Youth Entrepreneurship
SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE TO START AND GROW THEIR BUSINESSES

CRS’ Commitment
Young people, ages 15 to 24, number more than 1.2 billion and represent one-quarter of the world’s population. Yet many of them struggle to obtain decent work. Nearly three in four young workers work in informal jobs, and around 39% of young workers are in vulnerable employment, defined by the International Labor Organization as working on their own account or contributing to family work. Moreover, more than 123 million young people are working yet living in poverty. Facing difficulties obtaining formal employment, and whether out of interest or necessity, many young people start businesses at or near subsistence levels. Yet most lack access to entrepreneurship skills development, individualized technical support and the financing to sustain and expand their businesses. Additionally, the businesses that young people start often fail to respond to market demands. Recognizing these challenges, CRS is committed to ensuring the design and implementation of impactful youth entrepreneurship projects. The aim is for young people to leverage market opportunities that enable them to support themselves and their families, have sustainable livelihoods, and contribute to more stable communities.

CRS’ Approach
Building on the integral human development and positive youth development frameworks, CRS youth entrepreneurship programs aim to incorporate key components that support young people in starting and growing sustainable businesses.

We begin with a market assessment that includes identifying in-demand entrepreneurship opportunities, mapping relevant ecosystem actors and understanding the targeted youth population to inform the design of the entrepreneurship program. As a perquisite for enrollment, young people receive career guidance to develop self-awareness, understand their local market and develop a career plan that reflects their aspirations and defines their goals and steps for achieving them. If their career plans include starting a business or expanding one they are already operating, we link them to entrepreneurship skills development opportunities, facilitate their development of viable business models, link them to financing options, ensure that they receive individualized technical support and engage market actors to support their business growth and expansion.
PROJECT HIGHLIGHT

Youth Entrepreneurship in Rwanda: The Gera Ku Ntego Project

Following market assessments to identify entrepreneurship opportunities and understand ecosystem actors, CRS in Rwanda is partnering with government, Church, financial and private sector entities to support 24,000 rural young people interested in starting or expanding their own businesses. As part of the project, young people form savings groups and develop their entrepreneurship skills through training in life skills, business skills and financial literacy. Participants also enroll in vocational training relevant for their businesses from private sector entities and cooperatives. After completing training, young people receive two years of mentoring and support from private service providers, employment and agricultural officers. Working with them, young entrepreneurs can secure additional funding, legalize their business, and access inputs, markets and transportation benefits through microfinance institutions, cooperatives and government programs. After the first year of the project, 82% of participants were self-employed, 15% had obtained wage employment, and youth-led savings groups had collectively saved $81,000 and borrowed $61,000 for their enterprises.


2. Before enrolling in an entrepreneurship program, young people need to receive career guidance to determine whether they aspire to be entrepreneurs. If that is the case, then they can choose to enroll in an entrepreneurship program.