

Constructing Futures

Case study: Salimatu Saddick



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 **Salimatu Saddick**, 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.

Salimatu is 21 years old and started her six-month training in aluminium fabrication in August 2016. Since then she has continued the placement with her Master Artisan and works alongside seven male and three female colleagues in an aluminium workshop in Sekondi-Takoradi.

This image was produced as part of the Youth Forward initiative in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation.
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‘We must let go of the life we have planned, to accept the one that is waiting for us. When I was younger I wanted to be a soldier, but financial difficulties made this impossible. Now I am working in the construction sector as an aluminium fabricator. I have discovered that life is not about finding yourself: life is about creating yourself.’



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

When I was growing up, I wanted to join one of the security agencies in Ghana, such as the police force, a security guard company or the military. In secondary school, I was inspired to see my friends and colleagues outside in the schoolyard doing their Cadet training of physical activities, saluting, singing and marching. However, after I completed secondary school my family did not have the finances to support me to enter tertiary education, so I had to give up on this career path. Instead, I went to work and earn money as a market trader, working alongside my aunt. Many young people go into trading because you can earn money quickly. I wasn't very happy working at the market, though. Although I was earning money, I saw my colleagues continuing their studies at college and moving into more skilled jobs – I felt left behind.

On my way to my market job, I heard about the construction programme with YEIDIE, and so I went to

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their office and learnt more about the Youth Forward programme. Six weeks later, they called me and asked what type of construction I wanted to do – I chose aluminium, fork-lift driving and electrical work. My first choice, however, was aluminium fabrication as I had seen aluminium products in the market and been inspired by the material and its potential. YIEDIE linked me up with a Master Artisan, with whom I would do a six-month aluminium fabrication apprenticeship, and also provided me with the necessary safety clothing and tools. The clothes and

tools are very helpful: without the gloves I could suffer injury and without the boots they provided I could cut myself. It's a simple thing, but without these safety clothes, many Masters would not allow you to train with them.

Now, when I wear my safety clothing in public, people see me and are surprised. It's rare to see a woman in this sector, but even rarer to see one in the role of an aluminium fabricator. Some comment on how they are impressed to see a woman working in construction. Often other women do not believe that they too could work in construction, but I assure them 'yes you can, of course you can.'

Yet this type of work is not without its challenges. The main problem women face is the physically hard nature of the work. Every day we lift heavy materials and some women think that this type of work uses too much energy, or that it can do damage to their bodies, causing problems if they wish to get married, or start a home and a family. It is true that it is difficult for women to balance construction work with their responsibilities at home; it can be extremely tiring. However, I do not believe the work affects our bodies – it is a misconception. Other women here become pregnant when they are young. During your placement you are trained in your preferred construction area; however, you are not paid, so it is impossible for

young women to train while also feeding themselves and their babies – it is simply not an option.

For these reasons, many women move into informal jobs such as market trading or retail, where they can choose their hours and start earning a low salary quickly. Masters should provide financial incentives to make the sector more accessible to women, and provide counsel to advise them on how to manage their workload.

Sometimes, but not always, a Master will give you a small amount towards transportation: 2–5 Ghanaian Cedis (30–80 pence). I have to ask my mum for transport money and if she can't provide it, I have to walk to the workshop, which is a 5 km journey. We work long hours (10–12 hours per day), so I bring something from home to eat, or go without for the day. I am lucky, though, as not everyone has parents who can help with these things.

I have been working with my Master in aluminium fabrication for two years now. After completing our six-month training, he decides whether to keep us or not, and we decide whether we stay or move on. I have not found a paid job yet and I want to advance my skills so that I can stand out in my trade. Because of this, I have decided to stay on and continue my learning.



'Young people can be incentivised to work in the construction sector when their basic needs are fully provided for. When you are training with a Master, you do not receive a wage and so it is only those young people who can receive financial support while they train for six months, that can enter the sector. Without this young people are prevented from moving into this type of work and therefore take on less skills-based jobs, such as working in market trade.'

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I work alongside men and women at my workshop. There is teasing and sometimes us women are mocked when we do a piece of work that does not turn out right. However, I know that this is not because we are male or female, as we can all make mistakes – even someone who has trained for many years can still make mistakes.

I have not experienced it personally but you do hear of sexual harassment in the workplace. The most common thing you hear of is that when a female construction worker approaches a company looking for employment, she may be asked to do ‘something’ before she gets the job. This is a very bad attitude to have because we should be respected for our good work, not anything else.

YIEDIE offers mentoring and they sometimes visit us at our workshop to offer advice and supervise our work. It leaves me feeling happy with the work I am doing – they encourage me. I feel confident with my newly acquired skills and I want to expand on them to learn another trade, such as electricals. By doing so, I can make my work different and unique. In the market, they sell very similar products from stall to stall. By using two trades I can make products which stand out, making myself more competitive.

In the future, I will be recognised as one of the best aluminium fabricators, making sliding doors, swing doors, show-cases and many other products. I want to travel and learn from other fabricators outside of Ghana to build different skills. The main barrier to me achieving this is finances, so I am using this time to learn and save any money I do make to build my own shop. I wish I could get a workshop space or work for a company that would pay me so I could actually start to save a meaningful amount – if we could be linked to these companies after completing our training, that would support us greatly. Although I want to have my own shop, I understand that before becoming a successful entrepreneur you have to work under someone. This is the reality.

When I told my family I wanted to enter construction and the YIEDIE programme, at first my mum would say, ‘why did you choose this? It is men’s work and is too hard and risky’. These days, though, she is very happy for me because she has seen my work and how I have benefited from it. She will no longer have to give me money, as I will be able to feed myself and be independent. For others, I would say: work hard and do not give up.

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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