The Impact of a Tech-Centered Vocational Training and Employment Program for Youth in Kenya

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Fieldwork: Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA)

Location: Nairobi, Kenya

Sample: 800 unemployed youth

Timeline:
2016 to 2020

Partners:
Samasource

Access to quality jobs is a pressing concern in sub-Saharan Africa. Researchers have partnered with Samasource and Innovations for Poverty Action to conduct a randomized evaluation measuring the impact of a digital vocational training program, with and without an employment program, on formal employment of young Kenyans.

Policy Issue: Access to quality jobs is a pressing concern in Sub Saharan Africa. As of 2015, nine out of ten workers in the region worked in informal jobs, and 64 percent of workers were living in poverty.1 Barriers to quality employment are particularly large for youth, who often lack the skills and information to access good jobs. For young women with childcare responsibilities or young people who are spatially disconnected from job opportunities, these barriers can often be even larger. Providing young people with employable skills, and helping them connect to employment opportunities, may help address these barriers. More evidence is needed on the impact of vocational training, and on what components of these programs can make them successful at improving employment outcomes for young people. To address this evidence gap, researchers

are evaluating the effectiveness of a vocational training program in Kenya.

Context of the Evaluation: This study is taking place in Nairobi, Kenya, among low-income young men and women with little to no formal work experience. While the Kenyan labor market adds around 800,000 workers per year, those employed by the formal sector increase by around 50,000, and only two out of every five wage jobs were in the formal sector as of 2011. In such a competitive landscape, many young Kenyans struggle to land formal wage jobs and improve their living standards and economic prospects.[2]

The partner for this evaluation, Samasource, is a non-profit business that connects marginalized populations and youth to internet-based employment. Samasource provides both vocational training through its Digital Basics program and helps graduates pursue paid employment through Samasource and its network of hiring partners. The program in Kenya is open to young women and men who are at least 18 years old and have completed a high school education.

Details of the Intervention: Researchers have partnered

with Samasource and Innovations for Poverty Action to conduct a randomized evaluation that measures the impact of the Digital Basics program, with and without the opportunity to apply for paid employment at a Samasource Digital Center, on formal employment of young Kenyans.

Digital Basics is a free, classroom-based vocational training program. Trainees attend class six hours a day for ten days. The curriculum covers basic digital skills, occupational skills relevant to digital work and the business process outsourcing (BPO) industry, and job search preparation. Samasource offers its trainees childcare services, and provides professional attire and transportation funds for job interviews. Samasource's Digital Center hires some graduates of the training program to complete digital projects, sourced from companies such as Google and Walmart, including image tagging, image annotation, data classification, or dataset creation for machine learning algorithms.

Applicants to the program who meet the minimum qualifications for participation in the program will be randomly assigned by lottery to one of three groups:

1. Training only: Individuals will be offered the Digital Basics program, but will not be able to apply for hire at the Samasource Digital Center.
2. Training + employment: Individuals will be offered the Digital Basics program and will be eligible to apply for hire at the Samasource Digital Center.
3. Comparison: The third group will not be offered either the training or employment programs at the time of the study.

Researchers will measure impacts on employment and income over a three-year period.

Results and Policy Lessons: Project ongoing. Results forthcoming.

[1] https://www.ilo.org/africa/media-centre/pr/WCMS_444474/lang--en/index.htm

[2] http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTAFRICA/Resources/257994-1335471959878/kenya-economic-update-december-2012.pdf

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