Problematizing Entrepreneurship (Education) in International Development: A Case Study of a Youth Program in Burkina Faso

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Problematizing Entrepreneurship (Education) in International Development: A Case Study of a Youth Program in Burkina Faso

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Abstract

Entrepreneurship education and training (EET) has become more prominent on the international development agenda as a strategy for inclusive growth and poverty alleviation. Proponents of EET argue that it has reached marginalized groups - such as unemployed youth - in non-formal education settings, equipping them with the skills, mindsets, and knowledge to secure better economic outcomes for themselves. However, critics assert that the human capital focus of EET reflects a neoliberal orientation that essentially glosses over structural problems and shifts the burden of development onto the target populations of such programs. This tension underlies the dilemma of development work, whereby the urgency to “do” or find technical, actionable, and general solutions to complex and specific problems leads to scenarios where any intervention is deemed better than none. Along with that, the absence of criticality increases the likelihood that such responses fail, miss the mark completely, or have far worse unintended consequences.

Therefore, in light of the increasing volume of EET programs, it is imperative to interrogate how they intersect with people, in specific lived contexts, with heterogeneous practices, and varying understandings of development. Using a case study of an EET program for out-of-school youth, I will illustrate how EET can simultaneously serve multiple agendas, from integrating individuals into the global capitalist economy to enabling target populations to fulfill their own aspirations and meet their own social and economic objectives. Importantly, the case study indicates that individuals and communities do not unquestioningly receive education programs like EET.
Acknowledgments

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I want to thank my irreplaceable family and friends, who constantly challenge my views and assumptions about education and society, and who have supported me, emotionally and otherwise, through many an adventure, including this Master’s program. To God be the glory.
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Introduction

According to the World Bank (2016), 767 million people – roughly ten percent of the world’s population in 2013 – lived on less than $1.90 a day (the international poverty line). Of these, nearly half were in Sub-Saharan Africa, and most lived in rural areas, working primarily in the agricultural sector (World Bank, 2016). Although there is a downward trend in extreme poverty globally, it remains widespread in African countries (World Bank, 2016). Around the world, young and poorly educated individuals make up the vast majority of people living in conditions of extreme poverty. In 2015, the global youth unemployment rate was 12.9 %, and this figure was expected to rise to 13.1 % in 2016 (ILO, 2016). While the unemployment rate for youth in developing countries has been relatively stable at approximately 9.5 %, the International Labor Organization (ILO, 2016) estimated that 7.9 million youth will likely be unemployed by 2017.

Situated within the broader field of technical and vocational education and training (TVET)\(^1\), entrepreneurship education and training (EET) has emerged as an increasingly important strategy to address widespread poverty and high unemployment rates. EET typically refers to the use of formal instruction or organized educational activities and training - often in non-formal education settings - to enhance skills and mindsets that are important for participating in entrepreneurial activities (World Bank, 2013). In its tenth edition, the 2012 Education For All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report, entitled *Youth and skills: Putting education to work*, focused specifically on EFA Goal 3:

> Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programs.

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\(^1\) Though often used interchangeably, TVET and EET are not the same. The definitions for both concepts are fluid, which is why they are often conflated as the same kind of programming.
By “putting education to work,” the report clearly reflects the shift towards a “skills agenda” in the development sector. SDG 4 in the post-2015 development agenda specifically re-commits the international community to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.” This illustrates the human capital orientation as well as the inclusive growth approach that undergirds mainstream modes of education and development. For development scholars, practitioners, and policymakers, moving beyond the rhetoric requires also examining potential strengths and flaws of this approach.

The purpose of this capstone project is to interrogate the role of EET in advancing the international development agenda. Through a case study of a youth program, I will illustrate how this strategy aligns with a human capital approach to development while simultaneously serving a neoliberal agenda. Neoliberal doctrine espouses trade liberalization, open markets, privatization, deregulation, minimal state and public sector interventions, and champions market-led solutions (Klees, 2012). At the same time, EET outcomes can overlap with the individual and collective social, economic, and environmental goals of target populations.

**Literature Review**

**The Case for Entrepreneurship and EET**

Governments, international development agencies, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) continue to seek ways to alleviate the effects of poverty and to improve livelihoods for all.

Although the global GDP has grown by about 130% within the last three decades (DataBank,

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2 This refers to the UN global development framework as codified previously in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and now the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
2017), over 1 billion people live in poverty. This has raised questions about the liberal “trickle-down” approach - that higher incomes will result in a reduction of poverty and unemployment - and drawn attention to the limitations of the development-as-economic-growth paradigm, which dominates the development industry. As the discourse has evolved, the potential for entrepreneurship, including self-employment, to contribute to poverty alleviation efforts remains a curious topic for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers.

Entrepreneurship has no universally accepted definition. Schumpeter (1934) identified innovation—the creation of new ideas and products—as a central feature of entrepreneurship and, thus, a stimulus for economic growth. Others see it as a transformative process for creating new wealth or value (Bilic, Prka, & Godovic, 2011; Klapper, Amit, & Guillen, 2010). The World Bank (2013) uses a broader definition that includes formal and informal economic activities undertaken to create wealth, including through self-employment opportunities. A common definition notwithstanding, entrepreneurship’s purported positive contributions to the economy and society are widely documented (European Commission, 2004; Kelly, Singer & Herrington, 2016; ILO, 2009; World Bank, 2013). In addition to its potential to create jobs and wealth, many see entrepreneurship as a means to address urgent social problems (ILO, 2009) such as youth unemployment (Awogbenle & Iwuamadi, 2010). Entrepreneurship may not be a panacea for solving these problems, but it can be part of the response, hence its appeal to policymakers and development practitioners.

Henry, Hill, and Leitch (2005) explored EET at the global, organizational, and individual levels,

3 According to the World Bank database, the world’s total GDP was 108,179 trillion USD in 2015 and about 47,075 trillion USD in 1990 (converted to constant 2011 international dollars using purchasing power parity rates).
highlighting the importance of this strategy at all levels to equip people with the skills and abilities “to enable them to deal with life’s current challenges and an uncertain future” (p. 101). Research has shown that students who participate in entrepreneurship programs are more likely to exhibit entrepreneurial competencies (OECD, 2012; Henry et al., 2005) and that, bearing in mind contextual differences, such programs could potentially enable youth from economically disadvantaged backgrounds to access and create economic opportunities (Wiger, Chapman, Baxter, & DeJaeghere, 2015). This approach of combining academic knowledge with experiential learning could be particularly effective in building the knowledge base and skillset of vulnerable populations.

The volume of entrepreneurship training programs around the world reflects the heterogeneity of target populations and diversity of program objectives and outcomes. For example, Valerio, Parton, and Robb (2014) identified as many as 230 EET programs as part of their research on the evaluation of such programs. Much of the extant literature on EET focuses largely on youth in formal educational settings (ILO, 2009; World Bank, 2013), such as schools. However, the prominence of the informal economy in many developing countries has seen governments and other actors provide TVET - and presumably EET - in non-formal education settings (Nordtveit, 2016). Therefore, as this field expands, it is imperative to analyze its theoretical underpinnings and interrogate how it impacts real lives and contributes to - or inhibits - social change.

**Situating EET in Development Paradigms**

Problematizing EET entails situating it within the broader debates and dilemmas of development. Does EET serve primarily to create skilled workers who can contribute productively to the economy, and therefore society? In relation to marginalized communities, are EET activities
more likely to contribute to economic and cultural reproduction (Bourdieu (in Swartz, 1997)) or disrupt the status quo of inequality by providing pathways to resistance (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1986)? Is EET mainly a disciplinary mechanism in the Foucauldian sense (Lemke, 2001) or might it facilitate agentic behavior? Or, as postcolonial and dependency theorists would argue, is EET a macroeconomic tool for capitalist exploitation and ideological domination (Kamat, 2012)?

These objectives and outcomes of EET surely overlap and manifest in different ways across time and locations. Given the diversity of epistemological approaches and ontological assumptions underpinning analytical frameworks (Burrell & Morgan, 1979) – among many other reasons beyond the scope of this paper – it is no wonder that opinions about the constitution, purpose, and success of EET, and global education reform efforts and development work in general, seldom converge. It is also important to view EET, as a development strategy, in context of larger issues that it cannot singlehandedly fix. That said, an analysis of the dialectic between the global, or “macro-thinking” -- the metanarratives and frameworks -- and local, “micro-practice” of EET -- what happens meaningfully in the lives of program participants -- might deepen our understanding of its role in furthering development goals. In this paper, I will illustrate how EET fits into conventional development discourse as well as engage with the general critiques - both discussed briefly below.

Mainstream Approach: Putting Education to Work
The dominant narrative about international development assumes the existence of a linear progression towards economic growth and extols the architecture that facilitates this process. Problems in society, such as poverty, represent deviations from an otherwise efficient, well-functioning system (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Therefore, decision makers - including states and, increasingly, transnational political and economic actors - craft and deliver solutions with the
objective of making social and economic systems more efficient, rather than bringing about fundamental social change. The human capital approach conceptualizes education as instrumental to economic development (Harber, 2014; Tikly, 2012). With its focus on developing knowledge and skills to help people improve their social and economic situations, (and, thus, increase GDP), EET reflects a shift towards inclusion that fits firmly in this linear development-as-economic-growth paradigm.

Problematizing EET: Critiques of the Dominant Paradigm
Critics argue that the disproportionate emphasis of the human capital approach on skills development reflects the neoliberal orientation of EET. In their view, this conceptualization of human development limits itself to economic concerns but does not adequately incorporate cultural, social, and environmental factors (Tikly, 2012). Thus, EET risks obfuscating the complexity of development challenges.

Moreover, by using language that rationalizes development strategies, reports like the 2012 EFA Global Monitoring Report (GMR), create a narrative that contributes to the assumed objectivity or neutrality of claims about education. Critical perspectives challenge this “common sense” nature of dominant discourse, posing such questions as: who shapes the education agenda, and who decides - and how - what should be taught? Robertson and Dale (2015) categorize these questions as moments of “the politics of education” and “of educational politics,” respectively. Torres (2013) further points out that:

The view of the establishment is that education and politics are clearly two sets of practices, which do not, and should not, interconnect. Education remains objective, in theoretical terms (because the truth could be told objectively); neutral, in political terms (because educators don’t take sides); and above all, apolitical, considering normative and political choices (politics usually embodies the praxis of fighting for ideological positions
defending social and/or particular interests, while education is a noble practice that seeks the public good for everyone involved)… Education is thus a practice that should be devoid of ideology and political interests. (p. 464)

Recognizing that education is political, critics have consistently taken issue with the ideological slant in education policymaking, citing, for instance, World Bank dominance in the process (Kamat, 2012; Klees, 2012, 2017; Nordtveit, 2012). The Bank and other transnational actors have increasingly eclipsed the activities of the agency originally tasked with carrying out a global education agenda, namely UNESCO (Robertson & Dale, 2015). Steeped in neoliberal economic doctrine, which emphasizes market-led development strategies with minimal government or public sector intervention, World Bank educational policies tend to undermine the very goals they set out to achieve, critics argue. Rather, they “help the advantaged accumulate ever more advantages” perpetuating conditions of “poverty, inequality and marginalization” (Klees, 2008, p. 336).

With education seen “in terms of a new frontier for capital to colonize and profit from” (Torres, 2013, p. 473), this ideologically motivated approach to education and development fails to address the structural inequalities in society. Critics assert that EET aligns with a neoliberal agenda to the extent that it seeks to integrate youth in the global capitalist economy.

While shedding light on these fundamental shortcomings of the development enterprise, the critiques pave the way to reimagining how its neoliberal human capital orientation might overlap with social justice principles. Therefore, through a case study, I will explore how EET can simultaneously reinforce neoliberal hegemony as well as create pathways to actively contest its foundations. In other words, even as the forceful undercurrents of neoliberalism persist in EET, programming in this field allows for dissenting voices to emerge and for so-called beneficiaries
to exercise individual and collective agency in pursuit of their own objectives for well-being and fulfillment, thus showing the complexity of this development strategy (Khurshid, 2016).

The following section introduces the case study of an entrepreneurship program for out-of-school youth in rural contexts. As part of a dialectical process of action and reflection, I also raise issues that came up for me when I designed and carried out the research.

Case Study: Youth in Action Burkina Faso

What is Youth in Action?
Youth in Action (YIA) is a six-year social and livelihood development program that Save the Children implemented in partnership with The MasterCard Foundation. The program aims to improve the socioeconomic status of more than 40,000 out-of-school rural youth in Burkina Faso, Egypt, Ethiopia, Malawi, and Uganda. YIA combines non-formal educational and real-life learning experiences to enable youth to develop new knowledge and skills, and enhance their existing resources and capacity, and thus identify and explore livelihoods opportunities.

Burkina Faso’s socioeconomic conditions generally reflect the global findings on poverty: 40.1% of the population live below the national poverty line (World Bank, 2014), and 71% of the total population live in rural areas (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2017). In addition, the country ranks among the top ten in the world with the youngest populations (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2015), with approximately half of its 18 million

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4 In the case of Burkina Faso, out-of-school youth are 15-18 year olds who have been pushed out of the school system or have had to stop attending school for various reasons.
people aged below 18 years old (UNICEF Data, n.d.). The scourge of unemployment is particularly striking because the majority in this group – 65.4% (Youth in Action, 2017) – is younger than 24 years old (Coulibaly, 2015). In addition, 74% of Burkinabe youth live in the rural areas.

With an underdeveloped industrial sector, the country’s largely agrarian economy engages a majority of the labor force, yet offers few formal sector employment opportunities to young people. The government legally owns much of the untitled rural land, but customary law, which differs from community to community, governs its use and usually grants primary rights to family groups (Hughes, 2015). Still, youth generally have little to no access to land for farming, depending on their family status.

Against this backdrop, Save the Children launched YIA Burkina Faso in 2012 as part of a broader effort to respond to the challenge of youth unemployment. Participants are out-of-school girls and boys, who are 15-18 years old. YIA operates in three of Burkina Faso’s 13 provinces – Boucle du Mouhoun, Cascades, and Hauts-Bassins – and aims to reach 4,500 youth in those communities over a six-year period. This constitutes just over 10% of the overall program target population across the five countries. During the first five months of a program cycle, youth participate in the Learning Phase, which seeks to increase literacy, numeracy, and financial literacy skills, while also developing vital social assets. The youth then proceed to the Action Phase, which, in Burkina Faso, entails apprenticeship or entrepreneurship training for them to start their own businesses.

Through the vocational training or apprenticeship pathway, youth receive money for technical
vocational skills training and to cover raw material costs. This takes place in community-based agri-training centers or else in coordination with the Ministry of Agriculture, when possible. The entrepreneurship track is a practical learning opportunity that allows youth to identify and try out viable local business opportunities of their choice. During this phase, youth learn how to develop a business plan and conduct market assessments, among other business-related activities. In addition, they receive support from local mentors and through peer coaching and networking. Finally, YIA provides a small cash transfer or links to financial services to youth participants to support their business launch.

The Burkina Faso program focuses heavily on the entrepreneurship component because of the lack of employment options for out-of-school youth. For many youth in Burkina Faso, livelihood opportunities are grounded in agricultural value chains or agri-business (Dalberg Global Advisors, 2013). With its focus on skills development and a program name that conjures up images of empowerment and self-sufficiency, YIA bears the hallmarks of a direct response to the 2012 EFA GMR call to “put education to work” for youth. Its launch that same year lends further weight to this observation.

**Research Design & Methods**

In summer 2016, as part of a research fellowship, I conducted a small-scale qualitative study as part of SCI’s broader (and ongoing) evaluation of the program. The country team commissioned the research study to collect additional information about what youth and community members viewed as important entrepreneurial skills. They sought to determine how the program could better support skills development of out-of-school rural youth in agriculture-dependent
communities. The study also aimed to contribute to the literature on EET by exploring the experiences of out-of-school rural youth.

Research Questions
The YIA study focused on the views held by youth, community members, and program facilitators, vis-à-vis entrepreneurship education and training (EET) in Burkina Faso. Consultations with various stakeholders could reveal strengths and weaknesses of the program that the country team might not have otherwise anticipated. The following research questions guided the research:

1. What are the perceptions of the youth and community members towards youth entrepreneurship in rural Burkina Faso?
2. What are the strengths and challenges of how YIA is addressing self-employment and entrepreneurship among rural youth in Burkina Faso?
3. What community mechanisms can the project leverage to strengthen its entrepreneurship training, especially as related to the agricultural value chain?

These questions clearly indicate that the study ultimately aimed to improve the program and make it more efficient.

Sampling
The study occurred in two of the three regions where YIA is operational in Burkina Faso. The program team selected these regions because of their relative proximity to the program’s headquarters, in Bobo-Dioulasso. The study focused primarily on youth who were either enrolled
in YIA or had recently graduated from the Learning Phase of the program. In addition, the study included parents, mentors, and facilitators, whose varied interactions with the youth meant they could offer valuable insights about the program’s strengths and areas for improvement. With the support of two YIA field officers serving as interpreters, I facilitated 22 focus group discussions (FGDs) in ten villages and the two regional offices overall. I used FGDs as the data collection tool in order to get a sense of agreements and disagreements as they emerged among participants in the study (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). The number of people who participated in the FGDs across the two regions was as follows:

Table 1: Focus Group Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Number of FGDs</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Participants per Focus Group (average)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentors</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitators</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>245</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I used cluster sampling to ensure the communities selected represented the youth cohorts in question. In many villages, there is one cohort of YIA youth, but some had two groups, including the most recent cohort (Five). Villages selected for the study had to have Cohort Two, Three, or Four youth. I used a simple Excel randomization process to select ten Cohort 2-4 villages until there were at least three youth samples representing each cohort for the study. I excluded Cohort One and Cohort Five villages because they included youth who either had yet to participate in YIA programming (C5) or had long since graduated from the program. There was an effort to do quota sampling of the youth, to attain equal gender representation. However, this did not always work out, as the entrepreneurship track did not necessarily attract equal numbers
of boys and girls in each village. The parent groups were selected through convenience sampling, and were therefore a mix of parents (or guardians) of youth in the sample and of other adolescents in the program. On behalf of the research team, community advisors invited all mentors in their respective communities to participate as their availability permitted. Similarly, facilitators also participated on the basis of their availability on the days of the FGDs.

Research Methods
In FGDs, participants shared their views on entrepreneurship education and its impact on their lives and communities. Appendix A shows the questions that guided the discussions among the youth. Appendices B and C detail the interview protocols for the mentors, parents, and facilitators.

Questions in the group discussions aimed to encourage the participants to share their opinions and ideas about YIA and EET without feeling as though they had to provide any particular or “correct” answers. The adult participants discussed their perceptions of youth entrepreneurship, education, and the program elements of YIA. Through a participatory activity that served as both an icebreaker and a data collection tool, youth had the opportunity to reflect on their personal experiences before discussing their perceptions of YIA. They started by drawing images to illustrate what came to their mind when they heard the term “entrepreneurship.” To create as nonthreatening and open a discussion as possible, I encouraged youth to refer to their drawings to elaborate on their own personal experiences or if they felt shy or uncertain about how to answer questions.
Limitations

Power Dynamics in Research Process
It is important to acknowledge the power dynamics that exist between the researcher and the researched, but also between program implementers and so-called beneficiaries. In interviews, there is always a possibility that participants will say what they believe the interviewer wants to hear. Moreover, with FGDs, group members may participate differently (Gragg, 2007); some may dominate the discussion, while others may not express their opinions because of the limited confidentiality – or other reasons. Either way, there is no guarantee that this type of setting will capture all the voices present.

Nevertheless, I tried to limit this bias using a variety of strategies stemming from a guiding belief that the ongoing relationship between YIA – specifically the field officers – and the communities would allow for authentic discussions. Before each FGD, I explained the purpose of the study, emphasizing that the responses would go towards improving the program. Given the value of their input to this process, I encouraged participants to be as honest and candid as possible.

Gender Relations
I also anticipated, perhaps stereotypically, that boys and men might dominate the discussions. The icebreaker activity was one way to encourage participation from all the girls and boys. As they each illustrated their vision of entrepreneurship, they could refer to their drawings during the discussion. In the adult FGDs, especially the parent and mentor groups, some questions were directed specifically to the women, to limit potential gender bias in responses.

Language & Literacy
Language presented a possible limitation in the FGDs, where the interpreter communicated
questions and responses from French to Dioula, and vice versa, and in some cases, from another local language first, such as Mooré. In anticipation of the potential loss of nuance through translation, I built follow-up questions into the focus group protocols to provide an opportunity to clarify responses. The FGDs with the facilitators were conducted exclusively in French, with no need for translation into Dioula. As such, I excused the Field Officer from these two sessions, in an effort to allow the facilitators to speak freely—even if critically—about the program, without fear of disciplinary action.

Rossman and Rallis (2017) discuss the ethical challenges of acquiring informed consent. I was aware of the limitations of presenting written materials to participants with generally low literacy levels, further compounding the language factor. I had prepared consent forms in French, which then had to be translated – in writing – into Dioula. The assumption behind this element in the research process is that a signature (or thumbprint) will suffice as evidence of consent. To address this challenge, the field officer candidly explained the purpose of the research and emphasized participants’ right to leave at any point. My overall impression, though, was that the adults had general expectations about the process, based on previous FGDs facilitated by YIA staff.

Sample Size
The findings offer valuable insights into how EET may be contributing to the livelihoods of youth and communities in this particular study. However, the findings are representative of its participants, and are not generalizable to the entire youth population in Burkina Faso, or even to the overall YIA program. Moreover, the particular focus of the study limits the extent to which the findings can contribute to this broader analysis of EET.
Data Analysis

I identified themes that emerged from the FGDs within and among the different sets of participants and across the two regions. I then triangulated the data to deduce how perspectives overlapped or diverged among youth, parents, facilitators, and mentors, as well as along gender lines. I also included information from the program website and from conversations with program staff to develop this thematic analysis. To an extent, this capstone represents a search for alternative understandings of the data.

In the following section, I will discuss some of the purported benefits and limitations of this particular EET program and illustrate how this development strategy simultaneously furthers a neoliberal agenda and serves the target population, meaningfully (or not), in their lived experiences.

Study Findings & Discussion

In this section, I will present and examine the findings from the qualitative study and determine the ways in which this particular EET program might reinforce a neoliberal agenda while also helping individuals and communities fulfill their own social and economic goals. Generally, the findings affirm that Youth in Action fits seamlessly within the mainstream framework of international development education. Discussions about the strengths and challenges of YIA EET shed light on the program’s emphasis on self-improvement for the youth and on its human capital orientation to develop them for economic participation. The youth, mentors, facilitators, and parents acknowledged the importance of competencies, knowledge, and technical skills that would position youth to improve their livelihoods through self-employment.
Furthermore, youth and adults (in this study) believe YIA is doing important work in their communities. One parent said the program “has brought a light and given the children a taste for knowledge that will allow them to go forward.” A mentor in the same region echoed that sentiment, declaring that YIA had “awakened” youth enrolled in the program and “lifted them from obscurity.” Many similar remarks in the FGDs conveyed positive perceptions about YIA but also suggested that the communities believe they can reshape the program’s agenda to better meet their needs.

**Introducing Rassidatou**

Rassidatou is a fictional persona, a composite portrait of the youth who participated in this study. She describes herself as confident, driven, and committed to learning. Her parents would add that she is patient, hardworking, quick-thinking, and respectful of her elders. I developed her profile using the words and ideas shared in the FGDs. Her insights, scattered across the following subsections in italicized insets, expound on the experiences of a representative subject of entrepreneurial development in this particular context.

**Entrepreneurial Activities**

*Like many of my friends, I would like to raise animals - maybe chickens (“sise”) or sheep (“saga”) - and sell them. I can use some of the money to help at home, and put the rest in a savings account (“caisse populaire”). One day, I can open up a store where I can sell grains and fertilizers.* -- Rassidatou

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5 “YIA a apporté une lumière et a donne les jeunes le gout de la connaissance qui les permet a prendre la route.”
6 “YIA éveille les enfants, les enlève de l'obscurité.”
The icebreaker activity revealed that YIA youth are engaged in a variety of entrepreneurial activities that align with the demands of the economy but not necessarily their interests. The popularity of subsistence agricultural activities—especially animal farming and crop production—reflects not only the significance of the agricultural sector to the local and national economy, but also the neoliberal logic driving the program agenda. However, despite this narrow range of possibilities, a few youth mentioned interests that did not fit the YIA mold, like tailoring, welding, hairdressing, mechanical work, and shopkeeping. Therefore, while attempting to orient youth towards the economy, consequently regulating their identities (Kelly, 2001), YIA also makes it possible for youth to envision alternative paths for themselves.

Developing the Neoliberal Subject through EET

EET exemplifies how the dominant paradigm of international development diffuses neoliberal principles to develop rational, self-regulating, autonomous, responsible, and empowered subjects (Kelly, 2001; Khurshid, 2016; Read, 2009. Also, see Lemke, 2001 for Foucault’s analysis of neoliberalism). The findings presented in this subsection illustrate how Youth in Action mobilizes the neoliberal subject through its Learning Phase. At the same time, though, the findings also indicate that youth use the tools they acquire to exercise agency in a variety of ways.

The Entrepreneurial Subject

*My parents believe that entrepreneurship is the future.* I agree with them! If this had been two years ago, before YIA, I wouldn’t have been able to sit here and talk with you. The fact

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7 The youth had to draw a picture to illustrate what they understood the term “entrepreneurship” to mean. See Appendix A to read more about the youth FGDs.
8 “L’entreprise c’est l’avenir.”
that I came by this place shows that I am not uncomfortable. I have learned a lot about myself and my community, and I feel confident that I can start my own business and improve my situation. Where others might see problems, I see opportunities! It’s important to have alternatives and to always think about how to improve the business and evolve beyond the main activity. My mentor has repeatedly said that “one must have the mindset that it has to work out, and it will work out.” -- Rassidatou

By training youth to be entrepreneurial, that is, adaptable and resilient in the face of challenges, the Learning Phase is developing the mindsets and capabilities that youth and adults identified as necessary for successful outcomes in entrepreneurship. In all ten youth FGDs, many cited YIA as a primary reason for their increased self-confidence and belief that they could pursue their interests. Moreover, youth and adults alike generally valued the formal instruction and training that YIA’s Learning Phase provides. Therefore, by defining what constitutes entrepreneurial success as well as shaping consciousness about how to attain it through the Learning Phase, YIA develops neoliberal subjectivities, which I discuss below.

The Empowered & Self-Reliant Subject

Reading and writing are skills we will need, even if we (go on to) work for someone else. -- Rassidatou

The Learning Phase develops self-reliant youth by building skills deemed necessary to facilitate the transfer of business-related knowledge and capabilities: literacy, numeracy, proficiency in Dioula, and financial literacy. In both regions, and across the different population groups,

9 “Si c’était deux ans avant YIA ici, [je] ne pourrait pas s’asseoir ici et parler avec [vous]. Le fait que [je] suis passée dans l’espace, je ne me suis pas complexée.”

10 “Il faut penser toujours comment améliorer l’entreprise; comment faire des activités pour évoluer l’activité principale.”
participants emphasized the importance of developing these foundational academic skills prior to youth starting their own enterprises. Although the study focused primarily on perceptions about these skills, I observed that many youth in the study – of whom girls comprised the majority – were unable to write their names or the date. Moreover, when I asked facilitators how the curriculum could be improved, they emphasized the need to build up the literacy component, suggesting that the actual acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills remains a work in process. Nevertheless, this observation does not undermine the dominant perception that participants in the study consider reading and writing to be vital skills.

Although YIA staff and community members alike viewed these skills as indicators of empowerment and self-reliance, definitions of the latter two terms may differ among and within the groups. A neoliberal reading underscores the functionalist objective of empowering unemployed youth by developing skills to help them participate actively and independently in the economy, as epitomized by Rassidatou’s quote at the beginning of this subsection. An alternative interpretation might view empowerment and self-reliance through a humanist lens first. For instance, youth reported feeling a sense of personal achievement and fulfillment as a result of being able to calculate change at the market or deposit money into a savings account on their own. In other words, empowerment and self-reliance can encompass more than the narrow economy-oriented definitions. Moreover, it is also plausible that different motivations for the skills development yield overlapping outcomes -- as described by youth themselves -- that can reinforce each other.
The Self-Regulating Subject

Self-regulation, based on the Foucauldian notion of governmentality, refers to the ways in which people internalize knowledge and discourses that guide their behavior, resulting in more efficient social control (Lemke, 2001). In a neoliberal worldview, governmentality may be understood as placing the burden of responsibility on individuals for their own material conditions. The self-regulating neoliberal subject assumes the responsibility to take action that addresses specific problems while also embracing the associated risks of failure. Khurshid (2016) suggests that development actors see this taking on of challenges as “an embodiment of individual empowerment” (p. 625) in the self-regulating subject. Chant (2011) problematizes this notion that those “in need” of development should themselves bear the burden of development. The emphasis on skills diverts attention from structural changes, such as labor market reforms and employment programs that might provide more enduring ways out of poverty.

From a neoliberal perspective, the findings of this study illuminate the discourse of self-regulation embedded in and propagated through YIA’s learning modules. Youth could readily recall specific takeaways from the Learning Phase about attitudes, mindsets, and behaviors appropriate for their growth as entrepreneurs. Together with the adults, they believed that

11 “Ils s’impliquent plus dans les activités familiales, et ils ont plus de respect, plus de considération des vieux.”
12 Il y a des moments où c’est pas facile, donc il faut avoir le courage pour dire même si ça ne va pas aujourd’hui, ça peut aller demain.
academic knowledge and technical capabilities were necessary, but not sufficient, for launching a business. Additional competencies they highlighted included: being able to interact with and learn from other people; believing in themselves; being passionate, courageous, and resilient against the odds; and being able to make decisions based on a careful cost-benefit analysis.

Yet, participants’ prioritization of interrelational competencies suggests that subjectivities do not necessarily develop in a top-down manner, but rather through a negotiation with local norms. In other words, whereas neoliberal principles emphasize individualism, EET in this context seems to have had to adapt to local modes of social interaction. The following subsection further examines how EET shapes and is shaped by social structures.

The Role of Community in EET

If you start out by yourself, you are less likely to succeed than if you are in a group. - Rassidatou

Reinforcing and Challenging Neoliberal Hegemony through Social Networks

The interconnectedness of various actors – youth, facilitators, mentors, parents, community members, and YIA staff – shows that a strong, socially supportive environment exists around program participants. The youth reported that their greatest support for entrepreneurship development came from their communities in the form of financial resources, material assistance, expert advice, moral support, and so on. Logically, then, YIA has incorporated these networks into its EET strategy, and, as the third research question\(^{13}\) indicated, YIA seeks to

\(^{13}\)What community mechanisms can the project leverage to strengthen its entrepreneurship training, especially as related to the agricultural value chain?
strengthen this core aspect of its programming.

One might argue that, by using these social networks to help achieve EET development-related goals, YIA reproduces neoliberal governmentality, with the community as the “empowered” subject. Moreover, as previously mentioned, the burden to reduce poverty rests on youth, their families, and the broader communities (Elder & Kone, 2014). However, such an analytical approach might also deny the community any agency, limiting itself to a top-down conceptualization of power. Facilitators observed that without true partnerships with the communities, YIA would encounter difficulties in carrying out program activities and achieving its longer-term objectives.

These findings suggest that community members can embrace YIA’s rationale for their involvement and they can also challenge these goals while still participating, but sometimes with different motivations. For example, parents believed that having strong social supports would dissuade the youth from seeking livelihood opportunities in other towns. Therefore, with their children remaining within their communities, parents believed they would be better able to deepen their relationships with them. YIA staff also agreed that using local experts or mentors would discourage youth from leaving home. In their view, however, youth should stay to invest in developing their own communities. Therefore, community involvement in EET can facilitate program delivery while also paving the way for individuals or communities to address their own needs. While different neoliberal-oriented and humanely-defined reasons exist for youth remaining, there appears to be a shared outcome of outcome of greater well being and opportunities for people within their communities.
Mentors and Facilitators: Local and Hierarchized Expertise

As previously mentioned, formal instruction and training constitute a significant component of EET. Mentorship is vital as it can help address skills and knowledge gaps (World Bank, 2013). YIA mentors belong to the same communities as the youth they work with. Those in the study saw their role as an essential opportunity to transfer trade-specific skills to youth, particularly those with no prior experience. YIA commissions program facilitators through third-party implementing partner organizations to teach the Learning Phase. Among the facilitators I met were former literacy trainers, educators, and community organizers.

While parents and youth spoke highly of mentors, facilitators in both regions, in contrast, offered more muted accolades of the mentorship component. Parents and youth seemed to value the availability and social support of mentors, along with their expertise and technical guidance. On the other hand, the facilitators largely took issue with the overall support structure provided for youth, and with the mixed quality and qualifications of mentors, in particular. Since mentors tend not to be professionally trained, facilitators expressed concern about their ability to develop youth’s entrepreneurial skillsets. Facilitators appeared to emphasize the need for mentors to be highly skilled individuals, with both technical know-how and academic skills (such as literacy and numeracy).

The mentorship component reveals three critical observations about Youth in Action.

1. The discourse of facilitators in this study conveys a matter-of-factness about the type of knowledge that counts as expertise and who can be considered an expert.

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14 According to the facilitators, low literacy rates among adults in rural Burkina Faso, and women in particular, likely explained why there were relatively fewer women mentors in the communities they had served.
2. The use of local mentors can be seen as reflecting a neoliberal focus on skills and attitudes with “little attention to the material and social conditions needed to support” entrepreneurship (DeJaeghere & Baxter, 2014).

3. Nevertheless, recruiting local mentors, regardless of their formal educational qualifications or vocational training, indicates that the program may be incorporating what youth and parents see as useful for youth development.

Awogbenle and Iwuamadi (2010) observed, “Empowerment is not complete without a corresponding adequate funding provision for the trained manpower” (p. 835). The facilitators highlighted the challenges they face in carrying out their duties. In their view, the working conditions are not always conducive. They expressed grave concerns about the paucity of their compensation, frequent delays in payment, and what they perceived as a lack of genuine interest in their well-being. These findings highlight a recurring fundamental challenge, that EET can only address a small part of a much larger problem. Therefore, the discourse should shift away from presenting it as a panacea.

Financing: A Burden of Responsibility

The financial support from YIA is so helpful. But what I have is not even enough to start things up. Some friends told me it was difficult to implement all they had learned in the modules with the amount provided. One of the advisors said our parents would need to work to make up the cash shortage to help us get what we need. Sometimes, when my money is not enough [to buy products], the supplier gives me credit, which I reimburse later. So I have the support of the supplier and also of my mentor, because it is the mentor who established

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15 "Ca ne suffit meme pas.”
Another way that the neoliberal approach of EET visits a form of responsibility on youth and their families is through the financing model. As Rassidatou’s remarks suggest, the provision of startup funds, along with the lessons about self-reliance and resourcefulness, seem to prepare youth and their families to work within the system. In the FGDs, parents, especially, expressed concern about inadequate financial support from YIA, which is not surprising, given the paucity of financial resources and already limited access to funds in the target communities. Even if entrepreneurial mindsets and capabilities contribute significantly to the process of youth development, the lack of support to address material needs can create disillusionment about EET as a way out of poverty.

Questions about “what now” vis-a-vis the cash transfer compel a discussion about the social inequalities and their root causes, and also reflect the communities’ awareness of the broader problem. Nevertheless, while the economic conditions in rural Burkina Faso create challenges for many families, the anecdotal data suggest that families desire to help their children in whatever way they can. Being able to provide any assistance matters to the parents, even as it corroborates the notion that the neoliberal underpinnings of EET “responsibilize” its so-called beneficiaries.

16 “Il lui donne les produits; il vient, il vend, même si son argent ne suffit pas on peut lui donner un crédit. Lui, il vient, puis il rembourse. Donc il a le soutien de son fournisseur et de son mentor, parce que c’est le mentor qui a mis en place la relation avec le fournisseur.”
The focus on access, participation, empowerment, and equality of girls in entrepreneurship fits into the broader development goal to “achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls” (SDG 5). However, feminist critiques of anti-poverty strategies, such as microfinance programs, call into question the extent to which they enable women to challenge structures of power in households and society at large (Kabeer, 2005; Kalpana, 2011). According to Wilson (2011), “the use of the concept of ‘agency’... frequently has the effect of reassuring us that women do in fact exercise choice in situations where structural constraints mean that women are simply ‘choosing’ survival” (p. 99). Like microfinance programs, EET does not automatically empower girls or alleviate poverty (Visvanathan & Yoder, 2011).

Nevertheless, as suggested in earlier sections, YIA operates on the premise of youth empowerment. The question in the study about gender and youth entrepreneurship reflects the program’s alignment with SDG 5. Youth, families, and the program seem to share this goal: in 20 out of the 22 FGDs, the predominant view was that there are no gender-specific roles in entrepreneurship. For many youth, the decision to take up certain activities over others was informed by their interests and passions, as well as the feasibility and profitability of the different ventures.

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17 “Ils choisissent parce qu’ils veulent le faire, et pas parce que ca c’est le travail d’homme et l’autre c’est pour la femme.”

18 “Je suis femme; je dois aller la ou’ sont les femmes.”
However, feminist scholars contend that the neoliberal paradigm coopts the concept of agency, masking the differential impact of gender and other social divisions (Kabeer, 2005). Through a discourse that focuses primarily on the inclusion of young women by developing their capacities, rather than recognizing their gendered status in society (Vossenberg, 2014), EET risks obscuring other forms of oppression. It is unclear from the FGDs alone whether or how discourse within YIA explicitly reinforces or challenges patriarchal notions about entrepreneurship. As Rassidatou’s statement suggests, there are different understandings about “traditional” roles for young men and women, both in the household and in the labor market. Discussions on the interplay of cultural norms, changing economy, and specific family situations illuminated the complexity of factors that influence - and gender - youth choices in entrepreneurship.

Based on the study findings, it is plausible the program is “embracing the global narrative of education as an empowering institution while redefining gender empowerment as constituting local moral codes” (Khurshid, 2016, p. 623). As one mentor remarked, “Ça dépend au milieu” - it depends on the environment - indicating that “empowerment” has no fixed or singular meaning. The mixed views about gender and its role in entrepreneurship mean local cultural norms about gender, as well as socioeconomic conditions, also shape how YIA youth and communities view the possibilities for youth self-employment. Therefore, EET creates new opportunities just as it reinforces gendered hierarchies and expectations with regard to youth self-employment.

Conclusion
Entrepreneurship education and training (EET) is increasingly seen as a key strategy for
addressing poverty and unemployment. With its emphasis on building skills and capacity development for self-employment, EET aligns with the prevailing neoliberal paradigm of international development. The neoliberal agenda persists through EET as youth are prepared to integrate into the global capitalist economy. Critics assert that, with little consideration of the social and economic contexts, EET imposes particular types of livelihoods and does not bring about fundamental social change.

The findings from a case study on a youth development program illustrated that when EET programs intersect with people, in specific lived contexts, with heterogeneous practices, and varying understandings of development, critical and contradictory outcomes can emerge. In targeting out-of-school youth, the program, Youth in Action (YIA), aligns with the development goal of inclusive education and also reflects the neoliberal and human capital orientation of EET. YIA’s EET programming aims to develop certain skills and knowledge in youth so that they can participate in income-generating activities in their local economies and to feel confident doing so. From a neoliberal perspective, the program - through the Learning Phase modules - develops subjects who are self-reliant and empowered, and who, along with their communities, bear the responsibility and risks of finding a way out of poverty. However, the case study also revealed that program participants may want the same outcomes as the program designers, even if for potentially different reasons, such as: personal development of youth; local employment opportunities; and involvement of community members in EET. Importantly, the findings from the study draw attention to a prominent critique of EET and other anti-poverty strategies - that they do not address root causes.

With an awareness of the flaws and challenges of delivering EET, target audiences can question
and potentially reshape elements of such programs to focus on livelihoods that they value. These perspectives provide nuance for understanding how EET impacts the target populations’ lived experiences and helps them achieve their own individual and collective social and economic goals. Therefore, it is vital to continuously interrogate the programs and processes of EET to direct them more towards responding to local environments and critically examining programming in relation to structural inequalities in society.


http://youthinaction.savethechildren.ca/where-we-work/burkina-faso/
Appendix A: Youth Focus Group Guide

Icebreaker: C2-C4 Youth

- **Draw-Write-Narrate**

In this *semi-public* activity, the researcher will ask participants to illustrate (with drawings or diagrams) what entrepreneurship means to them. Semi-public means the participants will be called upon to share their views by either (i) displaying the illustration and describing it, or (ii) keeping their illustration private, but still describing it to the group. *(15mins)*

Allow 3-5 minutes per report-back. The researcher will document the responses on the board or flip chart and group them by theme. *(30mins)*

- **Brainstorm and Group Discussion**

*Kick off this next activity by providing a definition of entrepreneurship. Try to incorporate language used in the activity above.*

**Individual brainstorm:** Ask participants to think about five skills they think are most important for them to be successful in entrepreneurship. [Possible prompt: *What would it take to make your illustration a reality for you?*] *(5mins)*

1. **Youth Focus Group Discussion:**

- What skills are important for you and your peers to be successful in entrepreneurship?
  - *Quelles compétences spécifiques sont les (3-5) plus essentielles pour démarrer une entreprise?*

- How do you see these five skills being addressed by Youth in Action?
Quelles compétences est-ce que YiA vous a apporté pour la mise en œuvre de vos entreprises?

- How will these skills help you launch your businesses?
  - Comment est-ce que ces compétences vous aideront à démarrer vos entreprises?

- Are you confident about launching your businesses? Why?
  - Avez-vous confiance en vous-même dans la mise en œuvre de vos entreprises? Pourquoi?

- What obstacles are you encountering in launching your business?
  - Quels obstacles rencontrez-vous dans la mise en œuvre de vos entreprises?

- Which supports are you benefiting from in starting up your businesses?
  - De quels soutiens bénéficiez-vous dans la mise en œuvre de vos entreprises? (Citez les sources du soutien svp.)

- What is the attitude of YiA youth regarding gender in the choice of entrepreneurial ventures?
  - Quelle est l’attitude des jeunes de YiA dans le choix de leurs entreprises au regard du genre?
  - Aviez-vous fait le choix de vos mentors sur la base du genre ou sur la base des qualités et de l’expérience de ces derniers? Pourquoi?
Appendix B: Mentor Focus Group Guide

Interview Protocol: Mentors

Mentors’ Perceptions of [Youth] Self-Employment & Critical Entrepreneurship Skills in Rural Burkina Faso

* Introduction Icebreaker *
Q: What specific skills do you think are critical to successfully start your own business?
   
   ● Selon vous, quelles compétences spécifiques sont les plus essentielles pour démarrer une entreprise?

Q: What specific skills are critical for YiA youth to be successfully self-employed?

   ● Et pour les jeunes de YiA, spécifiquement?

Q: How do you see YiA addressing these skills? (Do you think entrepreneurship is something that can be taught?)

   ● Selon vous, comment est-ce que YiA transfert actuellement ces compétences en entreprenariat? (Est-ce que vous croyez qu’elles pourraient être enseignées?)

Q: What specific challenges do youth in this community face in starting their own businesses?

   - How do these challenges constrain youth entrepreneurship?

      ● Quels sont les défis pour les jeunes en essayant à démarrer leurs propres entreprises?

      ○ Comment est-ce que ces défis contrainent-ils les jeunes?

Q: What interventions do you think should be further implemented to address these challenges?

   - What are urgent areas in which intervention needs to be made?
   
   - Who do you think should be involved in making the intervention?
   
   - How?

      ● Comment exactement pourrait-on répondre à ces défis?
Selon vous, quels sont les défis les plus urgents auxquels des solutions doivent être trouvées?

A vos avis, qui devrait être impliqué? Comment?

Q: Do you have other suggestions to improve the quality of training for youth to be self-employed?
- Are there specific skills or knowledge that need to be further incorporated in the YiA training?
  - Avez-vous d’autres suggestions pour améliorer la préparation des jeunes à l’entrepreneariat?
  - Y a-t-il d’autre compétence ou du savoir que YiA pourrait inclure dans la formation?

Q: How are you supporting youth in the creation of their businesses?
- How will this support help them launch their businesses?
  - Comment soutenez-vous les jeunes dans la création de leur entreprise?
  - Comment est-ce que ce soutien va les aider à mettre en place leur entreprise?

Q: Why do you think there aren’t many women mentors in entrepreneurship?
  - Pourquoi n’y a-t-il pas beaucoup de mentors femmes à l’entrepreneariat, selon vous?
  - Quel est l’attitude des jeunes dans le choix de leurs entreprise au regard du genre?
Appendix C: Parent Focus Group Guide

Interview Protocol: Parents

**Parents’ Perceptions of [Youth] Self-Employment & Critical Entrepreneurship Skills in Rural Burkina Faso**

*Introduction Icebreaker*

Q: What specific skills do you think are critical to successfully start a business?
   - Selon vous, quelles compétences spécifiques sont les plus essentielles pour démarrer une entreprise?

Q: What specific skills are critical for youth to be successfully self-employed?
   - Et pour les jeunes, spécifiquement?

Q: How do you see YiA addressing these skills? (Do you think entrepreneurship is something that can be taught?)
   - Selon vous, comment est-ce que YiA transfert actuellement ces compétences en entreprenariat? (Est-ce que vous croyez qu’elles pourraient être enseignées?)

Q: What are the strengths and challenges of the different activities in entrepreneurship development (like cash disbursement) being used by YiA?
   - Quels sont les avantages et les défis des activités que YiA utilise dans la formation de l’esprit d’entreprise?

Q: What specific challenges do youth in this community face in starting their own businesses?
   - How do these challenges constrain youth entrepreneurship?
     - Quels sont les défis pour les jeunes en essayant à démarrer leurs propres entreprises?
       - Comment est-ce que ces défis contraintent-ils les jeunes?
Q: What interventions do you think should be further implemented to address these challenges?
   - What are urgent areas in which intervention needs to be made?
   - Who do you think should be involved in making the intervention?
   - How?
     ● *Comment exactement pourrait-on répondre à ces défis?*
       ○ Selon vous, quels sont les défis les plus urgents auxquels des solutions doivent être trouvées?
       ○ A vos avis, qui devrait être impliqué? *Comment?*

Q: Do you have other suggestions to improve the quality of training for youth to be self-employed?
   - Are there specific skills or knowledge that need to be further incorporated in the YiA training?
     ● *Avez-vous d’autres suggestions pour améliorer la préparation les jeunes à l’entreprenariat?*
       ○ Y a-t-il d’autre compétence ou du savoir que YiA pourrait inclure dans sa formation?

Q: How are you supporting youth in the creation of their businesses?
   – How will this support help them establish the businesses?
     ● *Comment soutenez-vous les jeunes dans la création de leur entreprise?*
       ○ *Comment est-ce que ce soutient va les aider à mettre en place leur entreprise?*

Q: What do you think of the qualities and characteristics of the mentors? (Please explain your answer.)
     ● *Que pensez-vous des qualités et des caractéristiques des mentors des jeunes?* (Élaborez, svp.)

Q: Why do you think there aren’t many women mentors in entrepreneurship?
     ● *Pourquoi n’y a-t-il pas beaucoup de mentors femmes à l’entreprenariat, selon vous?*
     ● *Quel est l’attitude des jeunes dans le choix de leurs entreprise au regard du genre?*