An integrated approach to empower youth in Niger, Senegal and Sierra Leone

Findings and lessons from the Youth Microfinance Project
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Acronyms

ACA  Association Conseil pour l’Action
CEDA  Community Empowerment and Development Association
CEFORD  Community Empowerment for Rural Development
CFA  Communauté Financière Africaine
CV  Community volunteer
DAC  Development assistance community
DFS  Decentralized financial system
FA  Field agent
GAMA  Groupe d’Appui au Mouvement Associatif
GGEM  Grassroots Gender Empowerment Movement
GQA  Group quality assessment
IGA  Income-generating activity
MFI  Microfinance institution
OECD  Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAMECAS  Partenariat pour la Mobilisation de l’Epargne et le Crédit Au Sénégal
PE  Peer educators
ToRs  Terms of reference
USD  United States dollar
VSL  Village savings and loan
VSLA  Village savings and loan association
WARO  West Africa regional office
YAB  Youth advisory board
YMF  Youth Microfinance (Project)
YSL  Youth savings and loan
YSLA  Youth savings and loan association
Executive summary

The Youth Microfinance (YMF) Project aims to improve the lives and help realize the rights of West African youth. The overall goal is to empower young people both socially and economically by increasing access to financial services and enhancing their skills and competence through training in life skills and financial education.

The primary objective of this discussion paper is to triangulate the various monitoring and evaluation outputs of the YMF Project, in order to identify the most relevant lessons for sharing within the Plan International networks as well as the wider development community. This includes the data collected in the rolling baseline survey, the Most Significant Change Stories publication, the Financial Diaries research, the midterm and final evaluation reports, as well as the ongoing monitoring and evaluation quarterly and annual reports.

The content of the paper includes background on the YMF Project and an introduction to the objectives of the paper. A description of the YMF Project program pathway is outlined, including the major program components and the integrated approach adopted by the YMF Project. This is followed by an explanation of how the sequencing of project interventions has contributed to the social and economic empowerment of youth participants. The paper highlights what has been learned from the YMF Project about the ways in which selected youths with enhanced access to financial services have utilized informal, semi-formal, and formal financial services for their own wellbeing, as well as for the benefit of their households. The pilot initiative to link youth participants in the YMF Project with formal financial institutions is also examined. The paper further explores the contribution of the YMF Project to peer mentoring, and how the activities within the program pathway, namely the identification and development of community volunteers, peer educators, and youth advisory boards (YABs), has contributed to the harnessing of youth leadership. Finally, the last section highlights important lessons from the YMF Project and suggestions for improvements in future program design in order to continue the promotion of the social and economic empowerment of youth.

Participation in youth savings and loans associations (YSLAs) has empowered youth by providing them with access to financial services and training in life skills and financial education, which in turn has led to income generation, increased capacity to save, and asset accumulation. Additional results have included: reduced dependence on their parents and other family members; increased investment in economic activities; acquisition of new skills and knowledge; and development of their leadership potential. Being in better economic conditions and having acquired greater knowledge has augmented these youths’ status within their households and their communities. Participation in the program as members and office bearers of the YSLAs, as trainers and volunteers in the program’s implementation, and as advisors within the project’s governance structure has enabled these youths to emerge as leaders and social change agents within their communities. Central to the success of the project is the integration of these various program components, enabling young people to develop their capacities to make a smooth transition into adulthood.

There are several prominent lessons to be learned from this project. A notable achievement has been the scope of the project’s outreach, both in terms of the number of youths involved and the number of YSLAs established within communities in all three countries. The project also had a significant impact in motivating youths to save and borrow through the YSLAs to manage their personal, business and household expenditures. On the other hand, the outcome of the pilot linkage with a microfinance institution (MFI) met with limited success in its attempt to mainstream youth into the formal financial sector.

Future project design should include greater emphasis on integrating the messages of the program within communities, with particular focus on the gender dimension of empowerment. While the provision of life skills and financial education has increased the knowledge of many youth, there remains a need to strengthen the delivery of the training to ensure deeper impact in terms of shaping behavioural change of individual participants as well as other stakeholders around them, and greater efforts to leverage the social capital of the YSLAs for the well-being of the community as a whole.
1. Background
1.1 Background on the Youth Microfinance Project¹

Africa has the youngest population in the world, with 200 million people between the ages of 15 and 25. Youth in Africa are among the most vulnerable segments of the world’s population. Of the 1.76 billion young people aged 15 to 24 living in developing countries in 2005, 19% lived in Africa and of these, 60.7 million lived on less than one dollar a day and 2.1 million lived on less than two dollars a day. Appropriate and targeted development interventions, such as providing demand-driven microfinance, enterprise and job skills, life skills, and financial education can help harness young people’s energy and creativity, as they transition into adulthood and become contributing members of society.²

Plan International Canada designed the YMF Project to improve the lives and livelihoods of youth and help them to realize their rights through social and economic

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² Financial Diaries Report 2014
empowerment. The project was implemented over a four-year period. Originally scheduled for completion in December 2013, the program was granted a six-month, no-cost extension to June 30, 2014. It was born out of a shared interest between The MasterCard Foundation and Plan International Canada in exploring ways to promote the financial inclusion of poor West African youth on a large scale.

The project was implemented in Senegal, Sierra Leone and Niger. These countries are characterized by low Human Development Index scores (i.e. low literacy, limited financial access and persistent social, economic, cultural, and gender barriers), especially in rural areas.³ Poor youth in these countries face many challenges. There is a lack of access to formal education and the formal job market, with large numbers of young people who are illiterate or have limited job skills. Recognizing the complex nature of poverty and the need to overcome a number of barriers facing youth, the YMF Project adopted a holistic program pathway, combining a number of social, economic, and human development interventions.

The project designed three program components common to all three countries: establish self-managed YSLAs⁴; provide youths with life skills and financial education training; and share program results with key stakeholders and disseminate this learning to a wider audience. In addition, in Senegal, a fourth component piloted linkages with formal MFIs to meet the demands of individuals or groups in even greater need of financial services.

The age group for the YMF Project was 15 to 25, with young people from rural, urban, and peri-urban areas. Based on the project design, about 70% of the target group had to be women and girls. The project outreach target was set at 70,000 youths, with quotas for individual countries, i.e. 30,000 in Senegal, 15,000 in Sierra Leone, and 25,000 in Niger. At the end of the project, outreach figures totaled almost 90,000 youths, of which 84% were women.⁵

Implementation of the YMF Project was supported and coordinated by Plan Canada’s National Office in Toronto, Canada, and involved several other constituents, including Plan country offices and local partner organizations in Niger, Senegal and Sierra Leone. YABs were created in each country to give youth a direct hand in program management and governance.

The project was distinguished by the involvement of a number of strategic partners and collaborations to provide knowledge and technical assistance in each of the project components. The key partners for the YSLA component, which involved providing management training to members, included Association Conseil pour l’Action (ACA) and Concept in Senegal, Association Godia and Groupe d’Appui au Mouvement Associatif (GAMA) for Niger, and Community Empowerment for Rural Development (CEFORD), Community Empowerment and Development Association (CEDA), and Grassroots Gender Empowerment Movement (GGEM) in Sierra Leone. The partner for the linkage component was PAMECAS, an MFI in Senegal. For the life skills training and financial education, the project worked with ACA and Concept in Senegal, Lafia Matissa in Niger, and GGEM and CEFORD in Sierra Leone.

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³ Final Evaluation of the “Youth Microfinance in West Africa” Program, ADVISEM, July 2014
⁴ Youth Savings and Loan Association (YSLA) is a term coined by the YMF Project to refer to Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) which are adapted and geared towards youth.
⁵ Final Evaluation Report 2014
1.2. Objective of the discussion paper

The target audience for this discussion paper is the Plan International community, but the findings from the YMF Project are also likely to be relevant to a broader audience of other practitioners, donors and researchers in youth economic development.

As part of the YMF Project’s knowledge-management process, this paper will draw conclusions from the project where possible and, more importantly, will outline ways in which this knowledge can be used to improve future initiatives in integrated development approaches focusing on youth.

The paper’s primary objective is to identify the most relevant lessons learned based on a triangulation of the various monitoring and evaluation outputs of the YMF Project, including the data collected in the rolling baseline survey, the Most Significant Change Stories, the Financial Diaries research, the mid-term and final evaluation reports, as well as the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the quarterly and annual reports.

The paper provides a description of the YMF program pathway and the four program components. It looks at how the integrated approach adopted by the project and the sequencing of interventions have contributed to the social and economic empowerment of youth. Its second area of focus is an assessment of the extent to which the YMF Project has contributed to creating access to financial services and enhanced the financial management acumen among youths in the use of financial services. The paper also highlights the project’s contribution to peer mentoring, and how the various efforts to integrate youth participation in program design and implementation (in particular the identification and development of community volunteers, peer educators and YABs) has helped to harness youth leadership. The last section highlights important lessons learned from the YMF Project and suggestions for improvements in future program design in order to continue the promotion of social and economic empowerment of youth.

1.3. Methodology

The discussion paper was developed using secondary data6, with various documents prepared during the lifetime of the project, including the proposal submitted by Plan International Canada to The MasterCard Foundation (2009), quarterly and annual reports from 2010 to 2014, the mid-term evaluation (2012), and the end of project evaluation (2014). The other documents included in the desk review were:

- The final evaluation of the “Youth Microfinance in West Africa” Program, ADVISEM, July 2014
- The impact evaluation reports for Niger, Senegal and Sierra Leone, June 2014
- Synthesis Report - Impact of a Youth Savings and Loan Association Program, June 2014
- Counting Change: How Youth Manage Their Money (the report based on the Financial Diaries methodology)
- Most Significant Change Stories: Voices of Youth (the most significant change stories and report)

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6 A list of documents reviewed is provided as an annex. None of the approaches and monitoring and evaluation activities included a counter-factual (comparing program with non-program participants). The focus of monitoring and evaluation is more on gathering insights, hearing voices, and collecting data using baseline and end-line surveys.
2. Overview of the program pathway
The project designed an approach that integrated social, economic, and human development interventions to achieve the project’s goal to empower youth socially and economically, and to bridge the identified gaps in training and economic opportunities in order to help stop the cycle of poverty for the youths, their families, and their communities. A visual representation of the program pathway is shown in Figure 1.

The project had a target of reaching at least 70,000 youths in Senegal, Niger, and Sierra Leone. The key components of the project include:

1. Youth-specific financial services, namely youth saving and lending associations (YSLAs)
2. Piloting linkages with microfinance institutions (MFIs)
3. Training on life skills and financial education
4. Knowledge management

The project has reached over 89,000 youths, of which 85% are women.
Youth participation in all components of the program pathway was a cross-cutting element. For instance, youths were involved as community volunteers in the formation of the YSLAs and in the promotion of financial services to other youths. Peer educators were used to roll out life skills and financial education training. Youths were also involved in the governance of the YMF Project through the YABs. The youth members of the YSLAs, as well as the community volunteers, peer educators and YABs, were involved in all of the project’s knowledge-building components, serving as key respondents in evaluations, and as contributors to project reports and publications, most notably the Most Significant Change Stories publication.

2.2 Sequencing or progressive approach of the program components

The four program components included specific outputs or activities rolled out in a sequenced or progressive manner, as depicted in Figure 2. The sequencing began with the organization of the YSLAs and the training of youth members in basic YSLA management. The project then provided youth members of the YSLAs with training in life skills and financial education as they initiated savings mobilization activities. These youth members followed the proper sequencing of training as outlined in the village savings and loan (VSL) methodology; however, in a number of cases, due to delays in the delivery of life skills and financial education training by the project partner organizations, some of the youths had already started borrowing from the YSLAs prior to receiving the financial education training. In Senegal, youths were also linked to a partner MFI for access to credit.

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8 The project’s life skills training curriculum was developed in response to a needs assessment conducted with the project’s youth. The training modules in Senegal and Niger included a wide range of themes such as relationships, risky behaviour, gender, discrimination, and self-esteem. In Sierra Leone, life skills training was focused on the areas of gender equality and HIV/AIDS prevention and awareness in order to meet the specific needs of the target population.

9 Definitions and indicators for measuring social and economic empowerment will be presented in another section of the paper.
The YMF program pathway was characterized by three key design elements, namely:

a) Client-focused or demand-based approaches to design of the program pathway and specific program components;
b) Choice of the YSLA methodology as the delivery mechanism; and

c) Inclusion of training on financial education and life skills.

**a) Client-focused or demand-based approaches to design**

In most African countries, access to financial services is a challenge. The primary source of financial services in poor communities, include family, informal savings groups (or osusu groups), traditional moneylenders, traders and other creditors who provide cash or in-kind services, and some semi-formal and formal services like village savings and loan (VSL) organizations and MFIs. Young people are generally excluded by most formal and informal financial services. Regulations prevent banks from granting credit to youths under 18. Without proper identification, youth cannot open bank accounts. Specialized financial institutions such as MFIs tend to view youth as a high-risk, low-profit segment of the population. Community-based mechanisms and traditional instruments such as moneylenders and osusu groups show a bias toward adults. Many are not interested in serving youth at all. The mismatch between demand and supply for cash forces youth to depend on family for their financial needs.

Furthermore, most formal, semi-formal, and informal financial service providers lack products and services that are aligned to meet the specific needs and characteristics of youth. Youth require community-based mechanisms that allow them to save small amounts of money and borrow in small amounts to contribute to household expenditures, meet their personal needs, invest in income-generating activities, cope with sudden shocks, and purchase personal and household assets. They need a financial mechanism that combines flexibility, convenience and offers specialized products and services that can enhance their self-reliance.

Demand-driven design informed by market research was instrumental in the creation of the YMF program pathway. The YSLA approach adopted by the YMF Project is based on traditional VSL methodology with the core model being retained but adjusted with operational adaptability according to the context of implementation. Distinctions between YSLAs would be observed as the model allows members to decide how they would run their group. Utilizing YSLAs in the YMF program pathway for the delivery of both financial services as well as life skills, financial education and information on other relevant social issues, including gender sensitivity and conflict management, reflects the initiative’s client-centred approach.

Although Niger, Senegal and Sierra Leone are very different and provide unique settings for development initiatives, the YMF Project design succeeded in being responsive through customization, while retaining simplicity for ease of implementation. The project was structured around a common set of “building blocks” to provide consistency in the implementation in each country. Barring language issues and a stronger integration of gender equality issues in Sierra Leone, there was little variance in the basic design. The country-disaggregated data allows for interesting comparisons. Results from baseline and end-line data show that the project’s impact

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1 Market research studies were conducted in 2008 and 2009. The project was initiated at the country level in the third quarter of 2010, or Year 1 (July 2010). The market research identified the need for a youth-led savings group approach, where young people can save and take loans when necessary, while also learning the art of managing money together. The research also identified the need for integrated life skills and financial education, leadership and business/enterprise development training, with the savings group serving as a pathway for youth economic development.

2 Proposal 2009

10 French in Niger and Senegal, and English in Sierra Leone.
on youth in Niger was not as good as in the other two countries. The impact evaluation suggests that emergencies created by droughts and conflict in neighbouring Mali, as well as the relative poverty of the country, are factors that could have played a role in the more limited outcomes seen in some of Niger’s end-line indicators when compared with the other two countries.\textsuperscript{13}

**b) Suitability of the YSLA as a delivery mechanism**

The VSL methodology has been promoted in vulnerable communities all over the world, including West Africa. It is recognized as an early entry point to financial access and as such as an appropriate intervention for remote, rural, or very vulnerable groups of people. The YMF Project adapted the VSL methodology to suit the needs of the youths in Niger, Senegal and Sierra Leone.

Through participation in the YSLAs, youths learned about the principles of savings and money management and started to save from their existing sources of cash. Financial education training covered the principles of responsible borrowing and saving to repay loans, investment in asset creation—and saving for planned and unplanned expenditures—and enabled the YSLA members to make informed choices about accessing credit from the group.

The YSLAs acted as a “one-stop shop” through which youths obtained information, training, and other forms of support to help them set goals and make good financial decisions. Youths were exposed to a range of savings mechanisms that enhanced their savings discipline and helped them to build up small amounts of cash assets. The YSLAs’ positive impact could be attributed to the community-based approach, the responsive design of financial products and delivery mechanisms, and the additional capacity development opportunities offered by YSLA activities.

The program design’s client-centric nature and appropriateness of its individual components contributed to the project’s outreach to 89,553 youths, a 128\% achievement rate over the original project target of 70,000.\textsuperscript{14} Figure 3 below shows the gradual increase in outreach over the project period, both in terms of the number of YSLAs and YSLA members.

Another positive factor was the fact that being community-based, YSLAs offered a significant degree of convenience to the target group. The youth key informants interviewed by the evaluation team emphasized the intrinsically flexible nature of the YSLAs; each YSLA could develop its own by-laws and internal rules, the application of these rules, and the manner in which groups opted to manage their social funds, as well as the terms and conditions for financial products.\textsuperscript{15} The rules and regulations could vary in terms of the time and date of the weekly meetings, the interest rate paid out on deposits, and the interest charged on various credit products.

The YSLAs also offered savings instruments in addition to credit products to meet the different financing needs of their members. Youths had access to flexible withdrawal from their savings to meet personal needs, household expenditures, and minor emergencies. They could also borrow from the YSLA credit fund to invest in business activities. In addition, the group savings fund provided loans for emergencies. Members also earned interest on their deposits.

The training provided on YSLA management and financial education enabled the youths to control decision-making about their own money, learn democratic processes to manage the money within the YSLA fund, and establish good governance through simple rules and processes. The training included an orientation for all YSLA members on the governance and management of the YSLA and on the roles and responsibilities of the members. The YSLA members elected their own governing bodies and managers. The success of any YSLA group depended on the active participation of its members and their ability to elect competent leadership that was committed to the wellbeing of the members. The YSLA mechanism leveraged the strength and capacity of youth to enable individual and collective success.

In addition, YSLA activities offered youths an opportunity to develop financial management and other life skills to support their transition into adulthood. They could also develop their leadership skills through participation in the following activities, such as being office-bearers within the YSLAs, acting as peer educators and community volunteers to support the rollout of the YMF Project, and engaging in the governance structure as YAB members.

In general, the final evaluation of the YMF Project supported the claim that the model used could reach target clients efficiently and effectively. According to the

\textsuperscript{13} Final Evaluation Report 2014

\textsuperscript{14} Final Evaluation Report 2014

\textsuperscript{15} Final Evaluation Report 2014
key informant interviews, the model has clearly proven effective in reaching large numbers of youths. A critical point raised in the evaluation referred to the need to balance the focus on outreach with the need to allow the youths a sufficient amount of time to receive and absorb the financial and life skills training.\(^{16}\)

c) Emphasis on financial education and life skills training

The YSLA methodology was effectively used as a delivery mechanism not only for financial services, but also for the provision of life skills training and financial education. In general, the topics covered by this training included the development of self-confidence and self-esteem, communication and interpersonal skills, decision-making, good health practices, HIV/AIDS awareness, family planning, teenage pregnancy, and gender and other rights issues.

Training in financial education was combined with savings mobilization, followed by access to loans. The sequencing of training prior to credit availability was designed to provide youths with practical knowledge about accessing financial services so that they could make informed choices. The financial education training included topics such as how to set financial goals, how to increase savings and keep them safe, how to save for unexpected expenses, how to make sound investment decisions, using savings and loans, knowing when to borrow rather than to use savings, how to engage in financial negotiations, and how to meet each financial objective or goal successfully.

Although the YMF Project’s final evaluation shows that not all the YSLA groups were provided with the same quality of information and that not all youths retained the information provided to them in the training, there is evidence from the final evaluation as well as other assessments\(^{17}\) that the inclusion of financial education was an important factor that contributed to a positive impact on youth.

Financial education helps youth to learn better money management, and gain a clear understanding of the difference between wants and needs. Such knowledge has a potential impact down the line, as youth transition to adulthood and become more active in the economy.\(^{18}\) Interviews from the Financial Diaries research as well as the stories collected through the Most Significant Change Stories methodology indicated that youths valued financial education training because it developed their confidence and capacity to leverage the potential of financial services.

\(^{16}\) Final Evaluation Report 2014

\(^{17}\) Attribute Ranking and Level of Satisfaction tool - PRA 2014

\(^{18}\) Final Evaluation Report 2014
3. Evidence of impact of the program pathway on empowerment
There is evidence that the YMF Project has contributed to the social and economic empowerment of participating youths and the development of responsible financial behaviours. The following paragraphs highlight some of the evidence showing that youths have been able to save in small, incremental amounts using various savings instruments (including YSLAs), as well as earn income from other economic activities. The youths invested their income and savings to finance the creation or expansion of existing economic activities, and to accumulate personal and household assets. Furthermore, youths were contributing money earned from their income-generating activities and using their savings towards household expenditures, particularly on enhanced nutrition, education, and health care. The youths gradually reduced their dependence on parents and other family. The improvement in their economic status resulted in positive impacts on their self-perception as well as enhanced status of youths among their peers, families, and communities. Participation in the YSLAs improved the self-esteem of these youths, motivating them to play a larger role in their communities as leaders and social change agents.
3.1. Income generation

The Financial Diaries research respondents reported a wide range of income from varied sources. In Niger, 37% of respondents earned between USD 10 and USD 50 per month, while 33% earned between USD 100 and USD 500. In Senegal, 64% of respondents earned less than USD 10 per month. In Sierra Leone, respondents’ monthly income was generally between USD 10 and USD 100.

Table 1 provides the evolution of the percentage of YSLA members in all three implementing countries who were involved in income-generating activities between the baseline and the end-line survey, showing the amount invested in these activities and the profit realized. The data supports the claim that the YSLA has made a significant contribution to the increase in members’ involvement in income-generating activities as well as in the investment in these activities, showing economic empowerment both in terms of engaging in economic activities and sound economic decision-making.

Youth members of YSLAs in all three countries experienced gains in terms of increased participation in income-generating activities as well as a higher investment in IGAs compared to baseline data. A notable indicator is the increase in the percentage of YSLA members who have paid employees. Given the lack of data on profit margins, this indicator is helpful in showing that there were some IGAs doing well enough to recruit paid employees.

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All USD amounts in this report have been rounded to the nearest dollar.

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Table 1: Evolution of income-generating activities (IGAs) conducted and investment by YSLA members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Senegal</th>
<th>Niger</th>
<th>Sierra Leone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Base</td>
<td>Final</td>
<td>Base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of YSLA members conducting IGAs</td>
<td>49.3</td>
<td>67.6</td>
<td>49.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average amount of money invested in IGAs (in USD)</td>
<td>91.4</td>
<td>110.1</td>
<td>62.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of YSLA members who earned profits from their business</td>
<td>85.5</td>
<td>90.7</td>
<td>97.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average amount of profit from IGA in USD</td>
<td>95.5</td>
<td>53.8</td>
<td>97.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of YSLA members who have paid employees for their business</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Synthesis Report 2014
Figure 4 shows the most typical sources of income for the target group. In all three countries, the most common source of income was petty trading, while service jobs and handicrafts were other main sources. Some youths earned income from transportation and agricultural labour. Income from remittances is another significant source, particularly remittances from family members sending money from another district or province (although there was also evidence of remittances from abroad).

**Figure 4: Income sources for target group**

Source: Financial Diaries Report 2014
3.2 Enhanced capacity to save

Youths in the YMF Project demonstrated both the will and the capacity to save by managing their personal and household expenditures, and by continuously enhancing their sources of income.

Project youths in urban Senegal depended mostly on money saved at home, while in Sierra Leone the majority of the respondents reported depending on cash gifts from family or friends. While the petty trades managed by the youths were found to be running mainly on the businesses’ working capital, a number of respondents took loans from YSLAs or withdrew YSLA savings to cover petty trade-related expenditures. A notable number of responses indicated that money received as gifts from family or friends was used as a source for meeting various expenditures, reflecting the dependency phase of the ordinary life cycle for those youths.

Savings enhance the social safety and reduce the vulnerability of the poor to sudden shocks. The Financial Diaries research as well as impact evaluation data provide evidence that youths in all three countries actively engaged in saving; some for the very first time. The average savings per member had increased from USD 2 or less in the first year to as much as USD 17 by the end of the project.21

In all three countries, the data sets from the Financial Diaries research as well as the impact evaluations indicated that the YSLAs were the most commonly used savings instrument. Youths were also using osusu22 groups and savings at home. The Financial Diary Report confirmed that the youths saved in various ways: they saved regularly either in large, irregular amounts, or in a more consistent pattern. Savings patterns depended on the individual, the seasonal cash flow, and the purpose of savings.23

As illustrated by the following story, the YSLAs motivated youths to develop their savings potential, and more importantly to save toward specific purposes, such as contributing to household expenses, and investing in improving their lives as well as the well-being of other family members.

Figure 5: Source of money for savings by all respondents (n=110)

- **Savings at home**: 12.72%
- **Income from business**: 62.52%
- **Business capital**: 0.31%
- **Borrowing from family/friends**: 0.05%
- **Sale of assets**: 1.29%
- **Gift from family/friends**: 23.11%

Source: Financial Diaries Report 2014

21 Financial Diaries Report 2014
22 Osusu groups are informal savings mechanisms in which members accumulate savings in a group fund. Funds are collected in daily, weekly, or monthly cycles. These cycles continue until each member has had a chance to access the cash in the fund. Once it has completed the cycle, the group may decide to disband, or initiate another cycle.
23 Financial Diary Report 2014
Box 1: Idrissa Sesay’s story

Idrissa Sesay found it difficult to save from his meager earnings, but he saved as much as he could every week with the YSLA. His savings allowed him to take a loan to sell top-up cards. He made a profit over time and was able to set up a shop where he now sells top-up cards, provisions, and drinks. Idrissa is careful with his expenditures so he is able to send money to his mother every month. He is also able to save toward meeting financial contributions to the extended family at “happy and sad events,” and is also saving to pay for the education of his younger brothers. Idrissa is able to save more than when he first started with the group. He has opened a savings account and is saving toward achieving his goal of continuing his accounting studies at the local college.

Source: Most Significant Change Stories

The different components embedded in the YSLA methodology have contributed to the capacity, motivation, and habits of youth members to save. Firstly, the life skills and financial education training provided through the YSLAs has enabled them to manage their expenses and save from their income, and plan to save for specific purposes. To quote one respondent, the YMF Project brought “financial and moral discipline” to participants. Secondly, the YSLA offers youth a safe and flexible savings mechanism.

While project youths turned to a variety of financial instruments to generate income and manage their expenses, the YSLAs were the most commonly-used saving instrument, followed by osusu groups and savings kept at home. However, responses from Niger and Senegal show that although respondents used YSLAs most frequently (1,200 instances of savings with YSLA compared to 350 instances of savings at home in one year), the average savings amounts were higher in the other savings instruments (i.e. USD 62 average savings in YSLAs compare to USD 75 average savings at home in one year).24

Some respondents saved large amounts in YSLAs, while others reported regularly depositing small amounts. Deposits were generally made from business income and money received from family or friends. In Sierra Leone, a higher percentage of youths reported using disposable funds available at the household level (31% against less than 1% for Niger and 7% for Senegal), along with business income and monetary gifts. In Niger, 80% of the money for savings came from business income, while in Senegal savings from business income for urban and rural youths was 73% and 86%, respectively.25

With regard to withdrawals, respondents tended to make greatest use of the easily accessible savings kept at home. Respondents in all three countries also made withdrawals from other savings instruments (i.e., YSLAs, MFIs and osusu groups) on a less frequent basis. Withdrawals were mostly made in order to meet their petty trade-related expenditures, to help family or friends, or to contribute to family expenses during ceremonies.26

24 Financial Diaries Report 2014
25 Financial Diaries Report 2014
26 Financial Diaries Report 2014
3.3 Asset accumulation

The possession of assets by YSLA members may be considered as a proxy of their level of wealth. The creation and accumulation of assets, particularly durable goods, is often taken as an indicator of people moving out of poverty. There is evidence from the Financial Diaries research and the impact evaluation that youths in the YSLAs have been able to use their earned income and savings to acquire both personal assets as well as assets for the household.

Youths in the three countries reported ownership of assets organized into four categories: i) livestock; ii) various means of transportation; iii) various types of household goods and appliances such as furniture, fridges, stoves, kitchen utensils, and productive tools such as sewing machines, agricultural, fishing and business tools, and kits, and finally; iv) consumer electronics, such as TVs and mobile phones.

Table 2 shows a list of the key asset categories and the percentages of members who possessed at least one of these items, as well as the change in asset ownership at the time of the baseline and end-line data collection. Comparisons between the baseline and end-line data indicate that YSLA members in all three countries showed slightly greater asset gains between 2011/2012 and 2014.

Table 2: Percentage change in ownership of assets by YSLA members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Senegal</th>
<th>Niger</th>
<th>Sierra Leone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Base</td>
<td>Final</td>
<td>Base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Livestock</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cows</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheep</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>32.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goats</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chickens</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>37.2</td>
<td>29.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Means of transportation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Car</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motorcycle</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bicycle</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Household appliances and agricultural tools</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stove</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fridge</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sewing machine</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embroidery machines</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business tool kits1</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural/fishing tool kits</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tables</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>35.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chairs</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>24.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Electronics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile phones</td>
<td>54.2</td>
<td>68.2</td>
<td>44.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total number of YSLA members</strong></td>
<td>349</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>434</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Synthesis Report 2014
The data shows an increase in the purchase of productive assets, including appliances, agricultural tools, and sewing machines. The increase was particularly significant in the purchase of business tool kits and agricultural and fishing tool kits. In the case of business tool kits, the increase was from 10.3% to 22.3% in Senegal, and from 3.5% to 14.0% in Sierra Leone. For agricultural and fishing tool kits, the increase was from 0.9% to 6.9% in Senegal, from 3.5% to 14.5% in Niger, and from 8.4% to 32.8% in Sierra Leone.

Similarly, the data points to an increase in ownership of livestock, with an increase in the purchase of a variety of animals such as cows, pigs, rabbits, guineafowls, goats, sheep, chickens, ducks, donkeys, and horses. The most popular livestock appears to be chickens, with ownership increasing from 30.4% to 37.2% in Senegal, from 29.3% to 33.4% in Niger, and from 39.7% to 59.4% in Sierra Leone. The percentage of youth members in the YSLAs possessing a sheep increased from 12.6% to 18.6% in Senegal, from 32.5% to 40.8% in Niger, and from 4.7% to 17.5% in Sierra Leone.

There was a notable increase in the purchase of lifestyle goods, in particular television sets and mobile phones. More than half of the YSLA members possessed a mobile phone and virtually all members in Sierra Leone. The percentage of youth owning a TV in Senegal climbed from 10.3% to 15.2% in Senegal, from 10.1% to 21.9% in Niger, and from 43.9% to 65 in Sierra Leone. Youths also reported investing in household goods such as stoves, furniture (chairs and tables), and kitchen utensils. There appeared to be a particular focus on purchasing chairs and tables, as the percentage owning tables went up from 4% to 28.9% in Senegal, from 35.3% to 59.4% in Niger, and from 68.4% to 89.8% in Sierra Leone.

The investment in livestock and various types of tools demonstrates that the youths developed an understanding of the need to invest in productive assets. The purchase of furniture, kitchen utensils, stoves, and fridges indicates that increased income flow has resulted in the desire and ability to improve overall quality of the standard of living. Also, youths were able to balance their need to expand their asset base with their desire to purchase lifestyle and consumer goods, like mobile phones and TVs.
In general, there was a greater increase in asset accumulation in Sierra Leone, which might be attributed to the fact that at baseline the members were comparatively better off than members in Senegal and Niger. However, the changes in all countries in terms of asset ownership suggested that the YSL activities have had a positive impact on the household economic status of the target group.

The following story illustrates how YSLAs helped youths accumulate assets, which in turn enabled them to improve the lives of their family members by contributing to their wellbeing.

**Box 2: Fati Seyni’s story**

**Fati Seyni** is a YSLA member as well as a community volunteer and peer educator. She helped establish 13 new YSLAs, and provided them with life skills and financial training. In addition to learning how to be part of a group, learning to express herself in public, and earning the respect of others, Fati has become in her words, “rich”. She used a YSLA loan and the income from her work as community volunteer and peer education to buy livestock – sheep and poultry. She was able to fatten her sheep and sell them for a significant profit. This money enabled her to pay the school fees for her daughter who is in sixth grade.

*Source: Most Significant Change Stories*
3.4 Improved role in household health and economy

The evidence from the *Financial Diaries Report*, the *Synthesis Report*, and the *Final Evaluation Report* indicates that since their participation in the YSLA activities, youths in the YMF Project have greatly enhanced their roles in the household economy, making significant contributions to nutrition, health, and education. In some cases, the youths are also contributing to ceremonies and entertainment expenditures. By making such contributions to the household expenditures, these youths have succeeded in enjoying enhanced status within the household, earning the respect of parents and other family members.

According to the *Financial Diaries Report*, youth respondents indicated that the greater proportion of household expenditure (36%) went toward purchases of food. Other household expenditures included health and education related expenditures (11%) and spending on ceremonies and entertainment (16%). In Niger, the data showed that respondents spent their funds primarily on food, with a stable monthly average of USD 105 throughout the year, which was significantly higher than their outlays on merchandise for their petty trades (on average, USD 28 per month). In Senegal also, respondents reported spending on food as the key area of expenditure, irrespective of urban or rural location. Average food expenditure for the one-year data collection period was USD 240. Similar responses were received from the rural respondents, who reported average spending of USD 325 throughout the year. As in Niger, trade-related expenses were the second-highest spending area. Approximately one-fifth of their total expenditure went toward buying raw materials or merchandise (13% and 7% respectively). In Sierra Leone, the youths responded that they spent more on expenses related to their petty trades than on any other expenditure area, including food.29

Table 3: Spending on health and children’s schooling, baseline versus end-line

| Indicator | Niger | | Senegal | | Sierra Leone |
|-----------|------|-------|--------|-------|-------------|----------------|
|           | Baseline adjusted | End-line | Baseline adjusted | End-line | Baseline adjusted | End-line |
| Expenditure on health care by YSLA members | | | | | | |
| Proportion who paid medical expenses for their household | 51.8 | 46.3 | 26.4 | 42.1 | 57.4 | 72.3 |
| Average amount of medical expenses met by YSLA members for their household members (USD) | 11.5 | 13.1 | 5.8 | 29.6 | 30.8 | 54.8 |
| Household children primary and secondary education rate and investment into education | | | | | | |
| Proportion who have supported other children’s education | 23.8 | 25.1 | – | – | 40.6 | 58.1 |
| Average amount spent on education for their children and/or other children (USD) | 7.2 | 15.4 | 6.0 | 22.7 | 107.0 | 299.6 |

Source: Final Evaluation Report 2014

Table 3 highlights the change in the access to health and household children’s education between the baseline and the end-line data collection period. The data for Senegal and Sierra Leone show a significant increase in expenditure on health care by YSLA members, i.e. the proportion of youth participants who paid the medical expenses for their household. In Senegal, the expenditures on health care rose from 26.4% in 2011-2012 to 42.1% in 2014. In Sierra Leone, this measure climbed from 57.4% to 72.3%. Similarly, there was an increase in investment in the education of children in the household. The proportion of members who supported the education of other children in the household in Niger increased from 23.8% in 2011-2012 to 25.1% in 2014. In Sierra Leone, the figure rose from 40.6% to 58.1%. The average amount spent on education for children rose from USD 7.20 in 2011-2012 to USD 15.40 in Niger, from USD 6.00 to USD 22.70 in Senegal, and from USD 107 to USD 299.60 in Sierra Leone.

The Synthesis Report pointed to a significant increase in YSLA members’ expenditures to support better nutrition, health care, and education in each of the three countries. The data showed that the greatest change in expenditure on health care and education occurred among youth in Sierra Leone. Members in Sierra Leone seemed to be spending more on education and health since the baseline. Participants in Niger experienced a minor change when compared with their counterparts in Senegal and Sierra Leone. In Niger, the percent of YSLA members meeting the health costs for their household diminished between baseline and end-line, while positive change was seen in Senegal and Sierra Leone.

Figure 7 illustrates the significant increase in the YSLA members’ expenditure to support education and health in each of the three countries. The data also shows a higher proportion of YSLA members who contributed towards medical expenses for their households.

For instance, in Senegal the average amount spent by youths for the education of their children increased from USD 6 to USD 22.70. In Niger, the amount increased from USD 7.20 to USD 15.40. The baseline point in Sierra Leone was already comparatively high at USD 107 and it further increased to USD 299.60.

The proportion of YSLA members who covered medical expenses for the household increased in Senegal from 26.4% to 42.1% and in Sierra Leone from 57.4% to 72.3%. The average amount spent on medical expenses by YSLA members for the household also went up significantly from USD 5 to USD 29.60 in Senegal and from USD 30.80 to USD 54.80 in Sierra Leone, but in Niger the increase was much less, from USD 11.50 to USD 13.10. The youth’s enhanced ability to contribute to household expenditures is an important indicator of greater self-reliance and economic empowerment.
3.5 Enhanced self-confidence and self-esteem

The Synthesis Report sought to measure self-esteem among youths by exploring the following: their economic confidence and decision-making power, public speaking, and intermediation in community disputes. Figure 8 shows that the YSLA activities contributed to an improvement in members’ self-esteem in each country.

Figure 8: Percentage change in perception of youth regarding self-confidence and self-esteem

Source: Synthesis Report 2014

Several youths, as illustrated in the Most Significant Change Stories, indicated that prior to the program they had doubts about their potential to achieve their personal goals. Furthermore, interviews with key respondents such as family members, community leaders, and project staff, indicated that prior to the project there was a negative bias toward youth within their communities. The YMF Project triggered a change in the social mindset of the youths involved.

The percentage of youth indicating that they had the power to obtain money from their earnings as well as from financial service providers to cover their needs increased from 0.6% to 32.1% in Senegal, 4.4% to 12.7% in Niger, and from 19.8% to 42.8% in Sierra Leone.30

Youths also perceived an increase in their authority over the use of the income from their businesses declined from 26.3% to 22.3%.31 The decline may be partially attributed to deeply seeded cultural and gender norms that limit young people, especially female youth, to have financial authority. This finding also correlates with Figure 9, which indicates that close to 80% of YSLA members think men should make most of the household decisions.

In all three countries the youth respondents felt more confident about speaking up in public gatherings, with the proportion climbing from 1.4% to 35.2% in Senegal, 6.0% to 14.1% in Niger, and 22.3% to 30.7% in Sierra Leone.32

Most youths also reported an increased ability to influence community decisions. This also impacts how youth are seen as leaders and social change agents, as further discussed in Section 3.7. The percentage increased from 1.7% to 24.4% in Senegal, from 4.1% to 9.4% in Niger, and from 10.6% to 23.5% in Sierra Leone. In all three countries youths in the YSLAs felt that their ability to

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30 Synthesis Report 2014
31 Synthesis Report 2014
32 Synthesis Report 2014
resolve disputes between neighbours or other members of the community had increased; from 0.3% to 42.1% in Senegal, from 0.7% to 9.4% in Niger, and from 19.5% to 30.2% in Sierra Leone (please see Figure 10).

In their responses to the surveys conducted by the evaluation team, participants indicated that the life skills training enabled them to speak in public and that they were now aspiring for leadership roles in their communities; something they once thought was unachievable.

In the final evaluation report, the respondents in the focus group discussions and key respondent interviews indicated that at the beginning of the program, youths were “isolated, aggressive, and idle” and lacked understanding of how to engage in dialogue with their peers. The Synthesis Report also suggested that the training provided through the YSLAs provided youths with alternative means for resolving conflicts and engaging in informed debate and dialogue.33 Several youths profiled in the Most Significant Change Stories mentioned the impact of the YSLA in contributing to behaviour and attitude changes, in particular the access it afforded to training and skill-building activities.

In their responses, youths reported that they had developed survival and coping skills over the duration of the program. Young women in particular expressed appreciation for the training provided to deal with concrete needs, such as life goals, HIV/AIDS, family planning, teenage pregnancy, early marriage and domestic violence.34

As part of the participatory rural appraisal activity for the final evaluation, youths were asked to draw sketches to visualize their future and develop life plans or targets; another important indicator of economic empowerment (illustrated in the two sample drawings included here). Youths were able to clearly articulate their vision of life plans and goals, depict themselves engaged in various types of economic activities, and draw pictures of valuable assets they would like to own. The illustrations suggest that these youths developed a positive image of their futures, and felt empowered and enabled to work toward achieving their goals.35

33Synthesis Report 2014
34Final Evaluation Report 2014
35Final Evaluation Report 2014

Drawing 1: A 19-year old male from Dakar, Senegal, who wants to run his own workshop.

Drawing 2: A 20-year old female from Freetown, Sierra Leone, who would like to be a businesswoman in her community.
3.6 Gender dimensions of empowerment

a) Participation of women in income-generating activities

The data reviewed supports the claim that the YSLA promoted economic self-reliance among women and girls, and encouraged women and girls to engage in savings and credit activities to reduce their vulnerability and enhance their economic status. The impact evaluation indicates that participation in the YSLAs resulted in an increase in income-generating activities, as well as increased investment of loans and other income in these activities. As the majority of the youth members of YSLAs were female, it can be assumed that the YSLAs succeeded in having a positive impact in motivating them to engage in productive activities, in turn allowing them to earn income, save more, and invest in asset creation and the expansion of their business activities. By earning income and through having the ability to put aside some income as savings, young women were able to reduce their vulnerability while also enhancing their status within the home and the community.

b) Impact of gender training on youth members of YSLAs

As part of the YSLA program, Plan provided gender sensitization training to youth members. During the end-line data collection, a module on gender perception was included to assess YSLA members’ perceptions regarding some key gender-related statements, as illustrated in Figure 9.36

![Graph showing gender perception of YSLA members by sex]

Source: Synthesis Report 2014

Although it is not possible to assess changes in behaviour (as baseline data was not collected), the end-line data shows that the youths demonstrated some positive perceptions regarding gender relationships related to reproductive and productive work.37 For instance, the majority of respondents (above 85% in all three countries) felt that a husband should spend his free time with his wife and children. A significant percentage of respondents in Sierra Leone (88.4%) felt that a husband should help with household chores and child care. The percentages were less in the other two countries: 62.3% in Senegal and 48.2% in Niger.

Figure 9: Gender perception of YSLA members by sex

One point of note is contained in the data from Sierra Leone, where the youths had specifically asked for gender training to be a focus in their life skills training. The measures there were more positive compared with the other two countries in terms of the perception of household decision-making. Placing a greater focus on gender in life skills training could be one of the lessons learned when planning for future initiatives.

Other information, such as the qualitative data collected from female respondents in interviews conducted by the final evaluation team, indicate that the YSLA has had a positive impact on their lives, and in particular on their self-perception. Women and girls’ involvement in YSLAs helped them improve their conflict management skills.

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36 Index inspired by CARE International Surveys, e.g. CARE Strategic Impact Inquiry surveys on women’s empowerment.
37 Reproductive work includes child bearing/rearing responsibilities and domestic tasks. It includes not only biological reproduction but also the care and maintenance of the economically active and non-active family members. Productive work includes work done by both women and men for pay in cash or in kind. It includes both market production with an exchange-value, and subsistence/home production with actual use-value, and also potential exchange-value.
and engage in household decision-making, even though their contribution was not always welcomed by the older generation.

*Most Significant Change Stories* and respondents in the final evaluation report stated that the life skills training and financial education allowed them to contribute to community development meetings and express their opinions confidently among men. Young women in particular felt that they were receiving greater respect not only from male members of the YSLA but also from other adult males in the community.38

The story outlined in Box 3 illustrates the positive impact of the project on developing individuals' self-reliance and self-worth.

Changes in attitudes and behaviour with regard to gender equality take time and the final evaluation report highlighted that while gender issues were addressed in part through the life skills training, the impact on perceptions regarding gender equality was limited. The degree and type of change related to gender is multilayered; some changes could be seen within a relatively short time given the right sensitization, training, and awareness raising; while changes to more deep-rooted beliefs and cultural norms require sustained efforts and are likely beyond the time frame of the project. To achieve positive impact on gender dimensions there is a need to design specialized program components, and to ensure that the design and implementation of activities involves key stakeholders in the community who influence behaviour and practices.

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38 Most Significant Change Stories 2013

**Box 3: Theresa Kabia’s story**

**Theresa Kabia** has learned to save, organize her finances better, and in her own words, “make her money work for her”. However, she feels that the greatest impact of the YSLA on her life has been that she no longer has to beg for work or engage in transactional sex to feed her children. By saving with the YSLA and borrowing a loan to set up her own food stand she is now able to buy whatever she wants and she is able to walk “with her head high in the community”. With the share-out from the YSLA, she was able to buy another shop that sells household goods and save more from the profits. She plans to fulfill her dream of opening a restaurant. For Theresa, the most significant change as a result of the project was how the project empowered her to become an independent, self-reliant woman.

Source: Most Significant Change Stories
3.7 Youth as leaders and social change agents

The YMF Project has contributed to developing the natural qualities of leadership within a large number of youths who have served as executive committee members in the YSLAs, as community volunteers and peer educators, and as members of the YABs. The Most Significant Change Stories show that there is a change in self-perception, as many youths came to regard themselves as leaders and change agents by influencing decision-making within their households and by contributing to decisions at the community level.

The economic outcomes that accrued from improvements in access to financial services and financial education translated into greater social status for the youths, as money is regarded as an indicator of power. Participation in YSLAs enabled these youths to effectively emerge as social change agents in their communities. Project participants whose stories were collected using the Most Significant Change methodology indicated that they used the social funds in the YSLAs to borrow toward needs, such as payment for medical expenses and hospitalizations, the purchase of medication, or to cover expenses associated with weddings, christenings, or funerals. By being able to support not only their own needs, but also the needs of their households, the youths were regarded as productive and contributing members of their families.

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**Figure 10: Perception of youth regarding their role in the community**

![Bar chart showing perceived role of youth in the community](chart)

Source: Synthesis Report 2014

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**Box 4: Fati Hamidou’s story**

Fati Hamidou, a housewife, was nominated by YSLA members as the secretary of her group. She was later nominated by a project leader to supervise the savings of a neighbouring YSLA, and then recommended as a community volunteer. Her success in this latter role led to her being recommended for a “Training of Trainers” to provide life skills and financial education training as a peer educator. Fati claims that she learned a great deal through this training, especially about saving, setting goals in life, and having the courage and determination to fight. She feels she “has become independent and (is) respected by everybody.” Fati believes that the project changed her life, as she now earns respect and enjoys many advantages. She now has enhanced status as a “project agent” with an income that enables her to contribute to her family’s expenses, including the building of a mud-brick wall around her family home. Fati plans to go back to school to continue her studies.

Source: Most Significant Change Stories

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39 Financial Diaries Report 2014
40 Final report 2014

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4. Insights into the use of financial services by youth
4.1 Patterns in the use of financial services

a) Savings instruments

The Financial Diaries research observed the following:

- Youth, like adults, use a range of financial instruments to manage their money creatively.

- The financial instruments available for youth are dominated by informal sources.

- Youth lack access to formal financial services.

- Youth have high capacities and a propensity to save.

- There is a tendency to save at home more.

- Life cycle and seasonality factors play important roles in how youth manage their money.

The Financial Diaries research also showed that youth have access to a variety of savings options and are using the YSLAs, savings at home, osusu groups, banks, and post offices. Some youths were saving for the very first
The evidence from the Financial Diaries shows that in all three countries, the YSLA was the most commonly used saving instrument, followed by the osusu groups and savings at home. Figure 11 illustrates youth preferences for savings instruments.

Figure 11: Savings instruments used by youth

The active participation of youth in YSLAs for saving indicates that they found this to be a useful option for conserving small amounts for specific purposes, especially when they did not have access to formal financial institutions. Banks and other formal financial institutions were either not accessible or involved a number of legal requirements, including identification cards and documentation, which created barriers affecting convenient access and withdrawal. Similarly, osusu groups were also limited in terms of convenience and flexibility, as they operate on a random or cyclical basis, making withdrawals for unplanned expenditures or emergencies more complex.

The YSLA approach offered a value proposition to members through flexible withdrawals of savings, ready access to credit (for legitimate requests), as well as access to loans for small expenditures or emergencies from a social fund. Youth depositors could earn interest on their deposits and the money stayed in the group. However, the data shows that while the YSLA was the preferred method for saving, a large number of youths continued to save informally within the home despite the fact that their money was at risk of theft or loss. Saving at home is popular given the greater convenience and flexibility for use and withdrawal relative to other instruments. Saving at home also has no paper work or restrictions, such as a minimum amount for saving, and timing of withdrawal. By contrast, saving with YSLAs or at banks might require more rigidity or structure.

It might well be safe to assume that the YSLA is a preferred method for planned savings, while saving at home is convenient for meeting regular household expenditures and for cashflow management for the business, although the project did not collect data to understand these preferences. At the same time, despite the flexibility and convenience offered by saving at home, there were some youths among the respondents who indicated that they did not save at home at all.

Youth in Niger indicated a strong preference for saving larger amounts of cash at home. Although the majority (345 responses) reported saving with the YSLA as compared to 198 respondents who saved at home, the average amount saved at home over one year was as high as USD 330 compared to USD 4 per month, on average, with the YSLA.

The project data does not support a high usage of formal financial instruments such as MFIs and banks, although we know that few young people used banks. Only nine out of the 30 respondents in Sierra Leone deposited savings with banks, but they appeared to use this instrument as term savings, as access to the deposits was infrequent.

The data also shows that youth understand the link between savings and access to credit as illustrated by the Most Significant Change Story provided in Box 5.
b) Credit sources

The Financial Diaries research indicates that youth have a limited range of credit sources. As illustrated in Figure 12, in all three countries the majority (88%) indicated that the YSLA was the major source of credit. Family and osusu groups were still relevant to accessing credit, although they were less relevant than before the start of the project. Banks, MFIs, cooperatives, NGOs, and moneylenders remained relatively insignificant credit sources even towards the end of the project.47

The Synthesis Report also shows that in all three countries the majority of young people used YSLAs for loans (95.5% and 99.7% of the youth respondents in Senegal and Sierra Leone respectively). In Niger, the percentage of youth using YSLAs as a source of loans was slightly lower at 68.5%, with 11.4% of the respondents indicating family as a key source of credit and 18.6% utilizing traders who offered goods as credit. By comparison, family and traders were not significant credit sources for youth in Senegal and Sierra Leone.

Given that youth generally lack access to both formal and informal financial services, particularly for loans, the capacity of YSLAs to offer credit is a key advantage. In all three countries, the evaluations showed that YSLAs were considered to be the most common source of credit, followed by loans from family members. Loans from the YSLAs tended to be more frequent and larger in size.47

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47 Synthesis Report 2014
Figure 13: Main use of loans taken by YSLA members

Senegal  Number of loans = 900

Sierra Leone  Number of loans = 677

Niger  Number of loans = 1214

Source: Synthesis Report 2014
4.2 Linking YSLAs with a microfinance institution

The data in Figure 14 shows that formal institutions such as banks and MFIs were not a significant source of credit for young people in the YMF Project. Less than 1% of the youth respondents in Senegal and Sierra Leone, and none in Niger reported borrowing from banks or MFIs.18

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Figure 14: Source of loans taken by YSLA members

**Senegal**
- YSLA 95.5%
- Family/relatives 2.7%
- Microfinance Institution 0.9%
- Bank 0.3%
- Goods as Loan with a trader 0.2%
- Other 0.3%

**Niger**
- YSLA 68.5%
- Family/relatives 11.4%
- Microfinance Institution 0.3%
- Bank 0.0%
- Goods as Loan with a trader 18.6%
- Other 0.4%

**Sierra Leone**
- YSLA 99.7%
- Family/relatives 0.0%
- Microfinance Institution 0.1%
- Bank 0.1%
- Goods as Loan with a trader 0.0%
- Other 0.0%

Source: Synthesis Report 2014
The YMF Project designed a pilot initiative to facilitate linkages between YSLAs and formal financial institutions to motivate youth to access formal financial institutions. It also represented an opportunity for formal financial institutions to offer an alternative to informal moneylenders, and semi-formal financial sources, such as YSLAs.

This linkage component was implemented only in Senegal, targeting 3,000 youths or 10% of the YMF Project’s total target in the country. Although preparatory work on the linkage pilot was initiated in 2012 or approximately mid-way through the YMF Project, the planning phase took much longer than expected and the actual linkage of youths to institutions did not begin until 2013. This delay affected the final number of youths who were linked by the end of the project.

The YMF Project selected Partenariat pour la Mobilisation de l’Epargne et le Crédit Au Sénégal (PAMECAS) as the MFI for this component, as it had prior experience with the design and implementation of youth financial services, including individual and group loans through YSLAs, as well as the refinancing of YSLAs. The linkage project involved orientation sessions provided by the YMF Project staff as well as PAMECAS agents to YSLA members. The YSLA members were then supported in opening accounts with PAMECAS. PAMECAS offers three types of credit services, including individual and group loans through the YSLA, as well as a refinancing product for the YSLA.

At the end of the project, about 55 youths had borrowed as individuals, 50 YSLAs had received group loans for members, and another six YSLAs had been refinanced by PAMECAS, borrowing the equivalent of USD 6,300 since the beginning of the initiative in 2012. The project evaluation report shows that only 1,300 youths, less than 43% of the original 3,000 targeted, tapped into the services provided by the linkage component. This could be due the extra time the project took to develop training modules to educate youths about MFI products. The additional steps taken to sensitize youths helped to reduce the chance of exposing them to unnecessary risks, but also caused some delays linking youths to PAMECAS. If given more time, it is foreseeable that more youths could have been linked. These numbers could also indicate that young people did not want to bank with PAMECAS, or that they were simply not ready to enter into the formal system. Data were not collected or analyzed to understand this low uptake.

Given that the majority of the youths in the YMF Project were not able to participate in the linkage component, there is an opportunity to build stronger ties and capacity to include youth in the formal financial system for future initiatives. Furthermore, there is other evidence to support the interest of youth in such linkages. The data from Niger, collected during sessions held with youths as part of the final evaluation, described linkages as a necessary next step for the YMF Project, and indeed, some YSLAs in Niger forged links with formal financial institutions on their own. In Sierra Leone, focus group discussions revealed that, acting on their own initiative, YSLA members opened individual or group accounts with local commercial banks. In this context, stakeholders regarded linkages as a potential means to meet young people’s growing need to access funds and find a reliable mechanism to safeguard their savings.

In addition to the pilot project with PAMECAS in Senegal, other unplanned linkages in Sierra Leone and Niger suggest that youth in the YSLAs have the will and the potential to access formal financial institutions as they have understood the advantages of financial services, in particular the benefit of credit for investment in business activities, and have felt equipped and confident enough to do so themselves. Over time, provided with the right motivation and support, more youths could develop the confidence to engage with formal financial institutions like PAMECAS. The individual loan product is attractive for youths who require larger loans for working capital or for investment; a demand that cannot be met by the YSLAs with their reliance on savings from members for loan funds. YSLAs that are unable to meet the growing demand for refinancing can also benefit from links with banks or MFIs.

Figure 15 from the Synthesis Report shows that not only was there an increase in the percentage of YSLA members who had accessed a loan during the six months before the point when the survey was conducted, there was also a significant increase in the average amount of loan taken and the size of loan taken among those who had borrowed either at the baseline or the end-line.

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49 PAMECAS had developed a youth-friendly service named N’Doorte (“beginning” in Wolof) that included both savings and loans for youth between the ages of 12 and 25. Clients could access credit as individuals or as a group through the YSLAs.

50 The linkage program was designed with PAMECAS, an MFI that had previously designed youth financial products and services in collaboration with the UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) and The MasterCard Foundation. Plan Canada partnered with PAMECAS to field test the products and services designed by PAMECAS through the pilot linkage project, which involved a small number of the YMF Project’s youth participants.

51 Final Evaluation Report 2014

52 Final Evaluation Report 2014
Given their limited capacity to raise savings and the absence of links with formal financial institutions, YSLAs might not be able to meet the increasing demand for loans from existing members. Formal financial institutions are therefore an alternative source of credit for YSLA members. Furthermore, banks offer safety and security of cash.

Another important factor in considering the importance of links between youth and formal institutions is the need for youths and their family members to gain access to money transfer and payment mechanisms. There is evidence that youth are both receiving and sending money transfers (remittances), indicating potential demand for such services that are not yet provided by YSLAs. According to the Financial Diaries data, a significant percentage of the income for youth was sourced from remittances from abroad, as well as from other provinces within the country (see Figure 4). Similarly, in the Most Significant Change Stories, Idrissa Sesay, a youth participant based in Freetown, Sierra Leone, reported that he sent money every month to his mother in Masiaka, a town in Port Loko, for basic household expenditures, including ceremonies and other household social expenditures. Access to formal financial institutions will offer youth the opportunity to benefit from payment services, mobile banking, online banking, and other financial products that are not available within the YSLA model.
5. Impact of the project on harnessing youth leadership
5.1 YSLA executive committees

Each executive committee typically consists of a president, vice-president, treasurer and secretary. For many of the youths elected into one of these positions, it was the first time they had been given the opportunity to take on a leadership role among their peers.

In the *Most Significant Change Stories* report, some of the youths talked about their experience in being part of a YSLA executive committee and how that gave them greater confidence; not only in managing their respective YSLAs, but also in how they were viewed by their family members and their community.

**Box 6: Aissatou Dramé’s story**

*Aissatou Dramé says,* “Before joining the Youth Microfinance (YMF) Project, although I got along with my peers, I used to be shy and had trouble expressing myself in front of an audience. My responsibilities within the group have enabled me to better understand the roles and responsibilities of a leader. Thanks to the support of the project… I have become a good leader. I am included in family meetings in spite of my young age, and I get much more respect from adults in the village. Now I take part in the village development committee meetings, where I do not hesitate to take the floor and give my opinion.”

*Source:* *Most Significant Change Stories*
5.2 Youth advisory boards

YABs were part of the YMF Project's governance structure, and were elected by the YSLA members. Their role was to provide support to YSLAs, which included helping groups that might be struggling, resolving conflicts, monitoring group quality, providing technical training, and collecting data. In their role, the YABs supported the project's local partners and field agents in the implementation of the program, extending their depth and reach of monitoring, supervision, and support of the YSLAs.

The final evaluation found that respondents regarded YABs as efficient intermediaries. YAB members were found beneficial to the program and added value to the training and planning processes and education of new youth members. These YAB members became leaders and role models for other youth participating in the program. There is evidence that YAB members remained committed to the YMF Project and youth issues in their community.53

The YABs had an active role in the development of YMF Project policies and procedures, as well as in the design of the community volunteer policy and the life skills strategies for YSLA members. The community volunteer policy was prepared in consultation with over 100 youths across the three countries and was used as a guiding document for the identification and training of volunteers and the roll out of volunteer-led YSLAs. YAB members themselves reported that involvement with the project had increased their self-confidence and enabled them to act as role models for other youths.54

5.3 Community volunteers and peer educators

Community volunteers and peer educators were YSLA members selected by their peers to assist the project partner organizations in managing YSLA operations. These included motivating youths to organize YSLAs and benefit from access to financial services as well as life skills and financial education training. Community volunteers were trained by the project so that they could support training of YSLA members in the YSLA methodology. These volunteers worked under the supervision of field agents. Although their responsibilities were somewhat similar, community volunteers were unpaid (except in Niger, where the CVs get a stipend to align with the normal practices in the country), while the field agents were paid employees of partner organizations. Peer educators were youths who were able to contribute as life skills and financial education trainers, and were identified by the project staff and provided with training to support and develop their peers.55

The final evaluation also indicated that community volunteers and peer educators contributed significantly to the growth and development of the YSLAs. In particular, the volunteers helped open direct communication with communal authorities, i.e. village mayors. As a result, these community leaders were better able to grasp local needs and identify key challenges. The active promotion by community volunteers contributed to the increase in average savings per YSLA member from USD 3 to USD 5 in Year 1, and to USD 17 by the end of the project. The evaluation report shows that the YSLAs assisted by these volunteers were performing consistently better than those working with the field agents. The evaluation report from Sierra Leone shows that community volunteers worked particularly hard in rural communities and were able to actively encourage youths to save and to take loans and invest in viable businesses to prevent youth out-migration to urban areas.56

The success of the project in surpassing the outreach targets for YSLA members can be attributed in part to the contributions of the community volunteers (and field agents), who were instrumental in the organization of the YSLAs and in attracting youths to join the YSLAs and actively participate in all YSLA activities.

53 Final Evaluation Report 2014
54 Annual Progress Report, January to December 2010
55 Final Evaluation Report 2014
56 Final Evaluation Report 2014
The YMF Project supported the participation of 13 youth project participants, including YSLA executive committee members, YAB representatives, community volunteers and peer educators at the project’s 2012 regional conference in Dakar, Senegal, entitled *Investing in African Youth: Making Financial Services and Training Work*. These youths were able to share their experiences with other international participants and benefited from the opportunity to bring home important lessons to share with their communities. Participation in this event not only motivated the youths who attended, but these young men and women were able to motivate others by sharing their experiences upon their return home. The project offered youths the opportunity to express their opinions and inputs in various forums, including:

- Participation in an initial needs assessment conducted for youths at the pilot stage
- Participation in rapid socioeconomic assessments for specific program regions
- Representation (through YABs) on the YMF Program Steering Committee
- Participation in program implementation planning workshops held in each of the three countries
- Participation in monitoring activities
- Participation in the regional conference of all key program actors, hosted in Senegal in 2012
- Participation of youth members of the YSLAs in the Making Cents Conference entitled “Global Youth Economic Opportunities Conference” in Washington DC in 2012

The inspiration provided by these youth leaders has motivated their peers to join the YSLAs, improve their outlook on life, and develop positive life plans. In interviews conducted during the final evaluation, parents of participants reported that their children are less likely to drop out of school, and that the project gave illiterate youth the opportunity to access life skills and key financial management concepts and knowledge that will help them throughout life. The project has helped their communities see youth in a new light and appreciate the economic and social potential of young people.

Through the promotion of youth leadership, the YMF Project has contributed to the development of a generation of youth within the community who can act as change agents well beyond the scope of the project.

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*Source: Final Evaluation Report 2014 (Figure 4).*
6. Next steps: building on learning and assessing gaps in the program pathway
6.1 Enhancing the integration of gender dimension

The gender lens used within the YMF Project was limited and focused primarily on outreach. While there was gender sensitization training provided to project staff, the YMF Project did not have a particularly strong focus on gender sensitization for the community or the YSLA members. There was no specific gender strategy to guide implementation, even though women and girls formed the majority of the target group. The final evaluation shows the need for better understanding within the project staff, and all major stakeholders, to better understand gender constraints, such as equitable access to economic opportunities and limited decision-making powers.

The evidence from the field supports the need for greater integration of the gender dimension in program strategy and design. In all three countries (including in Sierra Leone where the project included gender sensitization training), youth members in the YSLAs reported that attempts to have open discussions on life skills topics associated with gender or reproductive health generated a fair amount of resistance within the groups. In Niger, the resistance from male members in mix-gendered groups was so great that community volunteers had to replace this activity with a discussion about young people’s rights, and conduct the discussion in the presence of elders, preventing any discussion on gender equality.

Field agents as well as community volunteers reported that training on gender sensitivity was often greeted with resistance from some local communities. For instance, in Senegal, village chiefs opposed the delivery of family planning training in their communities. In Sierra Leone, field agents and community volunteers who delivered YMF gender training in private homes at the request of young people’s parents occasionally faced opposition from the male heads of household. The reason given for this resistance was that local communities had not been properly briefed before the discussion, i.e. there is need for gender sensitization prior to informed discussions that could lead to positive changes in behaviour and attitude regarding gender roles in society.

In order to achieve real social and economic impact in these communities, with particular impact on the female segment of the population, future program design

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\(^{64}\) The exception is Sierra Leone, where the youth had identified gender as a focus for their life skills training.

\(^{60}\) Final Evaluation Report 2014

\(^{61}\) Final Evaluation Report 2014
must address specific issues where there is a need for gender-focused interventions. Gender sensitivity training should be a must for project staff but also for YABs, community volunteers, peer educators, and field agents.

Future initiatives should identify ways in which discussions on sensitive issues can be conducted with greater effect. For example, initial discussions could be conducted first within same-sex groups, and only then in mixed gender groups, with the presence of elders who have also been involved in the design and provided with training of trainers. In this way, the hope is that the adults can support the transmission of positive messages rather than acting as the main opposition.62

Gender sensitivity training should also be provided within the YSLAs for wider audiences. Most importantly, project managers must invest in gender sensitivity training and awareness building within the larger community, with particular focus on the community leaders as well as educators who are respected and valued. These individuals can then support the work of YSLA leaders and project staff, taking on the role of champions for the project and stepping in to prevent conflict. Particular attention and specialized content and treatment will also be required to take into account the national context, recognizing that each country will have a unique mix of culture, social structure, religion, and economic and political environments that shape the degree and ways in which males dominate leadership and decision-making roles.

6.2 Integrating the YMF Project principles and goals into the community

The life skills training provided through the YSLAs was aimed at building youth’s ability to assimilate new life skills and to apply these skills in their immediate environment and help bring about positive change. One way of bringing about change would be involvement in other community-based organizations; however, the evaluation and impact evaluation reports indicate that after joining the YSLAs, youths showed less interest in becoming involved with other community organizations.

Integration of the YSLA activities into the community is also essential to produce the greatest benefit and quality of impact. Field agents and community volunteers reported to evaluators that training on sensitive topics was often greeted with resistance from local communities because there was no proper briefing in advance. The project evaluation noted however, that incidences of resistance decreased toward the end of the program.63 This suggests that continued exposure and understanding had led to a change of attitude towards sensitive training topics.

Life skills training should address this issue, and highlight ways in which YSLAs and members can collaborate with other community-based organizations to have deeper social and economic impacts in the community.

6.3 Improving the delivery of life skills training

There were significant discrepancies in the level of understanding among youth regarding the life skills modules, which emerged as a notable lesson. In some groups, particularly in Niger, participants were unable to talk about the skills that they had acquired during the life skills training. Several recipients reported having difficulty remembering lessons associated with some of the modules they were taught. In addition, despite repeated prompting from the evaluators, youths had a hard time giving a clear explanation of how concepts they had learned and clearly understood (such as gender equality or human and child rights) could apply in, or become part of, their daily lives.64 There is a need to ensure the content of the modules are suitable for the target group (such as level of literacy), and to adapt the delivery of the training so that it is learner-centred, participatory and age appropriate.

64 Final Evaluation Report 2014.
6.4 Leveraging the social capital of YSLAs

There is evidence from the desk review that there are several areas where the project results went beyond the expected outcomes. For instance, the final evaluation states that in all three countries, youths played a major role during emergencies by coming together to rebuild homes destroyed by floods or landslides, pay for health bills incurred by a member or a member’s relative, or to make extra contributions for a member’s wedding. YSLAs also reported that they helped set up joint meetings with neighbouring groups to discuss challenges, and exchange lessons and best practices. The development of social capital is an essential outcome that should be integrated into program design, as it is a critical asset for poor communities that lack resources and are vulnerable to shocks. In the future, program design should leverage this opportunity to use the YSLAs as a platform for youth to engage in dialogue within the community on sensitive issues. Additionally, design modifications should consider the potential of YSLAs having a domino effect, i.e., YSLA members bringing home learning from life skills training, financial education, and access to financial services and sharing this with other household members.

6.5 Intensifying the pilot linkage initiative

There is evidence from all three countries that youths in YSLAs are interested in accessing services provided by formal financial institutions. There is evidence that youths forged links with commercial banks and local MFIs outside of the YMF Project, even if they had no youth-friendly products to offer.

Conclusive evidence regarding the long-term sustainability of the YSLAs will require post-project follow up for a determined period of time. It is a fact that only the stronger YSLAs with committed members and strong leadership will survive. Some members may drop out of the YSLAs seeking opportunities for individual linkages with formal financial institutions, given their new-found confidence with financial intermediation.

A proper review of the existing links forged during the YMF Project, as well as a demand assessment with a risk analysis, would be required prior to the design of future linkages. This would demonstrate the demand of the service and the benefits that youths could derive from access to formal financial services.

Lessons learned from the YMF Project support the notion that linkages with formal financial institutions may be an appropriate next step to mainstream or graduate people, including youth, from informal and semi-formal financial services. Certainly, young people should be offered choices and options to do so. Links with MFIs such as PAMECAS can support financial inclusion, as they give YSLA members a chance to access a wider range of financial services than those normally available to them. Formal financial institutions offer a less risky alternative to saving large sums of money in an YSLA cash box.

Also, youths who drop out of YSLAs but require access to financial services can be introduced to formal financial institutions. Links with MFIs and banks could be considered as part of an exit strategy for the YMF Project and as a graduation plan for more mature YSLAs that need access to refinancing and for individual YSLA members who require larger loans and demand a wider range of financial services that cannot be met by the YSLA.

Prior to the roll out or expansion of the pilot linkage component, there is a real need to explore the effectiveness and impact of the linkage component, and evaluate the reasons as to why YSLAs and individual youths may want to have greater access to MFIs and banks. It is also important to examine whether the formal financial institutions in the community have changed their negative perceptions regarding youth, and are open to engaging them as depositors and credit clients.
Conclusion

Triangulation of the different data sets collected from the YMF Project has demonstrated that the YSLA methodology is a good starting point for providing basic financial services to youth. On the other hand, youth could greatly benefit from more flexible and accessible savings and credit products that would enable them to manage their money more effectively. This could be achieved through YSLA’s testing product innovations, especially with savings withdrawal facilities, or ensuring better access to formal financial services with flexible loan repayment schedules and withdrawal facilities. Typically, the more demand-driven the service, the better it is able to satisfy the needs of the target population and the more it should contribute to their livelihood development. This applies to adults as well as youth.65

Targeting youth to ensure they have access to appropriate financial services can lead to economic empowerment and help shape them into agents of social change in their communities. Moreover, supporting youth by helping them invest in their future increases their economic and social resilience, which in turn can promote social cohesion and harmony as they are provided with the necessary tools and support to successfully transition into adulthood.66

The YMF model has demonstrated that it can be scalable, given that the project has surpassed its outreach target (70,000) by 28% (89,553).67 The program pathway can be adapted to other regions where it can serve as a model for development initiatives that focus on the social and economic development of youth. The YMF Project has demonstrated that youth, even in the most vulnerable conditions, have the capacity and the discipline to save. The sequenced program pathway of the YMF Project has enabled participating youths to build good savings habits and to build their confidence to access formal financial institutions. Participation in the YSLA loan activities has helped youths gain a better understanding of their credit needs, how to repay their loans by managing their income and expenditures, and to make sound financial decisions in general.

Skills and awareness imparted through life skills training is a critical component of the holistic package of support offered to the youths. Lessons learned from the YMF Project highlight the need for deeper analysis involving more planning and dialogue with community stakeholders in order to identify gaps and barriers to the social issues that youth face (particular concerning gender equality), in order to provide the most appropriate channels of delivery.

Youth have demonstrated that when provided with responsive financial instruments, such as safe savings and loans, they can make informed choices about how they manage their money and leverage their access to a range of financial services (including YSLAs and formal financial institutions) to save and borrow for different needs. Most importantly, the project has shown that if given the opportunity, youths can not only enhance their economic self-reliance, but also contribute to the wellbeing of the household by investing in nutrition, education, and health.

Youth in the YMF Project demonstrated their ability to develop long-term visions by borrowing towards business expansion and by using their income and savings to expand their personal asset base and create household assets. Their participation in training and in YSLA activities has enabled these youths to take on greater responsibility within the YSLA group, in the household, and in the community. These young people have also gained the confidence to speak out and influence decision-making at the household and community levels. Enhanced economic status has earned project youths the respect of their family members as well as other members of the community.

The YMF Project has created a space for youths to foster their leadership skills, to serve as role models for others, and to contribute as change agents in society. One of the key lessons learned from the YMF Project is the effectiveness of the YAB model, which embodies the essence of putting youth in the centre of their own development. The idea to leverage the energy and enthusiasm of young people to help them become leaders and to be actively engaged in the design and implementation of a development project is something that could be adapted for future youth empowerment initiatives.

65 Financial Diaries Report 2014
66 Financial Diaries Report 2014
67 Periodic Project Report, May 2014
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