

Constructing Futures

Case study: Leticia Turkson



Constructing Futures is a youth-focused participatory project that explores the aspirations of young people working in Ghana's construction sector

The project involved training 10 young Ghanaians in photography so that they could use photos to share their experiences of learning a trade in Ghana's construction sector.

The photographs and their accompanying stories give an insight into their motivations for joining the sector, the challenges they have faced accessing training and meaningful employment, and their aspirations for the future. This case study profiles **Leticia Turkson**, one of the 10 project participants.

Constructing Futures was carried out in collaboration with PhotoVoice, with participants selected from Global Communities' Youth Inclusive Entrepreneurial Development Initiative for Employment (YIEDIE) programme. YIEDIE forms part of the Youth Forward initiative, a partnership led by the Mastercard Foundation.

Leticia is 23-years old and is due to complete her six-month training apprenticeship as an electrician in September 2018. Leticia plans to continue training and apply for the National Vocational and Technical Institute (NVTI) certification before starting her own electrics business.

‘When I completed senior high school it came to a point where I had to further my education to provide for my future. I started teaching in a private school but the salary was simply too low to live off. And so, I had to make a choice.’



This image was produced as part of the Youth Forward initiative in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation. © Leticia Turkson/ODI/PhotoVoice 2017

Before I started my training to become an electrician, I taught in a primary school in Takoradi. Teaching was okay, but I did not really gain anything out of it in terms of skills or furthering myself professionally. The pay was also very poor – I received 100 Cedis (£16) per month, which was not even enough to cover the cost of my food. I come from a large family and have seven siblings, some of them still young, and so at the end of each month I would give my family 30 Cedis of my salary. I could not cope earning such little money and realised I would have to learn a trade if I wanted to become more financially secure. Since I was unable to continue with further education because of my circumstances, I decided I would learn a trade in construction and, as a woman, challenge the stereotype that it is a man’s job.

When YIEDIE made an announcement in the town centre, I found out that there were opportunities to

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enter a construction training programme and so I applied. In 2011, I had been doing some work with a local carpenter and so my first choice for training was carpentry. However, I had to select three areas and, in the end, I was given electricals which I accepted.

My older siblings have typical jobs – a medic, a driver and a seamstress – and so when I told my mother that

I would like to enter into construction, she didn't feel it was an appropriate career pathway for me. She told me that I was too small to do a man's job and that the labour-intensive work would damage my body as a woman and as a future mother. Like many people in Ghana she really believed this, and so forbade me from pursuing the trade. As a result, she did not support me with the transport money I needed to attend the training. Even with this, I felt determined and so I would walk 3.5 miles to the Master Artisan's workshop each day for my placement – it was only when I arrived there that we would drive to the client's house. I faced teasing from my family during my training and at some points they would tell me to leave home and find a more suitable job – 'Stop this and go and occupy yourself with baking', they told me.

I have been training as an electrician for nine months now and my parents are more supportive. They have seen positive changes in me and note the skills I have acquired, along with my boldness and determination. They now realise that I can still work in electrics as a woman, and make money which can help support the family. To have convinced them and demonstrate my determination and ability as a young electrician; I am extremely proud that I have proved them wrong.

YIEDIE provided me with safety clothing and equipment, as well as helping me find a Master for my placement. If I did not have their help I would have struggled, because this was a new sector for me, and I didn't have any contacts in electricals. For other young people, unless they already know someone, not having links to construction companies can act as a real barrier to accessing the sector – they wouldn't know where to start.

I enjoy the training but it is demanding and not without its risks. In any construction work there are many challenges, but working in electricals can be particularly dangerous. If you don't pay attention you can get an electric shock and die. The most dangerous part of my job is the pole work (electrical lines), where it is critical that you focus. I have even experienced an electrical shock myself. I was working with a colleague doing house wiring and, as I was speaking to my Master, I failed to concentrate on holding the live and neutral wires properly. I got a shock and fell off the ladder, injuring myself. I was okay in the end, but for others it can be more serious, even resulting in needing to leave the job, or death. For many, such risks are a deterrent to them joining the sector. I believe, though, that every work has its challenges, so I will continue.



'My motivation has become a reality. When I was young, I decided to be a news reader but by the time I completed senior high school my family was experiencing financial difficulties. Even just to apply to college was 150 Cedis and my family were simply unable to afford this. So, I had to change my goals and enter construction. I was motivated to make this work and overcome the challenges of being a woman in a male-dominated sector. Through hard work I can now see myself as a Madam (female boss) in the future. I have realised I can do even better than the men around me.'

This image was produced as part of the Youth Forward initiative in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation. © Leticia Turkson/ODI/PhotoVoice 2017

Sometimes we work long hours, beyond the standard 6 am to 12 pm shift. We distribute the work between us, meaning that you are reliant on others to cross-check your own work, which can take a very long time. I am in a team of five and I am the only woman. Sometimes, when we go to site, the male workers will tease me but I don't let it discourage me – when you are working with guys, you need to make them cooperate. At times, they will help too if you are struggling. I have heard of other women experiencing sexual harassment in the sector. For example, a Master might not be married and specifically ask for a female worker, before trying to marry you. Often, women will feel pressured in this situation because they want to keep their training placement in order to continue working and earning money. If this happened to me, as part of the YIEDIE project, I could report it to my mentor at Global Communities. Other people would have to go to the police station, which doesn't often happen.

I like my job because it helps me communicate with other people in other trade sectors. You get to see their work and I learn a lot. As a result, once I have completed

my training in electrics, I would like to return to carpentry. For the house work, it's useful to have both.

I want to continue working in the construction sector and in three years' time would like to open both an electrical appliance shop and a workshop. I would employ both men and women – as a female electrician I can be a role model for other women in the industry. As part of the YIEDIE programme, you can apply for a grant at the end of your training, to help you work independently. Ideally, I don't want to work for other people but if I am not successful in being awarded the grant, I will work for a company in order to save money and open the shop. If you work hard, you will pass your assessment and get your NVTI certificate which allows you to apply for jobs with companies. YIEDIE will support trainees with finding a company and providing an attachment letter.

I want to stay in Takoradi and will use the money I earn to support my family. I want to help people more than helping myself, and if I had my own business I could support my family and feel very proud. They would be proud of me too.

The **Youth Forward** initiative is a partnership led by the Mastercard Foundation, Overseas Development Institute (ODI), Global Communities, Solidaridad, NCBA-CLUSA and GOAL. Its focus is to link young people to quality employment or to start their own businesses in the agriculture and construction sectors in Ghana and Uganda.

The **Youth Forward Learning Partnership**, led by ODI in partnership with Development Research and Training, Uganda and Participatory Development Associates, Ghana, works across the initiative to develop an evidence-informed understanding of the needs of young people in Ghana and Uganda and how the initiative can best meet those needs.

The **Youth Inclusive Entrepreneurial Development Initiative for Employment (YIEDIE)** is a five-year project implemented by Global Communities in partnership with Mastercard Foundation and part of the Youth Forward initiative. YIEDIE seeks to promote collaboration among different actors to create economic opportunities for disadvantaged youth. This is achieved by providing training in technical and entrepreneurial skills, empowering youth to gain dignified and fulfilling employment in Ghana's construction sector.

PhotoVoice is a UK-based organisation that specialises in participatory photography projects for social change. For more information about their work, visit www.photovoice.org

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