



LEARNING BRIEF: DISRUPTING THE YOUTH LABOUR MARKET – HARAMBEE AND SYSTEMS CHANGE



PREAMBLE

The challenges relating to youth unemployment are entrenched and systemic. They require solutions that have advanced through proven ideas and initiatives, and are integrated into key systems. They need to be of a sufficient size and duration that they can be scaled up in order to ensure the sustainability of the institution, the programme, and the impact. In 2010, Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator was launched with the express intention of tackling South Africa's significant (and even then increasing) challenge of youth unemployment. Undertaking a considered and learning-driven journey over the last 10 years, Harambee has begun to see the results of an approach which has been focused on "a realignment of the underlying institutions, relationships, functions, incentives, norms and/or motivations within the labour market with a view to realising a higher (outcome-focused) equilibrium" (Co-impact handbook, 2019, p. 10).

This learning brief reflects on the systems change approach that has been at the heart of Harambee's 10-year journey: on the manner in which Harambee has sought to tackle the youth unemployment crisis in South Africa, in a way that recognises that, in complex situations, many of the elements

in a system are interacting with each other and changing each other, creating feedback loops that might change what already exists. (Eyben, 2005). In this complexity, the approach that Harambee adopted, has reflected not only the acknowledgement of these interactions and changes, but also the need for constant improvisation, which, as Eyben notes, is often the most reasonable action to take, rather than focusing on control and order (Ibid).

In her book *Lean impact*, Ann Mei Chang identifies three principles of lean impact: Think big, start small, and relentlessly seek impact. And the *Co-impact handbook*¹ offers principles for systems change: Start with a transformative idea; Focus on a key lever or "fulcrum"; Ensure strong leadership; Build an effective coalition of key actors; Constantly keep a focus on learning and adaptation; and Expect to manage shifting norms. These principles for impact and for systems change have been used to frame this analysis of the Harambee journey, and are returned to in more detail in Part 4 of this brief, where we look at the overarching learning and consider how these both demonstrate the value of these principles, as well as offer insights that further enrich this picture.



¹ Co-impact handbook, 2019, Accessed at <https://www.co-impact.org/handbook/>



1 UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM HARAMBEE IS SEEKING TO ADDRESS

The Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator was established to tackle very low rates of youth employment in South Africa. Historical inequalities mean that, in South Africa, unemployment is a function of race, education, gender and geography – young people live far from opportunities for employment, and transport to both seek and keep work is often prohibitively expensive. This makes it extraordinarily difficult for anyone, and particularly young people, to make the move from 'outside' the labour market, to being an 'insider'. Young people in South Africa are likely to remain outsiders, since the employment rate among young people, under the age of 27, who are looking for work is below 50%. Between 2008 and 2020, the number of young people in jobs has declined in real terms². This dismal picture is largely the result of South Africa's systemic failure to create new jobs, due to long-term low levels of economic growth. This, coupled with a weak education system that does not adequately equip school leavers for employment, and is simply not large enough to cater for the number of young people interested in further education and training. Of the 70% of young people who are not employed, more than half are also not in any form of education or training. There are few opportunities for youth in both the formal and informal economy and poor linkages between work-seekers and jobs, work experiences, or entrepreneurial support. This is exacerbated by the reluctance amongst employers to offer work opportunities to young people, and the barriers to entry that are frequently placed in the way of young work-seekers. Within this, the organisation identified the following specific problems:

- Poor work-seekers don't know where the jobs are, nor do they have a network of family and friends in employment who can share information about jobs. In addition, many entry-level jobs are not advertised but are offered 'internally' to connections of existing employees; working people often share information about available jobs on transport to work or other places where working people gather.
- This lack of a network means that poor work-seekers also find it difficult to look for, secure or keep jobs; transmit good interview skills and work readiness; provide useful information about career paths and how to apply for further studies.
- Even if poor work-seekers are able to overcome these barriers linked to a lack of a network, finding jobs to apply for requires expensive transport, and money for

printing of CVs or data to apply online.

- If ultimately they find a job, many jobs are short-term and young people can become unemployed again after four or six months and have to begin the cycle again; young people are also often completely ill-equipped (due to inadequate guidance at school or access to working role models) to navigate the complexities of the workplace, to engage with supervisors, and to work effectively in teams.
- And in addition to these challenges, young women are particularly prejudiced for a myriad of reasons: they are constrained by socially imposed childcare and other family care obligations; many women lack the confidence of their male counterparts; they are less likely to complete school; they spend more of their households' resources on transport; and women face sexual harassment which may constrain their job seeking and their ability to keep a job.

Harambee recognised that there have been significant levels of expenditure to address these challenges with low rates of return on this investment. This is exacerbated by the lack of coordination amongst key role players, low levels of efficiency and disjointed systems. Harambee has sought to be a disrupter in order to impact positively on young people, on employers and on society as a whole by removing systemic barriers creates more opportunities for all.



² Harambee, 2020, Inclusive growth for young women and men: Our vision for systems change.

2 AN OVERVIEW OF HARAMBEE'S EVOLUTION: A PHASED APPROACH TO IMPLEMENTATION

2011 – 2013: Proof of concept

Between 2011 and 2013, Harambee focused on proof of concept, refining the problem and the possible solutions to learn about what could work, what needed strengthening, and what was needed to expand the reach of the organisation and engage other role players in the youth employment field.

The key objectives in this phase were to change how employers saw young people; how young people could build networks and increase income in their households through employment; and what policies were required to enable and support these changes.

Five large companies, who were committed to partnering with Harambee in addressing the youth unemployment crisis and which also had significant potential for taking young people into entry level jobs, were engaged. These entry level jobs were then carefully profiled to understand what 'kind' of young people would succeed and flourish in the jobs. This process was known as 'demand contracting' and involved a diagnostic process with employers to define the value proposition and secure placements.

Harambee then moved on to sourcing- initially focusing on a cohort of 40 young work-seekers from very poor households, historically excluded from the labour market and at risk of long-term unemployment, but with potential to integrate into the formal economy. This cohort was targeted to disrupt the queue, as these are the young people who usually do not have their own networks or means through which they are likely to access work opportunities or exposure to the formal economy. So finding work for them was a start in support of more inclusive hiring. The social means profile also ensured that the candidates' income could significantly improve the living standard and opportunities of their broader family, household, and community.

This group was then screened; their potential and behavioural attributes and competencies were assessed; and they were matched to the 'found' jobs in the five companies. Before

Objectives: Proof of Concept

- Positively influence employer attitudes around giving work opportunities to young people
- Enable disadvantaged and marginalised young people to access social networks and mainstream employment opportunities
- Increase levels of income in families of young people in the programme
- Contribute to effective policy development and programme design for youth employment programmes and initiatives

being placed, all the candidates underwent fit-for-purpose, work readiness competence and behaviour interventions to 'bridge' them into the workplace. After they were placed, Harambee worked with employers and the young people to support the process and track progress.

During this phase, 780 young unemployed people were placed in income-earning positions. As, or even more, important, was the infrastructure and systems developed over these two years: an operational model, team, infrastructure, IT capability, processes and systems to enable delivery at scale. In addition to this, the foundations for systems change were laid through an increased awareness around the skills, challenges and needs of young work-seekers, as well as through Harambee's recognition of the importance of partnerships. Harambee had initially partnered with Yellowwoods, a private investment group, to undertake the proof of concept, and then quickly brought government into the eco-system that they were growing to support youth unemployment. The partnership between Harambee and Yellowwoods was broadened to include the JobsFund (within National Treasury). This, together with development partners, created a strong foundation for Harambee to begin to diversify and access additional placement opportunities as well as widen the pool of candidates that Harambee could progress into the economy.

Harambee successfully proved that youth from poor households, with no prior work experience, could perform and progress in the formal economy.



2 AN OVERVIEW OF HARAMBEE'S EVOLUTION: A PHASED APPROACH TO IMPLEMENTATION

2014 – 2019: Building solutions for scale up

Over the next five years, Harambee used the learning from the first phase, elicited from both their own reflective practice and feedback from youth and employers, to adapt and test three aspects of its model: implementing scalable solutions to the challenge of youth unemployment; building the eco-system; and testing its model in a different context. The objectives for this phase focused on deepening and broadening the impact of the programme for employers and for young people, and for the communities from which the young people were drawn. Also, in this phase, Harambee started to deliberately focus on building the evidence base for shifting systems and policies.

Harambee started this phase with a target of 10,000 young people in earning positions, and by June 2018 Harambee had actually placed more than 18,000 young people in jobs; and more than 15,000 young people had self-placed in income earning opportunities after going through various Harambee processes. In addition, more than 56,000 young people received some form of training through Harambee.

The vast numbers of young work-seekers were 'touched' by a defined suite of work-seeker support services designed and continually refined by Harambee. Harambee got better at sourcing young people – they reached out by putting 'feet on the street' in the most marginalised communities, encouraging young people into Harambee opportunities; they adapted their mobi-app to ensure swifter responses. They spoke to young people who had left employers into which they had been matched, and heard about the impact of high transport costs. This resulted in them trying to ensure that young people were recruited to jobs that were only one taxi ride away from their homes. Harambee also saw that young women work-seekers were experiencing particular employability constraints and worked to overcome some of the barriers that had been identified - by providing flexibility for female candidates to address childcare issues; deferring programme entry if a woman was pregnant; and offering transport stipends for women attending bridging programmes to ensure safety.

Harambee also continually engaged with employers and changed its matching and bridging strategy to better meet employer requirements. They did so by working with employers to understand the need to match into 'job families' rather than single jobs, in order to ensure flexibility and progress in the workplace. The bridging programmes were expanded and some of the content taken online. Services provided to employers were increased to assist them to develop assessment processes appropriate for specific jobs,

Objectives: Building Solutions for Scale Up

- Positively influence employer attitudes and behaviours about providing work opportunities to young people who are first-time work entrants
- Enable disadvantaged and marginalised young people to access sustained employment opportunities and social networks
- Enable disadvantaged and marginalised young people to access tools that they can use to seek further opportunities
- Increase levels of income in families and communities of young people in the programme
- Serve as a catalyst by creating an evidence base that can contribute to programme design and policy development for youth employment programmes and initiatives

and to improve their induction processes, and adopt more inclusive HR practices. Harambee worked with employers in traditionally male dominated sectors such as the green economy and the digital economy to identify opportunities for young women entrants, and strategies for ensuring that these young people would retain their jobs.

Critically, during this period, Harambee used the evidence that it was collecting to advocate for more inclusive hiring, particularly for young women. These shifts away from reliance on a school leaving certificate, not only increased Harambee's ability to match young people to different types of jobs based on their understanding of psychometric profile, interest and competence, but also changed the way that employers thought about hiring young people. The system was starting to change.



2 AN OVERVIEW OF HARAMBEE'S EVOLUTION: A PHASED APPROACH TO IMPLEMENTATION

The surging demand from young people, not least evidenced by Harambee being named as the seventh favourite brand in South Africa among low-income earners, meant that Harambee needed to expand the possible opportunities in which to place young people. This recognition was swiftly addressed by a two pronged approach: in the formal economy Harambee sharpened its focus on unlocking demand and creating new jobs in sectors such as business process outsourcing, installation, repair, maintenance (IRM), tourism, and digital. At the same time, Harambee supported young work-seekers with the skills for self-placement and, in the informal economy Harambee provided information on community-level income generating opportunities, such as micro- and social- enterprises.

Institutionally, Harambee - together with employers, government, and impact investor partners - has collectively developed an impact bond - Bonds4Jobs - to finance disruptive skilling models and optimize conversion rates from learning to earning. To shift the skilling system to address the 'demand supply mismatch' and entry-level skills scarcity in growing sectors like digital tech, installation, repair and maintenance, and in advanced sales and service. These jobs were chosen as many of them do not necessarily require the formal (and often irrelevant) tertiary qualifications, but they do require fit-for-purpose demand-focused skilling and work readiness interventions.

At a local government level, Harambee built a partnership with the City of Johannesburg, which forged new pathways for young people to access public employment. Harambee then gained provincial recognition and has played an important role in supporting Gauteng province's Tshepo 1 Million, which is "a youth skills empowerment initiative by the Gauteng Government designed to break down the barriers that young people encounter when looking for work opportunities."

Harambee also began to play an increasingly important role in the wider eco-system of players involved in the youth employment space: it built solid partnerships through effective programme implementation with local and provincial government in Gauteng and the Eastern Cape, which together with the already strong relationships between Harambee and national government, provided a platform

for eco-systems change within a national framework. To further build the eco-system and influence systems change, Harambee arranged and hosted knowledge sharing and networking events and conferences for different players. These included representatives of all tiers of government, employers, the private sector, trade union members, academics from higher education institutions, NGOs and development partners (both South African and global). These engagements all supported building of communities of practice in ways that sharpened strategies and thinking in the field and ensured that these become more oriented to supporting systemic change, in order to more effectively address youth unemployment at a larger scale.

This also ensured that Harambee and other parties in the eco-system were able to build working relationships across nearly all the national government entities that direct economic policy, higher education and training and labour. Harambee's credibility in this space was recognised by the then Deputy President of South Africa, who welcomed Harambee's model of inclusive hiring and data-driven matching and their pathway management approach. Indicating that this was a powerful complement to government services such as those offered by the Department of Labour (now Department of Employment and Labour).

Over and above Harambee's convening role, it also added value in this space through reflecting on challenges it had encountered in an open manner and, based on their data and analysis, working with others to find pragmatic solutions. As a result of these leadership investments and interactions, Harambee created a space where partners could collectively reflect on, and contribute to, national planning and policy in education-to-employment transitions.

The Value of the Harambee Model for Elsewhere in Africa: Rwanda

In 2018, Harambee entered into a partnership with the Rwanda Development Board and Rwandan Ministry of Youth to develop the Rwanda Youth Employment Accelerator - a pathway management system for Rwandan youth. This was based on Harambee's experienced in South Africa, however it was adapted taking into account the Rwandan context, which is far more informal than the South African. The learning from applying the model in this context is now being applied to South Africa and its informal sector.

Harambee demonstrated how to achieve social impact at scale in order to solve seemingly intractable problems, and provided a case study of good practices in match-making interventions within the most difficult segment of the market: long-term, unemployed, entry level work-seekers



2 AN OVERVIEW OF HARAMBEE'S EVOLUTION: A PHASED APPROACH TO IMPLEMENTATION

2020: Activating the network effect

By the beginning of 2020, Harambee had established itself as a pathway manager within the wider eco-system, and was working tirelessly with employers, government, and development partners to grow inclusive opportunities for young people. This phase sees Harambee move beyond numbers and build the tools and capabilities to support government, policy makers, employers, and social investors to develop large-scale solutions needed for systems change. The goal being the creation of an inclusive labour market that addresses the entry-level demand-supply mismatch and also accelerates inclusive growth. The impact of COVID-19 has not derailed Harambee from this objective but has in fact demonstrated its ability to pivot effectively.

Since inception, Harambee has placed over 170,000 young people in jobs and work experiences and has partnered with over 500 businesses in South Africa and Rwanda to achieve this. All the while, Harambee has been systematically growing its reach and building partnerships: from the early pilot for 40 people, through seeking solutions to scale its model to galvanising plans to institute systems change.

In particular, Harambee's seven years of work with the Presidency (through the National Planning Commission, the Department of Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation, and the Human Resources Development Council), has positioned Harambee as an anchor partner in the country's plan to tackle the problem of inclusive economic growth³. This has allowed Harambee, playing the role of a pathway manager, to fulfil a key facilitation role in the eco-system.

Harambee in the Pandemic

- Harambee has been able to leverage its core competencies and its capacity to engage young people and ensure that they have voice, in order to inform its work with multiple partners in and outside of government in the launch of a COVID-19 communications campaign that, by June 2020, enabled five million young people to access accurate information about COVID-19
- Harambee staff also helped businesses to use and make sense of government relief programmes
- In doing this work, and through its interaction with businesses about their changing demand, Harambee has been able to build an evidence base from real-time data. This revealed what businesses need, what challenges they are facing, and what kinds of interventions can be put in place to enable young people to meet this demand

Objectives: Activating the Network Effect

- Advocate for labour market-wide change that promotes inclusive employment policies, practices and outcomes
- Move beyond numbers and also build the tools and capabilities that can support government, policy makers, employers and social investors in developing large-scale solutions needed for systems change to drive an inclusive labour market that addresses the entry-level demand-supply mismatch and also accelerates inclusive growth
- Catalyse, grow and make accessible new income-generating opportunities that can absorb excluded youth
- Adapt the operating model to remain responsive and capable of servicing a spectrum of labour absorption activities, in recognition that income-generating opportunities for young people will not simply be straight lines to jobs but multiple pathways to opportunities for economic engagement



³ Harambee systems change workshop plan



2 AN OVERVIEW OF HARAMBEE'S EVOLUTION: A PHASED APPROACH TO IMPLEMENTATION

This pathway manager approach was institutionalised by the Jobs Summit in 2018, which meant that all social partners including business, government, labour and community representatives have agreed that the development of a pathway manager is a key to developing new entrants to access the economy. The potential of this approach to realise systems change and reach millions of young people has been widely acknowledged, and this initiative has since been adopted by the Presidency as the centre of the Presidential Youth Employment Initiative (PYEI). The Pathway Management Network – or network of networks will be responsible for:

- Identifying and aggregating jobs and opportunities for work experiences, which is the most critical function. This will happen through sector-based approaches (e.g. masterplan processes), government hiring opportunities (e.g. employment stimulus programmes), private sector jobs, as well as entrepreneurship, community, township and rural opportunities.
- Identifying and advocating for policy, regulatory, and other changes that will improve the outcomes of the entire system. These include reducing data costs (zero rating of SA youth by all network operators); reducing barriers to employability by adapting qualifications requirements; and informing incentive schemes to promote youth employment.
- Ensuring that young people are able to access a network of networks through the SA youth platform - receive nudges to jobs, work experiences and income-generating programmes, support for work-seeking, learning, and encouragement across channels (social media, WhatsApp, IVR, SMS, mobile learning) to build their profiles, and a partner portal and mapping of services that connects young people to nearby organisations that offer work-seeker support, learning, and opportunities.

Harambee has worked with partners to build and to demonstrate the value of a 'network of networks' consisting of a multiplicity of networks implemented by partners in and outside of government. In doing this, Harambee and its partners have built trust and credibility, so that young South African work-seekers can access this network of networks to find job opportunities, to earn income, and to stay engaged and connected.



3 OVERARCHING LEARNING FROM THE FIELD

The previous section highlighted the process, impact, and key insights. This section explores the learning that can be drawn from the Harambee experience about preparing for system change, managing system change, and reinforcing that change in tackling youth unemployment.

Preparing for Systems Change – Focusing on the problem, finding the ‘transformative idea’

KEY INSIGHTS FROM THE HARAMBEE JOURNEY:

- Insight 1:** It is possible to include young people that have historically been excluded
- Insight 2:** The skills mismatch can often be quickly and effectively addressed
- Insight 3:** Changing perceptions of young people creates a foundation for new possibilities

Mei Chang writes in *Lean Impact*: “Love the problem, not your solution”⁴: Harambee started the journey by developing a deep and intimate understanding of ‘the problem’ – why employers were so reluctant to give work opportunities to young people; how to create more opportunities given the large numbers of young people entering the labour market every year; how to ‘include’ young people that have been ‘outside’ so that young people are able to find and retain their place in the labour market.

Once the problem had been identified, Harambee developed what some principles of systems change describe as a ‘transformative idea’. In this case, the idea was that it is possible to solve youth unemployment and address inequality at scale and that to do this there is a need to understand employer demand in innovative ways. Harambee achieved this by spending time at the companies, profiling the jobs, working with companies to understand what the job would require and what young people needed to be ‘like’ to succeed in their workplaces. They then used this information to design detailed assessment tools, as well as youth-centric and fit for purpose bridging programmes to ensure that the right young people would be selected for the various employment opportunities, and that they develop the confidence and work readiness to match the needs of employers. Harambee quickly recognised that to meet this demand in ways that supported improved retention of young people, meant that as important as understanding employer demand was the need to really listen to young people. To understand their aspirations and to find ways to create opportunities for young people to build their profile and navigate change in ways that

supported growth. Critically, Harambee was able to identify needs and communicate with both employers and young people, and began a slow process of transforming youth skills and attitudes, and employer systems and behaviours.

It is important to note that the shape of this transformative idea has changed over time: Harambee has recognised the impact of the changing nature of work globally and has expanded its focus on a ‘job’, to understanding a sustainable ‘income generating opportunity’. This shift was made in response to very early learning that there were simply not enough ‘formal jobs’ in South Africa to meet the surging demand from young people and that there is a need to innovate and support scalable models for youth to earn in community, village, township, and informal economies. In making these changes Harambee, has been able to reach far greater numbers making their vision realistic and tangible.

The learning from Harambee demonstrates the importance of retaining a strong focus on the underlying problem. Ashoka, in their guideline to *Embracing complexity* (2020),⁵ emphasise the importance of organisations undertaking an on-going process of learning and adapting as part of the journey towards systems change. Harambee’s focus on the problem and not the solution has ensured that the organisation remained flexible and that it has been able to continually adapt, considering feedback, learning and context. This is demonstrated by the changes that were made to tactics and operations across and within the three phases of Harambee’s evolution, as well as, more recently, by Harambee’s pivot during COVID-19. During lockdown, where placement was impossible, Harambee was able to immediately start offering new kinds of support to keep young people engaged and to help employers and government navigate totally new terrain. As one small example – Harambee’s call centre is, on the surface, a key point of pathway management, and nudging callers into employment opportunities. When the lockdown blocked most of those pathways and opportunities, the call centre supported employers, and Harambee found new ways to work with partners to disseminate accurate and trusted information. As the context changes and the economy begins to open up Harambee has in turn shifted gears to work – as part of the National Pathway Management Network – to enable the sourcing and matching of hundreds and thousands of young people into opportunities created by the Presidential Employment Stimulus Package. These changes all give meaning to the need to ‘start small’: because the final solution is not yet known, and hypotheses must be tested in order to reach scalability and ultimately systems change. At the same time, the need ‘to think big’, a principle required for massive impact according to Chang (2019). The importance of the transformative idea and thinking big is that they create an exponential rather than a linear goal and a different mindset is adopted.

⁴ Chang, A. M, 2019, *Lean impact: How to innovate for radically greater social good*: p. 39.

⁵ Ashoka, 2020, *Embracing complexity: Towards a shared understanding of funding systems change*. Found at <https://www.ashoka.org/en/embracing-complexity>



3 OVERARCHING LEARNING FROM THE FIELD

Managing Change – building systems for change, creating a supportive institutional culture and building strong coalitions

KEY INSIGHTS FROM THE HARAMBEE JOURNEY:

Insight 4: Bringing people into the system is not enough: the system must – and can – build hope

Insight 5: Mechanisms can be introduced that build a greater sense of agency

Insight 6: Strengthening demand side planning is key: moving from specific jobs to profiling job families

Insight 7: The importance of matching and bridging for niche areas of demand

Insight 8: Growing demand in ways that contribute towards a more inclusive economy

Once the problem and the ‘transformative idea’ had been pinned down, it was time to get to work. Another core principle of systems change is to focus on a key lever or “fulcrum”⁶: identifying one aspect of a system that is crucial and can potentially affect change in other parts of the system, rather than taking on the whole system initially.

In Harambee’s case – the ‘fulcrum’ was the interface between employers who want to provide access to new labour market entrants but don’t know how to find the ‘right ones’, and young people who desperately want jobs but can’t get them. Or if they do get them, can’t keep them, and specifically the case management and client service systems that contained a set of operating procedures and processes in order to assist young people on their paths from learning to earning and that worked with employers to understand specific needs and worked to find solutions to barriers to retention. Harambee started very small – piloting the case management and client service process with 40 young people and five employers.

These processes served as the fulcrum for systems change and through these mechanisms, Harambee was able to start shifting the perceptions and behaviours of different partners in its eco-system. In their initial proof of concept phase, Harambee employed a formal case management approach in which every person it came in contact with, was assigned a staff member who tracked their progress on their pathway to earning. This was adapted in the second phase when Harambee realised that this was not a scalable solution - since it is too

resource heavy. However, based on the feedback from young people about the value of the feedback from the staff member (usually a psychologist), Harambee ensured that even in the lighter touch option, young people continued to get feedback from their assessments that both affirmed their capacity and helped them to make choices. In doing so, young people began to change and develop an increased sense of agency through being part of a network. This increased their confidence and increased the likelihood of young people finding and staying in work, and also led to young people helping others in their community to secure work. Furthermore, Harambee evolved their client service processes and their approach to developing job profiles. As part of its role as facilitating systems change in South Africa, Harambee has increasingly begun to work with employer associations in developing job families and aggregating demand and, in addition to placing young people, Harambee also encouraged young people to self-place based on their developing profiles.

Through these iterations Harambee retained its emphasis on understanding demand, in a manner that is embedded in the workplace, in ways that supports more inclusive hiring and demand led-training. So that young people can be assessed, matched and bridged based on whether the role requires a friendly person who can engage clients, a strong logical ability to undertake coding, an ability to deal with the cold if a butcher or to stand if in retail. In adopting this approach, Harambee is transforming the way in which supply and demand is conceptualised, and thus beginning to transform both. These processes enabled Harambee to build trust with employers by building skills profiles for their requirements and skilling youth in work-readiness. This too set up a system change effect when employers began to change their attitudes to employing young people, and reconsidering their own HR and induction practices. Harambee found that while matching and placement are key, what creates a greater impact is when employers shift their HR practices to overcome some of the barriers facing young work seekers and instil a more inclusive economy.

Harambee also recognised that there was a need to do more: to find ways to create new jobs. By focusing on key sectors in the economy Harambee was able to identify, support and capacitate intermediaries to work with the key actors in the identified sectors to understand where the opportunities are; consider what is needed to unlock these jobs; and enable young people to be prepared to access these new opportunities. The value of this approach was well demonstrated in the global business services sector which has been able to – even in this difficult climate – continue to grow and absorb young people.

⁶ Co-Impact Handbook



3 OVERARCHING LEARNING FROM THE FIELD

Harambee also evolved its approaches to 'nudging' young people, through different pathways in the labour market, building partnerships that enabled young people to build their profiles and shifting to provide affordable online learning. This has allowed Harambee to scale up its employability and skills programmes. WhatsApp is being usefully employed to link young people to mentors and to each other for motivation and ideas, which is further supported by gathering market intelligence, including aggregating the range of earning, learning, and other available opportunities across the country for young people in the network.

Leadership in a systems change organisation requires a range of skills and the ability to access expertise in law, policy, technology, marketing, or performance management. As an adaptive entity, leaders are unlikely to be able to predict what skills they need prior to needing them, and yet they must be able to acquire them. Failure is inherent in learning, and leaders need to be explicit about creating a safe space for failure and risk-taking. The ability of Harambee to evolve from demonstrating to accelerating the network effect reflects the nature of the organisation and the extent to which its values and culture encourages reflection and change.

Learning and adaptation is vital to systems change because it recognises the complexity and dynamic nature of social change. This is further highlighted by Chang in Lean impact, who outlines the stages of the learning cycle: build, measure, learn from the feedback loop, and innovative. Chang argues that success depends on the speed of the cycle. This learning brief has captured the extent to which Harambee has given meaning to the need to learn and adapt, in a way that is strongly data driven and that allows for innovative practices which seek to both better meet the needs of the young people and the opportunity holders (such as employers) and increase

efficiencies such that these changes can happen at scale. The example of the adaptations elicited by the learning about the impact of transport costs in young people keeping jobs, reflected in the box below, is illustrative here:

Although Harambee had a strong focus in their bridging programme relating to time management, this continued to be a challenge when young people went into the workplace. As a consequence, Harambee undertook research to find out why young people were not getting to work on time. They realised that many of the young people live far from their work and need to take multiple taxi or bus rides. As a result, Harambee developed the capacity to map where a young person lives, transport routes and the potential workplace. This allowed Harambee to match people with opportunities that are only one taxi ride away. Harambee also encouraged others in the ecosystem to be sensitive to this issue if they could.

This example of transport is both an example of the kinds of adaptations that Harambee makes, and it also reinforces the importance of addressing root causes rather than symptoms. This has allowed Harambee to both practically address barriers relating to transport and to advocate for an awareness of the challenges young people face with respect to transport. As part of this research Harambee also specifically explored the transport issues that specifically impact on young women: this allowed for an awareness of particular issues relating to safety and these insights also fed into the advocacy work undertaken by Harambee with employers.



3 OVERARCHING LEARNING FROM THE FIELD

This prioritisation of learning is illustrated by the extent to which Harambee has prioritised monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) since its inception. This monitoring work focused on understanding how young people moved through the 'funnel' with the case management system and this was then supported by the institution of the 'employment journey' tracking processes which allows Harambee to understand how young people navigate the labour market. This has also been complemented by on-going mechanisms for receiving feedback from employers – with high level client service people – and regular and in-depth

evaluations which ensure that young people have a strong voice in this process. This focus on MEL has also been supported by research studies undertaken by external academics, utilising data generated by the Harambee's monitoring system. These have provided further insights into the ways in which interventions implemented by Harambee, as well as those undertaken by players more broadly in the field, could be strengthened. These different mechanisms all provided evidence to inform the adaptations made throughout the life of Harambee.

The cross-cutting focus on gender

System change requires an emphasis of leaving no person behind. This is strongly demonstrated in the way in which Harambee ensures that young people are not excluded because of geography, because of an absence of networks or because of poverty. In this regard Harambee has sought to understand the specific barriers that young women face and has found ways to address these through the way in which it has set targets and run its bridging programmes. This emphasis is also addressed by making sure the staff are representative and have large numbers of young women both so that young candidates have someone they can relate to and can aspire towards. Finally, Harambee has placed gender firmly on the agenda of partners in the ecosystem and has encouraged employers to review their hiring practices in order to absorb a greater number of young women, as well as advocating for systems changes that assist to overcome the particular barriers that young women face.

Harambee's commitment to a supportive organisational culture includes a gender lens. It empowers women by employing young women of colour, and it is noteworthy that almost two thirds of the leadership team are women. Harambee also has a deliberate strategy to support female work-seekers and models practices in which young women are supported by other young women, which may contribute to both an increased sense of confidence amongst young women.



3 OVERARCHING LEARNING FROM THE FIELD

Reinforcing Change – focusing on long term goals, managing organisational growth through institutionalising mechanisms for effective learning and adaptation, and building a ‘winning coalition’

KEY INSIGHTS FROM THE HARAMBEE JOURNEY:

Insight 9: Optimising public and private funding for more effective (and credible) programming

Insight 10: Building hope and agency allows young people to build resilience and meaningfully shift from beneficiaries to participants

Insight 11: Strengthening a holistic approach to skills development and building linkages ensures that skills acquired have currency

Insight 12: Incentives and ladders are key contributors to an inclusive economy

Harambee has created regular spaces for organisational development and for recognising the work of its staff. In terms of organisational learning, Harambee has an array of opportunities for sharing data, reflections, and insights. There is a dedicated knowledge management team that continually engages with the learning emerging and ensures that staff can internally reflect on these insights in ways that supports both smaller and more substantive iterations in its bid to enhance the impact of its work. The organisation hosts brown bag lunches, staff meetings, and strategic reflection sessions, all to ensure a two-way process: garnering feedback and insights from all corners of the organisation and sharing learning and adaptation strategies, so that they become embedded in operational processes. This is deemed good practice in the literature, as Chang (2019) argues that the learning and adaptation strategy must permeate the whole organisation, rather than be in a learning unit or in the heads of the executives.

Harambee also deepened its learning by testing it in another country, Rwanda. This is important in complex systems because new contexts throw up different problems, and the whole model must adapt to those. The issue of differences between the contexts has aided Harambee in South Africa: since Rwanda has a much larger informal sector than South Africa, lessons learned in Rwanda can be applied in South Africa which allows Harambee more confidence in its work to expand youth income-seeking into the informal economy.

Fundamentally Harambee has reinforced the changes it has introduced through an institutional culture, which is very directed to collaboration, recognising that this can yield greater results than can be achieved alone, simply because the change required is systemic. Harambee began with a small coalition, which grew over time due to Harambee's own efforts to build and sustain relationships. Harambee managed to leverage its work at a local level (City of Johannesburg), to provincial, and then both across provinces and nationally. It did this with a myriad of partners from both the development and private sectors. Through working with partners, Harambee has been able to advocate for labour market-wide change that promotes inclusive policies, practices and outcomes (to enable placements and self-placements). It has also been able to work across partners, in both the private and government sectors, to find ways to institutionalise different forms of demand-led training, and continues to work towards creative funding options to enable a holistic approach to skills development that has currency. In doing so, Harambee is working with partners across the ecosystem in ways that build linkages. This approach to partnership is also evidenced in the way in which Harambee approached its work in Rwanda, where Harambee has worked in innovative ways with partners. Building a ‘winning coalition’ is recognised as an essential component of systems change, because changing a ‘system’ requires work on multiple levels (Co-impact, 2019).

This approach, of building a winning coalition, is also given expression in the way that Harambee has approached the development of a learning and action agenda. Harambee openly shares their learning and insights through a weekly newsletter – entitled Friday Fabulousness – where Harambee reflects on their data to deepen the knowledge of systems change in the field. Harambee also hosts events, which creates a space for Harambee and its partners to collectively learn, exchange ideas, and share expertise to others. The willingness of Harambee to share both its successes and challenges with partners in this open way displays courage and confidence, and demonstrates that Harambee is open to working in partnership to find solutions to challenges. This engagement is dependent only on the commitment to holding, as the consistent thread, the imperative to seek ways to fundamentally address youth unemployment. This evidence-based approach has provided a solid basis for addressing youth unemployment in an informed way.



3 OVERARCHING LEARNING FROM THE FIELD

This approach to the co-creation of solutions is important for garnering commitment from partners who are part of the processes. The interventions generated are therefore often more sustainable than top-down solutions or solutions that are initiated and implemented by only parts of the system. Its success is evident in the responses from young people – who increasingly shape their participation in the programme – government partners, employers, civil society and other development partners. As well as the ongoing way that solutions have been co-created allows Harambee to increase the impact of its work in a manner that is aligned with the priorities of partners in the eco-system, which is an important basis for systems change.

While the focus of this learning brief has largely been on Harambee's role and activities, it is evident from this brief that the extent of the change has only been possible because of the way that development partners have supported these iterative processes and recognised the value of supporting a learning organisation that adapts to learning, context and the wider eco-system whilst remaining true to their mission.

These partnerships are built on an understanding of the nature of system change. Ashoka highlights the need to 'prepare for long-term engagement', stating that there is a need to be realistic about the time it takes to achieve systems change. If the rule of systems change is focusing on problems to be solved rather than particular solutions, then partners in the eco-system need to be prepared for a long-term investment, because finding solutions to intractable problems cannot be achieved quickly or easily. Harambee's partnerships with the JobsFund, Yellowwood Investments and the Mastercard Foundation since their inception, have allowed for Harambee to hold a partnership between public and private as central to its DNA. That these partners have been patient in allowing the Harambee model to develop, change, adapt and grow, has allowed it to evolve such that it is set to contribute to a significant system change.

Alongside the long look, comes the need to manage growth on that journey. If an organisation is to think big but start small, then this requires flexibility on the part of the organisation, in terms of their own organisational ability to embrace change, and for the development partner to allow different pathways

to systems change to emerge (Ashoka, 2020). The literature highlights the importance of development partners, allowing for clear articulation of long-term goals and key milestones, rather than detailed plans and budgets (Co-impact, 2019). This is because in systems change, while the goals do not change over the course of the funding, the means of achieving them does because of the inherent requirement of learning and adaptation. Supporting this kind of growth also requires the willingness of development partners to support these kinds of learning processes, and a willingness to share in the reflection and thinking when challenges emerge.

And finally, in a 'winning coalition' one needs 'winning partners' who embrace a system change agenda and all that it brings. The first issue to engage with is that systems change takes substantive funding. The second issue is that this typically requires collaboration across development partners. Harambee has a number of donors funding different parts of its model, and in order to make this work, Harambee managed to establish mechanisms to work with development partners in a transparent manner that ensures that the funding received is synergistic and optimises impact. Winning partners should be prepared for collaboration, which is a lesson reflected in the literature (Co-impact, 2019), and the willingness of different types of funders to come together in innovate ways is well captured in this learning brief, which points to the insight emerging from Harambee about ways to optimise public and private funding. Harambee, through its Pay for Performance Impact Bond, found ways to bring together investors, to supply working capital in return for a set profit; outcomes funders, to repay investors their capital plus profit on achievement of agreed outcomes; implementers, organisations conducting training, skilling, and linkage to employment opportunities; and evaluators, to assess whether outcomes are being achieved. In doing so they demonstrated the benefits of demand-led funding and further demonstrated that innovation can emerge from partnerships that attempt to transcend more traditional ways of funding and understanding impact.



4 IN CONCLUSION

This learning brief highlights the ways in which Harambee has evolved and the extent to which it has contributed to systems change. The innovative way it has been able to grow both the concept and the practice of pathway management within the South African context, and its ability to learn, adapt and scale, has allowed Harambee to support the Pathway Management Network as part of the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention (PYEI). Harambee's vision is to enable: 1 million young women and men to increase their individual income by accessing jobs, work experiences through public programs, or by starting activities that allow them to earn; at least 5 million young women and men to engage with a national network and participate in the economy. This includes improved psycho-social outcomes and improved employability; and at least 7 million young women and men to have reduced costs to work-seeking, transport, data, and childcare so that they spend on what will be useful to them to access opportunities. That this is an attainable set of objectives, is testimony to the extent to which real change has been realised and the value

of the learning offered through these experiences. In outlining the way in which Harambee has tackled these challenges, we have highlighted the learning that has emanated from these processes, with a view to contributing to a growing understanding of how to tackle systems change in ways that build the resilience of the wider eco-system to sustain these changes "such that millions of people experience meaningful and sustained improvements in their lives" (Co-impact handbook, 2019, p. 10).

The importance of capturing this institutional history with a view to looking forward, is well captured by Rebecca Solnit, *Hope in the Dark*, who observes that,

"You 'row forward' looking back, and telling this history is part of helping people navigate toward the future. We need a litany, a rosary, a sutra, a mantra, a war chant for our victories. The past is set in daylight, and it can become a torch we can carry into the night that is the future."

