

# Creating Jobs for Young Women Can Be Challenging but Doable

## A Mixed Approach

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**A Series from the BRIDGES Knowledge Compendium**





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# About the Mastercard Foundation

The Mastercard Foundation is a registered Canadian charity and one of the largest foundations in the world. It works with visionary organizations to advance education and financial inclusion to enable young people in Africa and Indigenous youth in Canada to access dignified and fulfilling work. Established in 2006 through the generosity of Mastercard when it became a public company, the Foundation is an independent organization separate from the company, with offices in Toronto, Kigali, Accra, Nairobi, Kampala, Lagos, Dakar, and Addis Ababa. Its policies, operations, and program decisions are determined by the Foundation's Board of Directors and leadership.

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# About the BRIDGES Programme

First Consult

BRIDGES is a five-year programme (2019–2024) aimed at creating and supporting 530,000 youth jobs, mostly for women. It's implemented by First Consult in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation. The Programme focuses on the manufacturing sector, covering all regions and city administrations to address unemployment in Ethiopia. BRIDGES supports both self- and wage-employment, targeting unemployed youth and micro, small and medium enterprises, to provide them with demand-based skilling, information, mindset training, linkage, capacity building and access to finance. BRIDGES delivers this support in collaboration with its enabling partners including public and private organizations.

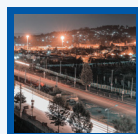


# About the BRIDGES Knowledge Compendium

The BRIDGES Programme has designed and implemented over 35 interventions in a wide variety of sectors, from fishing to mining and furniture making, addressing complex challenges young people face related to access to finance, information, the right mindset, and skills. In so doing, the Programme leads and intervention managers often found themselves off the beaten track of youth job creation and support in Ethiopia. In this Compendium, ten senior and long-serving members of the BRIDGES team author eight titles, personally reflecting on their journey of trying to meet the quantitative and qualitative targets set for their interventions against the limitations of budget, program design and external factors, sometimes failing, often succeeding and sometimes somewhere in between. The knowledge pieces were peer reviewed by other team members in First Consult and finalized after multiple iterations following discussion and deliberation.



- 01.** Navigating Challenges and Maximizing Opportunities: Reflections on Leading Half a Million–Youth Job Support Programme by Henok Tenna, Programme Lead



- 02.** Unlocking Finance for Youths and MSMEs: A2F BRIDGES Journey by Getachew Mekonin, Access to Finance Lead



- 03.** Creating Jobs for Young Women Can Be Challenging but Doable: A Mixed Approach by Semir Mohammednur, Enterprise Development Lead



- 04.** Layering Up for Impact: Reflections on the BRIDGES Journey by Wengel Tessema, Deputy Programme Lead



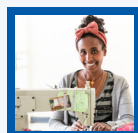
- 05.** It's All in the Head! How Mindset Training Unlocked Young People's Potential to Work by Etalem Engida and Habtamu Ertro, Enterprise Development Lead and former Senior Intervention Manager



- 06.** Unleashing Digital Potential: Empowering Youth through Inclusive Job Creation by Dawit Alem, Intervention Manager



- 07.** TVT as an Engine for Job Creation by Woldemichael Solomon and Melaknesh Ayele, Intervention Manager and former Workforce Development Lead, respectively



- 08.** Monitoring and Evaluation in Programming: The Quest to Harness 718,000 Jobs by Robel Daniel, MERL Lead, BRIDGES

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## Creating Jobs for Young Women Can Be Challenging But Doable

### A Mixed Approach



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#### • The Target

The centre of every economy revolves around a vibrant and young workforce engaged in either wage or self-employment. This young workforce drives growth and innovation, and Ethiopia is no exception. In 2022, there were nearly 3,106,441 youths engaged in the workforce and an additional 1,137,331 unemployed. The unemployment rate of young women stood at 34.4% in 2022. Without the inclusion of the youth, especially young women, in the workforce, achieving sustainable economic growth will be a pipe dream.

Job creation is an output of various elements. Government, private sector actors, markets, and communities play the biggest part. All of them must work in harmony to foster a favourable environment for job creation. But that is not the case. All actors are limited with the resources and capacity needed to create jobs that meet the scale and nature of the youth's demands. This limitation has created more unfavourable conditions for young women to engage in both wage and self-employment. Among these conditions, the leading ones affecting young women are unpaid care work, lack of access to education, social and cultural norms, discrimination, and bias, as well as unaccommodating workplaces.

The BRIDGES Programme was designed to overcome the limitations faced by the various actors. The Programme is a youth-focused job creation initiative to support 502,600 young women. Since the launch of the Programme in January 2020 up to December 2024, 438,502 young women were reached. The support of the Programme was directed at accelerating young women's entry into the labour force through both wage and self-employment.



**The methodology applied to support young women focused on filling the gaps that various actors faced as well as complementing their strengths in the job creation space.**

The actors referred to here are the Government of Ethiopia, private sector actors, and the general public.

Actors	Limitations	Strength
Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provision of adequate skills and market</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Policy framework and Infrastructure development</li> </ul>
Private sector actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gender bias and market driven job creation</li> <li>Lack of resources for training and skill development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create jobs as per their operating capacity!</li> <li>Entrepreneurship and innovation</li> </ul>
Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cultural and social norms</li> <li>Limited market access</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collaboration and collective access</li> <li>Informal sector opportunities</li> </ul>

Figure 8: Limitations and strengths of actors



## • How do we target young women?

To realize the large and ambitious target of the BRIDGES Programme despite limited resources and time, the Programme took two major approaches to target young women. The first approach was focusing on sectors that create jobs for young women, such as the garment and apparel sector. This approach focused on tackling challenges that limit young women's participation in these sectors, as well as improving the existing working environment. The second approach focused on facilitating self-employment for young women. Though the Programme did not scale this approach to a great extent, it was effective in overcoming the challenges young women faced to create their own jobs.



## Our Challenges and Success

### **90% women participants in interventions supporting industrial park jobs: the sectoral approach.**

The Programme reached more than 40,000 young women through its interventions in industrial parks. This significant achievement was made possible because 90% of industrial park workers are female. Our value addition was focused on creating a smooth transition for young women to join the industrial workforce. The young women who were potential employees of the parks were from an agrarian background and had little to no knowledge about industrial work and its lifestyle. This was topped with challenges agrarian young women face.

### **One might ask, what are these specific challenges faced by agrarian women?**

The challenges include lack of skills and education, lack of resources, gender roles and norms, limited job opportunities, gender-based discrimination, and lack of a support system.

The Programme collaborated with ten industrial parks and worker sourcing and screening centres across Ethiopia to help young women enter the parks smoothly and overcome challenges. The parks had a high demand for employable young women, but it was difficult to find qualified candidates for the job. Although the park was well-equipped to train young women in the technical skills required for their jobs, the factories faced resistance in providing technical training. This was because most had little or no educational background and had never left their rural contexts.

The BRIDGES Programme conducted a careful diagnosis to understand the gap that young women faced in integrating into the parks. The major findings were that young women faced a gap in the soft skills required to be a part of the new industrial community. This was created majorly, but not limited to, the lack of a standardized soft skills training provision for young women. The skills needed revolved around communication, self-presentation, time management, mindset, and the like. These sets of skills are crucial for any industrial worker to succeed, especially for those who are first-time entrants to the sector.



The Programme has now identified the challenge and the solution to foster a smoother entry for young women into the parks. By designing a standardized soft skills training package with an adult learning framework, an intervention was designed to support young women. The intervention followed a direct training of young women and a training of trainers approach to reach scale. Sourcing, screening, training, and placement centres for young women were targeted and capacitated to deliver the training. We enabled this by training woreda official screeners who had direct contact with jobseekers to recruit following standard guidelines ethically. The job seekers (young women) would be informed of the realities in terms of the location of the job, the type of job, pay, living conditions, and other requirements.

Once the young women started relocating to the industrial park towns, it became particularly challenging to find safe and friendly neighbourhoods into which they could settle. To ease their settlement, we supported the identification and recordkeeping of a database of available housing options within the financial capacity of the young women and, most importantly, identifying the safest housing possibilities for newly arriving jobseekers.

Our Programme then introduced the Industry Park Labor Database. The database was a critical component of the sourcing and screening intervention. The digital workforce management system promoted a safer recruitment channel, which is even more important and impactful when it comes to women jobseekers or workers who may be subjected to exploitation. It also promoted accountability and better management practices among employer companies in the industrial parks.

The Programme did not stop at the improvement of the placement of young women. It went further by supporting the parks in collaboration with different partners to safeguard young women while they were at work. Two parks had set up grievance reporting centres. The centres were an independent body that collected workers' grievances and worked to address them. The centres were located inside the parks, and workers physically came and reported their cases. In collaboration with other partners, the Programme supported the set-up of a call centre that had a gender and legal expert as well as a call centre operator. This additional line of reporting helped workers to report and follow up their cases in a streamlined manner.

In this intervention, the Programme contributed to tackling key issues that were limiting the entry of young women into highly demanded sectors. This was followed by pilot support to overcome the challenges young women faced while staying in those sectors. With this approach, the BRIDGES Programme supported and capacitated more than 40,000 young women in the industrial workforce.





## • Bringing the jobs to the women: homeworker model

Young women are often responsible for additional activities in their communities and at home, including childcare and household chores. In one of our interventions, we partnered with an enterprise focused on taking the job to where the young women are, in their homes and neighbourhoods.

Young women's additional home responsibilities limit them from availing themselves to the conventional working hours offered by employers. The enterprise we partnered with understood the limitations of young women in this regard. Taking it upon itself, the enterprise designed a model in which it would supply inputs to young women that they could take home. The young women were trained beforehand on what to make of the inputs and how to add value to them at their own homes. They were given targets and delivery dates for when they had to deliver the value-added inputs to the enterprise. The only demand of the enterprise was for on-time delivery from the young women.

The advantage to the young women was that they could work in their homes on their own schedules. This flexibility created a favourable condition for the young women to use their days effectively by working throughout the day when housework was low. With this model, the enterprise sourced inputs from nearly 100 young women. When asked why the enterprise was limited to only working with 100 women, the response was operational capacity and lack of a more robust market.

The BRIDGES Programme, after partnering with the enterprise, managed to reach more than 500 women in two years. The intervention was designed to support the enterprise to reach more young women by focusing on expanding its operating and market capacity. By extending support in product quality, digital visibility, and factory enhancement, the enterprise was able to attract a larger quantity of orders. The intervention further supported the enterprise by developing a standardized training module which was used to capacitate new young women who can work from home. By leveraging the expanded market and the standardized training module, the enterprise was able to create an income stream for more than 500 young women. Understanding the challenges of young women is critical for their integration in the workforce. To achieve scale, this approach can be adopted in business models of early stage/growth-oriented enterprises and industries.

## • Supporting women in establishing daycares but failing to create enough jobs

The BRIDGES Programme simultaneously focused on fostering self-employment for young women. At the beginning of 2021, the Programme observed a high unemployment rate in the nursing industry. Meanwhile, there was high urbanization and a concentration of adults in shared living spaces, condominiums, and apartments. Along with different partners, the Programme identified the demand for daycares in the urban market.

An opportunity presented itself to design an intervention exclusively targeting women. The idea was to train unemployed nurses in the field of daycare business and use the high demand for daycares to encourage the creation of new businesses in the daycare industry. The working spaces were designed to be utilized from open spaces in the shared living areas of the urban community.



At the initial stages of the intervention design, open spaces in government-operated condominiums were sought as the ideal locations for the daycares. The intervention was launched by this positive attitude and the high enrollment of potential business owners (young women).

During the implementation phase of the Programme, trainees graduated and were excited to start their daycare businesses. However, two major challenges emerged at the time. First, the desired spaces for the daycares were already allocated to manufacturing firms and were no longer available for service-providing businesses like the daycares. Second, the high standard requirements to obtain a daycare license necessitated a significantly larger resource than what the Programme could offer. Despite approaching financial institutions, it was not possible to secure the necessary funds for such a business.

The combination of the above challenges led to a high dropout rate from the young women engaged. Understanding the shortcomings of the intervention design, the Programme decided to enhance the aspect of wage employment, which was in the initial intervention design. The trained young women were provided with opportunities to become babysitters at their clients' homes.

The young women had mixed feelings about the babysitter approach, with only 40% willing to pursue this opportunity. The major reason for some of the young women's unwillingness was the failure to meet their expectation in helping them create their own business. While the intervention was successful in attracting more young women than men, it failed to create jobs at scale. Therefore, there is a need for a more thorough analysis of all stakeholders and their incentives. It is not enough to have a demand and supply; a clearer understanding of the situation is required.

### • Exclusive targeting of young women participants for the Programme's 5th year

Once the target of total jobs reached seemed likely to be achieved, the BRIDGES Programme pivoted to target exclusively young women in its interventions during its 5th year. Under the year five portfolio of the BRIDGES Programme, all interventions have been designed and re-designed to cater exclusively to women. As part of this effort, we have made direct outreach to 50,260 women.



**All public and private partners of the Programme give priority to young women.**

Pre-targeting of intervention participants only uptakes young women. This gives us firsthand information on the various needs the young women need and gives us space to prepare the support package better. With this at hand, the BRIDGES Programme has concluded its final year by supporting 438,502 young women in self- and wage employment.



## Our Recommendations

**Gender inequality is a deeply structural problem that cannot be addressed within the lifetime of a programme.** The challenge of reaching 70% young women participants would have been better considered during the programme design phase. Planning to support young women is not just a target we place and hope to achieve through conventional implementation strategies. Extending support to young women would only be solving half of the riddle. Women empowerment does not stop at empowering women; rather, it's a holistic approach of which all aspects of society need to be a part. The environment that will enable young women to thrive needs to be accounted for and facilitated. This is the other half of the riddle that needs solving.

Young women are already considered employed because of their substantial social contributions. Home work and childcare take the majority of young women's time. Topped with various cultural and educational barriers, young women are left behind in terms of active economic participation. Community dialogues and awareness creation on women's economic engagement should be incorporated into the initial programme design. Programmes should intentionally set aside resources to run multi-faceted awareness campaigns in the community. The campaigns must work to promote gender equality and empowerment. Intentional efforts to challenge and transform traditional gender roles and norms are crucial. This can involve community awareness campaigns, engaging men and boys in gender equality discussions, and advocating for women's rights and empowerment.

**Any programme that plans to address women needs to have a compressive gender mainstreaming strategy at heart.**

Dedicated resources such as gender mainstreaming experts need to be at the centre of each programme/intervention design. The need for a fully dedicated gender expert/s at the home office and regional level should be recognized and acted upon during programme design. The status of women in social settings differs from place to place.

There is a need to understand the contextual realities in implementation areas and incorporate them into programme design and implementation. Thus, the placement of a region/area-specific gender expert is key. An analysis of the roles and responsibilities, access to resources, and decision-making power of young women needs to be clearly understood. This will give an advantage to curate interventions in such a way that they match the needs of the young women and consider the local context.

**Gearing young women towards education and fostering an enabling environment:** Young women should have access to quality and affordable education. Efforts should be made to enhance access to quality education in rural areas, with a particular focus on young women. Offering vocational training programs that equip young women with relevant skills for industrial employment can enhance their employability. Enhancing that with entrepreneurial training can further increase their chance of self-employment.





Programmes should consider agrarian young women's specific needs and aspirations to ensure scale and sustainability. While also doing this, focusing on access to education is not enough. Community engagement through awareness creation and behavioural change communication needs to take place. The mere fact is that even if access to education is in place, the societal role that young women play will limit their capacity to follow their studies adequately. The housework will still be waiting for them afterwards. Do we not all remember the various support we needed to undertake our education, whether it be from our family, friends, or community? Thus, community engagements should foster ideas such as sharing responsibilities at the household level and establishing support systems to promote fair access to education. Only then can young women be truly placed in an equal position to pursue their education.



**Working environments and workplace settings need to be women-friendly.** Even when women overcome the challenges of actively working in various areas and find themselves in employment, they face a multitude of obstacles. The home activities and caregiving responsibilities do not just go away. Young women are forced to juggle between home responsibilities and work. This mostly leads to higher dropout rates from work for women. Programmes need to consider and set aside resources to create convenient workplaces for women. The workplace employers create for women needs to cater to the unique demand that women have to engage in the workforce sustainably. One of the unique demands that women need is a safe childcare facility. Employers should be incentivized and supported to invest in building such facilities that create ease for women. Programmes can support the private sector by co-investing in the creation of affordable facilities or in-house facilities. Even beyond, programmes should advocate for a policy that incentivizes employers and childcare givers to invest more in this area.

**Working hour flexibility for enhanced inclusivity:** The responsibility of young women goes beyond childcare and extends to other household activities. These activities fall at the same time where official working hours apply. The luxury of finding another person to undertake those activities, especially in rural areas, is very rare. In the absence of the lack of support, young women are forced to stay home. This limits the time they have to engage in formal work. The conventional working hours and modalities employers offer can prevent young women from joining the workforce.

In response to this, programme designs should take into consideration incorporating various working hour modalities and incentive mechanisms for employers to adopt a flexible working hour arrangement for young women. Programmes need to encourage employers to adopt flexible work arrangements, such as remote work, flexible hours, and job-sharing options. This type of working arrangement will help accommodate the diverse needs of young women, including those related to caregiving and household responsibilities. By incorporating an improved working environment and a flexible working modality, women's hurdles in formal work can be minimized. This can support women in having a better chance to excel in their jobs.





What does this all mean from a programme's perspective?  
In short, it means more intentionality and more resources.

## More intentionality

**It is important to strike a balance between addressing practical gender needs and addressing structural gender needs. Practical gender needs refer to the missing elements a programme needs to achieve its objective. For instance, if the aim is to create jobs for young women, one area of focus could be providing access to skills. You can offer free courses to women, which will help them enter the workforce through self or wage employment. However, this approach will only take you so far.**

Deep-rooted cultural and social norms can pose challenges to gender mainstreaming efforts. Gender stereotypes, biases, and discriminatory practices may create resistance to change and perpetuate gender inequalities. This is where the need to work on structural gender needs comes in. We must incorporate initiatives that promote accessible, affordable, sustainable, and high-quality education, as well as awareness creation, and behavioural change communication aimed at promoting gender equality. Moreover, we should advocate for gender-inclusive policies and ensure they are integrated with the programmes we design and implement to empower the community. Programmes, by being intentional about these activities, can create a foundation for inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

## More resources

**Allocating adequate resources, including financial, human, and technical resources, to support gender mainstreaming initiatives can be a challenge. Limited resources may result in competing priorities and hinder the implementation of gender equality strategies.** This has been the case for most programmes. Considering the additional factors it takes to support young women's jobs, the cost per job will be higher. Women often face specific structural barriers that limit their economic empowerment, such as limited access to finance, land, and productive resources, discriminatory social norms, and unequal opportunities for education and skills development. Overcoming these barriers requires targeted interventions, which will require additional resources and budget allocation.

Policy and institutional support: Women's economic empowerment programmes often involve advocacy for gender-responsive policies, legal frameworks, and institutional reforms. This will require engaging with policymakers, conducting research, and supporting policy implementation. Allocating resources for policy advocacy and institutional support is essential for creating an enabling environment for women's economic empowerment. Programmes working on women's economic empowerment need to account for the higher cost and reflect that in their overall budget.



**Allocating resources and budget to women's economic empowerment projects demonstrates a commitment to gender equality and ensures that the necessary initiatives and strategies are adequately supported for sustainable impact.**





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# **BRIDGES** **Knowledge Compendium**



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PROGRAMME