

UNDP GHANA-MASTERCARD FOUNDATION PARTNERSHIP
Young Africa Innovates (YAI) Programme- Phase I
Leveraging Youth Innovation to Support Africa's Economic Transformation.



MID-TERM EVALUATION
FINAL REPORT

UNDP 2025

Project/Outcome Information		
Project/Outcome Title	YAI Programme Ghana	
Atlas ID		

Corporate Outcome and Output		
Country	Ghana	
Region	All 16 regions	
Date Project Document		
Project Dates	Start	Planned
	2023	2025
Total Committed Budget	12,958,160 USD	
Project Expenditure at the time of Evaluation		
Funding Source	MasterCard Foundation, Ghana	
Implementing Party	UNDP Ghana	
Evaluation Information		
<i>Evaluation Type</i>		
Final/Midterm Review/Other	Midterm Evaluation	
Period Under Evaluation	Start: 2023	End: 2024
Evaluators	Benedictus TREVEH	
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Evaluation Dates	Start: March, 2025	Completion: October, 2025

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ACRONYMS

AccLab	Accelerator Lab
EMT	Evaluation Management Team
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
IDIs	In-Depth Interviews
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
MEST	Meltwater Entrepreneurial School of Technology
MVPs	Minimum Viable Product
NEET	Not in Employment, Education or Training
NEIP	National Entrepreneurship & Innovation Programme
NGOs	Non-Government Organizations
SCAMPER	Substitute, Change/Combine, Adopt/Adapt, Put to another use, Eliminate and Reverse/Rearrange
THRIVE	Tracking Hidden Regional Innovations and Visionary Enterprises
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
YAI	Young Africa Innovates
YAW	Young Africa Works

Executive Summary

The YAI programme, essentially, was designed to *identify, capacity build and scale-up* youth-led solutions to spur employment in Ghana. It is a vehicle leveraged to achieve the Mastercard Foundation YAW strategy objectives. The YAW strategy, has a 10-year agenda with a goal to move at least 3 million (1% of 300 million) African youth from unemployment/underemployment to dignified and fulfilling work.

The YAI Ghana programme contributes to this agenda by targeting support at some 5000 young innovators, over the 2.5-year programme period, through various formative processes at the end of which some 300-500 innovations capable of generating employment opportunities would be scaled-up. The programme design tests a strategic hypothesis that the creation of an inclusive and repeatable processes to seek out and foster atypical actors is critical to unlocking new solutions and earthing jobs at scale.

This midterm evaluation was carried out as part of the mandatory requirement for all UNDP facilitated programmes. Per UNPD statutes, all programmes must necessarily undergo evaluations; including midterm and end of programme evaluations. The YAI programme having reached the midpoint of implementation thus, qualifies for this mandatory midterm evaluation. However, apart from it being a mandatory requirement, it is also an in-built accountability activity of the programme.

This evaluation was conducted using a mixed method methodology, which involved the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative approach involved analysis of programme output data in comparison with midterm targets. The qualitative approach involved case study of a cross-section of stakeholders including the innovators, scouting organizations, innovation hubs, sub-partners and UNDP, the main partner. Some key community leaders; assembly members, chiefs and some opinion leaders, were interviewed also.

To facilitate the evaluation, the eight programme implementation processes were recategorized into three main phases; *recruitment/scouting, bootcamp and stage-gating* phases. The programme design targeted the recruitment of some 2500 innovators by midterm. Of these, 1250 (50.0%) were to be transitioned to the bootcamp phase whilst some 150-250 (12-20%) innovators are transitioned into the stage-gating phase by midterm.

Results of programme data analyzed for 14 of 16 regions, showed at midterm, more than 8000 innovators had been recruited. Of these, 1211 were transitioned to the *bootcamp phase* of which 148 were transitioned further, to the *stage-gating phase*. The results imply a 220.0 percent performance at the *recruitment/scouting phase*, 96.9 percent performance at *bootcamp phase* and a 98.7 percent performance at *stage-gating phase*, at programme midpoint.

A disaggregation of these results by the atypical attributes of the innovators; location, sex and disability status, showed the programme implementation strategy remained loyal to programme design. More than 50 percent (51.23%) innovators that transitioned into the bootcamp phase, were from rural areas. By sex, 56 percent innovators were female whilst by disability status, 15 percent were persons with disability with 85 percent being persons without disability. This ratio of disability status surpasses the current national ratio of 8.0 percent persons with disability to 92 percent persons with no disabilities

The case study respondents attribute this level of performance to four major facilitating factors. The first is the *relevance of programme design* and the *effectiveness of the implementation strategy*. Secondly, the *deliberate selection, on merit*, of a mix of government and non-government sub-partners, each with its distinctive experiences leveraged in facilitating each of the three phases. The third factor was the *programme on-boarding activities* organized by the main partner, which brought clarity to sub-partners, on

the responsibilities and expectations of their involvement in the programme. The fourth factor identified was the *resources; financial and technical*, made available for programme implementation at each phase, particularly for the participation of atypical innovators.

Exposure to programme implementation also produced positive unintended outcomes, which are early indicators of programme ownership and hence sustainability foot prints. The first, is the demand from community/district level stakeholders for feedback on the evaluation and selection of innovations. This demand emanates from a sense of programme ownership and responsibility, rarely achieved by most programmes.

Other unintended outcomes include personal level transformations resulting from exposure to female lecturers at the various phases of the programme. This exposure resulted in personal level decisions not to continue in cultural and religious stereotype mindsets, which is to the benefit of atypical stakeholders. These unintended outcomes need to be documented to inform reflections/reviews in programme design and implementation strategy.

Overall, the YAI programme is on good footing towards a sustainable achievement of targeted outputs but also offer learning opportunities for programme design and implementation strategy improvement for the next phase of the programme. The first learning is that, once there is intentionality the actualization of the concept of inclusivity in programme implementation is possible without undue/unmerited advantage to any population group. The second lesson is the various transformative outcomes/impact, exposure to programme activities at various phases, generated in the lives of innovators.

This ranges from changes in the stereotype mindsets; cultural and/or religious, culminating in decisions to change behavior. It also included transformation of enterprises from limping financially to enterprises attracting huge investment from investors outside the country. This outcome/impact stories need to be intentionally documented also for the lessons they offer.

For the remaining period of the YAI programme implementation therefore, the following recommendations are suggested, among others the;

- i. active integration of community/district level structures into the programme sustainability structures
- ii. formalization of the current informal handholding activities organized by scouting organizations and innovation hubs at the district/regional levels as part of the programme sustainability system
- iii. integration of the problem tree analysis and SCAMPER sessions into the same phase, possibly the bootcamp phase to free time for MVP development at stage-gating phase.
- iv. ensuring the reorientation of the MEST staff interacting with atypical youth innovators to use more personal tones than impersonal ones
- v. convening stakeholder forums on the evaluation findings to agree on the way forward
- vi. documentation and harnessing of unintended programme outcomes for programme sustainability at least at the community levels

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Description of Intervention

The YAI programme, is a vehicle being leveraged, by Mastercard Foundation, to contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the Young Africa Works (YAW) strategy in Africa. The objective of the YAW strategy is to enable some 30 million young people, including the atypical youth and underrepresented groups¹, to be in dignified and fulfilling employment by 2030. The YAI programme is implemented in Ghana and Nigeria with different orientations; the Ghana programme is sector-agnostic whilst it is sector specific in Nigeria²

Mastercard Foundation implements the YAI Ghana programme in partnership with UNDP Ghana. This partnership is founded on commonalities between the YAI programme and UNDP's programmes and initiatives including the Accelerator Lab (AccLab³); leveraging innovations for development and the inclusion of atypical youth and underrepresented youth often 'left behind', in programmes design. These two institutions would also benefit from leveraging each other's programme to enhance their respective programmes' outcomes.

1.1.1 The YAI Programme Theory of Change

The programme theory of change, which governs the YAI programme posits that;

An innovation system, which deploys processes of experimentation and continuous learning, to build a pipeline of diverse actors including atypical youth actors notably women, rural communities and persons with disability,

Can

- i. support African economies, including Ghana, to better manage the looming exacerbation in youth unemployment and underemployment predicted to result from the youth population bulge in 2055 by
- ii. transforming the youth including the atypical actors into co-creators and beneficiaries of innovative development solutions, which generate dignified and fulfilling employment opportunities

if

- i. national and pan-African innovation ecosystems are strengthened to engage the youth in creating job opportunities at scale
- ii. sound and practical models are leveraged to support innovations by atypical youth and strengthening partners' skills and knowledge to meet the needs of the atypical youth

by

- i. creating multiple entry points to enable a high proportion of diverse youth to participate in YAI programmes
- ii. equipping the youth with innovation skills and knowledge
- iii. removing barriers that exclude underserved populations
- iv. making technical and financial support available and accessible to innovators
- v. generating and sharing learnings about innovators' experiences

¹ Includes atypical youth and under-represented groups in the context of YAI, atypical actors are youth from rural backgrounds with low English literacy, no experience of receiving funding, no track record (e.g. bank accounts), young women and Persons with Disabilities

² Mastercard Foundation YAI Programme Summary & Approval Note page 3 of 14.

³ Accelerator Lab (AccLab), a global UNDP facility, which promotes user-led innovative solutions to address development challenges and accelerate development impact.

- vi. unlocking markets and access and distribution channels

then

- i. atypical actors would have improved access to innovation ecosystems
- ii. young African innovators would attract the needed investment in their innovations to meet the product market needs
- iii. regulatory framework for atypical start-ups would be made conducive
- iv. more African start-ups would reach the profitability stage and the incidence of failure of youth-led start-ups would reduce.

then

- i. a critical mass of young atypical innovators with sufficient motivation and high-quality innovation would progress through the YAI programme for the desired impact whilst
- ii. existing networks and partnerships between government, national and local innovators and private (formal and informal) sectors would be strengthened to help identify, refine solutions and create the appropriate pathways to scale.

which would

- i. transform the youth including the atypical actors into co-creators and beneficiaries of innovative development solutions, to generate dignified and fulfilling employment opportunities and by that
- ii. enable African economies including Ghana, to manage the looming exacerbation in youth unemployment and underemployment predicted to result from the youth population bulge.

1.1.2 The YAI Programme Design

Based on this theory of change, a 2.5-year programme was designed essentially, to *identify, capacity build and scale-up* youth-led solutions to spur employment not only in Ghana but also contribute to achieving the Mastercard Foundation YAW strategy objectives. The YAW strategy⁴, has a 10-year agenda with a goal to move at least 3 million (1% of 300 million) African youth from unemployment/underemployment to dignified and fulfilling work. The YAI Ghana programme contributes to this agenda by supporting some 5000 young innovators, over the 2.5-year programme period, through various formative processes at the end of which some 300-500 innovations capable of generating employment opportunities would be scaled-up.

The support involves;

- i. building and refining select innovations for impact, value and scale,
- ii. tutorials in leveraging partnerships and
- iii. the provision of short-term expertise in each innovator's field.

The programme design also tests the strategic hypothesis that the creation of an *inclusive and repeatable* processes to *seek out* and *foster* atypical⁵ actors is critical to unlocking new solutions and earthing jobs at scale. In furtherance of this, the YAI programme rolled out practical models and built the capacity of atypical youth to address societal challenges leveraging innovation.

1.1.3 Programme Implementation Arrangements and Strategy

To facilitate the attainment of the YAI programme objectives, a two-outcome implementation a plan was developed. *Outcome 1* is targeted at the establishment of a coherent and practical model with processes to

⁴ Mastercard Foundation YAI Programme Summary & Approval Note page 3 of 14.

⁵ In the context of YAI, atypical actors are youth from rural backgrounds with low English literacy, no experience of receiving funding, no track record (e.g. bank accounts), young women and Persons with Disabilities

funnel, support and nurture youth-led solutions. *Outcome 2* is aimed at unlocking and strengthening of innovation ecosystems to create high-quality jobs for young people. In all the associated processes, insights about experiences of young innovators are expected to be documented.

These outcomes have one output each, which outputs were to be achieved through the implementation of main and sub-activities. Output 1 (for Outcome 1) has 12 main activities with 24 sub-activities. Output 2 (for Outcome 2) has 2 main activities and 4 sub-activities. The outputs, which are to contribute to the attainment of the respective outcomes, have targets to be achieved by programme midpoint and endpoints⁶.

1.1.3.1 Implementation Arrangements

By the implementation arrangements, UNDP Ghana, the main Mastercard Foundation partner, is to facilitate the implementation processes. The facilitation is to be based on the principles of *lean innovation*, *empathy*, *experimentation* and *evidence*, which combines design thinking, lean start-up with agile methodology ideas. The implementation arrangements include the facilitation of eight (8) processes;

- i. *pipeline structure activation,*
- ii. *solutions submission,*
- iii. *organization of boot camps,*
- iv. *shortlisting/evaluation of solution,*
- v. *process stage-gating,*
- vi. *promotion/deployment of programme support structures*
- vii. *support scale-up and*
- viii. *institutional strengthening.*

1.1.3.2 Implementation Strategy

To implement the programme, a decentralized strategy was adopted, which strategy ensured activity implementation in all 16 regions of the country. Both grassroots and national level NGOs as well as government organizations were engaged in the processes. In addition to the grassroots NGOs, these organizations included the National Entrepreneurship and Innovation Programme (NEIP) and Ministry of Education (MoE), which are government institutions. It also was to include the Ghana Federation of Disability organisations (GFDO), a quasi-government institution, and Meltwater Entrepreneurship School of Technology (MEST), a social enterprise institution.

The UNDP, the main partner, is responsible for programme implementation coordination; first at each of the three programme implementation phases and across all three phases. At the recruitment/scouting phase, on-boarding each grassroots scouting institution and coordinates between these institutions and the collaborating institutions; the Ministry of Education and Ghana Federation of Disability Organizations to identify innovations/innovators. At the end of this phase, UNDP ropes in an independent evaluation team to select innovations/innovators to the bootcamp phase.

At the bootcamp and stage-gating phases, UNDP coordinates programme activities with the sub-partners responsible for each phase, directly. Each sub-partner, however, also work with partners, which, support the respective activities in the phases. At the end of bootcamp and stage-gating phases, UNDP coordinates the selection processes independent of sub-partners. UNDP also coordinates the integration of lessons from one phase into the next.

⁶ YAI Programme Implementation Plan

1.1.4 Evaluation Objectives

The overall objectives of this midterm evaluation are to;

- i. assess *progress towards achievement of project objectives and*
- ii. *determine any signs of project success/failure for early remedial actions to facilitate the achievement of planned results indicated in the project document.*

To this end, the evaluation activities involved the;

- i. **review of**
 - a. project's design,
 - b. implementation strategy and
 - c. an assessment of risks to sustainability and.
- ii. **identification of lessons learnt** to
 - a. improve programme benefits sustainability, and to
 - b. aid the overall enhancement of programming by UNDP and the partners involved in the project.

1.1.5 Scope

As of midterm, programme implementation was fully carried out in 14 of 16 regions. The evaluation activities thus, was limited to respondents in the 14 regions; a cross-section of innovators, scouting organizations, innovation hubs, sub-partners and the main partner, UNDP.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

2.1 Methodology

A mixed method methodology was adopted for this evaluation. In the main, the methods involved the

- i. review of programme documentation
- ii. analysis of quantitative programme output (secondary) data and
- iii. qualitative field (primary) data collection and analyses, and the
- iv. elaboration, discussion, validation and finalization of the draft report.

The methodology also involved iterative discussions/meetings, virtual/in-person, with the EMT including the YAI programme team to seek guidance/clarifications and also to agree on the evaluation activities before and after field work. After the field work, the meetings/discussions included a debriefing on field activities and a presentation of the preliminary findings.

2.2 Evaluation Approach

A multi-prong approach was adopted for evaluation data collection. First, quantitative programme output data harvested from programme database was analyzed by region (14) and the respective characteristics of atypical innovators. The results were then compared to the expected midterm targets to establish performance or non-performance.

Second, the primary/field data collection approach was modeled on the decentralized strategy adopted for programme implementation. An experimentation, which clustered all regions into three bands as part of the decentralized implementation process was undertaken. The evaluation activities were implemented in each band sequentially and lessons learnt in Band 1⁷ informed implementation in Band 2⁸ and lessons from Band 2 informed programme implementation in Band 3⁹. Respondent regions were sampled from these three bands.

To further facilitate primary data collection, the eight (8) programme implementation processes were reorganized into three phases. Phase 1, the *recruitment/scouting phase* comprised all programme activities from pipeline activation to communities scouting, solutions submission and innovations evaluation/selection. Phase 2, the *bootcamp phase* consisted of the call-up of innovators selected for the bootcamps, the bootcamp activities and innovations evaluation/selection for the phase-3, Phase 3, the *stage-gating phase*, also involved the call-up of innovators selected for phase-3, the stage-gating activities and evaluation of innovations at the end of the three stages. This delineation facilitated the identification of success/failure factors and lesson learnt at each phase.

2.3 Sampling Methodology

A stratified purposive sampling methodology was used to identify and select respondent sub-partners, scouting institutions and innovators for the interviewing. The regional clusters, Band 1-3, constituted the sampling frame and the regions, the sampling units. First, the regions were purposefully sampled from each band and a cross-section of stakeholders, exposed to the programme, in the selected region, were also purposively selected based on predetermined characteristics.

⁷ Ashanti, Ahafo, Bono East and Bobo regions

⁸ Band 2- Central, Western and Western North Regions

⁹ Band 3- Upper East, Upper West, North East, Northern, Savanna, Oti and Volta regions.

Ashanti, Central and Western, and Northern regions were selected to represent regions in the three Bands. Ashanti region represented Band 1 regions because of the number of innovators, including the atypical innovators, recruited at the scouting phase that transitioned into bootcamps phase and further into stage-gating phase. The Central and Western regions were selected to represent Band 2 regions because of the innovative experimentation some innovation hubs in the regions were undertaking.

The hubs reportedly, allow innovators terminated at various phases of the programme, to apprentice with them, at no cost, to improve their innovations and/or their innovation skills. Each region has its own strategy. Whilst the innovation hub in the Central region use THRIVE¹⁰ centers in the district capitals to support innovators, the Western region innovation hub use their office space in the regional capital for the same purpose.

For Band 3 regions, the Northern region was selected as the representative region. Unlike the regions in Bands 1 and 2, Band 3 regions were not exposed stage-gating phase at programme midterm. Also, no innovation hubs in the region offer apprenticeship opportunities to innovators yet. These contrasting disparities amongst selected regions offer a learning opportunity to case study how these factors impacted innovators in particular.

2.4 Sample Size

The purpose of collecting primary/field data from stakeholders first, is to understand from their perspectives, facilitating/inhibiting factors that may account for the outputs observed; a ‘wisdom-of-the-crowd’ approach. Case study methodology, which effectively facilitates this approach was adopted for this evaluation. A total of seven (7) respondents were purposefully identified with predetermined criteria, which sample size was based on the recommendations of Hollweck and Yin (2014)¹¹ for case studies. Hollweck and Yin (2014), posit that in case studies, by the seventh respondent, an information saturation point is attained such that no new/additional information can be gleaned from interviewing more/additional respondents.

The seven respondents interviewed for the case study were made up of two innovators from each programme phase and a community leader. The seventh respondent initially was to have been an innovator with any remarkable peculiarities. However, on the recommendations of scouting organizations a community leader; a chief, and assembly member or an opinion leader, was roped in. According to the scouting organizations, they showed ownership and responsibility for the programme at the community level.

In the selection of the six respondent innovators, deliberate efforts were made to select atypical innovators; females, persons with disability particularly rural area innovators. A 2-step criterion was adopted for selecting respondents for each of the three phases. First, their exposure to the programme must have been terminated at one of the phases. Secondly, they must be opposites of each other; one working on the innovation post termination whilst the other does not.

In addition to the innovators and community/opinion leaders interviewed, leaders of the scouting organizations responsible for Phase-1 activities were also interviewed. NEIP and MEST teams were also interviewed on the phases they managed; NEIP for the bootcamps and MEST for the stage-gating phase.

¹⁰ THRIVE- Tracking Hidden Regional Innovations and Visionary Enterprises

¹¹ Hollweck, T. (2015). Robert K. Yin. (2014). Case Study Research Design and Methods. Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation, 30(1), 108-110.

2.5 Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

2.5.1 Data Collection Instruments

Before the fieldwork, separate data collection instruments were designed for the stakeholders. A semi-structured qualitative 5-point Likert-based Return-On-Investment (ROI) questionnaire was designed only for main partner (UNDP) and sub-partners (NEIP and MEST) amongst others, to assess their programme sustainability risk perception. The other stakeholders, on the other hand, were to have been interviewed only for their perspectives about programme implementation challenge/success factors with KIIs, IDIs and/or FGD guides.

In the field however, it was obvious from the direct observations, which showed that the perspectives of *all* stakeholders were equally important in achieving evaluation objectives. The questions in the semi-structure questionnaires and interview guides were therefore amalgamated and administered as KIIs, IDIs and FGDs to all stakeholders.

2.5.2 Data Collection Procedures

The data collection procedure was also modelled as an experimentation to cumulatively improve/rephrase questions in response to regional norms/customs/traditions, whilst maintaining the objectives of the questions. Data collection started in the Western region through Central region to Ashanti region and ended in Northern region. In most cases, the KII or IDI sessions transformed into group discussions as most leaders by default, always invited team members to join the sessions.

The group discussion sessions nonetheless proved productive in all cases, as a mix of English and the local languages were used. Issues, opinions and/or perspectives expressed by a stakeholder or a group of stakeholders were immediately triangulated with other stakeholders either in the same sessions, in other phases and/or regions. Also, opportunity was given to programme sub-partners as well as the main partner to validate their respective perspectives and/or other stakeholder perspectives on issues, and vice versa.

2.5.3 Data Analysis

The quantitative programme data reviewed during the evaluation inception phase was analysed with SPSS¹², which software helped produce outputs disaggregated by location (region) and socio-demographic characteristics of innovators and programme phases. The case study interviews were designed to collect information on factors that facilitated/inhibited programme output achievement. It was also designed to collect perspectives on programme design, implementation strategy, programme sustainability and any other issues for improving the programme. The interview data was analysed for patterns in the responses.

Each of the four regions was treated as a case, in which the seven respondent responses were examined for patterns. Response from each of the four regions were also examined for any similarities/contrasts in the patterns of responses/issue raised/perspectives shared. These were shared/triangulated with the affected organizations/institutions for their perspectives as well.

At the end of field trip a summarized pattern of issues raised and perspectives shared was triangulated with YAI programme team as preliminary findings in post-field work debriefing session. The programme team intimated having picked up similar patterns of issues raised/perspectives shared in programme monitoring visits and already finding relevant solutions.

¹² Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

2.6 Limitations

As with all field data collection exercises, the protocols of respondent willingness to participate in the interviews was respected. The data collection approach was to ensure a cross-section of all stakeholders participated in the process to ensure a balanced representation of views. However, some innovators who could not transition into subsequent phase(s), refused to participate in the process. Adherence to the 'willing participation' concept, thus could result in the 'loss' of some data peculiar to their circumstances to the evaluation.

The programme itself had generated so much awareness that some KIIs and IDIs in communities soon turned into group meetings, with relatives/community members, which could have resulted in loss of personal intimations cogent for programme improvement. Whilst the group meetings have positives to it, it could also mean the loss some intimations obtained only in KIIs and IDIs. To account for this, individual phone calls were placed with targeted individuals however, the individual level responses did not differ markedly from the group response; the group effect.

FINDINGS

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of analyses of both the secondary data and primary data collected phase by phase. The outputs of each phase are also discussed concurrently with issue raised and perspectives shared during the case study (qualitative) interviews.

3.2 Phase 1-Recruitment/Scouting Phase

3.2.1 Secondary/Programme Data

Programme data analysed for phase one showed that by the programme midpoint, more than 8000 innovators were recruited and exposed to phase-1 activities. This compared to the midterm target of 2500 innovators is a 220 percent performance. In comparison with the overall programme target of 5000 innovators, it is a 160 percent performance. Table 1 provides the comparative summary of the outputs at this phase.

Table 1. Innovator recruitment by region

Programme Period	Target	Achieved	Performance (%)
Midterm	2500	8000	220
Programme End	5000	-	160

Source: YAI Programme Report, 2025

3.2.2 Case Study Interviews

3.2.2.1 Facilitating Factors

The case study interviews with scouting organizations, innovators and some community leaders sampled in the selected regions provided some explanation to the level of performance observed in phase-1. The scouting organizations indicated three factors, facilitated this performance;

- i. the programme design, which ensured the inclusivity of the atypical innovators,
- ii. on-boarding training sessions organized by UNDP and
- iii. the facilitation of the scouting work.

With respect to the programme design, respondent scouting organizations indicated the focus of programme design on atypical innovators, was relevant to their existing activities in the communities. Therefore, they leveraged their existing information on innovators, networks and relationships within communities and the support of local government leaders to reach as many innovators as possible. They also indicated the thoroughness of the on-boarding sessions organized by UNDP, the collaboration with GFDO and MoE, and the financial facilitation of all the scouting activities, were crucial success factors for the phase-1 activities.

Community and local government representatives interviewed corroborated the scouting organizations depositions. They recounted how the scouting organizations enlisted them to convince some persons with disability with innovative crafts who initially declined participation in the programme. They also recalled the impact of community/district durbars organized by the scouting organizations, as ‘Innovation Expos’, to climax the recruitment activities, which they believe awoke dormant innovators in the community.

The community leaders indicated some of the ‘Innovation Expos’ were attended by chiefs in their palanquins alongside assembly members and even some District Chief Executives (DCE). They explained their presence was an important endorsement, which heightened awareness about the programme. As a result, parents invited them regularly to see if the crafts of their children, particularly the persons with disability, could pass as innovations.

3.2.2.2 Issues

The two main issues emerged for this phase;

- i. no knowledge about the evaluation criteria for innovations selection in the bootcamp phase
- ii. the lack of feedback on why an innovation was selected/or not selected

The community leaders intimated their lack knowledge of the evaluation/selection criteria and the absence of feedback from the UNDP team on why innovations were selected/not selected leaves them in awkward position at community meetings. They explained, having led the involvement of the community leadership, particularly the chiefs, in the programme activities, they were expected to provide feedback on all associated issues to the communities. They are concerned the YAI programme, in the absence of the feedback, could cost their community credibility.

Interactions with innovators, who could not proceed beyond the recruitment phase confirmed this issue. They were all disappointed their innovations could not make it to the bootcamp phase, having been asked to show case their innovations in public. They were more disappointed that no feedback was provided on their innovations for remedial actions in the future.

Regarding the status of their innovations, whilst some continued working on their innovations some others just resigned working on their innovations. Some even turned down meeting with the evaluator at the first instance. It took the intervention of their scouting organizations to agree to meet the evaluator, albeit reluctantly. Most of those still working on their innovations were however, readily available for the interviews. They also indicated reaching back to their scouting organizations for any possible assistance.

This communication gap has implications for transparency, stakeholder trust and ultimately programme sustainability. Therefore, these issues were raised immediately in the field with the scouting organizations. The issues were also raised with the UNDP team during the post-fieldwork debriefing and preliminary findings presentation session.

3.2.2.3 Responses

The scouting organizations also intimated having no knowledge about the evaluation/selection criteria. They were also not provided any feedback on selection results for innovators. Like the community leaders, they are also concerned for their credibility in the communities.

The UNDP agreed with this finding as a programme communication gap they had also noticed in monitoring visits. They intimated the issue would be addressed in the post-midterm implementation activities. They however, explained the scouting organizations, in initial briefing sessions, were informed about the selection criteria for innovators, which they had assumed would be brought to the attention of the innovators. They however, indicated they would collaborate with the scouting organizations to ensure systematic feedback is provided not only on the evaluation/selections criteria and outcomes but also on the general progress of the programme to innovators and stakeholders.

3.3 Phase 2- Bootcamp Phase

3.3.1 Secondary/Programme Data

This phase was led by the NEIP. A programme team member in a KII intimated that 50 bootcamps were to be organized by NEIP during the entire programme period across all 16 regions. By midterm, NEIP had organized 34 of the 50 bootcamps in 14 of the 16 regions when on average, 25 bootcamps were to have been organized. This output accounts for 136 percent performance at midterm. Tables 2-5 provide disaggregation of participants by, category and location (Table 2, regions and location (Table 3), region, disability and location (Table 4), and region, sex and location (Table 5).

3.3.1.1 Participant Innovators by Category and Location

Two broad categories of innovators were recruited; individual participants (persons with/without disability) and institutional participants (groups and organizations). By programme definition, groups are unregistered associations of individual innovators working together whilst organisations are registered association of individuals working together. The groups or organisations could be for/led by persons with/without disability. Table 2 shows the disaggregation of the participation rates.

Table 2. Participant Innovators by Category and Location

Main Categories	Sub-categories	Peri-urban	<i>Rural</i>	Urban	Total	%
Institutions	Groups	34	32	32	98	8.92
	Organizations	32	37	36	105	9.55
	Sub-total	66	69	68	203	18.47
Individuals	Persons with no disability	210	409	139	758	68.97
	Persons with disability	38	85	15	138	12.56
	Sub-total	248	494	154	896	81.53
Total		314	563	222	1099	
%		28.57	51.23	20.20		

Source: YAI Programme Data, 2025

A total of 1211 innovators were transitioned into the bootcamps however, this analysis is based on 1099 participants who met the criteria for this analysis after data cleaning. By innovator categories, individual participants accounted for 82 percent; persons with disability (13%) and persons with no disability (69%), whilst institutional representatives accounted for 18 percent participants; group representatives (9.0%) and representatives of organisations (10 percent). By location, rural innovators accounted for more than 50 percent (51.23%) participants, peri-urban participants 29 percent and urban participants, 20 percent.

This is reflective of programme design to recruit individuals but also recognizes groups and organizations. The participation rates by location are also reflective of the rural focus of the programme. The intra-individual participation rates of the persons with no disability (85.0%) versus persons with disability (15.0%) more than reflect their respective proportions in the 2021 Population and Housing Census structure for persons with no disability (92.0%) and persons with disability (8.0%)¹³.

3.3.1.2 Institutional Participation by Region and Location

Table 3 shows the rates of institutional participation by region and location.

Table 3. Institutional Participants by Region and Location

Region	Organizations				Groups				All Institutional Participants			
	Peri-urban	<i>Rural</i>	Urban	<i>Sub-total</i>	<i>Peri-urban</i>	Rural	Urban	<i>Sub-total</i>	Peri-urban	<i>Rural</i>	Urban	Total
Ahafo	1	3	3	7	1	1	0	2	2	4	3	9
Ashanti	15	10	8	33	15	4	19	38	30	14	27	71
Bono	2	7	1	10	2	3	2	7	4	10	3	17
Bono East	2	1	2	5	0	2	0	2	2	3	2	7
Central	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	3	1	2	0	3

¹³ Ghana Statistical Service, 2022. 2021 Population and Housing Census Report 2021. General Report Vol. 3C

North East	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	1
Northern	2	4	6	12	6	5	2	13	8	9	8	25
Oti	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Savannah	1	1	0	2	3	2	0	5	4	3	0	7
Upper East	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	2	0	2
Upper West	4	6	10	20	5	10	8	23	9	16	18	43
Volta	1	1	1	3	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	4
Western	2	2	5	9	0	0	0	0	2	2	5	9
Western North	2	1	0	3	0	2	0	2				
									2	3	0	5
Total	32	37	36	105	34	32	32	98	66	69	68	203
%	30.5	35.2	34.3	52	34	33	33	48	33	34	33	100

Source: YAI Programme Data, 2025

On the whole, for all institutional participants, Ashanti (71), Upper West (43), Northern (25) and Bono (17) regions had more participants selected than other regions. This pattern is also observed in the disaggregation of institutional participants into constituents, groups and organizational participants. Participants in the four regions have higher numbers of participants than any region. For group representation Ashanti (38), Upper West (23), Northern (13) and Bono (7) had higher representation than other regions. For organizations, again Ashanti (33), Upper West (20), Northern (12) and Bono (10) regions lead other regions.

A disaggregation of the data by location portrays an almost equal selection of rural (34.0%), peri-urban (33.0%) and urban (33.0%) participants. The disaggregation of the institutional components in the groups and organizational participants, however, depicts a different pattern. There are more rural participants (35.2%) amongst organizational participants than there are urban (34.2%) and peri-urban (30.5%) participants. On the other hand, amongst the group participants, almost equal proportions of innovators were selected from peri-urban areas (34.0%) as were selected from rural (33.0%) and urban (33.0%) areas to participate in the bootcamp.

3.3.1.3 Disability Status of Individual Participants by Region and Location

Table 4 disaggregates individual participants by disability status, region and location.

Table 4. Individual Participant Innovators by Disability Status, Region and Location

	Persons with no disability				Persons with disability				All Individuals			
	Peri-urban	Rural	Urban	-Sub-total	Peri-urban	Rural	Urban	Sub-total	Peri-urban	Rural	Urban	Total
Ahafo	5	17	0	22	2	13	0	15	7	30	0	37
Ashanti	55	94	32	181	7	7	8	22	62	101	40	203
Bono	29	22	11	62	2	4	0	6	31	26	11	68
Bono East	18	29	4	51	2	6	1	9	20	35	5	60
Central	19	15	9	43	6	6	0	12	25	21	9	55
North East	4	19	11	34	2	6	1	9	6	25	12	43
Northern	7	22	13	42	3	2	1	6	10	24	14	48
Oti	7	44	3	54	1	6	1	8	8	50	4	62
Savannah	20	30	5	55	1	8	0	9	21	38	5	64

Upper East	6	20	6	32	2	5	1	8	8	25	7	40
Upper West	5	16	10	31	1	6	0	7	6	22	10	38
Volta	9	34	3	46	5	11	2	18	14	45	5	64
Western	17	15	31	63	0	2	0	2	17	17	31	65
Western North	9	32	1	42	4	3	0	7	13	35	1	49
Total	210	409	139	758	38	85	15	138	248	494	154	896
%	27.7	54.0	18.3	85	27.5	61.6	10.9	15	28	55	17	100

Source: YAI Programme Data, 2025

In general, more innovations from rural areas (55.0%) qualified for the bootcamps than their counterparts from peri-urban (28.0%) and urban (17.0%) areas. The disaggregation by disability status portrays this same pattern. More non-PWD innovations from rural areas (54.0%) qualified for the bootcamps than from peri-urban (27.7%) and urban (18.3%) areas. Amongst the persons with disability innovators also, more rural innovations (61.6%) qualified for the bootcamps than peri-urban (27.5%) or urban (10.9%) innovations.

3.3.1.3 Participants by Region, Sex and Location.

Table 5 provides a disaggregation of bootcamp participants by region sex and location.

Table 5. Participant Innovators by Region, Sex, and Location.

Regions	Female				Male				All Individuals			
	Peri-urban	Rural	Urban	Total	Peri-urban	Rural	Urban	Total	Peri-urban	Rural	Urban	Total
Ahafo	4	22	0	26	3	8	0	11	7	30	0	37
Ashanti	37	74	13	124	25	27	27	79	62	101	40	203
Bono	13	9	5	27	18	17	6	41	31	26	11	68
Bono East	11	15	3	29	9	20	2	31	20	35	5	60
Central	9	7	4	20	16	14	5	35	25	21	9	55
North East	3	8	5	16	3	17	7	27	6	25	12	43
Northern	5	13	8	26	5	11	6	22	10	24	14	48
Oti	4	33	1	38	4	17	3	24	8	50	4	62
Savannah	13	24	2	39	8	14	3	25	21	38	5	64
Upper East	7	22	5	34	1	3	2	6	8	25	7	40
Upper West	2	8	4	14	4	14	6	24	6	22	10	38
Volta	11	32	2	45	3	13	3	19	14	45	5	64

Western	6	11	14	31	11	6	17	34	17	17	31	65
Western North	8	26	1	35	5	9	0	14	13	35	1	49
Total	133	304	67	504	115	190	87	392	248	494	154	896
%	26.4	60.3	13.3	56	29.3	48.5	22.2	44	28	55	17	100

Source: YAI Programme Data, 2025

On the whole, of the 896 individual innovators that participated in the bootcamps, 494 (55.0%) were from rural communities, 248 (28.0%) from peri-urban communities and 154 (17.0%), urban communities. Fifty-six (56) percent (504) of them were female whilst 392 (44.0%) were male. Of the female participants 60.3 percent were rural innovators, 26.4 percent peri-urban and 13.3 percent urban innovators. The male participants selected follows a similar pattern, there were more rural innovators (48.5%) than there were peri-urban (29.3%) and urban (22.2%) innovators.

The patterns observed among innovators selected for the bootcamps shows the programme implementation faithfully kept to programme design of focusing on the atypical youth often neglected in programmes design and implementation.

3.3.1.4 Jobs Generated

By design, innovators terminating at the bootcamp phase, would be able to directly employ 3 or 4 new hands to help with their innovations. Of the bootcamps conducted in 14 out of 16 regions, a total of 4,178 direct jobs have been created by the 1052 graduates post the bootcamp phase. This represents an average of 4 (3.9) direct jobs per innovator, which highlights the strong employment impact of the bootcamp model. Based on the current job creation trend just after bootcamps; 3 jobs/innovator would yield 1,800 new jobs whilst 4 jobs/innovator would yield 2,400 new jobs. Thus, upon the completion of the additional bootcamps in the two regions, an estimated 5978-6578 job would be created. These estimates rely more on direct employment numbers since the innovators tended to under/overestimate the indirect/secondary employment numbers.

3.3.2 Qualitative Interviews

3.3.2.1 Facilitating Factors

The qualitative interviews with innovators, scouting organizations, the sub-partner was every educative. All participant innovators were very loud about the transformative effect of the sessions. Every respondent, without exception, mentioned the problem tree analysis session, as the foremost session that transformed their approaches to innovation thinking.

They mentioned also the camaraderie during the bootcamps and the networking even beyond the bootcamps as gains from the bootcamp phase. The selection of female lectures to deliver the sessions also had such positive impact on the participants that it broke cultural and religious stereotyping norms in some participants. A respondent innovator of the Muslim faith, who comes from family of self-taught fabricators (mechanical engineering artisans) shared his experience. He intimated his parents refused him formal education because of fear of conversion to other faiths, which decision he ascribes to. However, his experience in the bootcamp change his mind. He said (translation)

“I was surprised to see a female with such level of engineering knowledge yet so affable. I tested her on all fronts both during and outside sessions, yet she did not get angry or looked disturbed. I am the champion in this whole district and beyond oo, but this lady has so much knowledge that I had to admit she knows more than me and I learnt some much from her. A female oo”

“I also have female children, and I have resolved they must go to school and I will support them to reach whichever level they can reach”.

The chaperons of persons with disability and the persons with disability shared their own experiences. Apart from the effectiveness of the technical sessions, they also indicated how they felt accounted for at the bootcamps. They mentioned their chaperons being allowed in the bootcamps with them and PWD-friendliness of bootcamp grounds and accommodation facilities as facilitating factors.

They also spoke well of the social accommodation fellow participants extended to them, which made them felt seen and included. A respondent with no disability, corroborated the experiences shared by persons with disability and their chaperons. He explained after the orientation sessions most of them understood the need to see persons with disability as participants and to assist them if need be. However, a decisive act by NEIP, which sent away a participant with no disability, who consistently stigmatized a person with disability in the bootcamp, underlined the importance of the orientation. By that decisive act no such issues recurred at the bootcamp.

3.3.2.2 Issues

The stakeholders at this phase nonetheless, grappled with some issues. The first issue was about the invitation to the bootcamps. They intimated some invitations were sent at short notice and given that they had no prior knowledge of NEIP calling them, they had to verify the information with their recruitment organisations. The scouting organizations did not have any first-hand information either and had to verify with UNDP before getting back to them. This, they intimated further, put some pressure on their preparations. Other innovators also indicated they were made to participate in bootcamp sessions outside their regions.

Interactions with the scouting organizations confirmed they were not officially involved in the bootcamp but had to support NEIP to get in touch with innovators selected. They explained that they did so because of their understanding of the programme design and the outcomes/impact it can create in the community. They therefore stepped in to support NEIP whilst solutions are found to the emergent/contextual implementation gaps. Secondly, they saw the need to put in appearance to assure innovators they were not abandoned and also to handhold some of them during process.

3.3.2.3 Responses

NEIP

These issues were flagged with the NEIP team, and they confirmed the support from the scouting organisation was important in reaching innovators. They explained they were not involved in the evaluation/selection process and therefore had no knowledge of innovators selected apart from the list UNDP shared with them. They further explained difficulties arose because some of the innovators used relatives/friends' phone numbers as their contact numbers.

They indicated when some of the numbers were called, the owners were either not immediately available, no longer in the communities or the numbers were no longer in use. Even those innovators reached successfully, had doubts since it was not their scouting organizations that reached them with the information. NEIP explained, they therefore had to fall on the scouting organizations for support.

This situation, NEIP explained further, accounted for the bootcamps not always fully patronized. This was why innovators who missed bootcamps in their own regions were asked to join bootcamps in other regions. They also confirmed having to rid a bootcamp of a recalcitrant participant who stigmatised a PWD after two cautions, which drove it home to participants that the bootcamp is an inclusive activity.

UNDP Team Response

The UNDP team responded to issues raised during the preliminary results presentation. On the issue of non-involvement of scouting organizations, they intimated NEIP was initially made responsible for communicating the bootcamp information to the innovators selected. However, based on learnings of the difficulties that arose, UNDP, revised the approach to involve scouting organizations in contacting selected innovators in collaboration with NEIP.

With respect to NEIP not being involved in the evaluation and selection of innovators for the bootcamps, the UNDP team explained that NEIP had played a role as a scouting organization before being selected to organize the bootcamps. To avoid biases, particularly unconscious biases, in selecting innovators for bootcamps, NEIP had to be excluded from the evaluation team. They explained further that all scouting organizations were purposively excluded from the evaluation team for the same avoidance of biases, therefore NEIP could not have been included.

On the issue of number days for the bootcamps, the UNDP team contended they also received feedback from innovators who participated in the bootcamp, most of whom found the days sufficient. They however indicated openness to the ideas and would have discussions with NEIP and MasterCard Foundation on the way forward on the issue. On issue of the lectures at the bootcamps being packed and fast they also contend that the feedback received rather indicated the lectures were sufficient in volume and pace.

The team also reacted to the issue of some innovators attending bootcamps outside their region. They explained the situation as arising from a number of factors including the need to secure a minimum number of confirmed participants for a bootcamp at a time. Therefore, if the numbers required cannot be sourced from a particular region, innovators from nearby regions were invited to join.

In doing so however, they explained further, the travel distance is an important decision factor. If the travel distance across regions was shorter than within regions, the across region travel was sanctioned. In such cases, innovators who had travelled outside their region were duly compensated, they added.

3.4. The Stage-Gating Phase

3.4.1 Secondary/Program Data Results

MEST is responsible for the stage-gating phase. Some innovation hubs also supported programme activity implementation at this phase. Tables 6 and 7 depict the participations rates of innovators in the stage-gating processes.

3.4.1.1 Bootcamp Participants Transitioned into Stage-gating Phase

Table 6 shows the number of bootcamp participants transitioned into the stage-gating phase.

Table 6. Stage-Gating Innovators

Region	Boot campers				Stage Gating							
					No				Yes			
	Peri-urban	Rural	Urban	Total	Peri-urban	Rural	Urban	Total	Peri-urban	Rural	Urban	Total
Ahafo	9	34	3	46	7	30	3	40	2	4	0	6
Ashanti	92	115	67	274	78	98	53	229	14	17	14	45
Bono	35	36	14	85	26	27	8	61	9	9	6	24
Bono East	22	38	7	67	17	29	6	52	5	9	1	15

Central	26	23	9	58	8	11	4	23	18	12	5	35
North East	7	25	12	44	7	25	12	44	0	0	0	0
Northern	18	33	22	73	18	33	22	73	0	0	0	0
Oti	8	50	4	62	8	50	4	62	0	0	0	0
Savannah	25	41	5	71	25	41	5	71	0	0	0	0
Upper East	8	27	7	42	8	27	7	42	0	0	0	0
Upper West	15	38	28	81	15	38	28	81	0	0	0	0
Volta	15	46	7	68	15	46	7	68	0	0	0	0
Western	19	19	36	74	14	13	26	53	5	6	10	21
Western North	15	38	1	54	14	37	1	52	1	1	0	2
Total	314	563	222	1099	260	505	186	951	54	58	36	148
%	29	51	20	100	27	53	20	87	36	39	24	13

Source: YAI Programme Data, 2025

Overall 13.0 percent (148) innovations from seven regions; Ashanti, Central, Bono, Bono East, Central, Western and Western North regions transitioned from the bootcamp phase to the stage-gating phase by midterm. Of these seven regions, Ashanti region leads with 45 innovators followed by Central and Bono regions with 35 and 24 innovators respectively. The Western, Bono East Ahafo region follow respectively with 21, 15 and 6 innovators. Western North had the least representation among the seven regions with 2 participants.

3.4.1.2 Innovators by Stages of the Stage-Gating Phase by Region

A disaggregation of the stage-gating phase innovators by the stages of the phase by region portray a clearer picture. Table 7 shows the details.

Table 7 Innovators by Stages of the Stage-Gating Phase by Region.

Regions	Stage 1				Stage 2				Stage 3				Total
	Peri-urban	Rural	Urban	Sub-total	Peri-urban	Rural	Urban	Sub-total	Peri-urban	Rural	Urban	Sub-total	
Ahafo	0	1	0	2	2	3	0	5	1	2	1	4	10
Ashanti	4	7	3	14	8	8	7	23	10	7	8	25	63
Bono	1	1	0	2	3	3	1	7	5	3	2	9	18
Bono East	1	1	0	2	2	2	1	5	3	4	1	8	15
Central	1	0	1	2	1	1	1	3	5	3	1	9	14
Western	1	0	3	4	2	2	3	6	2	2	4	7	17
Western North	0	0	0	1	1	2	0	3	3	5	0	8	11
Total	7	11	7	25	19	20	14	52	28	27	16	70	148
%	28	44	28	17	37	38	27	35	40	39	23	47	100

Source: YAI Programme Data, 2025

As portrayed in Table 7, 47 percent (70) innovators are at stage-3, 35 percent (52) stage-2 and 17 percent (25) in stage-1. For all the three stages, except stage-3, rural innovator participation is relatively higher than peri-urban and urban participation. At stage-1 rural innovator participation (44%) is higher their counterparts from the peri-urban (28.0%) and urban (28.0%) communities.

The participation rate at stage-2 follows the stage-1 pattern; rural innovators have 38 percent participation rate, peri-urban innovators 37 percent and urban innovators, 27 percent. The trend however, changed at

stage-3. Peri-urban innovators (40.0%) show more strongly than counterparts from rural (39.0%) and urban (23.0%) communities. These participation rates compared with the midterm target of 150-250 innovators, shows programme implementation could achieve the 300-500 innovators in targets by programme end.

3.4.1.3 Jobs Generated

Post each stage of the stage-gating phase, the application of the innovations generated jobs. A total of 1,538 jobs have been created so far by innovators participating in the stage-gating phase; an average of 10 jobs per innovator. With a target of 500 innovators for full stage gate participation, this is projected to result in approximately 4,835 jobs upon full implementation.

3.4.2 Qualitative Interviews

3.4.2.1 Facilitating Factors

The stage-gating phase apparently, is the most coveted for the technical depth and financial support offered through the stages. For all innovators, it is the stage of hope and expectation. This may explain the intense disappointment innovators not selected for the stage-gating phase, carry. Even for innovators whose innovations transitioned to stage-1 and/or 2 but not stage-3 still felt disappointed.

Innovator respondents interviewed speak of the depth technical expertise tutored them and the transformative impact it has had on how they process innovation thinking. Respondents indicated a process approach to innovation-thought session; SCAMPER as the session that gave them depth in all the training they received. They added that SCAMPER session was critical for the development of their MVPs and if they had been exposed to the concept much earlier, e.g. at the bootcamp phase, they would have more effectively developed their MPVs.

They argued the problem tree analysis and SCAMPER were the two sessions most mind shifting and probably the most important sessions for creating and refining their innovations outputs. They reasoned that because of the 'funnel strategy' for transitioning innovations through the phases, if the two sessions were taught at the bootcamp phase more innovators could be exposed to those concepts. So that even if they do not transition to the stage-gating phase, by that exposure the programme would have still created a sizeable mass of innovators who would be able think more innovatively.

The involvement of innovation hubs, some of which had participated in the identification/recruitment of the innovators as scouting organizations, in the stage-gating phase activities was also a success factor. Respondent innovators intimated the innovation hub personnel virtually 'handheld' them through the processes. They intimated their presence was only not assuring but they also addressed their concerns informally. They added, post the stage-gating phase, personnel for innovation hubs still paid them visits as they do with others who had been terminated at the earlier phases.

Innovators also commended the other experts that tutored them, particularly the one-on-one budgeting sessions. The patience of the experts in explaining the accounting/financial management concepts and the importance of identifying each budgetary input in the local language was another factor of success. During the interviews an innovator reflectively said (translation);

"Hmnn, you know, I now know why I have been running losses all this while. There were input costs I did not find important accounting for, which leaked profits out of the business. My only problem is the daily record keeping task. When my son returns from school, I'll give him that responsibility"

A PWD innovator also shared her story, which invariably typified the transformation the programme engendered in the personal lives of innovators and the communities. She explained she suddenly became blind in the last week of her final year of university, whilst writing her examinations. According to her, she went through the cycle of denial through to accepting she may be ‘bottled’ up her room eventually, away from society in the absence of assistance.

According to her, the only thing that kept busy was the brewing of a local blood tonic for pregnant women and the anaemic, on demand, which to her was insignificant. However, (translation);

“the YAI programme saw this as a significant innovation and has groomed me to this stage. That liquid product is not only now packaged in tea bags but is also registered by the FDA as product approved for consumption”. “In fact, this programme has given me back my life”.

3.4.2.2 Issues

Aside the commendations on the technical depth experienced at this phase, innovators had some issues with the management of the processes. The foremost issue mentioned is delay in funds release by UNDP. The innovators intimated that MEST was strict with timelines for outputs delivery such that innovators were disqualified from proceeding to the next stage once the timeline elapses.

Innovators also complained about arbitrary cuts in budgets meticulously done with the help of experts assigned them. They intimated, MEST without notice or consultation undertook budget cuts which affected production of outputs. They particularly lamented the attitude of MEST staff responding to their calls to seek explanation for the budget cuts as outrightly authoritative in a ‘take-it-or-leave-it tone.

Some innovators who made it through to stage-2 and even stage-3 had issues with the relevance of stage-2. They suggested for innovators whose products are already in the market, the stage-2 financial resources could be shifted to support their stage-1 or stage-3 activities. This, they argued would be a better use of the resources.

3.4.2.3 Responses

As done for all phases, in this evaluation, issues raised are flagged with all stakeholders for rounded perspectives. The issues raised by the innovators were raised with the innovation hubs/scouting organizations, MEST and UNDP.

The Innovation Hubs

Two innovation hubs, in Western and Central regions, which had also participated in the scouting phase confirmed using the opportunity of their presence as innovation hubs to handhold some of the innovators, albeit informally, because this was a gap they noticed, in the implementation strategy. According to them, post the stage-gating phase, they still handhold the innovators, through visitations, invitations use the facilities at the hub premises for free and/or to join various seminars and Expos. The two innovation hubs, however, adopt different strategies

Whilst the innovation hub in the Western region centralized the handholding activities largely at their premises in the regional capital, the hub in the Central region has decentralized approach. According to the Central region team they, in collaboration with the District Assemblies, created THRIVE centres within the Assembly structures, where they meet innovators, from all phases, including those from other programmes, on designated days for the handholding activities. They also assist/link them to attend various forums, as much as possible, close to their communities to avoid excessive cost.

They indicated cost is often the constraint for innovators in the communities availing themselves of opportunities, hence the decision to decentralize as close as possible to them. They also indicated informally

exploring with some DCEs in the Central region, the possibility of the District Assemblies assisting PWD innovators to participate in innovation seminars and/or Expos with allocations from the Disability Fund from the District Assemblies Common Fund (DACF).

MEST

On the issue of shifting the SCAMPER session to the bootcamp phase, the MEST team indicated openness to the idea once it can lead to the attainment of the programme objectives. They however, indicated that the decision essentially, is a policy level one and thus needed discussion at that level before operationalization.

Regarding the relevance of stage-2 of the stage-gating phase, they indicated the programme is flexible in that regard; an innovator necessarily may not have to sequentially go through all phases. They indicated since they were not involved in the evaluation of innovations at the end of the boot camp phase to determine which innovation could jump the sequence at the stage-gating phase, they had to keep to the process as designed.

They however, contended the ‘irrelevance’ of the stage-2 of the stage-gating phase. They explained, an innovator may have ‘a market-ready’ product by end of the bootcamp, however, by the end of stage-1 where SCAMPER is taught, the resulting MVP would be significantly different from the product qualified from the bootcamp. This ‘new/improved’ product then has to be market tested, at least, for appearance/presentation and affordability, before any scale-up attempts.

They cited a case in the Central region where an innovator already had ‘market’ for local deodorant powder made from waste ‘Fante-Kenkey’ leaves. This product with a niche market in the surrounding communities, by FDA and GSA standards, however, was not admissible for registration or certification let alone, scale-up in its initial form. After stage-1 the product was rebranded an organic product with differentiated packaging volumes and appropriate labelling in three forms: the original powder form, pomade and roll-on forms. Thus, the product in new forms, necessarily had to go through the stage-2 support to market-test the respective presentations and their associated costs, they argued.

Without the benefit of stage-2 support activities, the product which could have remained limited to the local community market, now has the opportunity to access the larger national market, at least. They however, insist to do otherwise is also a policy decision, which must be taken at the policy level before they can operationalize it.

Regarding strictness with timelines, the MEST explained that the programme is essentially an experimentation. Therefore, has to be managed within the agreed parameters to give meaning to observed outputs/outcomes. This, they indicated is important for the distillation of appropriate remedial measures to plug any gaps observed. They, however, considered the finding as an essential feedback which would be discussed with the main partner for the needed adjustments, where necessary.

With respect to the difficult communication between MEST staff and innovators, they indicated the staff would be identified and taken through the necessary orientation to forestall recurrence of such behaviour. They explained that this programme with atypical youth is their first and steep learning curve to the staff used to working with ‘high-end’ innovators with an impersonal approach. The conflict, they intimated, could have arisen from the impersonal approach displayed by the staff when it should have been more of the personalized approach of more listening and appropriate explanations.

UNDP

The UNDP team also noted the findings as an important feedback essential for improved programming. They indicated the findings, largely, confirmed issues picked up in their monitoring visits. They however provided some explanations to some of programme design issues flagged.

Regarding the non-involvement of sub-partners (MEST and NEIP), scouting organizations or innovation hubs in the evaluation processes. They insisted, the arrangement was to prevent any biases that could have resulted from any prior interactions at any level with innovators. They are however, open to suggestions from these institutions on any additional criteria to consider.

With respect to delays in the release of funds to innovators at the stage-gating phase, the UNDP team indicated that this was not a universal phenomenon involving all innovators. They explained the affected innovators had issues with their banking details which persisted till they furnished UNDP with the right banking details. They also indicated having decided already to start the innovator banking details verification processes much earlier than they did, in subsequent programme activities.

Regarding innovators' complaints about brevity of (5-6 week) stage-1 period of the stage-gating process, the UNDP team accepted this finding as valuable feedback. They recognized that the nature of innovations varies significantly, with some products—particularly those in hardware, agro-processing, or deep-tech—requiring more time to reach a minimum viable product stage. They added that if the standardized (5-6 weeks) timeline, which was to ensure consistency in implementation, has inherent challenges for certain innovators then there is the need for flexibility in MVP timelines.

On the issue of communication difficulties between innovators and MEST, the UNDP team accepted the feedback as valuable, which would be used to strengthen coordination between MEST and innovators, subsequently. They intimated the volume of innovators and the technical nature of some innovations may have created communication gaps in certain instances.

With regards to innovators complaints on little/no consultation on budget cuts by MEST, the UNDP team explained that budgeting is an important aspect of capacity building at that phase. It is purposed to help innovators prepare realistic budgets that align with available resources to safeguard core activities of the programme, including direct support to innovators. They contend however that, contrary to the perception of limited consultation, innovators were informed by MEST. Some innovators may have disagreed with the reductions, it does not mean they were not engaged. They indicated however, the issue would still be revisited to provide clarity for both parties.

For the other forms of delay including procurement delays, the UNDP team intimated that a key challenge encountered by their procurement team was that many innovators struggled to clearly specify their requirements in a way that vendors could respond to. This, according to the UNDP team, led to repeated requests for clarifications and adjustments with the risk of procuring items that did not fully meet innovator needs. The other challenge involved high-value items, which by institutional policy had to be procured centrally. This arrangement, they explained required additional time to process together, resulting in the delays.

They intimated the delays were one of the key learnings on the importance of building the capacity of atypical actors to articulate technical specifications effectively. Going forward, they intimated further, UNDP and partners will strengthen this support to ensure smoother procurement and better alignment between innovators' needs and the items procured.

Regarding the issue of innovators' handholding, the UNDP team indicated that from the outset, the scouting organizations' remit, officially, did not include handholding of innovators throughout the process. They admitted the results of handholding at the stage-gating phase in the Central, Western, and Western North regions, demonstrate the added value of involving scouting organizations more directly beyond their initial role. The team indicated going forward, UNDP and partners will explore modalities for closer collaboration between scouting organizations, hubs, and stage gate partners to ensure innovators across all regions receive consistent and structured support.

CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Introduction

A mixed-method approach was adopted to respond to the objectives of this evaluation. Primary and secondary data were collected and appropriately analysed. The results were triangulated between and among stakeholders by phase and by region. The conclusions drawn on the objectives of the evaluation emanate from the triangulation.

4.1.1 Project Design, Implementation Strategy and Risks to Sustainability

4.1.1.1 Project Design Relevance

Responses from the community level stakeholders showed that the project design, particularly the focus on the atypical youth was relevant. The willing participation of chiefs in programme activities, against traditional norms, underscores this relevance. The involvement of district political structures; assembly members and some DCEs in the activities is another pointer to the relevance of project design to local settings. Finally, the collective demand for feedback from the community level seals the relevance of the programme design to the communities.

The scouting institutions, innovation hubs and sub-partners and also UNDP the main partner all agree about the programme being relevant to their existing programs, which they can leverage to enhance the attainment of their respective organizational objectives. This is demonstrated in their willingness to plug programme gaps without prompts of rewards. This is observed in scouting organisations handholding innovators at their own cost. Also, in innovation hubs offering support systems to innovators.

4.1.1.2 Implementation Strategy Effectiveness

The testimony of innovators, particularly the persons with disability, indicating feeling seen and accounted for, is a pointer to success of the implementation strategy. The apparent conflicts between innovators and the MEST in budget accountability also testify to the success of the checks and balances built into the implementation processes to prevent abuse of the implementation system. Above all, the success of mixing national level institutions with regional and grassroot level organisations in programme implementation without any major breaks/hiccups in programme implementation is testament to the effectiveness of the implementation strategy.

4.1.1.3 Program Sustainability

Programme sustainability is on a strong footing as demonstrated in the open-mindedness with which stakeholders approach issues flagged. Their readiness to review actions in the light of feedback received is testament that the programme has robust sustainability structures. Other sustainability structures include the participation of community leaders in identifying innovators/innovations in the communities without any financial expectations from the programme and also, the support from the DCEs.

The use of knowledgeable and astute grassroots organizations as scouts and/or innovation hubs willing to handhold innovators post programme activities is also an important pointer to the robustness of the sustainability system at least up to programme midterm.

4.1.1.4 Enhancement of Programming

The issues flagged by various stakeholders at the respective phases provide opportunity for programme enhancement. It is important for stakeholder consultations to be organized to consider review the program policies in the light issues flagged.

4.2 Conclusions

4.2.1 Progress towards achievement of project objectives

The secondary/programme data analysed shows the programme performed beyond the expectation at all phases at midterm. This is indicative of good progress towards the achievement of the programme objectives by programme end. The indicators include the more than 200 percent (220%) of midterm targets and more than 100 percent (160%) performance at the recruitment/scouting phase (Table 1). At the bootcamp phase, 1211 of 1250 innovators in 14 of 16 regions were trained by midterm (Tables 2-5). At the stage-gating phase 148 innovators participated compared to the 150-250 expected (Tables 6-7).

4.2.2 Signs of Project Success/Failure for Early Remedial Actions

As at midterm, there are more signs of programme success than failure. All stakeholders show openness towards issues flagged. Main partners and sub-partners receive feedback as input for performance improvement, scouting organisations and innovation hubs filling in programme gaps whilst waiting for remedial actions to be officially sanctioned, at no cost to the programme. The main partner willing to review programme design/implementation strategies are all signs of programme success.

However, some programme failure opportunities, do exist if the programme implementation strategy fails to leverage sustainability opportunities offered at the community and district assembly levels. These opportunities have been manifested in the demand from community leaders including chiefs and DCE for feedback on innovators from their communities/districts at each implementation phase. This is an opportunity to informally integrate them as part of the programme sustainability structures.

The failure opportunities also exist if issues raised by innovators and other stakeholders are glossed over with no remedial actions.

LESSONS LEARNT

5.1 Introduction

The Ghana YAI programme experimentation offers a lot of learning opportunities, which could be adopted/adapted for improved programmes design, implementation and sustainability.

5.2 Programme design

The programme design was intentional about the inclusivity of atypical youth in every phase of the programme. A framework which identified, without ambiguity, atypical youth was provided, which buttressed the intentionality of the design. Despite the inclusivity agenda, the innovations of both the atypical or non-atypical youth were assessed equally without any advantages to the atypical youth.

The results of the YAI programme at midterm shows inclusivity without undue advantage to the target population is possible, once there is intentionality.

5.3 Programme Implementation

The YAI programme implementation arrangements also underscored, effectively, the intentionality of the programme design. It involved a curious mix of government/non-government organizations/institutions for the implementation activities. Each of the organizations/institutions appropriately on-boarded, brought their specific experiences, which contributed to the success of phases they managed, is also indicative of the intentionality.

5.3.1 Unintended Positive Outcomes

At the end of each phase, innovations were evaluated not only on technical merit but also the potential to generate employment. To avoid bias, particularly latent bias, the process was made independent of all organizations and institutions which managed/participated in the respective phases. The problem which emerged with this bias prevention measure is the lack of feedback on why an innovation was selected/not selected. This was a huge disappointment to stakeholders in the communities; the innovators and families, assembly members, chiefs and even DCEs.

The clamour for feedback at these levels obviously, is an outcome of the successful involvement of the communities and their leaders in the scouting processes. Probably, this outcome at that level was not anticipated but a good indication of programme ownership. This outcome needs to be harnessed for programme sustainability at the local level. Without it, the lack of feedback will become a sustainability risk, eventually.

The programme design, essentially was output driven i.e. number of employment opportunities innovations can generate. There are however, transformative outcomes, which exposure to the programme is generating in the lives of innovators. These outcomes do not necessarily count for employment generation but are crucial transformations, which need to be accounted for/documented as part of programme achievements. Two examples would suffice.

First, an innovator was exposed to the programme only at the recruitment phase. According to her, she received a call whilst preparing a batch of pineapple juice for a Food Expo at their district capital. The caller, the district assembly official responsible for Expo, informed her he had recommended her pineapple juice as an innovation to the YAI programme. The programme official called and scheduled an in-person meeting.

She intimated the official asked her to prepare to show the team the uniqueness of her pineapple juice, for which reason she should be considered for the programme. This request, she indicated troubled her so much so that on the day of visit, she was so engrossed thinking about what to say about the uniqueness of her pineapple juice that the last batch of the pineapple juice she was preparing got ‘burned’ into a brownish syrup. Frustrated, when the team arrived, she showed them ‘burnt brownish syrup’ in addition to the normal pineapple juice.

After the tasting the ‘burnt brownish syrup’ a member of the team remarked ‘it tasted like a pineapple concentrate’. She googled the word ‘pineapple concentrate’ after the team left and learnt indeed she made pineapple concentrate by accident. She exhibited the ‘burnt brownish syrup’ at the Food Expo under the label ‘pineapple concentrate’.

The label attracted a group of African-American tourists visiting the Expo. A tourist was excited with the taste of the ‘pineapple concentrate’ made some calls and then asked for samples. That began a partnership, which led to the purchase and installation of a world class concentrate making machine from China. The lady now exports no less than 20 barrels of pure pineapple concentrate to the US monthly, with an arrangement which amortizes the loan (for the machine) from profits generated.

Reflecting on the story during the evaluation visit, she did not hesitate to ascribe the progress/outcome in her enterprise to that simple question of ‘what is so unique about your pineapple juice that would qualify you out of the lot?’ She affectionately relabelled the question ‘sakora-headed’ question, when she found that YAI programme official who posed the question was a balding young man.

By the YAI programme standards the ‘brownish pineapple syrup’ could not make it beyond that recruitment visit. Even with this transformation, by the same standards, the ‘innovation’ would still not qualify for any phase of the YAI programme because it did not generate any additional employment. At best some staff would be reassigned from the concentrate unit to other units, a type of staff reduction. It thus may be necessary to rethink the evaluation criteria for qualifying innovations from one phase to the other.

The second example, is the transformation of cultural and/or religious stereotype mindsets to more open ones. As shared earlier in this report, an artisan of the Muslim faith, denied formal education for fear of conversion to other religions, resolved to support his female children to go to school to any level they are capable of. This decision, according him, was the result of his interactions with a female lecturer, which experience so enamoured him to making personal exception for his female children against religious edicts.

Finally, the participation of chiefs in “Innovation Expos” organized by scouting organizations in their communities, in their palanquins, is a break from tradition with serious consequences, including destoolment. The fact that these chiefs knew the innovators included persons with disability but participated in the fair and even interacted with them at their stands was highly unusual. This is because in some tradition, some chiefs have no direct interaction with persons with disability.

The break from the traditional protocol, without any consequences is a silent but huge transformation in the traditions. The resultant effect is that persons with disability in such communities are no longer objectives of ridicule, they seen as assets. Thus, anyone ridiculing persons with disability in those communities is reported to the chief’s palace and promptly dealt with. This is another unintended programme outcome which must be harnessed for programme sustainability at least at that level.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To assure programme success and sustainability the following recommendations are proposed, among others,

Recommendation	Responsible	Priority	Timeline
Active integration of community/district level structures into the programme sustainability structures	UNDP Team	High	By the commencement of post-midterm activities
Formalization of the current informal handholding activities organized by scouting organizations and innovation hubs at the district/regional levels as part of the programme sustainability system	UNDP Team/ Scouting Organizations/Innovation Hubs	High	-ditto-
Integration of the problem tree analysis and SCAMPER session into one phase, possibly the recruitment phase to free time for MVP development at stage-gating phase	UNDP Team/NEIP/MEST	High	ditto
Ensuring the reorientation of the MEST staff interacting with atypical youth innovators to use more personal tone than impersonal ones	MEST/UNDP	High	ditto
Convening stakeholder forums on the evaluation findings to agree on the way forward	UNDP Team	High	ditto

REFERENCES

Project Documentation (among others included)

YAI Annual Work Plan and Budget 2025

YAI 2024 Annual Work plan signed

Summary and Approval Note LIF

YAI Project Board Meeting Minutes Dec 2024

YAI-Mastercard Foundation Reports Feb, May, Aug and Nov 2024

YAI Mastercard Foundation Reports Feb and May 2025

PQA YAI

Shared YAI Final Learning Report Dec 2024

BTOR -Job Verification Mission Reports Ashanti, Central, Bono, Bono East, Savannah, Western and Northern Regions

ROI Methodology Questionnaire



ROI Methodology
Questionnaire.docx