

WNCAC
Washington Network on Children in Armed Conflict
“Youth Unemployment in Crisis-Affected Areas”
Friday, February 13, 2009

“I have 7 certificates on my wall. I’ve attended 7 trainings. With all of this, I cannot provide for my family. I’ve lost self-respect.”

~ Liberian Youth

Guest Speakers:

- **Radha Rajkotia** is the Youth and Livelihoods Technical Advisor at the International Rescue Committee (IRC), where she focuses on livelihoods programming for women and youth in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire.
- **Jason Wolfe** is an Enterprise Development Advisor with the USAID Microenterprise Development office.

Nick Oatley, Director of Institutional Learning at Search for Common Ground, introduced the event and emphasized the importance of convening various members to discuss key issues on a regular basis, noting the high turnout in the room. For this event, the RSVP and turnout was the highest to date.

Felix Unogwu, Children & Youth Specialist with Search for Common Ground and co-chair of the WNCAC, introduced the topic by sharing about his recent trip to Liberia, where he spent time interviewing youths about their lives and coping strategies. He collected 19 stories from youth ages 25 – 35, three of which he shared with the WNCAC participants. (See PPT entitled “Liberian Livelihoods”)

John Williamson, introduced speakers to speak about 2 approaches to addressing youth employment in the conflict environment.

**Radha Rajkotia’s Presentation
International Rescue Committee**

Radha’s began with a brief overview of the "sustainable livelihoods approach" (See PPT entitled “SLA Approach – IRC”). She highlighted the ways in which IRC has applied the SLA to youth programming in crisis and post-conflict settings, with emphasis on the evolution of youth needs. Participants were asked to consider the shifting importance of youth's asset bases in the context of a country's transition from post-conflict to development. The presentation then looked at how the SLA specifically targets economic strengthening and what the implications of this are for youth in post-conflict settings.

IRC has an economic recovery unit that uses different approaches for working with youth in post-conflict settings. For youth, IRC specifically uses a livelihood approach. “Livelihood” is framed in a sustainable livelihood framework and comprises the capabilities, assets and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks, maintaining or enhancing capabilities. (ex: food crisis, localized community fractions)

Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLA)

Is based on a number of **assets** (human, financial, political, social, etc) The goal is to identify available assets and enhance them, to improve access to processes, institutions and policies. Influenced by a pre-existing “livelihood strategy.”

Criticisms

- Limited practical assistance for application
- The non-sectoral approach doesn't match reality.
- Downplayed importance of focus on technological and financial support services, increased emphasis of “soft” issues (cap build, org, part)
- Need for robust evaluations of youth livelihood programming – using holistic approach as in design.

Benefits

- Useful as a conceptual tool
- Links b/w different factors affecting livelihoods
- Cross-sectoral and cross-institutional dialog possibilities

The CRISIS – DEVELOPMENT continuum (see PPT)

Often there are so many overlapping and complex needs of youth. The question is one of how to know and address these, and then to prioritize? The continuum, areas of priority, change over time, as the context changes. Programming changes along with the context.

See PPT entitled “Sustainable Livelihoods Approach” for more on Radha’s presentation.

Jason Wolfe’s Presentation USAID

Jason Wolfe’s presentation was an overview of the "value chain approach" (See PPT entitled “VCA Approach – USAID”) and highlighted key features that distinguish it from other strategies for economic development. Building on this foundation, he provided commentary on how this approach differs from and complements the sustainable livelihoods approach as well as on the implications for program designers.

Value Chain Approach – emphasis on Poor Households

How do we reconcile all the program approaches and the general interest in youth and economic strengthening? USAID developed to integrate poverty reduction and economic growth, and wanted it to be catalytic, with limited input and maximum bang.

Highlights for consideration:

- *end markets – final destination where goods are sold (who are they, where are they?)
- *enabling – tells what you can do.
- *inter-firm cooperation –
- *supporting markets – finance, transport, consulting, TA needs for business improvement
- *upgrading – every firm in VC has to make improvements – what are they?

What is the VCA?

- *taking a market-systems perspective (id all actors involved) – plumbing system – must understand the whole of the system
- *driving growth thru end markets – demand-driven approach/what do consumers want? B4 training/assistance programs.
- *fostering compet thru improved inter-firm relations – quality/standards/
- *upgrading at firm and industry level
- *facilitating improved competitiveness – trying to get those in the value chain to adopt changes on their own, promote changes within system

Distinctions b/w SLA & VCA (see slide)

- *SLA – household; VCA – market system
- *SLA – descriptive; VCA – prescriptive
- *SLA – constraints or gaps; VCA – opportunities
- *SLA – too broad; VCA – too narrow
- *SLA – assets; VCA – revenue/income

See PPT entitled “Value Chain Approach” for more on Radha’s presentation.

Discussion Session

Question:

What is the connection to the current economic recession? Conventional approach to addressing market failure is in questions? What do we need to do differently? How does SLA respond (VCA is rooted in neoclassical approach?)

Radha: The consideration of SLA is built around notion of shocks, should be sustainable around broad range of assets. The outcome of economic shock is one result of many, for example, the food crisis. How can we better equip youth to deal with multiple shocks? It’s not prescriptive, is only a conceptual framework as a way to understand what people’s livelihoods are and to know what their coping mechanisms are...

Jason: VCA is also concerned about shocks in a different way, from an industry perspective. What happens when market shifts, changes, goes away? Small, incremental changes, little by little, that they can risk... How are we equipping youth to address fluctuating markets.

Question: Tendency to look at sequencing, one thing before the other, pre-conditions, etc. Period of time to react to crisis is a matter of weeks. Talk about the urgency that is necessary:

Radha: Short-sightedness of urgency of youth programming has taken over long-term vision. Need to address/reverse this tendency. We can't, however, avoid recognizing the urgency. Govt of Cote D'Ivoire keen that IRC respond (along with donors) immediately. Mistakes in Liberia (too many "carpenters"), response/lesson – keep youth busy WHILE ALSO get transferable skills, marketable activities... Like to see more preparation on opportunities and interventions that are responsive to youth needs but also for context...

Please see audio portion for the remainder of discussion session.