



**Research &
Learning
Agenda**

2014-17

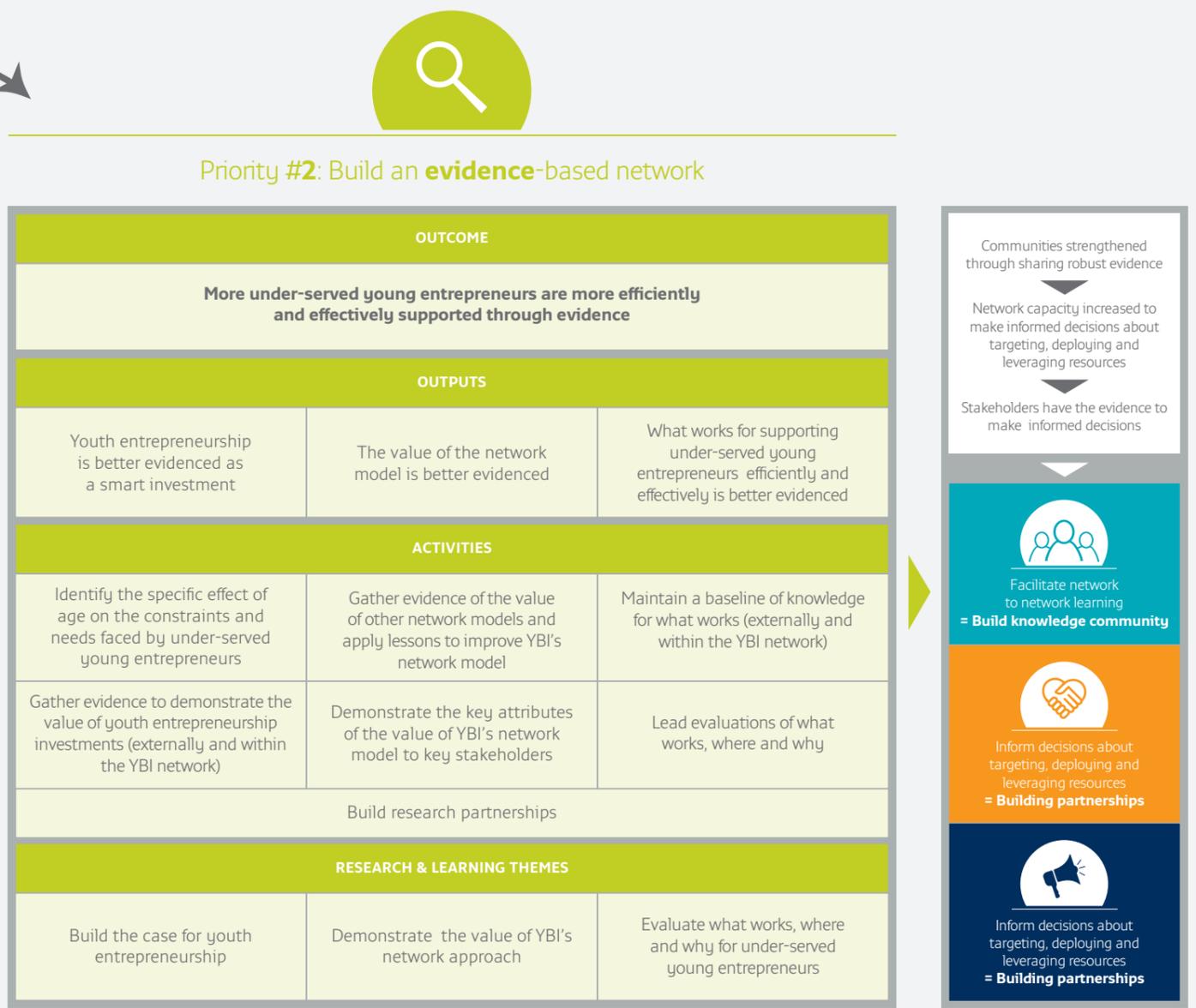
A strategic approach to learning

In order to maximise impact in delivering against YBI's [Strategic Plan 2014-17](#), a **strategic approach to generating and applying learning** is critical. One of the five priorities in YBI's Strategic Plan 2014-17 is to "Build an evidence-based network"

YBI 2014-17 PRIORITIES AND ENABLERS



Investing in building an **evidence-based network** will drive the efficiency and effectiveness of support provided to under-served young entrepreneurs by YBI members:



This document sets out YBI's three-year Research and Learning Agenda.

This Agenda accompanies YBI's Strategic Plan 2014-17 and is complemented by a Performance and Accountability framework for monitoring and transparency.

It contains:

- YBI's Research & Learning vision
- YBI's Research & Learning principles
- YBI's Key Learning Questions
- YBI's Research & Learning processes
- YBI's Research & Learning standards

YBI's Research & Learning vision

YBI believes that our global network offers a unique opportunity to build a leading evidence base in what works in supporting under-served young entrepreneurs where and why.

We are committed to strengthening our learning culture and our capability to understand, measure and report our impact, in order to: improve continuously our contribution to economic and social development through youth entrepreneurship; and enhance our accountability to our stakeholders.

YBI's Research & Learning principles

Research and learning is:

- Based on a global approach to maximise the transferability of learning in areas where knowledge gaps are identified by both the network and wider sector
- Integrated and embedded across all network activities, to build insights throughout our Theory of Change
- Delivered through a range of methodologies and processes, to ensure a proportionate approach
- Conducted in accordance with ethical principles, standards and guidelines¹, to increase responsibility and integrity
- Developed inclusively of beneficiaries and stakeholders wherever possible, to ensure relevance and responsiveness
- Designed for dissemination to inform decision-making and maximise the value of using the knowledge

YBI's Key Learning Questions

YBI's Research & Learning Agenda includes two sets of learning questions grounded in our Theory of Change.

The first set of learning questions is based on testing the assumptions and addressing the knowledge gaps behind the logic that a global network model maximises impacts for under-served young entrepreneurs in communities around the world.

The second set of learning questions focuses on understanding how we deliver the priorities and enablers in the Strategic Plan 2014-17 most efficiently and effectively.

All the learning questions are grouped under three themes:

1. Building the case for youth entrepreneurship
2. Evaluating what works where and why for under-served young entrepreneurs
3. Demonstrating the value of YBI's network approach

Our **VISION** is that youth entrepreneurship is recognised for driving sustainable economic development, and that all young people who want to set up a business are able to fulfil their potential.

Our **MISSION** is to enable more under-served young entrepreneurs to access the support they need to start and grow their business, helping them to create jobs, build communities and transform lives.

SUPER IMPACT: More under-served young entrepreneurs start sustainable businesses

IMPACTS

Under-served young entrepreneurs are more empowered, with increased confidence and capabilities/skills

Sustainable businesses are established that create new, quality jobs

A thriving global network drives scalability, sustainability, efficiency and effectiveness of support to under-served young entrepreneurs

OUTCOMES

Financial and non-financial services are expanded and improved for under-served young entrepreneurs

More under-served young entrepreneurs are more efficiently and effectively supported through evidence

More global knowledge and experience is captured, shared and applied through communities of practice to support under-served young entrepreneurs

Global investment for under-served young entrepreneurs is increased and more co-ordinated through partnerships

More influencers understand the case and act to support under-served young entrepreneurs

The YBI network is regarded as a global leader in youth entrepreneurship

PRIORITIES

#1



Improve and scale financial and non-financial support

#2



Build an evidence-based network

#3



Strengthen network communities of practice

#4



Increase and better coordinate investment through partnerships

#5



Be the global voice of under-served young entrepreneurs

ENABLERS



Technology



Quality assurance



Data

INPUTS

YBI Network: Members & Network Team

Under-served Young Entrepreneurs

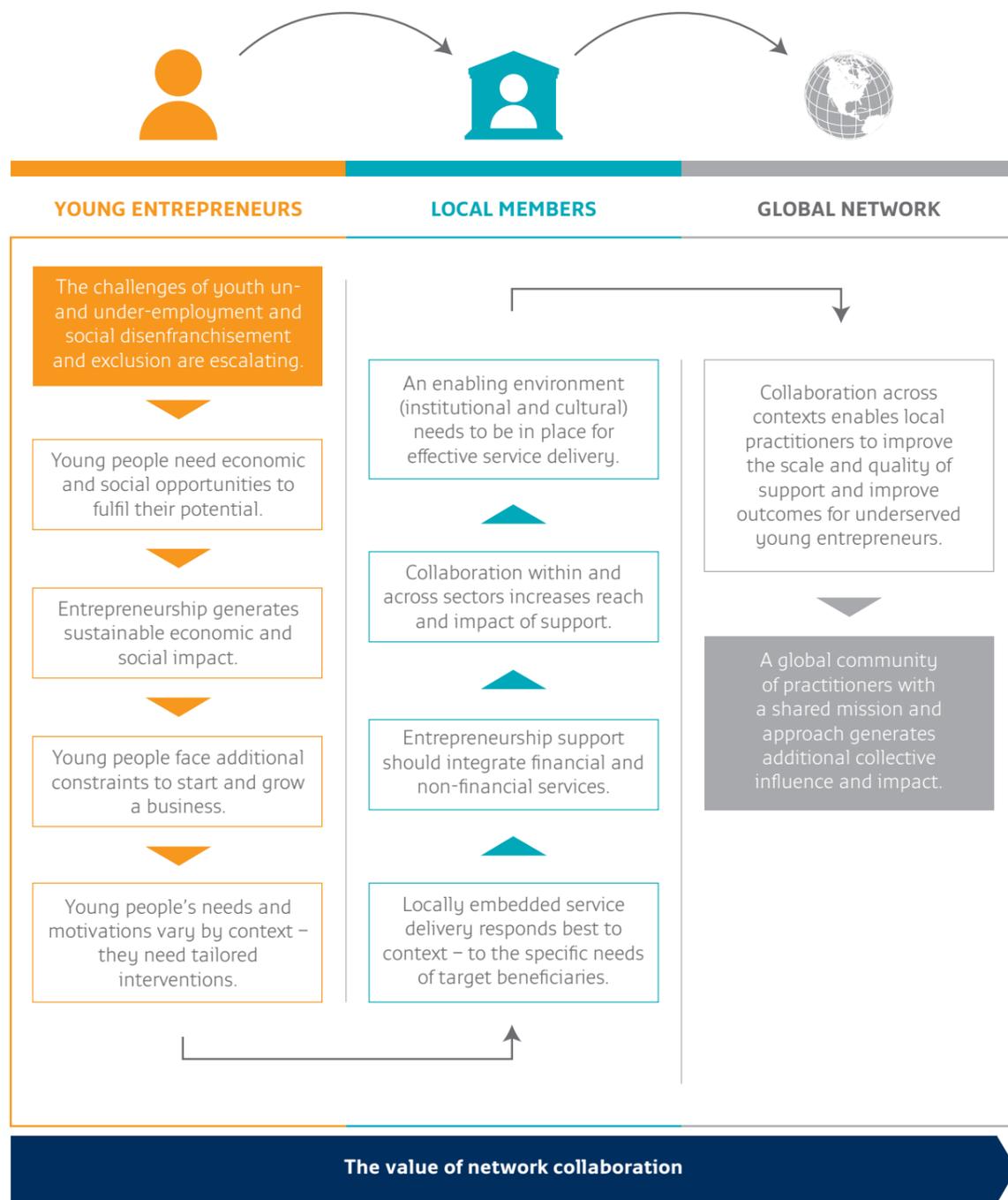
YBI Stakeholders

CHALLENGE: Escalating youth un- and under-employment and social disenfranchisement and exclusion

1. For example, based on Guiding Principles for Evaluators, American Evaluation Association (AEA) http://www.crsprogramquality.org/storage/pubs/me/MEshortcut_ethics.pdf

Key learning questions - network level

The first set of learning questions is based on testing the assumptions and addressing the knowledge gaps behind the 11-step logic that a global network model maximises impacts for under-served young entrepreneurs in communities around the world:



1. The challenges of youth un- and under-employment and social disenfranchisement and exclusion are escalating.

- What are the challenges facing youth globally?
- Is the situation escalating / static / improving?

“The weakening of the global recovery in 2012 and 2013 has further aggravated the youth jobs crisis... The global youth unemployment rate, estimated at 12.6 per cent in 2013, is close to its crisis peak... Skills mismatch is adding to the youth employment crisis... Overeducation and over-skilling coexist with undereducation and under-skilling... Large numbers of young people continue to face a future of irregular employment and informality.”²

2. Young people need economic and social opportunities to fulfil their potential.

- What are the benefits of investing in youth?
- What are the risks of not investing in youth?
- What kind of economic and social opportunities do young people need to fulfil their potential?

“While youth face enormous challenges, particularly with regard to employment and livelihoods, they nevertheless represent

the opportunity of today and tomorrow—as educators and innovators, entrepreneurs and investors, health professionals and scientists, politicians and peacemakers. This makes it doubly important to invest in them now—making it possible for future generations not only to survive but also thrive, and so that countries that invest in their youth can realize the vitally important ‘demographic dividend’ these youth represent.”³

3. Entrepreneurship generates sustainable economic and social impact.

- What are the economic and social impacts of entrepreneurship, and are they sustainable?
- How do these impacts compare with those of other labour market interventions?

“Entrepreneurship is widely acknowledged as a driver of sustainable economic growth as entrepreneurs create new businesses, drive and shape innovation, speed up structural changes in the economy, and introduce new competition – thereby contributing to productivity. Entrepreneurship also drives job creation and hence entrepreneurship is a critical contributor to economic growth that is inclusive and reduces poverty.”⁴

4. Young people face additional constraints to start and grow a business.

- Do young people face additional constraints? If so, to what extent?
- What are these constraints, and which constraints have the most effect?
- What are other significant discriminatory factors?
- Do young entrepreneurs need specific services compared with others?

“Evidence points to the need to differentiate between youth and general (or adult) entrepreneurship. Given their limited resources, life and work experience, young people face unique constraints and face greater barriers than older age cohorts. Moreover, the range of barriers as well as the variety of potential methods and measures to counter them is more extensive than of older entrepreneurs.”⁵

5. Young people's needs and motivations vary by context – they need tailored interventions.

- What works, where, why, for whom?
- “Entrepreneurship can vary widely from one country to another. Context is critical. Each country is unique in terms of its economic and social realities, and will seek to promote entrepreneurship and innovation using whatever tools are available and to meet specific goals relevant to the local context.”⁶

2. 'Global Employment Trends for Youth 2013: A generation at risk', ILO (2013) http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_212423.pdf
 3. 'Youth in Development Policy', USAID (2012) http://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1870/Youth_in_Development_Policy.pdf
 4. 'Generation Entrepreneur? The state of global youth entrepreneurship', GEM & YBI (2013) <http://gemconsortium.org/docs/download/2835>
 5. 'Stimulating Youth Entrepreneurship: Barriers and incentives to enterprise start-ups by young people' ILO (Seed Working Paper No 76, 2006) <http://www.ilo.org/youthmakingithappen/PDF/WP76-2006-Rev.pdf>
 6. 'Key components of entrepreneurship and innovation policy frameworks', Note by the UNCTAD Secretariat (2009) http://unctad.org/en/docs/ciimem1d6_en.pdf

Key learning questions - network level

6. Locally embedded service delivery responds best to context – to the specific needs of target beneficiaries.

- Is locally embedded service delivery the best option, and if so, what are the most effective models?

📌 Sustainable development, based on integrated strategies that incorporate key economic, social, environmental and political elements, must be locally owned. The role of external partners is to help strengthen capacities in [developing] partner countries “to meet those demanding, integrated requirements for sustainable development, guided by the conditions and commitments in each country.”⁷

7. Entrepreneurship support should integrate financial and non-financial services.

- Is a holistic approach to entrepreneurship support more effective than single service interventions?
- If so, why, and what combination of support is most effective where, why and for whom?

📌 As our understanding of the impact of entrepreneurship interventions strengthens, so too does the consensus that capital alone will not be sufficient to help under-served demographics

overcome credit constraints. Integrated approaches that combine financial and non-financial support and build the human capital of entrepreneurs are proving to be more effective...” However, “...existing evaluations of business training programs and capital injections for entrepreneurs have found mixed results. Additional research is needed to understand how training programs should be designed and delivered in order to best help entrepreneurs develop their operations and foster economic growth.”⁸

8. Collaboration within and across sectors increases reach and impact of support.

- What is the value of collaboration?
- What the most effective models of collaboration within and across sectors?

📌 Undoubtedly, achieving key outcomes in health, education, economic development, and environmental sustainability requires working together across sectors in new and more effective ways. Too many isolated or sub-scale efforts fail due to partnership approaches incommensurate with the complexity of global challenges. What’s needed is effective cross-sector collaboration that mobilizes the international community while also driving measurable progress on the ground.⁹

9. An enabling environment (institutional and cultural) needs to be in place for effective service delivery.

- What needs to be in place to enable effective youth entrepreneurship?
- What are the most effective ways to operate in different institutional and cultural environments?
- How do we enhance the enabling environment?

📌 It is the local context that triggers the start-up and growth of new businesses. Generating and strengthening an entrepreneurial culture that attracts and stimulates talents should therefore be a core objective of local youth entrepreneurship support frameworks with entrepreneurship education, start-up support and opportunity creation, that is, making places conducive to youth entrepreneurship as key components. Local partnerships, involving schools, higher education institutions, training providers, business development services, local authorities and local businesses, are crucial to the creation and sustainability of such entrepreneurial ecosystems.¹⁰

10. Collaboration across contexts enables local practitioners to improve the scale and quality of support and improve outcomes for underserved young entrepreneurs.

- Does being part of a network enable local service providers to scale and improve services and improve outcomes for underserved young entrepreneurs?
- If so, how?

📌 We have studied several organizations that exemplify this network approach. By mobilizing resources outside their immediate control, networked nonprofits achieve their missions far more efficiently, effectively, and sustainably than they could have by working alone. Many traditional nonprofits form short-term partnerships with superficially similar organizations to execute a single program, exchange a few resources, or attract funding. In contrast, networked nonprofits forge long-term partnerships with trusted peers to tackle their missions on multiple fronts.¹¹

11. A global community of practitioners with a shared mission and approach generates additional collective influence and impact.

- Does a global network approach increase influence and impact, and if so, how?

📌 It is clear that networks provide an effective mechanism for learning and innovation and enable collaboration beyond the usual institutional, cultural and functional boundaries; but they come with their own costs and risks.¹²

7. 'Shaping the 21st Century: The Contribution of Development Co-operation', OECD (1996) <http://www.oecd.org/dac/2508761.pdf>
 8. 'Closing the gap, YBI (2011) <http://www.youthbusiness.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/ClosingTheGap.pdf> and 'The Impact Of Training And Access To Capital For High-Potential Entrepreneurs In Colombia', J-PAL (2010-12) <http://www.povertyactionlab.org/evaluation/impact-training-and-access-capital-high-potential-entrepreneurs-colombia>
 9. 'Shaping Global Partnerships for a Post-2015 World', Stanford Social Innovation Review, Sonja Patscheke, Angela Barmettler, Laura Herman, Scott Overdyke & Marc Pfitzer (2014)
 10. 'Shooting for the Moon: Good Practices in Local Youth Entrepreneurship Support', OECD LEED (2010) http://www.youtheconomicopportunities.org/sites/default/files/uploads/resource/OECD_2010-Good_practices_in_local_youth_entrepreneurship_support.pdf

11. 'The Networked Nonprofit', Stanford Social Innovation Review, Jane Wei-Skillern and Sonia Marciano, (2008) http://www.ssiireview.org/articles/entry/the_networked_nonprofit
 12. 'Not everything that connects is a network', Simon Hearn and Enrique Mendizabal, ODI Background Note (2013) <http://www.odi.org.uk/publications/5137-networks-network-function-approach-rapid>

Key learning questions - strategic level



Priority 1: Improve & scale financial and non-financial support services to under-served young entrepreneurs

- Which in-country models best deliver sustainable and scalable quality services to under-served young entrepreneurs, under which circumstances?
- What is the Return on Investment of YBI Offerings for (i) members and (ii) the network team, and how do we maximise it?
- Does expanding the YBI network necessarily have to take place through adding new members or scaling existing members, or are there other strategies that are more efficient and achieve an equivalent impact, for example strengthening in-country ecosystems?



Priority 4: Increase and better coordinate investment through partnerships for under-served young entrepreneurs

- What are the characteristics of a partnership that delivers systemic change?
- In which situations does central management by the network team maximise the value of network partnerships, and when should management be decentralised?
- How could a network resource-raising community enable strengthening of local and regional partnerships for all stakeholders?



Priority 2: Build an evidence-based network

- How does the YBI network most effectively (i) attract and (ii) allocate resources in relation to this priority?
- How can YBI most effectively design and package evidence to increase its usefulness to, and uptake by, target audiences?
- How is technology best deployed to build and share evidence?



Priority 5: Be the global voice of under-served young entrepreneurs and position YBI as a leader in the field

- What are the most effective network processes and activities to amplify local and regional voices at the global level?
- How do we best leverage members' skills, experiences and resources in this area for network value?
- How do we identify, recruit and make the best use of ambassadors to ensure that they add value to the YBI brand?



Priority 3: Strengthen network communities of practice

- What level and type of central coordination is necessary to sustain effective communities of practice?
- How widely should YBI communities of practice be opened up for participation?
- What kinds of community activities are most effective in delivering which kinds of change?



Enabler 1: Technology

- What is the value of a shared approach to technology as a network?
- How can YBI most effectively use technology across different contexts to support i) the network as a whole; ii) individual members; and iii) young entrepreneurs?
- Which network processes are most effective to identify i) which of the technology options available are most strategic to adopt; and ii) how they should be implemented?



Enabler 2: Quality assurance

- What quality assurance standards and mechanisms are most relevant to youth entrepreneurship practitioners?
- How should YBI's quality assurance processes be adapted to different member models and capacities?
- What is the Return on Investment for (i) members and (ii) the network team of undertaking quality assurance, and how do we maximise it?

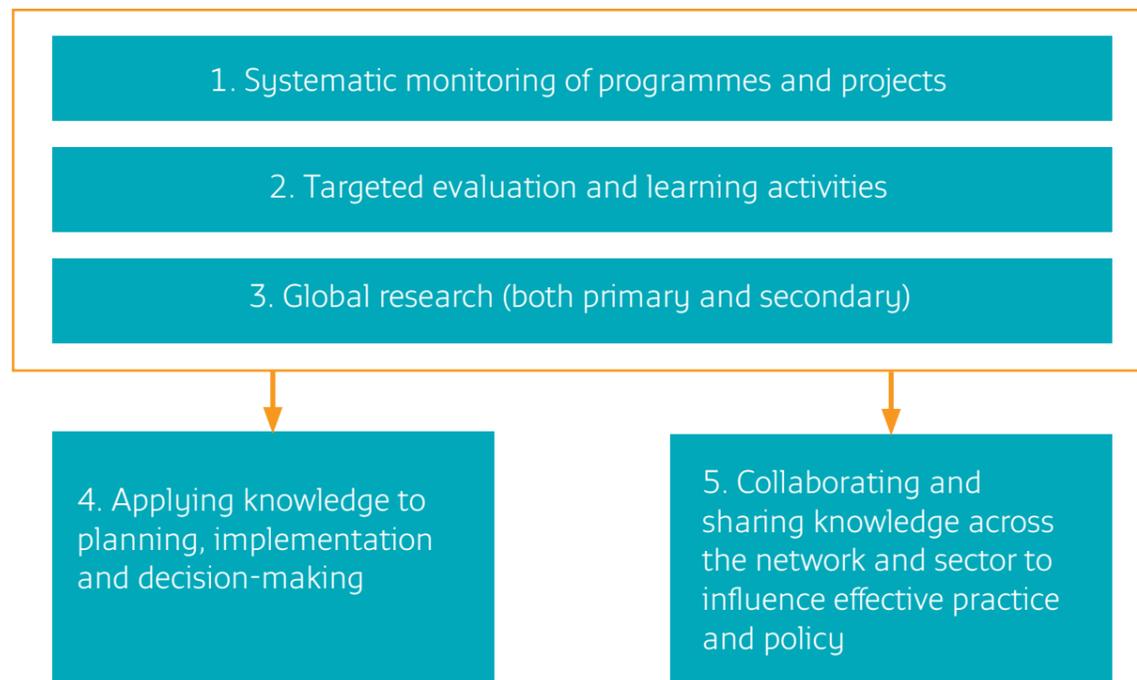


Enabler 3: Data

- What are minimum standards for data quality and how do they align with network quality assurance?
- What are the most useful mechanisms for sharing data, in order to meet network and external needs?
- What is the Return on Investment for (i) members and (ii) the network team of deriving and applying quality data?

YBI's Research & Learning processes

Research and learning against the YBI Strategic Plan will be delivered through five key processes:



YBI's Research & Learning standards

Research and learning activities will be governed by the following standards in implementation:

- Designed and delivered with maximum alignment to member priorities and needs
- Based on a wide range of methodologies and mixed approaches to ensure proportionality to available resources
- Integrated at design and planning phase for use throughout the project or programme lifecycle
- Aligned with external best practice, for example, the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) criteria¹³; Donor Committee for Enterprise Development (DCED) standards¹⁴
- Developed through collaborative partnerships to increase the rigour and relevance of learning



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Nimali Gunawardana from Sri Lanka, working in her business which converts coconut husks into useful materials.





ANNEX

Priority #2

Build an **evidence**-based network

Taken from YBI's
**Strategic Plan
2014-17**

OUTCOME

More under-served young entrepreneurs are more efficiently and effectively supported through evidence

Building a global evidence base

The global YBI network of expert practitioners is a unique asset to develop a sector-leading evidence base in understanding what works in supporting under-served young entrepreneurs. We are committed to investing in strengthening our culture and capabilities to deliver on this potential. By applying learning we will improve outcomes for the entrepreneurs we support, scaling up proven practices and driving innovation.

By 2017 our goal is to develop and host for the network and for the sector the most comprehensive evidence base in what works in supporting under-served young entrepreneurs.

Through our global network, we will generate new and transferable evidence about the efficiency and effectiveness of different types of entrepreneur support for different profiles of under-served young entrepreneurs in different contexts. We will also analyse the value of operating as a network to deliver quality support at scale.

We will focus on three key areas in generating the evidence:

- Building the case for youth entrepreneurship
- Understanding what works for under-served young entrepreneurs
- Demonstrating the value of a network approach

As the only network with a dedicated focus on youth entrepreneurship and global reach, we will strengthen our role as an international convener for research and learning, working collaboratively with other leading practitioners and research institutions. In order to develop our comprehensive evidence base, we will systematically aggregate relevant evidence and learning from across the sector.

Embedding research and learning

Alongside this Strategic Plan, we will implement a strategic approach to network research and learning, set out in more detail in the YBI Research and Learning Agenda 2014-17 (published separately and available on YBI's website).

This Agenda has been developed based on learning to date, and through analysis of the knowledge gaps and assumptions in our theory of change and in the delivery of the Priorities and Enablers set out in this Strategic Plan.

We will deliver this Agenda through:

- **Sector research:** collaborative initiatives to address key knowledge gaps in youth entrepreneurship
- **Network research:** coordinated initiatives across multiple members to generate comparative and transferable learning

Nyaga Jenet, 28, was supported as part of YBI and Enterprise Uganda's programme in Northern Uganda.



- **Member research:** specific studies in-country to assess the impact of member services for under-served young entrepreneurs

Understanding the effect of context

A major commitment in this Agenda is to understand the effect of context on what works. During 2014-17 YBI will take forward our leadership position on the question of 'how does context affect impact?'

By 2017 we will publish a diagnostic of context endorsed by the sector and the results of at least 10 evaluations by context using a variety of methodologies.

We are committed to sharing the knowledge and evidence we generate as a network widely with the sector to enable others to target investments more efficiently and effectively and to facilitate collaborative working in the field. See Priority 5 for more about this commitment.

CASE STUDY

Measuring the effectiveness of supporting under-served young entrepreneurs in Northern Uganda

In conflict-affected northern Uganda, YBI is working with local member Enterprise Uganda on a two-year Department for International Development (DFID)-funded programme (2013-15) that provides enterprise training and tailored support, including mentoring and business counselling targeting 10,500 youth.

Core to the programme is the design and implementation of a full monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) system at each stage of the project lifecycle that combines YBI's MEL tools and skills with the network's technology platform. A range of tools and templates have been created, readily adaptable for other projects.

Key results and learning

The programme operates at scale in a post-conflict context, and learning and results are being captured, shared and applied for decision-making, continuous improvement and sector knowledge.

Learning from the programme has demonstrated the importance of designing the MEL system at planning stage based on a theory of change approach, making underlying assumptions and key learning questions explicit. Further, it has shown the value of local market research, when adapting services for a new area or target group. For example, through a market research study led by local, trained youth, unexpected findings, such as a strong savings culture among the youth, extremely positive attitudes towards entrepreneurship, and variance in education levels have been applied to programme design. The close integration of appropriate supporting technology is equally proving essential when dealing with large quantities of data required for such programmes.

Our **vision** is that youth entrepreneurship is recognised for driving sustainable economic development, and that all young people who want to set up a business are able to fulfil their potential.

Our **mission** is to enable more under-served young entrepreneurs to access the support they need to start and grow their business, helping them to create jobs, build communities and transform lives.

This Research and Learning Agenda is designed to complement YBI's Strategic Plan 2014-17. For more on our Strategic Plan, visit www.youthbusiness.org/who-we-are/strategic-plan/

Front cover image

Xida Xie founded a company specialising in environmental engineering and waste water treatment with the backing of Youth Business China.

www.youthbusiness.org

 @youthbizint

 /youthbusiness

