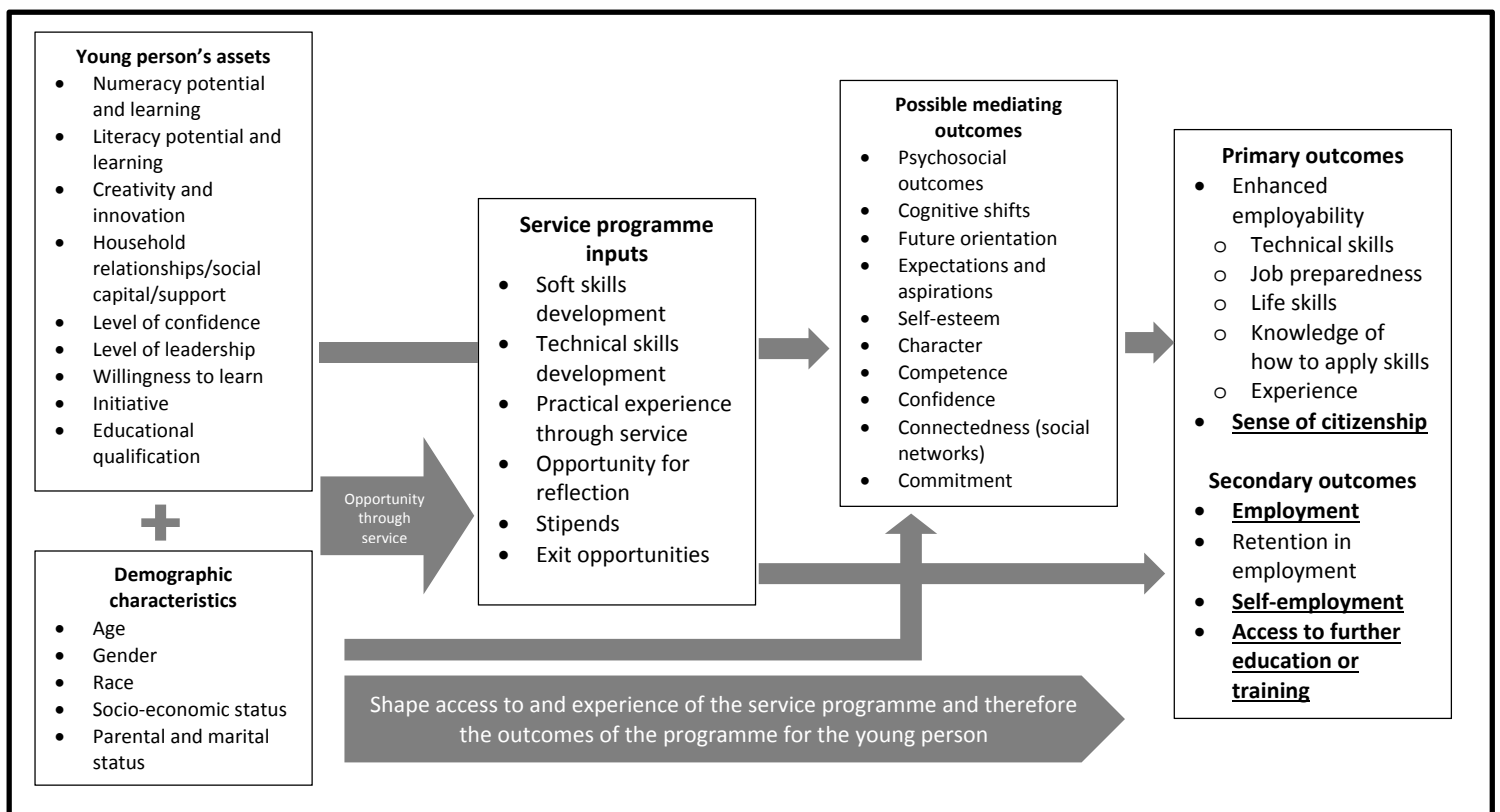
Employment is assessed by actual absorption into the labour market, as well as retention in the workplace. Employability on the other hand focuses on the features that may lead to employment or prepare young people for self-employment where employment options are scarce. Such features include technical skills, job preparedness skills, and knowing how to apply the skills learned. In this section of the report we focus on examples from the country profiles that point to how service programmes contribute to technical skills training, job preparedness training, and actual experience.

Once again, the diagram that illustrates the conceptual framework for this analysis shows how the youth service experience relates to employability, employment, self-employment, further education and training, as well as citizenship outcomes for the young participants.

4.4.1 Technical skills training

Most of the NYS programmes assessed incorporated a significant technical skills training component, although the focus, design and length of the training differs across programmes. This component of service programmes may be considered to be the largest contribution to enhancing employability of young people, particularly for young people who would otherwise not have access to training opportunities through post-secondary training institutions.

In **Cote d'Ivoire** participants have the opportunity to be trained in a wide range of fields including agriculture, handicrafts, construction and public works, as well as information and communication technologies (ICTs). In the **Gambia** the youth are provided with 14 categories of training which include tailoring, farming, maritime and small scale fishing, carpentry, auto-mechanics, electrical engineering, machinery, plumbing, welding, painting and decoration, and hair dressing.

In **Zambia**, the youth are encouraged to select programmes they are interested in. In the past, skills training lasted for six months, but this has since changed to 12-24 months, depending on the training area the participant wants to embark on. Skills include carpentry, welding, automotive mechanics, brick laying, carpentry, agriculture, and youth entrepreneurship. In **the Gambia** the six-week paramilitary training course is followed by 22 months of skills training and community service. During the 22-month period, participants are deployed to an institution of their choice to learn marketable skills in one or more of the following areas: livestock, auto-mechanics, carpentry, computer/PC repairs and maintenance, electrical and electrical engineering, entrepreneurship, rice production, hairdressing, maritime and small scale fishing, masonry, painting and decorating, plumbing, refrigeration and air-conditioning, tailoring, welding, and fabrication.

In **Ghana**, alongside the programme's civic aims, the NSS has made skills training and youth employability a key priority. Technical skills include teaching, farming, accountancy, geo-physical exploration, book-keeping, procurement and financial management, illustrating the hands-on practical element of the scheme:

> *Our educational system focuses more on theory than practice. We have little or no time at all for practicals so it is only through the NYS that we are able to know about the practical aspect of our course.* (Ghana Country Profile 2013)

However, it is important to note that while the NSS does provide the opportunity to develop certain technical skills, they are not always aligned to the skills the young person feels they need to propel them into their future career of choice.

In addition, the NSS uses the opportunity to introduce the servers (NSS Personnel) to new economic activities. These include skills-building in agricultural methods, food processing and marketing to give

them the tools to build livelihoods in agriculture, which employs 60 per cent of the population and contributes 30 per cent to the country's GDP.

For the **Namibia** programme the third and final phase of the NYS is focused of skills training. During this phase, participants are provided with an opportunity to build skills in the following fields: hospitality, food and beverage, plumbing and pipe-fitting, metal fabrication, joinery and cabinet making, bricklaying and plastering, hairdressing and cosmetology, automotive mechanics, and office administration. The actual skills training programme runs for two years. In addition, Namibian participants are given supplementary training regardless of the trades they pursue. All trainees are compelled to undertake the supplementary subjects in order to upgrade their proficiency in numeracy and literacy with a view to coping with their chosen trades: fundamentals of ICT, communication, entrepreneurship, technical drawing, mathematics, engineering science and building science.

> **Comparative experience: Brazil**
>
> *The programme is designed according to the demands of youth in their respective locations, ProJovem is not only designed to respond to their needs, but also to address the requirements from the work environment in which they are immersed. Therefore, all the components of the programme are co-ordinated to improve the skills and experiences the participants already had before they became part of the programme. We try to help them develop new skills through education, professional qualification and civic participation to engage in the job market and to be reintegrated into society as individuals that have their voices heard and are capable of changing their environment.*
>
> (Brazil Respondent 2013)

What is interesting about the Namibian programme is that skills training is planned in relation to identified national development goals, in the hopes that enhancing young people's skills in areas of national priority will in turn enhance their employability by ensuring that skills are linked to market needs. Thus, in Namibia they deliver recognised skills training and personal development programmes to the youth in line with national development goals so that the young people they train fit into what is required in the economy. For this reason, they target agriculture (e.g. crop production and livestock farming), health and social services (e.g. non-nursing services such as packing medicine in the pharmacies, cleaning), and public works (e.g. de-bushing roads and building feeder road embankments). According to the Namibia NYS respondent,

> *We offer training that is recognised and responds to the needs of the economy. We have shown the youth that the training is recognised, accredited and meets national needs.* (Namibia Respondent 2013)

Zimbabwe and **Liberia** also train young people in national priority areas because they believe this will enhance their employability. As the Zimbabwean respondent noted:

> *We send our participants to contribute in our primary industries for example mining, farming, timber production, so that they can play their part in nation building. Plus to develop and implement strategies and programmes which enhance youth participation in national social, economic and political development.* (Zimbabwe Respondent 2013)

The Liberia Peace Corps conscripts those interested in education and trains them to be teachers through certificated courses and continuous training. Currently, 130 young people work in 51 communities in Liberia and they have all been trained to provide services in education. Others are trained in other priority areas including agriculture and health areas (Liberia Respondent 2013).

Promising practice 8: NYS can enhance youth employability by addressing the skills mismatch that employers complain about

The strategic alignment of technical training offered by NYS programmes with the skills required by sectors targeted for economic growth could enhance the employability of young servers. However, this depends on four factors:

- the training should be designed with input from employers and possibly offered with their assistance
- the training should ideally be certificated by nationally recognised training authorities and sanctioned by employer associations
- the training must be relevant and of high quality
- within the priority sectors, the NYS needs to tailor its technical skills training options to respond to the interests and aptitude of the young participants.

4.4.2 Accreditation and certification

Ensuring that training is accredited is a key aspect of making youth service a viable pathway for young people. By ensuring that programmes are accredited, young people are able to exit with a recognisable asset that they can then use to navigate the pathways to employment and further education and training.

In this regard, the **Namibia** case could provide helpful insights for other programmes. In Namibia, formal school certification is required only for those specific programmes that require youth to achieve a certain level of education, for example the technical trades. The NYS uses the Namibia Training Authority (NTA) curriculum, which was recently (31 January 2013) accredited by the Namibia Qualification Authority (NQA) and awards the following national vocational certificates for Levels 1 and 2 in: Automotive Engineering, General Construction, Hospitality and Tourism, Business Services, Metal Fabrication, Information and Communication Technology, Joinery and Cabinet Making, and General Construction (Plumbing).

These training programmes are based on the standards set by the Namibia Training Authority which conducts studies to identify gaps in the labour market. The training is done according to these standards to enable youth to be absorbed into these sectors or to employ themselves. Thus, they also offer training that is recognised and responds to the needs of the economy.

> *We have shown the youth that the training is recognised, accredited and meets national needs. The workshops are equipped according to the NTA specifications. We work on their curricula and have external assessments. The trainees graduate with a recognised certificate Level 1, 2*

or 3. And all the courses are accredited by the National Qualifications Authority. (Namibia Respondent 2013).

In the **Gambia**, the youth service programme has also partnered with the qualification authority to offer accredited certificates. The national qualification acquired under the Gambian Training Authority provides certificates that indicate the areas in which the youth have specialised and this gives them a foundation for further training and development.

Where programmes are not working directly with the qualification authority to ensure that their programmes are accredited, they may partner with relevant accredited training bodies who will run their technical courses and programmes on their behalf. These courses and programmes in turn offer certificates and diplomas which young people can use to show their level of education and to enhance their employability. In **South Africa** for example, the NYS ensures that all technical training is provided by bodies that are accredited by Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) to ensure that all technical training is completed according to industry standards and that all participants receive a recognised qualification. The sector in which the programme is running determines which training providers are used.

As noted in Promising Practice 8, a key promising practice therefore relates to the provision of formal and recognised qualifications. The NYS programmes that work closely with their national qualifications authorities and with employers on the training they offer stand a better chance of issuing certificates that will hold their value in the market place.

While the above examples provide evidence of how NYS programmes can work together with qualifications authorities and accredited training providers to provide formal qualifications to participants, some youth service programmes have embarked on other means of providing recognition and certification for participation in the programme. For instance, in **Cape Verde** a 'volunteer passport', which symbolises the official recognition of volunteer work, is awarded after completion of the programme. The passport aims to contribute to the official recognition of volunteer work through an official certification that records the duration and purpose of the volunteer work provided by the volunteer, in order to obtain incentives that are indicated in the Volunteer Law n.42/2010. In this case, the passport is, according to the text of the statute "an essential complement of the curriculum vitae of young volunteers looking for their first job by certifying skills acquired". The passport was officially implemented on 17 April 2013 through the publication in the Official Gazette n.21. This accreditation is intended to support the young volunteers in accessing key benefits such as: obtaining scholarships, tuition reduction, ease access to certain health services, the right to obtain materials such as books, and other forms of training in order to properly develop their voluntary activities.

Similarly, in **Liberia**, **Nigeria** and **France**, volunteers receive certificates at the end of their training which they can use to apply for further training or for jobs. In **Nigeria**, the certificate of national service is a prerequisite for employment whilst in France, graduate volunteers receive a "*Service Civique* Certificate" with an official government logo, which can also be used to boost their chances of employability and self-development.

Presently in **Zambia**, youth get accredited certificates that are accepted in most government institutions. Some private institutions also recognise and accept the certificates youth get from the programme. But the interviewee from Zambia cautioned that the employment market has been flooded with people with all kinds of certificates. On a positive note, some private institutions purposefully select graduates trained at the centres because, as explained, some like the rigorous training which instils discipline in them, compounded with the combined life and technical skills training they get (Zambian Respondent 2013).

In **Burkina Faso**, at the end of their service, each young person receives a certificate, stating that he/she has volunteered for a specific number of months. Those young people who join the public service after their volunteering are exempt from their compulsory "national service" (which consists more or less of not getting their salaries for the first twelve months as public servant). The Volunteer Programme is very well known now both in the public and the private sectors, and valorised in recruitment processes in the employment space (Burkina Faso Respondent 2013).

These examples demonstrate how formal and official certification processes can be used to ensure that participation in service programmes becomes more widely recognised. However, such approaches do not provide participants with a qualification in the same way that the Gambian and Namibian programmes do. Nevertheless, in the absence of providing formal qualification, some kind of official recognition or certification is a promising practice in terms of enhancing the place of service as a pathway to employment.

On the other hand, there are a few programmes surveyed which currently do not provide accreditation certificates to graduates from the programme. In **Mali**, participants only receive an attestation (recognition form) at the end of each training component. It is not clear whether this is helpful afterwards either to find a job or to apply for further education. **Senegal** also does something similar in terms of just issuing a "certificate of service done", which serves as a certificate for the skills developed during the service. This, however, is not recognised by other educational and training entities in the country. For the **ECOWAS** Programme, the first volunteers will finish in August 2013. They will get a certificate, but because the programme is very new there was no information on whether it will be recognised. In **Zimbabwe**, the hope is that in the future, NYS will be recognised as a pre-tertiary level qualification for young men and women:

> *The hope is that the programme can be viewed as a pre-tertiary level qualification so that our participants can enter tertiary education after full training from the NYS. Yet currently, there is no regulation for NYS graduates getting qualifications.*(Zimbabwe Respondent 2013)

One of the Zimbabwean respondents stated that there are plans for making NYS certification acceptable by other institutions. By so doing, young people could use the certificates to apply for access to further training in public or private institutions or they could use the certificates to increase their chances of finding employment.

4.4.3 Job preparedness training

In addition to technical skills training, there is a great need amongst young people for job preparedness training. This might include skills regarding how to look for a job, how to apply for jobs, and how to behave in the workplace (being on time to work, workplace etiquette, communication and team work skills, amongst others). Where NYS programmes offer aspects of job preparedness training this should be recognised as a promising practice that ought to be built upon. Because service programmes place young people into real life work situations through the service component, some job preparedness skills are learned experientially. This distinguishes youth service programmes from other pathways such as tertiary education, which rarely include an experiential component.

Promising practice 9: NYS programmes can provide three types of training to young people excluded from other opportunities

Depending on how they are structured and the partnerships created, youth service programmes are able to provide marginalised or vulnerable young people with *access to formal qualifications*, which could start them on career paths that contribute to their employability, or equip them with various skills for self-employment.

A further promising feature of many NYS programmes is that they *combine both technical skills training with experiential learning*, which ensures that young people are able to not only practise skills, but also experience what it is like to be in a working environment, and build confidence in their abilities.

Besides training, most service programmes also focus on aspects of *citizenship*. This enables young servers to exit youth service with additional skills that may make them attractive to prospective employers, or to better create their options for self-employment.

However, there is scant evidence to demonstrate whether service in fact does do more than other types of training programmes to enhance employability in Africa. The fact that almost all programmes discuss employability as a key aim of their programmes and curricula, yet do not adequately identify how the programmes contribute to this goal, and do not measure such outcomes, is a key challenge that needs to be addressed if we are to understand better the ways in which service can contribute to this outcome.

Leaders of youth service programmes in **South Africa** spoke of developing written *personal development plans*, while others spoke of career development plans or plans of action. These promising practices help young participants to identify their goals and outline the steps they must take to achieve these goals. For these plans to be effective they need to be realistic and practical; they should be introduced early on in the programme and should be revisited regularly. The mentors or supervisors monitoring the plans should also be knowledgeable enough to link young people to existing sources of support or opportunity (South Africa Country Profile 2013).

In addition to the experiential component, it seems that most programmes that are including job preparedness training as part of the curriculum focus primarily on job search skills such as techniques and strategies for looking for work, how to prepare a CV, and interviewing skills. **ECOWAS** concludes its programme with such training, focusing on the preparation of CVs and drafting motivation letters

to support participants' job searches (ECOWAS Respondent 2013). The **Burkina Faso** Programme has a similar curriculum component. After the service, the youth get training on job search techniques. The National Agency in Charge of Employment (ANPE) is involved in fulfilling the final job search training and how to compile a CV.

In **Zambia**, preparing young people for the workplace is seen as a core component of the programme in addition to technical training.

> *They are taught discipline of themselves as people and how they relate with other people professionally and in the work place. They are also specifically trained to know their trade or subject area very well.* (Zambia Respondent 2013)

The Zambia case shows that some employers view the NYS as contributing to young people's work readiness by providing a combination of training that includes discipline, life skills and technical training. Private institutions purposively select NYS graduates because the preparation they have received from the NYS makes them preferred candidates for employment or further training.

In **Ghana** three employers commented on the value that the NSS adds to building confidence and other soft skills in the service personnel. Their views indicate that the employers prefer service personnel over young people who have not been through the programme. Technical skills as well as the softer skills such as professionalism, adapting to change, analytical skills, and communication skills were noted as valuable preparation for work readiness that young people would otherwise not necessarily have gained without the NSS. In particular, the NSS exposes the graduates to the workplace and helps them develop the professionalism, work ethic, and communication skills that are often not part of a tertiary education system.

Mentoring

In some NYS programmes job preparedness training does not form part of the actual curriculum, but is facilitated by pairing young servers with mentors. By connecting young people with people who are already employed, the NYS participants are able to learn what it means to be work-ready and are assisted emotionally to deal with life and work challenges. The mentorships also provide young servers with the opportunity to learn from the experience of older people. Some of the programmes surveyed have these components in their programmes. For example, the **Zimbabwe** respondent explained that,

> *There is mentorship in terms of being part of trade e.g. when young men and women are taken on board by people in building, carpentry in apprenticeship, mentorship takes place in that form. Mentoring is part and parcel of how we do training. The mentoring mostly comes from qualified technical people the participants are paired with.* (Zimbabwe Respondent 2013)

Liberia also includes a mentorship component. They explain this aspect of the programme as follows:

> *Mentors should be people who have the time, patience and are leaders who have a semblance of success in their own lives and they should be people who are willing to inspire others to be successful.* (Liberia Respondent 2013)

4.4.4 Gaining experience

Perhaps the strongest element of service programmes in terms of training and skills development is that they enable young people to gain experience of working with others, applying their technical skills, and developing their communication and other soft skills. Unlike tertiary institutions and other post-secondary training programmes, few of which incorporate practical aspects, service is much like apprenticeships and internships in that it offers young people opportunities for practical applications of technical skills learned, as well as experience of the workplace.

As mentioned above, the **Nigerian** National Service Programme involves placing young people within host communities in which they have to work with community members to identify and address community needs. By doing so they gain practical skills in constructing bridges, health care centres, classroom blocks, market stalls, and culverts. In addition to construction skills they also gain practical experience in training through running HIV sensitisation programmes, adult literacy campaigns, extra-mural classes for students, and road safety campaigns (Nigeria Respondent 2013). Evidently, as seen above, the young people are provided with opportunities to explore their innate skills sets and make more use of their academic and technical skills through experiential opportunities, which are likely to better prepare them for the workplace.

Clearly opportunities to gain experience through the NYS service year could enhance youth employability and self-employment. Once again the experience needs to be intentionally structured, managed and monitored to ensure that the young people are given practical opportunities to gain experience relevant to the workplace.

4.4.5 Access to further education and training

In some of the countries the National Youth Service Programme is set up with the specific goal of facilitating access to further education and training during or on completion of the service year. **Namibia** is a good example of how this is done. In an effort to supplement the NYS internal training capacity, the Namibia programme sends some of its participants to vocational training institutions around the country and to institutions in some SADC countries.

> *NYS covers full costs of study in other countries. We check quality of institutions and courses selected. The selection process of the trainees who go to our partner institutions is based on an aptitude test. In 2010, 35 trainees were sent to Zimbabwe; South Africa had over 70 trainees in electrical engineering who received the N6 certificates. Trainees are sent to other institutions because there are not sufficient facilities in Namibia to offer all the courses. The University of Namibia (UNAM) also take some NYS trainees.* (Namibia Respondent 2013)

According to the Namibia National Youth Service brochure,

> *A number of the trainees have already graduated and have secured employment with institutions that require their skills such as Ministry of Health and Social Services (nurses), Ministry of Defence (basic engineering) and various private and public transport operators (heavy duty drivers).*

Two promising practices emerge from this example. The first is that the programme is deliberately set up as a stepping stone towards further education and training for participants. Thus, there is an identified pathway for participants and the service programme is not simply a stop-gap measure as participants try to figure out how to negotiate the transition to work. The development of partnerships that enable the Namibian National Youth Service to facilitate these connections and to be recognised as a feeder institution is to be commended. Secondly, the NYS Programme helps young people to negotiate many of the barriers preventing access to further education and training, including lack of information and lack of access to financial support. The programme evidently does the research about which institutions are reputable, presents information to participants, and covers costs of tuition. By doing so, they minimise the barriers to educational inclusion and may be offering a catalyst for change in young people's lives. As the quote from their brochure suggests, the service programme does not contribute directly to employment, but it most certainly ensures that their participants can take the next step to further training, which in turn facilitates access to employment.

Comparative experience: Jamaica

The Jamaica NYS Programme provides educational grants to participants after graduation through the Financial Assistance Programme. The programme pays up to 20 per cent of tertiary education costs and then monitors the students to ensure they maintain certain grade point averages. The Jamaica respondent indicated that the NYS is in the process of developing a wider set of relationships with universities. For example, they are in the process of developing support for 50 youth over a period of four years as they enter tertiary education. Through this programme successful participants will receive a 75 per cent scholarship towards the costs of university study.

(Jamaica Respondent 2013)

4.5 Service as a pathway to employment and self-employment

An important component to consider in assessing promising practices related to service and employability is the extent to which programmes enable young people to take the next step on their pathway to work. In this section, strategies that programmes engage in to connect young people to further opportunities are considered. Programme strategies regarding linking young people with further education and training, as well as employment opportunities, are considered alongside any strategies that are aimed at preparing young people for self-employment options. Given the high levels of structural unemployment on the continent,

Comparative experience: Chile

Volunteers complete a two-year online certificate or training programme offered by Alberto Hurtado University and specifically related to community and social development. This gives them a benefit or edge in terms of employability and the opportunity to further their education in other institutions using the training experience and certificate from the course. The interviewee explained the benefit of this training to the programme:

The training prepares participants for their upcoming community and social work, and also prepares them to do similar work in the future. (Chile Respondent 2013)

considering the ways in which service prepares participants for survival outside of the labour market, most commonly in the form of self-employment, is an important aspect of pathways to consider.

4.5.1 Support for self-employment

Most of the NYS programmes are acutely aware of the limits of the labour market to absorb young people into full-time jobs. Accordingly, they had developed, or were considering developing, mechanisms to help the young people become self-employed after their period of service. The survey shows that in the main, three strategies were being used: the first is to introduce young people to business opportunities in different sectors. The second is to run a short training course on how to start a business. The third is to provide loans or grants to young people wanting to start their own businesses or facilitating connections to other programmes and companies that could do the same.

Introducing NYS servers to business opportunities in different sectors

In **Ghana**, the agricultural sector employs 60 per cent of the population, but only a fraction of tertiary graduates major in agriculture. The NSS has taken the opportunity to reorient many young graduates towards agriculture[2] by providing solid practical farming skills as well as using agricultural initiatives as a means to encourage entrepreneurship. The NSS has a number of farms where income is generated from agricultural activities including raising poultry, pigs and rabbits as well as through the growing and selling of cereals. For example, in the Greater Accra Region, the NSS Papao Farm is a fully integrated farm cultivating a number of crops as well as fish farming and animal husbandry. The farm provides practical experience for agricultural graduates as well as providing the same opportunity for non-agricultural specialists. Training is offered to service personnel providing skills-building in agricultural methods, food processing and marketing to give them the tools to build livelihoods in agriculture. The scheme has other farms in five other regions with plans to expand coverage to every region in the country.

In response to a short survey undertaken as part of this study, 87 per cent of current service personnel and 67 per cent of alumni agreed that their national service experience has equipped them to pursue other livelihoods such as farming. The NSS focus on agriculture straddles the interface between skills-building and civic service, as agricultural produce is donated to needy causes. However, these initiatives could be taken further. As one interviewee suggested, if the Ministry of Agriculture were to help support the NSS' agricultural initiatives with technology loans, NSS personnel could be involved in consultancies which would increase their technical capacities as well as providing an additional source of income for the scheme.

In some cases NSS personnel are deployed to projects for both skills-development and income-generation. For instance, the NSS has been operating a catering unit composed of a fast food outlet that specialises in pastries and a full-service restaurant offering both local and continental dishes. It has also been operating a borehole drilling unit and a water-bottling factory.

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[2] All service personnel deployed in the NSS headquarters in Accra are required to carry out weekly farm visits where they are given the opportunity to cultivate skills in agriculture.

Short training on starting a business

The **ECOWAS** Programme includes a component at the end of the programme focusing on tools for auto-employment (methods on how to launch an income generating activity) (ECOWAS Respondent 2013) and the **Burkina Faso** Programme includes a component on how to launch a business. The **Nigeria** Programme has established a Skills and Entrepreneurship Development Centre where "participants are taught to be job creators, self-reliant and not just job seekers when they cannot find employment" (Nigeria Respondent 2013).

In some cases these programme components are very short and, according to the available information, are not supported by ongoing mentoring or other forms of assistance. Enabling people to start and sustain a small business requires a great deal of support and incubation. Whilst a short curriculum component on self-employment may spark ideas and interest among the youth, is unlikely to result in them being able to set up and run enterprises on a sustained basis. Nevertheless, the fact that certain countries are thinking about the need to include some kind of training on self-employment is a promising practice that could be built upon.

> **Promising practice 10: Introduce practical training for self-employment in the NYS curriculum**
>
> A number of the NYS programmes include a short training component on how to start a small business, focusing on basic business principles – Burkino Faso, ECOWAS, Lesotho, Namibia and Zambia. However, this is often run at the end of the programme and, given its short duration, is likely to be largely theoretical in nature. Some of the other programmes (Ghana being a case in point) run income-generating operations that could provide the young servers with practical experience of producing goods for sale, positioning these in the market, packaging and pricing the commodities, and marketing and selling them to communities or other customers. Combining such practical activities with basic training for self-employment would give the servers a stronger foundation for accessing other forms of support post-service, such as formulating a business idea, applying for loans, looking for small business mentors, partners, etc.

Helping servers access financial support for small businesses

In **Zambia** the youth service programme directs servers wanting to start their own businesses to the National Youth Empowerment Fund. The young men and women develop a proposal, which they submit to the Fund. At the time of the research, there were no statistics to show the success rates of these proposals or how many servers had become successfully self-employed. Similarly in **Burkina Faso**, young volunteers willing to launch their own businesses are supported by the National Fund for Youth Initiative. This is a government programme that supports youth entrepreneurship. The Fund calculates an amount of money based on the number of months that the server has served, which is then given to the participant at the end of service period. This money (about US$ 240/year) is intended to help pay for training or examination fees or to launch a small business. Those launching their own business are further supported by the National Youth Fund.

In **Zimbabwe**, following their training and apprenticeship with craftsmen, young servers can apply for a revolving fund up to US$ 5 000 to start a business. The Ministry of Youth Development, Indigenisation and Empowerment has passed a regulation that says a considerable number of NYS graduates should be part of those who get funds for small businesses and loans from the ministry. Funded income-generating projects from the NYS participants are being prioritised since the start of the national indigenisation programme (Zimbabwe Respondent 2013).

In **Lesotho**, successful trainees with entrepreneurial skills, acumen and interest are given 10 000 Loti (about US$ 1 000) to start up their project (Lesotho Respondent 2013) and in **Namibia**, the NYS has a Youth in Business Credit Scheme, which is intended to assist all young people who want to go into business. The Namibian respondent explained that the young people will be approached and assessed for their capability to run a small business. After ascertaining their willingness and ability to run the business, those identified are joined to the scheme wherein they also have access to finances and other support (Namibia Respondent 2013).

In **South Africa** the National Youth Development Agency, in which the NYS is located, provides grants for survivalist enterprise and co-operatives and has links to other state agencies that provide loans to entrepreneurs. It also has a Career Guidance Programme and a Jobs and Opportunities Seekers' Database for unemployed graduates, although difficulties were noted with its implementation.

Strategic partnerships for small business development

A further promising practice with regard to facilitating self-employment for participants is the development of strategic partnerships with public and private organisations that can foster specialised mechanisms targeting young servers for business development. In the **Gambia** for instance, financial institutions including the Social Development Fund (SDF), GAMJOBS, and Arab Gambian Islamic Bank (AGIB) provide financial support for corps members to start their various businesses (Ceesay 2010). In addition, the Arab Gambian Islamic Bank provides micro-credit to the NYSS only (African Development Bank 2006). In **Namibia**, the SME (Small and Medium Enterprise) Bank was created in 2012. The SME Bank and National Youth Council run schemes that support youth in business and are sister institutions to the NYS. At the time of the research the Namibia programme was exploring a partnership with the SME Bank in so far as providing loans to the NYS participants.

> *We want to see how NYS graduates as well as others can be assisted. In addition to the SME Bank we are thinking of how to support these graduates who do not get employment. A big challenge because of collateral required although may be able to get N$ 1 000 without collateral. This is a loan. We are talking to see what we can do.* (Namibia Respondent 2013)

The **Nigeria** programme provides an example of an entrepreneurship programme that is supported with considerable financial resources for the youth who want to start businesses.

> *In the 2007/2008 service year, the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) introduced an annual venture prize competition for NYSC members in Nigeria as part of its corporate social responsibility. The competition is open to every cohort of participants and aims to inspire the entrepreneurial spirit of the youth participants and empower them to take ownership of their entrepreneurship*

concepts and ideas. There are two categories, state and national, and the competition covers all business concepts except commerce. Applicants are required to submit proposals. Proposals in the state category are reviewed by a state inter-agency selection committee. There are usually three winners. Whereas the top ten proposals from each Development Finance Office are sent to the Department and then are reviewed by a National Selection Committee for final selection. (Nigeria Background Information 2013)

While this initiative demonstrates promise, it should be noted that only a very small minority (ten out of thousands) of the NYS participants get the support offered. The programme offers support to a larger number of servers (3 800 since 2009) who get access to interest-free loans to go into poultry, banana or other agro-enterprises of their choice. They are supervised and mentored from the time they get their loans, which are between N250 000 to 300 000 (US$ 1 500 to 1 800). The loans are sponsored by the MDG Advocacy Group and are paid back after 30 months.

The above demonstrates that NYS programmes are making progress in recognising the need to stimulate self-employment and are coming up with promising ways in which to ensure that young people are able to access finance to do so. However, it is clear that financing a small business alone does not ensure success. Coaching, mentorship and ongoing support are also necessary. Very few countries had evidence of providing such support to potential entrepreneurs. Only Nigeria noted that its loan programme includes providing additional support, supervision and mentoring for entrepreneurs, which forms part of the country's War Against Poverty Programme. Here mentorship and coaching is introduced at the beginning of the training and forms an integral part of the entrepreneurship programme. Corps

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Comparative experience: Chile

Entrepreneurship cuts across the methodology used in implementing the Chile *Servicio Pais* Programme – it helps communities become more empowered and can create sustainable change.

The Chilean approach to developing entrepreneurial skills is practical and is directly linked with addressing the socio-economic needs in communities. The interventions which *Servicio Pais* participants organise relate to their diagnosis of the community and its overall needs. Together, volunteers and communities identify the 'problem' that they will address to benefit the community. Volunteers then help the community to resolve the problem partially or completely by the end of their service. This is done in stages:

Volunteers help communities to activate their own resources to address the problem. They help the community to empower itself and train the community to improve its capacity to deal with problem identified. They improve the level of organisation and association within the community and then connect the community with available services in the area. They help communities to gain recognition from others of how they dealt with the problem.

With constant supervision, the volunteers and programme managers also evaluate the kinds of programmes generated by volunteers and assess the importance of the programmes to the community over time. So in this context, the approach to entrepreneurship is mainly for the benefit of the community and for the skills development of the young volunteers. However, volunteers are not directly encouraged to save funds to start their enterprise after service.

(Chile Respondent 2013)

members are encouraged to be employers instead of just employees in the context of high youth unemployment.

Three key challenges emerge in how NYS programmes are facilitating self-employment opportunities for youth. The first is that the way in which skills for self-employment are built means that only a small minority find access to financial or other support post-service. Secondly, very few NYS programmes connect young people to mentorship or coaching facilities aimed at supporting young people starting out in business. The third is that none of the programmes demonstrated evidence of tracking how young people were using the grants and loans they had managed to access and whether they were running sustainable self-employment projects. Without such evidence, the potential for service to contribute to self-employment opportunities cannot be adequately assessed.

> **Promising practice 11: NYS programmes can prepare and filter candidates to increase their access to financial and mentorship support for self-employment**
>
> Financial and mentorship support are critical in helping young people make their business ideas come to life and building these into sustainable livelihoods. The examples from Zambia, Lesotho, Namibia, Nigeria and Zimbabwe demonstrate how the NYS programmes can, directly or indirectly, facilitate access to financial resources in the form of grants or loans to young servers. In these cases the funds are accessed through government facilities or facilities within the NYS itself. Facilitating this pathway is an important promising practice, particularly in those contexts where young people are unlikely to be able to access loans from banking institutions. At the same time, NYS programmes need to focus more attention on striking the partnerships for mentoring and coaching support to young people trying to start their own businesses.

4.5.2 Job placement

It emerged in the analysis of the NYS programmes that most were involved in facilitating exit opportunities for their participants – either directly or through partnerships with placement agencies. In some cases the job placements were intended to evolve from the service placements, whilst in other cases active efforts are made to facilitate job placements, usually in the government sector.

In **Nigeria** for instance, NYSC participants serve in government ministries and departments, government agencies, schools, hospitals, local governments, agricultural businesses and farms. Such service placements often result in full-time employment within these organisations after the designated period of service (Nigeria Respondent 2013). In **Burkina Faso**, the information from one of the officials interviewed for the research revealed that the youth who serve as volunteers during their time with the PNVB are often hired after their service in the health or education sectors, and fill major capacity gaps in these departments. In **Namibia**, some strategic partnerships help provide placements whereby the youth can gain practical skills during the programme and can access job placements after their National Youth Service. Some of the partners mentioned by the Namibian interviewee are the Namibia Defence Force, Correctional Services, the Namibian Police, the Ministry of Health and Social Services, and the Ministry of Works and Transport (Namibia Respondent 2013). While such placements are promising for young people and may provide additional work experience and reflect well on their CVs, it is important to note that government departments cannot continue to absorb

vast numbers of young people moving through service programmes, without expanding government spending and placing a strain on the public service budget. Young people must be able to access private sector jobs and be competitive in the open labour market.

Some programmes demonstrate connections with private sector partners as a means of facilitating job placement. In **Liberia**, Chevron provides opportunities for the youth to get six weeks of training in the form of an internship. The NYS in **Kenya** has developed a strong reputation for producing highly disciplined and well-groomed individuals with an outstanding work ethic. NYS-trained drivers, for instance, are much sought after by private individuals and by companies. As this respondent claims:

> *In terms of imparting direct skills to the students, I think it has done very well. It is very intensive – I have had a chance to meet with a people who have gone through that programme and completed. If he is a mechanic, he does that to the best of his ability, if he is a driver – very competent and these other skills, if they mean to do it, they do it very well; you do not have a single doubt. They do it very well; they impart good skills and discipline of the highest order. That is the much I know about the NYS.* (Kenya Country Profile 2013)

In **Namibia** the programme has established direct relationships with companies and channels NYS graduates according to the company's needs. A key factor here is that the NYS in Namibia has developed a good reputation in the public domain, which is helping to position it positively with employers. The **Ghana** NSS is also well-positioned within the country, a factor that facilitates its access to companies for discussion about placement opportunities for participants who have completed their service. Their employability is enhanced by the fact that these servers are university graduates who have also acquired, through the NSS, some of the softer skills required by employers.

In **South Africa** the National Youth Development Agency's YouthBuild Programme employed a ***job developer*** in its first phase. This person was responsible for identifying potential exit opportunities and assisting participants to develop career plans. A final evaluation of the programme showed high levels of satisfaction

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Comparative experience: Chile

Post-service support is well planned in Chile. The reputation of the volunteer programme is very positive and this serves to boost the credibility of the experience for the young volunteers. *Servicio Pais* is widely known in the country and people who have volunteered with the programme are seen as serious and responsible members of society. As such, "employers look favourably on it" as explained by the respondent.

The programme also fosters employment linkages by posting volunteers' CVs on the Foundation's website and by providing training certificates.

> *The programme gives volunteers experience, knowledge and prestige to help them in their careers. Many do stay in related fields in their career.*

(Chile Respondent 2013)

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with this role, but the position was discontinued because of the associated costs. A programme called Fit for Life, Fit for Work is run by an NGO called Etafeni in one of Cape Town's poorest communities and although it is not a youth service programme, it has achieved significant success in placing young unemployed school-leavers in paid entry-level jobs, internships or in tertiary studies with bursary support. Contributing to this success rate is the programme's ***job placement officer***, whose role is to

search for employment or bursary opportunities and maintain relationships with potential employers and other sources of support. While this is an expensive model and requires some skill, it is a useful and proactive way of linking youth to further opportunities which they must then make the most of themselves (South Africa Country Profile 2013).

A major weakness that emerges in the survey is that none of the African NYS programmes indicated that they tracked success rates of employment placements post-service. The official interviewed from the **Gambia** said that they help the young people they train to get employment, but was unable to provide statistics which would demonstrate the success of this intervention. Only **France** had undertaken a survey, which indicated that post-service 75 per cent of participants had a job or were studying. This lack of monitoring data severely constrains the possibilities for commenting on whether service programmes in fact do enhance employment outcomes for participants.

> **Comparative experience: Brazil**
>
> The ProJovem Programme in Brazil provides introductory training about labour market needs in the areas in which participants have chosen to develop their skills. The young people are then advised by their professional job advisors about the qualifications they require to apply for the jobs they want. They are also trained to write their resumés and are helped to create a good personal profile for the jobs they are interested in.
>
> (Brazil Respondent 2013)

> **Comparative experience: Jamaica**
>
> Based on exemplary performance during their service period, some participants are offered permanent jobs after they complete the NYS Programme.
>
> When private sector representatives have job openings, they approach the NYS to ask for recommendations of suitable candidates for the posts. The NYS consults its database of volunteer resumés and makes recommendations.
>
> (Jamaica Respondent 2013)

In summary, NYS programmes all incorporate the goal of improving youth employability. However, very few accurately articulate exactly how they promote employability and most do not evaluate the impact their programmes have on youth employment outcomes. Nevertheless, many of the programmes do demonstrate promising practices. These include connecting young people to further education and training (Namibia), providing them with technical and experiential training (all of the programmes), incorporating into their curricula lessons or experiential training on small business development (Nigeria, Ghana, Zambia, Liberia), and actively assisting young people to connect with post-service job opportunities or opportunities to facilitate the development of small businesses. There is however room for programmes to think more strategically about how to maximise such investments.

4.5.3 Widen youth access to information and networks

As mentioned above, one of the main constraints to young people finding employment is a lack of information and social networks that can be used to access available job opportunities. NYS partnerships might actually facilitate the availability of information and the growth of such networks. This was reflected on by a **Kenyan** respondent:

The NYS should offer the opportunity to create a network of information and labour market information, particularly for young people graduating from this system. Labour market information is very scarce, particularly for young people and you can see that the private sector employs nine out of every ten young people [who are employed] in this country; this is a global benchmark. Really the private sector has a lot of market information, but we have not invested enough to gather this labour market information and make it available to such institutions as the NYS, so that they can use it to develop their programmes [and make them] more responsive to the needs of the private sector. (Kenya Country Profile 2013)

Mali has developed a promising strategy in this regard. While training is conducted by the NYS team itself, the programme involves other public agencies focused on employment and professional integration to ensure that young people can find existing networks through which to seek employment. The Mali Youth Service Programme has thus planned partnerships with five agencies, the objective being that each young person should have some kind of exit opportunity at the end of his/her service. These partners include the Agency for Youth Employment, the National Agency for Employment, *Fonds Auto-Renouvelable pour l'emploi* – a warranty fund to support loans for business creation, and *Fonds d'appui à la formation professionnelle et l'apprentissage* – a fund aimed at helping youth associations that launch new projects. This strategic approach highlights the value that strategic partnerships can add to the youth transition outcomes of service programmes.

> **Promising practice 12: NYS programmes can actively assist young people to find exit opportunities as they approach the end of their service period**
>
> The study shows that NYS programmes have taken various steps to help young people transition effectively out of service and into jobs or further training opportunities.
>
> - *Partnering with local or national placement agencies* may be a good option. In Mali for instance, the young participants are referred to various national placement agencies, which provide support for finding a job.
> - Another option, although more costly, is to develop a *job placement officer* post. In South Africa the *job developer* position that was created as part of a YouthBuild project was viewed very positively by participants. However, the high costs of employing such a person ultimately led to this being removed from the programme.
> - A further option may be to link participants to further education and training opportunities. In Namibia, selected successful candidates are *provided with a bursary and assistance to apply for tertiary training* at a university in the SADC region.
>
> All of the above demonstrate the various ways in which NYS programmes can actively assist young people to transition out of the service programme and assist them to find and apply for jobs, loans for small business development, or further training opportunities.

5.   Conclusion

In this analysis National Youth Service has been approached from a youth development perspective, which recognises the assets and capabilities that young people have, and which seeks to understand the ways in which NYS programmes can build on those capabilities to enhance young people's employability or self-employment.

First and foremost this study applies a youth development approach to service programmes. A youth development approach is rooted within the capabilities perspective (Sen 1999, Nussbaum 2001), which seeks to understand the ways in which assets and opportunities interact to create capabilities. 'Assets' refer to the underlying individual strengths of a young person, as well as social capital, education, and material assets. All young people have assets of varying kinds and to varying degrees. Too often policy-makers focus on young people's problems and inadequacies rather than on what they have to offer. However, these assets may not always be leveraged for better capabilities, particularly where opportunities to exercise them are not available, are poorly integrated or inaccessible.

NYS programmes in Africa are currently operating in a context of extremely high levels of youth unemployment. They also receive high levels of state investment. Can they successfully deliver the pathways young people require to become productive citizens? The evidence presented in this paper suggests that National Youth Service programmes across the continent demonstrate a number of promising practices that can prepare young people for finding or creating work.

There are four reasons why NYS programmes are or can be uniquely positioned in the post-secondary school space to help young people make the transition into work. First, they are able to open up opportunities for technical training that would otherwise be closed, especially for young people who are poor, marginalised and therefore unable to access post-secondary education and training. Second, they engage young people (graduates and school leavers) in a period of service, of "doing good" in communities (Lough and Sherraden 2012). This not only provides technical and experiential training, but also has the potential to help the youth build a sense of character, confidence, competence and connectedness – key features of positive youth development that may be related to employability.

Third, NYS programmes often pay stipends to servers and engage them in financial literacy training. In this respect NYS is thus well placed to build the financial capabilities of young people and enable them to develop financial assets, which in turn are associated with positive outcomes such as access to and graduation from post-secondary education. Fourth, because NYS programmes are often focused on placing young servers in areas of national priority, they offer young people skills training in areas where there is a need for intervention, and where they may potentially find employment or self-employment. They can thus introduce young servers to areas of economic priority and potential growth.

The above demonstrates the ways in which youth service programmes are well positioned to contribute to enhancing the capabilities of young people and thereby help address the challenges of youth unemployment. However, the evidence also suggests that programmes need to do a great deal

more to focus on meeting the employability aims that they set for themselves. They also need to monitor and evaluate their progress in doing so. It seems that some of the NYS programmes have shifted their focus towards employability as a response to the pressing issue of youth unemployment, without thinking strategically about the best way to reach this goal. In general, NYS programmes could invest more resources to enhance employment outcomes for their young participants. They need to be more strategically positioned in relation to the workplace and labour market needs. They need to partner with the private sector, civil society organisations and post-secondary education and training institutions. They need to strengthen the accreditation and recognition of the training that the young servers receive. And they need to strengthen exit opportunities for the young people who have completed their period of service.

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