

Nigeria



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Executive summary

On the occasion of the programme's 10th year, SOS Children's Villages decided to validate YouthCan! success by commissioning an independent evaluation of its outcomes in four countries, considered valid case studies: Madagascar, Nigeria, Costa Rica and Brazil. The evaluation study took place between September and December 2020, with the data collection process involving four Member Associations, current and former participants, corporate volunteers and other informed stakeholders. This Country Report presents the main evaluation findings for SOS Children Villages Nigeria only, and it is part of a larger Global Evaluation Report.

SOS CHILDREN'S VILLAGES IN NIGERIA

SOS Children's Villages Nigeria was founded in 1970 with the goal of supporting children without parental care or who are at risk of losing it. Over the years, several additional services have been gradually added, particularly in the area of education. At present, SOS Children's Villages Nigeria is operational in the states of Lagos, Oyo, Ogun, Kaduna and Plateau, offering three main services: Alternative Care, Family Strengthening and Education.

YOUTHCAN! IN NIGERIA

In 2015, YouthCan! started in Nigeria under the original programme name, GoTeach, as a new partnership between SOS Children's Villages and Deutsche Post DHL Group (DHL). In 2017, that programme formally evolved into YouthCan!, with the aim to prepare young people living in SOS Children's Villages to enter the labour market, by increasing their employability. All the activities offered by the programme are structured to adapt to the needs and skills of different age groups. Among the most relevant activities of YouthCan!, it is important to mention the following: career guidance, professional/vocational trainings, soft skills trainings, job shadowing and internships, and one-to-one and group mentoring.

• Management structure and alliances

The implementation of activities is facilitated by the staff of SOS Children's Villages and, in particular, by the members of the Youth Development Unit. Each staff member allocates approximately 60% of his/her working time to YouthCan!. The programme was born as a collaboration with DHL Nigeria, but over the years, many other companies have joined the project, including global partners, AkzoNobel and Johnson & Johnson, and local partners, StarTimes, Radisson Blu and iSON BPO.

• Characteristics of participants

In general, YouthCan! participants enter the programme aged between 14–16 years old. They then continue their journeys by participating in whichever initiatives best suit their specific needs and interests. At least 50% of participants come via the SOS Alternative Care services, while the other half comes directly from the communities surrounding the SOS Children's Villages, where the organisation implements its Family Strengthening service. In some cases, the programme also welcomes 'external' participants who have not previously been involved in any other SOS Children's Villages programmes.

SUMMARY OF THE MAIN EVALUATION FINDINGS

• Main outcomes achieved by current and former participants

The evaluation assessment found that **YouthCan! in Nigeria effectively contributes to improving participants' employability skills**. Overall, 65% of surveyed participants attributed to YouthCan! a positive impact on their professional skills, 58% on their soft skills, but only 37% on their computer skills.

The program was particularly effective in improving participants' self-esteem: 90% reported feeling positive about the future and confident in their ability to find a job, even though their confidence was heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

On the downside, **YouthCan! Nigeria does not appear to be having an impact in terms of strengthening participants' social networks.** In fact, 30% of current and former participants said they do not have a reference person in their lives with whom they regularly talk about their studies or careers.

In addition, the study found that there is still room for improvement in the work experience opportunities offered by the program, particularly as this appears to be critical to improving participants' employment chances. Indeed, **unemployment was found to be relatively prevalent among participants who completed the survey.** However, because a significant proportion of both current and former participants were still engaged in formal education at the time of the evaluation, the survey results are not particularly informative in terms of the long-term outcomes of the program on participants' livelihoods and self-sufficiency. **These issues should be reevaluated in a few years to get a more accurate estimate of YouthCan!'s effectiveness in this area.** However, it must be considered that YouthCan! alone struggles to offset the structural lack of demand in the Nigerian labour market. In fact, even among participants who have already left the program, 29% were unemployed at the time of the survey.

• **FOCUS: The online platform YouthLinks**

The digital platform, YouthLinks, could play a crucial role in promoting networking and exchanges among current beneficiaries and with mentors. Unfortunately, **in Nigeria, its development is still at an early stage;** therefore, only one quarter of participants reported having used the platform at least once. The limited availability and high cost of internet connection within the country negatively affects the potential of diffusion of YouthLinks among participants.

• **FOCUS: The effects of COVID-19 on the programme**

The **COVID-19 pandemic affected the career choices or the employment status of participants to varying degrees.** Students reported facing some inconvenience and delays in their academic activities, while those who had already completed formal education suffered the economic effects of the crisis, particularly in terms of decline in labour demand and salaries.

• **Main outcomes achieved by corporate volunteers**

In general, all respondents confirmed that their participation in **YouthCan! increased their awareness** of the difficulties faced by vulnerable young people in the transition from school to work, **and it changed their attitude** towards their mentees. However, in Nigeria, this change in attitude seems to have occurred more at an individual level than at the company level. In fact, until now, it has been rare for corporate partners to hire YouthCan! participants, even among those who completed an internship with them.

In any case, the majority of volunteers feel that, through YouthCan!, they made a positive contribution to individuals and communities in need. Moreover, the programme has increased their sense of **self-worth** by making them more satisfied with themselves and with their work, as well as proud to be part of a socially committed company.

CONCLUSIONS

YouthCan! represents an innovative programme for Nigeria and, until now, its results have been very promising. However, its impact can be further increased by improving some aspects that are still lacking. As the limits imposed by the country's labour market cannot be ignored, the Member Association must analyse these thoroughly before further developing its YouthCan! approach.

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Ensure that young participants who cannot access the internet are not excluded from YouthCan! activities.

When restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic are no longer active, YouthCan! should ensure an adequate balance between initiatives carried out online and in person. Vulnerable young people who do not have access to the internet, due to a lack of devices or infrastructure, risk being excluded from activities.

2. Further promote the development of IT skills of YouthCan! participants and equip them with the necessary technological tools.

The desired increase in the use of YouthLinks depends on the improvement of participants' computer skills and on the availability of necessary technological equipment.

3. Increase collaboration and integration between the four regions in the country where YouthCan! is active.

Encourage greater collaboration and integration between the four regions in which YouthCan! is implemented, with the aim of capitalising on their respective experiences and ensuring alignment in the educational approach.

4. Increase activities aimed at strengthening the entrepreneurial skills of the participants.

Integrate into the programme a set of activities and courses specifically aimed at improving the entrepreneurial skills of the beneficiaries, and at supporting them in starting their own business.

5. Improve the effectiveness of activities aimed at strengthening participants' support networks.

Redesign programme activities aimed at strengthening the support network of participants, in order to more effectively tackle the isolation from which many of them suffer.

6. Diversify and increase sources of funding to improve the financial sustainability of the programme.

Diversify sources of funding by creating new partnerships with the private sector and by exploring other opportunities.