

EVIDENCE BRIEF · BLOOM ·
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Market Pathways for Marginalized Youth

Key findings and recommendations from BLOOM Africa labour market assessments in Rwanda, Tanzania and Somaliland



Leadership and life skills training, Tanzania. Photo: World Vision Tanzania

Purpose of the Brief

The Building Leadership, Opportunities and Options for Marginalized Women and Girls (BLOOM Africa) project is a five-year (2025-2030), gender-transformative initiative funded by Global Affairs Canada and implemented by World Vision to strengthen the economic empowerment, agency, and livelihood opportunities of marginalized adolescent girls and young women (AGYW), particularly those who are not in employment, education, or training (NEET). Across Rwanda, Tanzania, and Somaliland, BLOOM aims to build more inclusive pathways from skills training to decent work by linking youth to market-relevant training, employers, finance, mentorship, and safer income-generating opportunities. The project commissioned labour market assessments in Rwanda, Tanzania and Somaliland between December 2025 and July 2026 to identify sectors, skills pathways, employer needs, financial products, and systemic barriers affecting economic opportunities for marginalized NEET youth, particularly AGYW aged 15–24.

This brief brings together the main findings from assessments conducted in 13 districts in Rwanda, Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, and Hargeisa and Burco in Somaliland to inform BLOOM implementation and broader youth employment programming.

Across the three countries, participation included youth, private sector actors, government stakeholders and technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions. In Rwanda, this included 59 youth survey respondents, 96 focus group discussion (FGD) participants, 39 employers, 41 key informant interviews (KIIs), and 13 TVET schools; in Tanzania, 290 youth survey respondents, 4 FGDs, approximately 54 KII/consultation stakeholders, including 6 anchor employers, 40 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), 4 Municipal Youth Officers and 13 TVET institutions; and in Somalia/Somaliland, 282 youth survey respondents, approximately 16 FGDs and 10 key informants, including government line ministries, private-sector employers, TVET institution heads, financial institutions, business development services (BDS) providers, mentors and master craftspeople.

The assessments examined both labour demand and supply sectors with potential for employment and self-employment; employer requirements; the alignment of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) with market needs; formal and informal skills pathways; youth work preferences; and barriers to training, work, finance and business support.

Key Messages

- 1 Sector growth does not automatically mean access for marginalized youth.** Priority sectors must combine market demand and income potential with realistic entry requirements, safe working conditions, suitable skills pathways and access to finance.
- 2 Formal wage employment is limited in all three contexts, particularly for AGYW.** Informal enterprises, apprenticeships, master craftspeople, family businesses and self-employment are major entry points and should be strengthened rather than treated as secondary pathways.
- 3 Labour market opportunities differ across the three settings and are influenced by local socio-economic conditions.** Understanding community-level labour markets is essential because they provide the most immediate entry points to work and self-employment for marginalized youth. In Rwanda, this means selecting sectors linked to district-specific value chains and local demand; in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, upgrading informal enterprises and avoiding already saturated trades; and in Somaliland, combining market-relevant skills with trusted intermediaries who can connect youth to employers, customers and business opportunities.

- 4 Training alone is not sufficient.** Young people, particularly AGYW, need practical experience, tools, finance, employer connections, business support and follow-up to move from skills development into sustainable income.
- 5 Gender norms affect every stage of the pathway.** Family permission, unpaid care, safety, mobility, occupational segregation, limited networks and weak control over assets and income affect whether AGYW can enter and remain in work.
- 6 Digital and green sectors offer longer-term potential but are not yet easy entry points for AGYW.** They require intentional support to address education, equipment, mobility, safety, capital and employer readiness barriers.
- 7 Access to finance is a barrier on its own, beyond a training gap.** Young people, particularly AGYW, often lack collateral, savings history and confidence in formal systems. Informal mechanisms such as savings groups and Savings for Transformation (S4T) exist but do not always translate into access to formal finance unless deliberately designed to build that bridge.
- 8 Business support is assumed but not available in most contexts.** Coaching, market linkages and mentorship are essential for market entry, whether paid or self-employment, yet who actually delivers this support and whether it reaches AGYW remains largely unaddressed.



Students from Mugombwa TSS, Rwanda. Photo: World Vision Rwanda

How the Labour Markets Differ

Market structure, priority sectors and programming implications by country.

Country and market structure	Priority sectors and trades	Implication for programming
Rwanda Predominantly rural and peri-urban labour markets across the assessed districts. National policy supports inclusive youth employment, TVET and growth sectors, but local demand, transport, market access and employer capacity vary by district.	Agri-food, construction and technical trades, and hairdressing and beauty services emerged as strong priorities. Agri-food and construction align with labour market evidence and employer demand. Hairdressing and beauty emerged strongly from youth preferences and stakeholder validation as accessible entry points for AGYW.	Prioritize sectors at district level and connect training to functioning value chains, buyers, internships and employers. A national growth sector may not offer a realistic local pathway in every district.
Tanzania Dar es Salaam has a large and diverse urban economy, but most youth enter work through micro and small enterprises, informal apprenticeships and self-employment rather than formal wage employment.	Beauty and hairdressing, street food and catering, and tailoring and garment production are accessible and strongly preferred by AGYW but may be crowded and low-margin. Construction, mobile phone repair, and transport are preferred by young men and offer stronger growth potential but require equipment, work experience and safeguards for AGYW.	Work directly with informal and small enterprises. Further assess market saturation. Upgrade accessible trades through market differentiation, specialization, quality, technology, market links, and access to equipment rather than repeating basic training in saturated activities. Create AGYW-supported entry routes into higher-value occupations.
Somaliland Employment and enterprise are predominantly informal. Access is shaped by trust, family and clan networks, sponsors and respected intermediaries. Skills and certificates may not be enough for youth without recognized connections.	Priority areas include digital economy and multimedia; tailoring, beauty and henna; renewable energy, especially solar; construction and light engineering; climate-smart agribusiness; and waste management and recycling.	Assess both market potential and whether marginalized youth can realistically enter a sector. Combine skills development with mentorship, sponsorship, family and community engagement, employer links and suitable finance. Modernize accessible home-based trades while opening supported routes into technical and growth sectors.

Cross-Country Findings

1. Sector prioritization must consider demand and accessibility

The key question is not only which sectors are growing, but which sectors combine market demand, realistic entry points, skills pathways, and safety and income potential for AGYW. Digital services, renewable energy, construction, light engineering, climate-smart agribusiness and recycling may offer stronger long-term opportunities but are often gendered sectors and require higher education levels, equipment, mobility, capital and employer readiness. Traditional trades such as tailoring, hairdressing, food preparation, handicrafts and small-scale vending are easier to enter and may be socially accepted, but they can remain low-return unless they are upgraded through better tools, product quality, branding, digital marketing, market linkages and finance.

2. Informal pathways are central to labour market entry

Many marginalized youth do not move from school to TVET and then into formal employment. Their pathways include informal apprenticeships, master craftsperson training, unpaid family work, short-term labour, petty trade, agri-food microenterprise and cooperative-linked work. For instance, in Tanzania, more than half of surveyed youth reported finding work through friends and family. Informal apprenticeships and social networks are therefore not side issues; they are major routes into work.

3. TVET does not consistently meet employer requirements

Employers in Rwanda and Tanzania reported that graduates often lack practical technical skills, workplace exposure and soft skills and may require an additional two to six months of on-the-job training. Common gaps include applied technical competence, quality control, workplace hygiene and safety, communication, punctuality, reliability, customer service, teamwork, professional conduct, and basic business and costing skills.



Female TVET student at Hargeisa TVET Centre. Photo: World Vision Somalia

4. Social capital affects who can use their skills

This is particularly clear in Somaliland, where employment often functions as a social transaction. Family or clan connections, trusted intermediaries, sponsors and employer relationships influence who hears about opportunities and who is considered credible. Marginalized AGYW may have technical skills or certificates but may still be excluded based on their gender, or if they lack a mentor, sponsor or link to employers. Similar reliance on friends and family is also visible in Tanzania.

5. Gender barriers accumulate across the pathway

AGYW face lower education levels, higher rates of being outside education and work, unpaid care responsibilities, adolescent motherhood, disability-related exclusion, transport and mobility barriers, family or spousal permission, restrictive gender norms, safety and gender-based violence concerns, low control over land and assets, limited finance, and concentration in unpaid or low-return work. Across the three contexts, and particularly in Somaliland, the findings show that social permission can affect whether young women attend training, work, spend income, or pursue particular livelihoods. These barriers influence participation, retention and the ability to reinvest earnings.

6. Awareness of finance does not translate into access

Youth, especially AGYW, often lack collateral, guarantors, savings histories, business records and confidence in formal financial systems to access lending for training and business start-up. Finance is most useful when linked to a productive pathway and combined with business coaching, market links, financial literacy, recordkeeping, mentorship and follow-up.

7. Local finance and enterprise support systems are underused

Existing finance and business-support organizations, including government and non-governmental organization (NGO)-led programs, are not consistently linked to implementation. Weak or unclear business registration and start-up procedures also make it harder for youth to access finance and formalize enterprises, creating a systemic barrier that must be addressed alongside direct support to youth.

Recommendations for Donors and Implementing Partners

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- 01** Use context-specific sector selection. Validate priority sectors against current data on local demand, entry costs, income potential, saturation, safety and access for marginalized youth. In Rwanda, undertake this analysis at district level. In urban Tanzania, distinguish between accessible but crowded trades and higher-value opportunities. In Somaliland, assess the networks and trusted relationships required to enter each sector.
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- 02** Fund complete pathways, not training alone. Combine technical and soft skills with work-based learning, tools, certification, placement or enterprise support, finance, market links and post-training follow-up.
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- 03 Strengthen informal apprenticeships.** Introduce structured learning standards, safer training environments, recognition and support for master craftspeople, links to certification, mentorship and clear work-based learning outcomes.
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- 04 Upgrade accessible trades.** Support market differentiation and specialization, product or service quality, branding, digital marketing, business management and buyer links so that tailoring, beauty, food services and other common trades do not remain low-margin survival activities.
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- 05 Create safe routes into higher-value sectors.** Expand AGYW participation in digital services, renewable energy, construction, light engineering and other technical fields through preparatory training, women role models, suitable protective equipment, safe and supervised placements, family engagement, and employer commitments to safeguarding, non-discrimination, supportive supervision and decent work conditions.
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- 06 Build social connections into program design.** Use mentors, sponsors, employer networks, business associations and trusted community intermediaries to connect marginalized youth to information, apprenticeships, customers and jobs.
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- 07 Establish a graduation-to-finance bridge.** Link TVET completers and youth entrepreneurs to grants, savings mechanisms, microfinance, asset finance, group guarantees and youth-friendly products. Facilitate ways to reduce perceived lending risks among financial institutions and bundle finance with business coaching, recordkeeping, mentorship and market access.
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- 08 Measure employment quality and progression.** Track income stability, safety, retention, control over earnings, enterprise survival and progression into higher-value work for young women and men, not only training completion or job placement.
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- 09 Strengthen collaboration with microfinance institutions (MFIs).** Work with MFIs to co-design youth- and gender-responsive financial products building on existing savings groups and S4T mechanisms so that informal savings practices become a recognized bridge into formal financial services rather than a parallel, disconnected system.
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