




# Towards a micro-credential country model for Uganda

Recognition of non-formal and informal skills for young people in Eastern and Southern Africa through the innovation of micro-credentials

IN COLLABORATION WITH JET EDUCATION SERVICES  
(D. ODONGO AND P. MOLOKWANE)



# Table of contents

Acronyms.....	3
<b>Executive Summary .....</b>	<b>4</b>
 Section 1 <b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>6</b>
 Section 2 <b>State of Micro-Credentials in Uganda .....</b>	<b>9</b>
Navigating the Uganda Qualifications Framework.....	10
 Section 3 <b>Case Studies Findings.....</b>	<b>13</b>
Case Study 1: Refactory - Bridging the Digital Skills Gap.....	15
Case Study 2: Uganda Youth Skills Training Organization - Empowering Youth .....	16
Case Study 3: Norwegian Refugee Council - Empowering Displaced Communities .....	18
Case Study 4: UNICEF & ILO i-UPSHIFT - Fostering Youth Innovation and Entrepreneurship.....	20
 Section 4 <b>Towards a Micro-Credential Model for Uganda .....</b>	<b>22</b>
Underpinning principles.....	24
 Section 5 <b>Strategic Suggestions for Way Forward .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>30</b>

## List of tables, figures and boxes

Table 1: High level summary of case studies in Uganda.....	14
Table 2: Informal economy share of national employment in percentages.....	23
Figure 1: Journey of learners from training to receiving micro-credentials in Uganda.....	11
Figure 2: Overview of the Ugandan training system .....	28

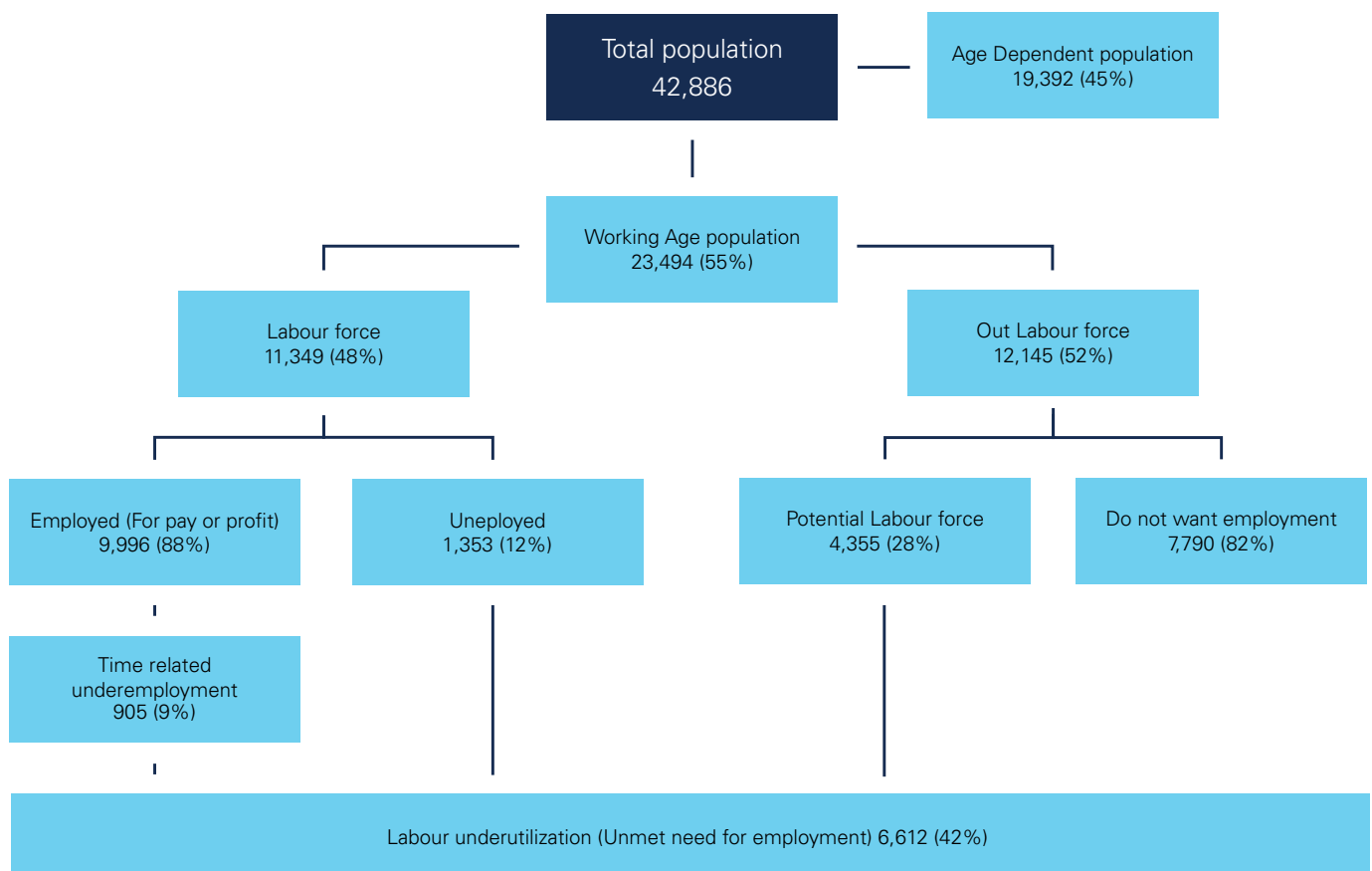
## Acronyms

<b>ATP</b>	Assessment and Training Package	<b>NQF</b>	National Qualifications Framework
<b>BTVET</b>	Business, Technical and Vocational Training	<b>MoES</b>	Ministry of Education and Sports, Uganda
<b>CEBT</b>	Competence-based Education and Training	<b>MOOCs</b>	Massive Open Online Courses
<b>CVTI</b>	Certificate in Vocational Training Instruction	<b>PAS</b>	Practically Acquired Skills
<b>DIT</b>	Directorate of Industrial Training	<b>SADC</b>	Southern African Development Community
<b>EAC</b>	East African Community	<b>ToR</b>	Terms of Reference
<b>EAQF</b>	East African Qualifications Framework	<b>TVSD</b>	Technical and Vocational Skills Development
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organisation	<b>UVQF</b>	Uganda Vocational Qualifications Framework
<b>ITC</b>	Industrial Training Council	<b>UYSTO</b>	Uganda Youth Skills Training Organization
<b>i-UPSHIFT</b>	Integrated UPSHIFT	<b>UBTEB</b>	Uganda Business & Technical Examinations Board
<b>IUCEA</b>	Inter-University Council of East Africa	<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>NRC</b>	Norwegian Refugee Council	<b>TVET</b>	Technical Vocational Education and Training
<b>NCHE</b>	National Council for Higher Education		

# Executive Summary

In Uganda, a nation brimming with youthful energy and potential, the pursuit of gainful employment and economic stability has long been a paramount concern. Youth unemployment, coupled with the demand for a workforce equipped with adaptable skills, has presented formidable challenges to the nation's socioeconomic development. Uganda is a country with a predominantly young population, where a significant portion of its citizens are under the age of 30. This demographic dividend holds immense promise for national growth and development, but it also places great pressure on the labour market to provide opportunities that are

commensurate with the aspirations of the youth. Among the youth aged between 18 to 30 years, which makes 9.3 million (22% of total population), 41 percent are Neither in Education, Employment or Training (UBOS 2021). The mismatch between formal education outcomes and the dynamic demands of the job market has exacerbated issues of youth unemployment and underemployment. As a result, there is an imperative need to explore innovative approaches to equip Uganda's youth with the skills and competencies necessary to succeed in a rapidly evolving economy.



Unit: 1,000 people

Source: UBOS National Labour Force Study (2021)<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.ubos.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/11\\_2022NLFS\\_2021\\_main\\_report.pdf](https://www.ubos.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/11_2022NLFS_2021_main_report.pdf)



The journey to unlocking the potential of micro-credentials in Uganda is not without challenges and complexities. However, as this research will demonstrate, it also holds tremendous promise for uplifting the nation's youth, aligning educational outcomes with market demands, and fostering sustainable economic growth. By examining the emergence, packaging, and transferable skills of micro-credentials, this paper aims to provide valuable insights for policymakers, educators, employers, and young Ugandans, as they navigate the ever-evolving landscape of education and employment in the 21st century.

Micro-credentials emerge as a promising response to these challenges, offering a paradigm shift towards a more inclusive, adaptable, and competency-based approach to skill development and recognition. Through detailed case studies and analysis, the document showcases the

successful implementation of micro-credential programs by various organizations, highlighting their impact on empowering youth, enhancing employability, and fostering innovation and entrepreneurship. The proposed micro-credential model for Uganda is grounded in principles of market-driven skills development, modular and flexible learning structures, and the strategic balance between technical and transferable skills. This model not only aims to bridge the gap between education and employment but also envisions a future where the Ugandan workforce is dynamic, skilled, and fully equipped to navigate and thrive in a global economy. By incorporating feedback from stakeholders and aligning with national and regional frameworks, the document sets the stage for a transformative approach to education and skill acquisition in Uganda, paving the way for sustainable economic development and the empowerment of its youth.





© UNICEF/UN0306556/Abdul

## Section 1

# Introduction



This research investigates current micro-credential projects and initiatives in the case study countries to formulate and design three country-relevant micro-credential models based on practice-focused, actionable, scalable evidence to increase recognition of non-formal/informal skills development opportunities to facilitate transitions or unemployed youth into the labour market.

This research draws on the published terms of reference (ToR) and has been further refined through an inception workshop held with UNICEF country teams and the Nairobi office on 25 April 2023. The research is limited to Burundi, South Africa, and Uganda, and is inspired by an earlier global study on micro-credentials commissioned by the ILO and UNICEF which is due for public release in 2024.

In Uganda, the pressing reality faced by its burgeoning youth population is a landscape marked by limited employment opportunities and a formal educational system struggling to keep pace with the rapid changes in the global job market. The vast majority of this young demographic, teeming with potential and energy, finds itself ensnared in the trap of unemployment or underemployment, often due to a glaring mismatch between the skills they possess and those demanded by employers. This socio-economic challenge is further exacerbated by the sheer number of young individuals entering the workforce annually, thus intensifying the

need for innovative and actionable solutions to foster sustainable development and economic integration. Recognizing this critical juncture, UNICEF has actively responded by commissioning this comprehensive study, underscoring their commitment to supporting youth empowerment through education reform. This study serves as a foundational piece in crafting strategies that leverage micro-credentials as a means to validate informal and non-formal learning, thereby enhancing young people's employability and participation in the economy. The urgency of this initiative cannot be overstated, as it seeks not only to address immediate employment challenges but also to lay the groundwork for a future where every young Ugandan can harness their skills for personal development and contribute meaningfully to the nation's prosperity.

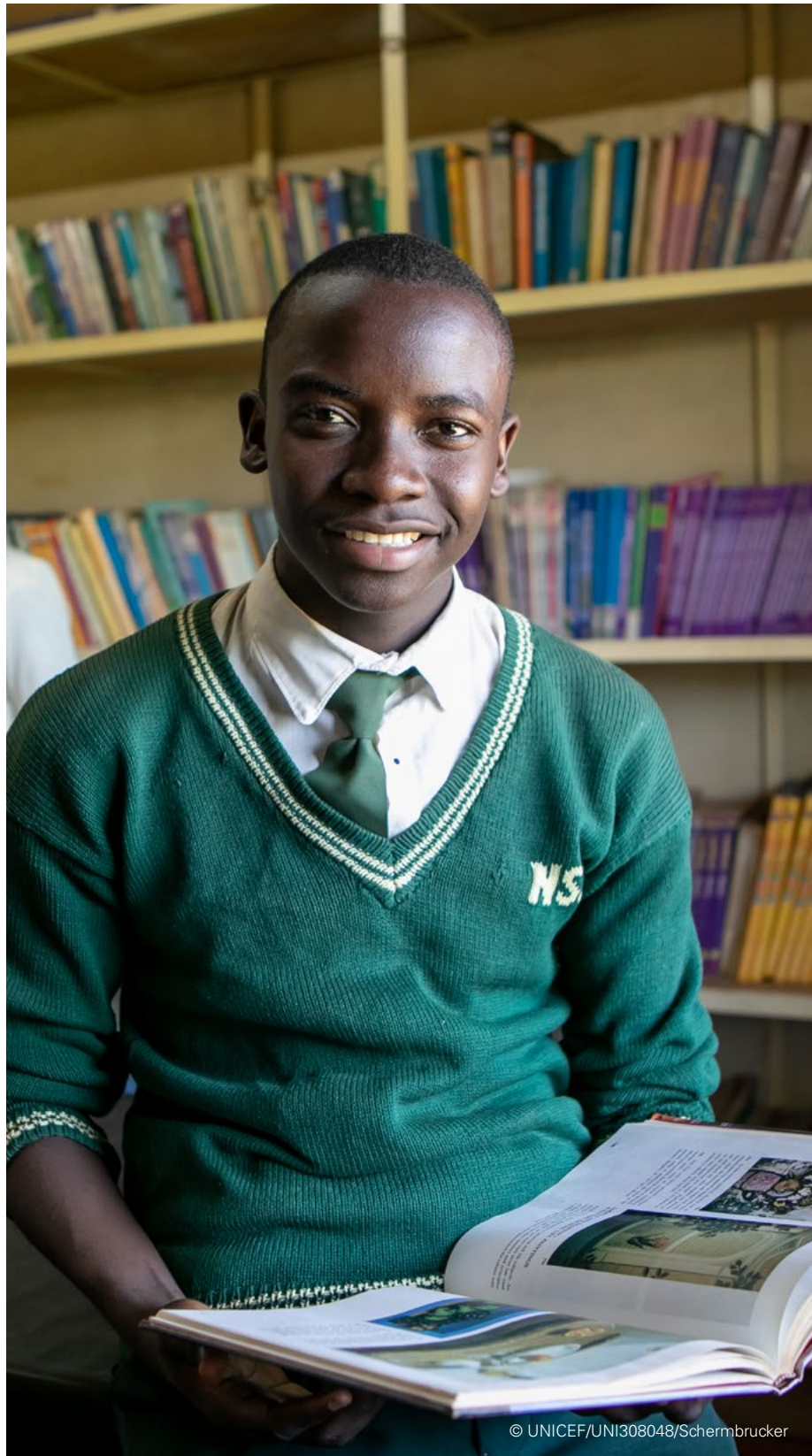
In particular, the research explores how perspectives, expectations, and awareness of micro-credentials among young people, employers (labour demand), and labour market institutions are addressed through the proposed country micro-credential offerings by education and training providers (labour supply). It will address the potential challenges and opportunities associated with micro-credentials, with specific regional and country-level examples to the extent possible, particularly in the context of high youth unemployment in low- and middle-income contexts.



Specifically, this study:

- 1. Reviews existing characterizations of micro-credentials**  
and develops working country context relevant models.
- 2. Researches existing country micro-credential projects**  
to identify challenges, opportunities and employment entry points targeted by micro-credentials and facilitate labour market transitions, especially from the informal to the formal economy, as well as access to decent work opportunities for marginalised young people.
- 3. Investigates the extent to which micro-credentials are recognized and valued**  
by country employers, informal workers, and jobseekers, and their efficacy in facilitating young people's transitions into and within the labour market.
- 4. Addresses how transferable skills credentialing can be implemented**  
to attract employer demand, which gives preference towards technical skills that are specific to a particular job role, occupation, company, or industry.

Building on the outcomes of the global UNICEF-ILO study, this research on existing country micro-credential projects provides context-relevant learnings and intelligence to inform, shapes and positions micro-credentials in each ecosystem. This research aims to produce a practical and accessible output that can be used as a point of reference for future research and debates to advance the agenda of micro-credentials in Uganda.



© UNICEF/UNI308048/Schermbrucker







© UNICEF/UN0145557/Schermbrucker

## Section 2

# State of Micro-Credentials in Uganda



Micro-credentials are most simply defined as a small volume of certified competencies acquired through life experience, work, or study.<sup>2</sup> Micro-credentials can be awarded to learners after they have taken a short course or through recognition of prior learning. In this context, micro-credentials have emerged as a beacon of hope. These bite-sized, skill-focused credentials are designed to bridge the gap between traditional education and the ever-changing demands of the labour market. They offer a flexible, accessible, and targeted means for individuals to acquire the precise skills required by employers, often in a shorter time frame compared to traditional degrees.

Uganda has faced persistent challenges related to youth unemployment, underemployment, and skills mismatch. In the past, traditional educational pathways often fell short of equipping young people with the practical skills and competencies required by employers. The

historical context illuminates the factors that have paved the way for micro-credentials to gain prominence in Uganda's education and training sector. In essence, micro-credentials have the potential to act as a strategic lever in the nation's effort to transform its burgeoning youthful energy into a skilled and employable workforce. By harnessing the potential of micro-credentials, Uganda can transcend traditional educational barriers, offering pathways that are more attuned to the aspirations of its youth and the realities of its labour market. The focus on skill specificity, combined with the agility of micro-credential frameworks, positions them as an ideal response to the national call for educational reform and economic revitalization. This approach not only empowers individuals to take charge of their learning and career progression but also equips them to contribute actively and innovatively to Uganda's economic future.

## Navigating the Uganda Qualifications Framework

In Uganda, a five-levelled TVET sector framework called Uganda Vocational Qualifications Framework (UVQF) is in place with around 300 assessment and training packages based on learning outcomes linked to partial and full qualifications mainly on levels 1-3, and with commitment to expand to level four and five in the years to come. The UVQF was officially introduced through the Business, Technical and Vocational Training (BTJET) Act of 2008 as part of the BTJET's overarching ten-year strategic plan 'Skilling Uganda'<sup>3</sup>. Section 20 of the Act establishes the UVQF which is integrated in quality assurance roles of the Directorate of Industrial Training (DIT), Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) to developing the occupational standards, the Assessment and Training Packages (ATP), accrediting assessment centres, accrediting assessors, conducting competence-based assessments and certification of successful candidates. Section 20 of the Act

also clarifies that UVQF is a mechanism, and Section 10 defines occupational and assessment standards in the world of work, the award of vocational qualifications to learners who meet the set standards implemented under the formal and non-formal education and training. The UVQF, is complemented by the principles of competence-based education and training (CBET) and therefore promotes the skills development programmes in the BTJET sub-sector through flexible modules packaged in the form of ATP.

The BTJET Act of 2008 revitalized the DIT, which had been rendered dysfunctional in 1996 by the repeal of the Industrial Training Act, with its training delivery functions then transferred to the MoES. It is now the body in charge of quality assurance and assessment of technical and vocational qualifications and competencies. The DIT is supervised by the Industrial Training Council (ITC), which advises BTJET policy issues

2 <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000384326/PDF/384326eng.pdf.multi>

3 <https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/2011/skilling-uganda-btvet-strategic-plan-2011-2020-5481>

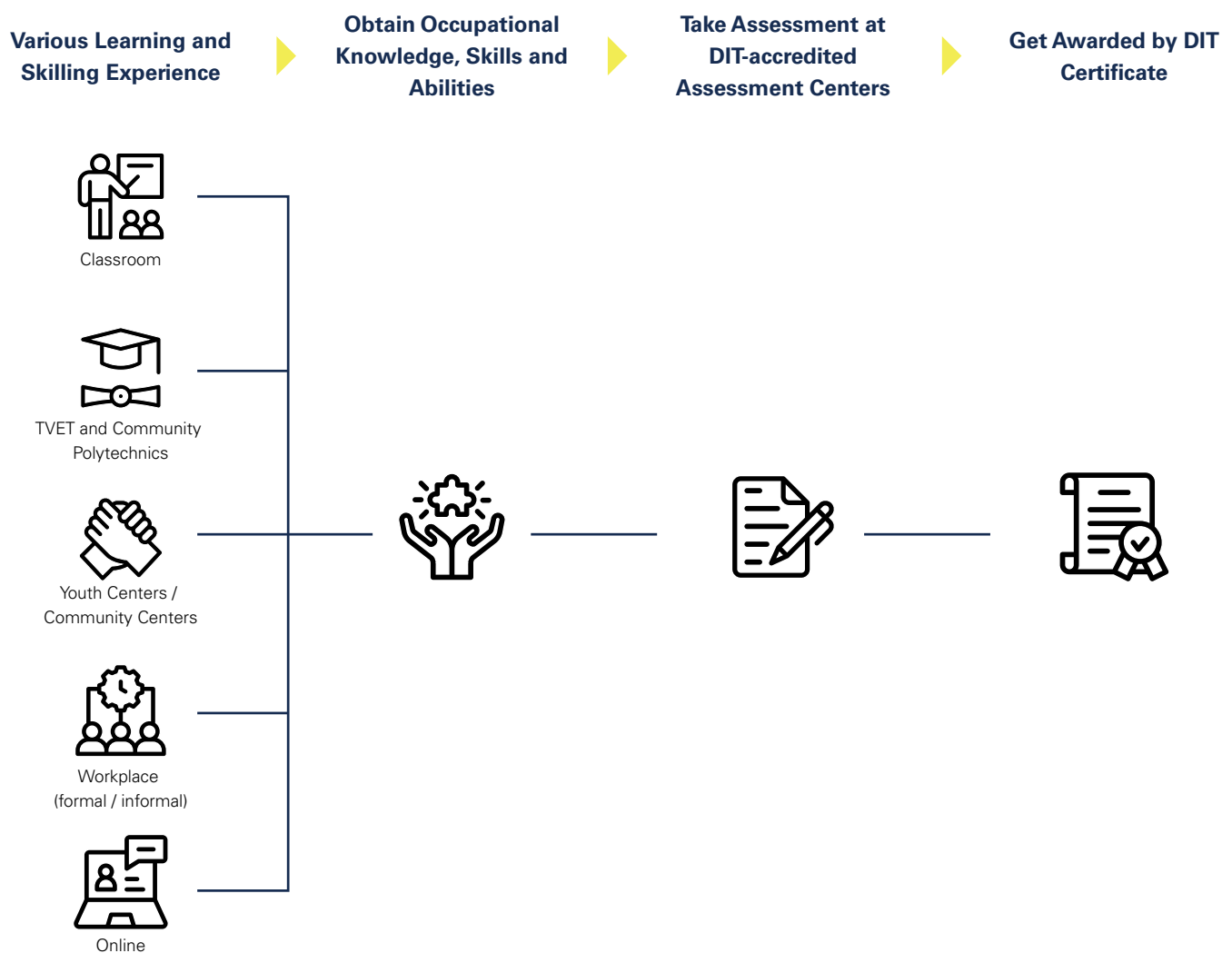


to the MoES. Formed with representation from industry, the Council is committed to ensuring TVET reforms and their operationalization, market-driven skills development in vocational training that are also in line with global skills development trends. The DIT started issuing UVQF qualification certificates with effect from 2009, phasing out trade test certificates. It assures employers that every UVQF-certified individual can perform the relevant occupational

tasks to the level of competence indicated on the qualification certificate. Irrespective of the duration of the training, where they were trained from, medium of assessment, gender, or persons with special needs, learners who have acquired employable skills are encouraged to apply for the assessment by DIT to obtain the certificate recognized both in the Uganda Education System and the Labor market (as in the BTVET Act Sec. 21) and also Internationally.

**Figure 1:**

Journey of learners from training to receiving micro-credentials in Uganda



The DIT implements the Competence-Based Assessment (CBA) and awards the following qualifications:

- ▶ **Modular transcript:** Partial qualification after undertaking modular assessment in a given occupation.
- ▶ **Worker's PAS (Practically Acquired Skills):** A partial qualification after undertaking modular assessment in a given occupation most especially for apprenticeship individuals in the informal sector including the "jua kali", "katwe" and "kisenyi" type of informally skilled artisans.
- ▶ **UVQF level 1:** National certificate for individuals who merit in performing the full occupational skills but under supervision.
- ▶ **UVQF level 2:** National certificate for individuals who merit in performing the full occupational skills under moderate supervision.
- ▶ **UVQF level 3:** National certificate for individuals who merit in performing the full occupational skills at the supervisory level.
- ▶ **UVQF level 4:** National diploma for individuals who merit in performing the full occupational skills at technician level.
- ▶ **UVQF level 4-DVTI:** Diploma in Vocational Training Instruction is offered to BTVET Instructors after 9 months CBET programme.
- ▶ **UVQF level 5-DTIM:** Diploma in Training Institution Management is offered to BTVET Principals and Head Teachers after 9 months CBET programme.

Within this environment of regulated formal education and skills training under the watch of the different government institutions, there is a burgeoning skills training sector on the informal side of the economy. This is led by training providers who have taken it upon themselves to be part of the solution to the skilling and employment challenges already outlined in this report so far. They offer a myriad of skills and competencies to out of school and unemployed youth for transitions into the formal labour market while at the same time engaging the government to provide a mechanism for formalising such training. The next section looks at a selection of these organisation through a case study approach for a deeper look into this landscape of interventions using micro-credentials.





© UNICEF/UNI213111/Prinsloo

## Section 3

# Case Studies Findings



These case studies present a diverse sample of initiatives aimed at skill development and empowerment in Uganda. They underscore the commitment of various organizations, national and international, to cater to specific populations with tailored skill development programs across different modalities and geographical settings.

Each of the case studies provides a unique lens on the potential and practicality of micro-credentialing initiatives, presenting a comprehensive snapshot of how they can be

woven into the fabric of skill development in Uganda. From bridging the digital skills gap in urban centers to enhancing livelihoods in rural and displaced communities, the case studies collectively underscore the adaptability of micro-credentials to meet the nuanced needs of Uganda's youth. In documenting the successes and challenges of these programs, the findings offer critical insights into the role of micro-credentials in fostering a resilient, skilled, and competitive workforce, poised to drive forward national development in an ever-globalizing economy.

**Table 1:**

High level summary of case studies in Uganda

Organisation/ Project	Refactory	Uganda Youth Skills Training Organization (UYSTO)	Empowering Displaced Communities (NRC)	i-UPSHIFT (UNICEF & ILO)
<b>Status</b>	National NGO/NPO	National NGO/NPO	International NGO	United Nations
<b>Location</b>	Urban	Rural/Urban	Rural	Rural/Urban
<b>Specific population</b>	18-35 years old	Disadvantaged young people and women aged 12-35	Young and adult refugees	Adolescents and youth aged 15-24
<b>Skills focus</b>	Digital Skills	Vocational skills & entrepreneurship	Vocational & diversified livelihoods	Social Innovation, Entrepreneurial/ 21st century skills
<b>Modality</b>	Hybrid	F2F	F2F	F2F

## Case Study 1: Refactory – Bridging the Digital Skills Gap

Refactory, based in Kampala, Uganda, is a pioneering initiative founded in 2018, aimed at addressing the growing demand for digital skills in the country. Recognizing that Uganda's youth possessed untapped potential in the field of technology, Refactory was established as a micro-credential-focused institution. It offers short-term, intensive digital skills courses such as software development and coding.

### Key findings



#### Demography of participants

The participants in Refactory's programs typically fall within the age range of 18 to 35 years old. This aligns with their broader demographic of young adults seeking to enhance their employability and gain digital skills. Refactory often attracts individuals who have completed at least an intermediate level of education, such as secondary schools or equivalent. Many of the participants in these programmes have a strong interest in technology and digital skills.



#### Practical skills development

With courses between 1 - 6 months, participants receive hands-on learning that equips them with practical skills that are directly applicable to the technology industry careers in areas such as software development, web development, and data analysis in Uganda's evolving job market. They engage in real-world projects, gaining valuable experiences. Refactory couples traditional face-to-face contact hours with online course delivery.



#### Credentialing

Refactory places a strong emphasis on credentialing that aligns with the practical demands of the modern workforce. With a focus on digital skills and software development, Refactory ensures that its micro-credentials are not only robust but also relevant. Facilitated by DIT-accredited assessors, the credentialing process at the DIT-accredited assessment centre in Refactory involves a rigorous assessment of learners' abilities through practical projects, coding challenges, and real-world problem-solving exercises. These credentials serve as a tangible validation of the hands-on skills and competencies acquired during the program, making graduates highly sought-after by employers in the technical industry.



#### Engaging with employers

Refactory collaborates closely with local and international technical companies, ensuring that its programs are tailored to meet the specific needs of employers. This industry engagement enhances graduates' employability. So far, 1,526 learners have been through the program with 86% subsequently finding employment.



### Sustainability

In terms of program sustainability, Refactory offers supplementary programs to those within the DIT Assessment and Training Packages (ATP), to ensure that their graduates remain relevant and adaptable to the ever-changing technical industry landscape. Furthermore, the academy maintains strong ties with local and international

technical companies to guarantee that, graduates possess skills in demand. Institutionally, Refactory has a viable growth model and seeks diverse funding sources, including partnerships with governmental and non-governmental organisations, to maintain financial resilience.

## Case Study 2: Uganda Youth Skills Training Organization – Empowering Youth

Established in 2004, the Uganda Youth Skills Training Organization (UYSTO) operates in both peri-urban and rural areas, focusing on equipping young people with practical skills for various trades and professions. The UYSTO's micro-credential programs cover a wide range of vocations, from carpentry to tailoring and fashion design.

### Key findings



### Demography of participants

UYSTO's unique strength lies in its ability to reach rural communities, where access to education and vocational training is often limited. By offering micro-credentials relevant to local entrepreneurial and artisanal needs, UYSTO empowers disadvantaged young population aged 12 to 35 years old to become self-reliant. UYSTO also actively promotes gender inclusivity by encouraging young women to participate in traditionally male-dominated fields.



© UNICEF/UN0391487/Siakachoma/OutSet Media





### Practical skills development

UYSTO's approach is deeply rooted in the cultivation of practical skills that empower young individuals in the real-world. UYSTO recognizes that theoretical knowledge alone is not sufficient in today's competitive job market. Therefore, the organisation emphasises hands-on, practical skill development in various trades and vocations through face-to-face delivery. Through immersive in-person training programs, learners are engaged in practical exercises and real-life simulations that mirror actual workplace scenarios. Whether it's carpentry, tailoring, or entrepreneurship, UYSTO ensures that learners not only understand the theoretical concepts but also acquire the proficiency to apply these skills. This hands-on approach not only enhances their technical abilities but also fosters problem-solving skills, creativity, and adaptability. By prioritizing practical skills development, the curriculum delivered by UYSTO equips its learners with the expertise necessary to excel in their chosen fields, ensuring they are job-ready and capable of contributing meaningfully to their communities and the wider Ugandan economy.



### Credentialing

UYSTO places a strong emphasis on credentialing as a means to validate and recognize the practical skills and competencies that students acquire during their training programs. These credentials are earned through rigorous assessments, practical evaluations, and competency-based examinations, ensuring that graduates are well-prepared to meet industry standards and excel in their chosen vocations. UYSTO has a DIT-accredited assessment centre and offers linkages to Uganda Business & Technical Examinations Board (UBTEB) assessment centres, allowing their learners an opportunity for an upward trajectory into higher institutions of learning.



### Engaging with employers

UYSTO often maintains strong relationships with local businesses, which can lead to job placement opportunities for its graduates. Employers may directly hire UYSTO-trained individuals or provide job leads and referrals. In addition to this, UYSTO also provides support and training for young entrepreneurs who want to start their businesses.



### Sustainability

UYSTO actively engages with local communities and industries to align its programmes with the specific needs of the regions it serves. This community-centred approach fosters sustainability by ensuring that training is tailored to local contexts and remains aligned with evolving community needs. UYSTO's programs are designed to be inclusive, reaching out to a diverse range of learners, including disadvantaged and marginalised groups. This inclusivity not only benefits individuals but also contributes to societal sustainability by reducing inequalities and fostering social cohesion. UYSTO also explores diverse funding sources, including grant partnerships, and an in-house carpentry and tailoring workshop for revenue generation, to maintain financial stability.

## Case Study 3: Norwegian Refugee Council – Empowering Displaced Communities

The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) operates in Uganda with a focus on assisting refugees and displaced populations. Recognizing the importance of skill development in empowering these communities, the NRC has introduced micro-credentials programs tailored to their needs.

### Key findings



#### Demography of participants

NRC's micro-credentials target refugees and displaced individuals in Uganda, offering them pathways to gainful employment and self-sufficiency. This diverse demographic encompasses people of all ages with a particular focus on ensuring that the most vulnerable, such as women, children, and marginalized communities, receive the support they urgently need. By directing its efforts towards this vulnerable demographic, NRC plays a critical role in helping them rebuild their lives, access vital resources, and regain a sense of dignity and stability amidst challenging circumstances.



#### Practical skills development

Recognizing that displaced populations often face significant challenges in accessing education and employment opportunities, the NRC strives to empower them with tangible skills that can enhance their self-reliance and resilience. The NRC's practical skills development programs encompass a wide array of vocational and livelihood training initiatives, aimed at equipping displaced individuals with relevant competencies such as carpentry, farming, tailoring, and entrepreneurship through face-to-face delivery. These programmes not only impart practical skills but also emphasize the importance of income-generating activities, allowing beneficiaries to regain a sense of independence and financial stability.



#### Credentialing

Innovatively, the NRC seeks to address the unique challenges faced by displaced populations in Uganda through its DIT-accredited assessment centre, and provides short-term, targeted training in areas such as vocational skills, entrepreneurship, and digital literacy. What sets the NRC's approach apart is its adaptability to the circumstances of displaced individuals, making education and skill acquisition accessible in challenging environments, including refugee camps. These micro-credentials not only enhance employability but also instil a sense of empowerment and self-reliance among beneficiaries, giving them the tools to rebuild their lives and contribute to their communities and host countries.

The NRC's commitment to micro-credentials exemplifies its dedication to addressing the unique educational needs of displaced populations in Uganda, fostering resilience and self-sufficiency in the face of displacement-related challenges.



### Engaging with employers

To ensure that beneficiaries of its programmes can effectively transition into the workforce, the NRC actively engages with employers and the local job market. The NRC fosters partnerships with businesses, organisations, and industries to align its training curricula with the specific needs and demands of the job market in Uganda. This collaboration not only ensures that the skills acquired by programme participants are in line with industry standards but also creates opportunities for job placements, internships, and apprenticeships. By facilitating connections between programme graduates and potential employers, the NRC bridges the gap between skills development and gainful employment, ultimately enhancing the prospects for sustainable livelihoods and economic self-sufficiency among displaced populations in Uganda. This approach not only empowers individuals with practical skills, but also contributes to the socioeconomic development and integration of displaced communities into the host country's workforce.



### Sustainability

The NRC conducts regular assessments of the skill needs in the local job market to ensure that the graduates of its program remain relevant. This ongoing analysis allows the programme to adapt to changing demand, ensuring its long-term effectiveness. They also maintain robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the impact of their learning programs. These feedback loops inform improvements and adjustments, to enhance the program's long-term viability. The NRC also explores diverse funding sources, including grants partnerships, and donor support, to sustain the programme financially. This financial diversification safeguards against overreliance on a single funding stream.

## Case Study 4: UNICEF & ILO i-UPSHIFT – Fostering Youth Innovation and Entrepreneurship

UNICEF & ILO's i-UPSHIFT (Integrated UPSHIFT) programme in Uganda represents a noteworthy case study in the context of micro-credentials and skills development. It is a flagship social innovation and entrepreneurship skills building programme for adolescents and youth. The programme specifically nurtures crucial 21<sup>st</sup> century skills such as creativity, problem-solving skill, critical thinking, effective communication, collaboration, teamwork, hope for the future. i-UPSHIFT is an accredited micro-credential programme (As of July 2024) that is certified by DIT under the name of Vocational Occupation called "Social Innovator".

### Key findings



#### Demography of participants

i-UPSHIFT is primarily designed for individuals in the youth and adolescents age group, typically ranging from late teens to early twenties (aged 15 to 24). This demographic includes both male and female participants, especially out-of-school adolescents and youth. The programme aims to be inclusive and open to young people from various backgrounds, including different regions, urban and rural areas, and diverse socioeconomic backgrounds with a strong focus on the most marginalised including refugees. It emphasizes the development of practical skills that strengthen their resilience and employability, regardless of participants' educational backgrounds.



#### Practical skills development

i-UPSHIFT plays a pivotal role in fostering social innovation and entrepreneurship skills development among the nation's youth and adolescents. Through innovative and community-driven approaches, i-UPSHIFT empowers young participants to identify local challenges and develop innovative solutions. These solutions often require hands-on skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, creativity, teamwork and effective communication, and are delivered face-to-face. i-UPSHIFT encourages participants to transform their ideas into actionable projects, providing them with invaluable experience in problem-solving and entrepreneurship. By equipping young Ugandans with these practical skills, i-UPSHIFT not only enhances their personal growth and self-reliance but also fosters a culture of social responsibility and innovation. This approach contributes to the development of a new generation of change-makers who are poised to address local and global challenges, making a lasting impact on their communities while preparing them to be ready to join the world of work with the sets of skills and competencies acquired through the process.



### Credentialing

i-UPSHIFT methodology is certified by DIT under the occupation named “Social Innovator” established under UVQF governed by DIT of MoES as one of the feasible training methods to equip young people with social innovation and entrepreneurial mindset. Successful participants receive recognition, support, and mentorship from UNICEF and various public, private, CSO and academic partners, which can boost their confidence and open doors to further educational and employment opportunities. In the end of the learning journey, the participants can take an assessment facilitated by DIT in the accredited centers based in each community, and obtain a certificate if the skills and competencies meet the criteria.



### Engaging with employers

i-UPSHIFT’s community-based and innovative entrepreneurial initiatives often lead to valuable connections with local businesses and organizations. Through these collaborations, the participants gain opportunities to showcase their practical skills, problem-solving abilities, and innovative ideas to potential employers in addition to the DIT-issued “Social Innovator” certificate. Moreover, it encourages a culture of self-employment and entrepreneurship, equipping participants with the skills that strengthen their employability and while creating their own employment opportunities as a result. This engagement with employers and the broader job market not only helps participants explore diverse career paths but also contributes to the development of a more dynamic and inclusive local economy, ultimately benefiting both young individuals and the community at large.



### Sustainability

i-UPSHIFT fosters a culture of youth-driven sustainability, where young people take ownership of their communities’ development through their social innovation projects developed through participation in the training. The program emphasises community engagement and partnerships, involving local stakeholders, mentors, and organisations. This community-driven approach ensures that initiatives initiated by i-UPSHIFT participants remain rooted in the local context and are more likely to be sustained and scaled over time. The i-UPSHIFT methodology is being institutionalised through the development of “Social Innovator” ATP, which is going to be implemented through the formal and informal training system such as non-formal education centres and TVET centres across the country. This institutionalisation approach is carried out through the partnership with the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development and other government entities and line ministries to ensure the sustainability and scalability.



## Section 4

# Towards a Micro-Credential Model for Uganda



The pursuit of a comprehensive micro-credential model in Uganda represents a concerted effort to transform the educational landscape and fortify the nation's workforce in the face of evolving economic conditions. This shift towards a skill-specific learning framework is underpinned by the acute need to provide formal employment opportunities in a market where informal jobs dominate, accounting for as much

as 78 percent of the employment sector. With formal job opportunities clustered primarily in the services and industrial sectors, there is a clear imperative to partner with employers and design credentials that not only prepare the workforce for these opportunities but also add value to the predominant agricultural sector through enhanced processing skills and market access strategies.

**Table 2:**

Informal economy share of national employment in percentages

Country/region	Informal economy as % share of national employment
Burundi (estimated 2017)	93.9
South Africa (2018)	45.2
Uganda (2017)	78.0

**Source:** World Bank (2023)

Central to this model is a curriculum that encapsulates the needs of a dynamic job market, leveraging both job-specific skills and transferable competencies. The adaptability of the workforce is key, and so the curriculum must maintain a balance, allowing individuals to adapt to new roles as the economy shifts. Active labour market policies provide the scaffolding for this transition, supporting job seekers and aligning with micro-credential platforms that facilitate the pathway from education to employment. Such platforms are integral to the model, linking skills development directly to industry demands and increasing the employability of Ugandan workers.

The envisioned micro-credential model for Uganda is thus not just an immediate response

to current workforce needs, but a strategic investment in the nation's socio-economic future. It acknowledges the substantial role of non-traditional educational pathways in bolstering the employability of the youth, aligning educational outcomes with market demands, and fostering a more inclusive economy. This model underscores the potential of micro-credentials to serve as a transformative agent, equipping individuals with the competencies necessary for both current and future labour market success. The development of this model is imperative for harnessing the demographic dividend of Uganda's youthful population and steering the country towards sustainable growth and development.



## Underpinning principles

The underpinning principles of the envisioned micro-credential model in Uganda serve as the structural core for addressing the challenges of the local labour market and the educational demands of its youthful population. Together, these principles are intrinsically linked to form a cohesive strategy for improving youth employment outcomes. For instance, the content of micro-credentials is developed in response to market demands, which is then assessed through DIT's competency-based approach, ensuring that the credentials are valued by employers. The capacity to deliver these programs is supported by flexible learning platforms, which are necessary to adapt to the varied needs of learners. Finally, all these efforts are bolstered by an enabling environment created through supportive policies, ensuring that the micro-credentialing system is viable and accessible to all, including marginalized youth. These components create a robust ecosystem for micro-credentials, leading to an agile, skilled workforce ready to meet the evolving demands of Uganda's economy.

### 1. Content (Micro-credentials):

Micro-credentials represent a strategic tool for transitioning into the formal job sphere, specifically in sectors that offer greater stability and growth potential. For the agricultural sector, micro-credentials that focus on value addition, such as food processing techniques or modern agricultural practices, could significantly enhance the marketability and profitability of locally produced goods. Similarly, for the services and industrial sectors, credentials in digital literacy, customer service, and industrial machinery operation would provide a competitive edge to the workforce.

By integrating job-specific skills with transferable competencies such as problem-solving and critical thinking, micro-credentials can foster a workforce that is versatile and adept at navigating various employment scenarios. This dual approach equips learners not only with the technical skills required for immediate employment but also with a skill set that enables them to adapt to changing job markets and technologies, ensuring long-term employability and career progression.

### 2. Assessment (DIT Assessments):

The Directorate of Industrial Training's competency-based assessments anchor the micro-credentialing process in practical skill application, eschewing traditional rote learning evaluations for a more hands-on approach. This shift in assessment philosophy ensures that micro-credential holders can demonstrate their capabilities in real-world

situations, thereby enhancing their value to potential employers. Certifications from the DIT signal to the market that individuals are not just trained but are proficient and ready to contribute productively. Such certifications are crucial in a competitive job market, providing a reliable indicator of skill levels and readiness for the workforce.

For those seeking to further their education, micro-credentials offer clear and structured pathways, enabling credit transfers and the stacking of additional qualifications. This feature is essential in building a culture of lifelong learning and ensuring that education is a continuous, adaptable process that meets the individual's career aspirations and the market's evolving demands.

### 3. Capacity (Delivery Platforms):

The capacity to deliver these micro-credentials hinges on robust and flexible delivery platforms. In Uganda, this includes both traditional classroom settings and online platforms, allowing for a hybrid model of education that can reach a wider audience. This flexibility is crucial in a country with varying access to physical educational infrastructure and differing levels of internet connectivity. The platforms not only deliver content but also provide virtual environments for collaboration, networking, and showcasing achievements, thus enabling learners to capitalize on the full spectrum of opportunities afforded by micro-credentials.





#### 4. Enabling Environment (Policy etc.):

The effectiveness of micro-credentials is bolstered by an enabling environment fostered through proactive labour market and social protection policies. These policies aim to lower barriers to entry for skills development programs, addressing financial vulnerabilities and creating an ecosystem where all individuals, regardless of their

background, have the opportunity to improve their skills and employability. Additionally, with a significant portion of the population residing in rural areas, where access to electricity and the internet can be a challenge, the delivery of micro-credentials must be crafted to ensure inclusivity, potentially relying on more face-to-face instruction or low-tech solutions.

### Analysis based on the case studies

The micro-credentialing landscape in Uganda, as illustrated by the aforementioned case studies, is diverse and demonstrates a multifaceted approach to skills development across different sectors and communities. An analysis of these case studies provides critical insights into the effectiveness and potential of micro-credential programs in addressing employment and skills gaps.

#### 1. Model Efficacy and Market

##### Responsiveness:

Micro-credentials in Uganda, exemplified by Refactory, UYSTO, NRC, and i-UPSHIFT, demonstrate a keen responsiveness to the specific needs of the labour market. Refactory's tailored digital skills programs fill a critical void in the tech industry, preparing youth for a sector that's expanding globally and locally. UYSTO responds to the call for practical skills in traditional trades, while NRC addresses the urgent need for vocational training among displaced communities. i-UPSHIFT's innovative focus on entrepreneurship and social innovation is crafting a generation equipped with transferrable skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking and creativity and entrepreneurial mindset that can be applied to successfully join any professions in the market. However, gaps remain in ensuring that these programs are uniformly accessible across different regions, and that the skills taught keep pace with the rapid technological advancements and evolving industry needs. Opportunities lie in expanding these models to more remote areas and ensuring

continuous curriculum updates to reflect the latest market demands.

#### 2. Inclusivity and Community Impact:

The inclusive nature of these micro-credential programs ensures that they serve as potent tools for community development. Programs like UYSTO and i-UPSHIFT are commendable for their efforts to reach marginalized youth, including young women and refugees, who are often left behind in traditional education and training models. By focusing on local entrepreneurial and artisanal skills, these initiatives have a direct impact on community livelihoods, promoting self-reliance and fostering local economic growth. However, there remains a gap in addressing the full spectrum of inclusivity, particularly for disabled youth and those in extremely remote areas. The opportunity here lies in leveraging technology and mobile learning platforms to extend reach, as well as in developing targeted programs for underrepresented groups to ensure that no one is left behind in the skills development agenda.

#### 3. Pathways and Progression:

The micro-credential programs in Uganda offer clear progression pathways that can lead to formal employment, higher education, or entrepreneurial ventures, thus providing youth with various avenues to advance their careers. The strong link between programs like Refactory and the job market exemplifies this, with a significant percentage of its graduates finding employment post-completion.



However, there is a gap in the national recognition and standardization of these credentials, which can limit their transferability and progression to higher educational levels. The opportunity exists to integrate micro-credentials more cohesively into the national education system, thus ensuring they are recognized as legitimate stepping stones for further education and employment.

#### 4. Stakeholder Collaboration:

The success of micro-credential programs in Uganda is bolstered by active collaborations between educational institutions, industry partners, and governmental agencies. Such partnerships ensure that the skills imparted are up-to-date and in demand. For example, Refactory's engagement with tech companies helps keep its curriculum relevant and provides job opportunities for graduates. However, gaps exist in the form of inconsistent collaboration across different sectors and a lack of widespread industry involvement, particularly in rural areas. There is an opportunity to strengthen these collaborations, ensuring that more employers recognize and value these credentials, and that they actively participate in program design and implementation.

#### 5. Assessment and Certification:

The micro-credential assessment and certification process, as conducted by entities like the DIT, provides a rigorous validation of the skills acquired by learners, enhancing their employability. Programs that offer certification serve as a benchmark for skills and competencies necessary to acquire. The opportunity lies in expanding the recognition of micro-credentials as equivalents to formal educational qualifications, thereby increasing their credibility and the prospects for their holders.



© UNICEF/UNI226042/Naftalin





## Section 5

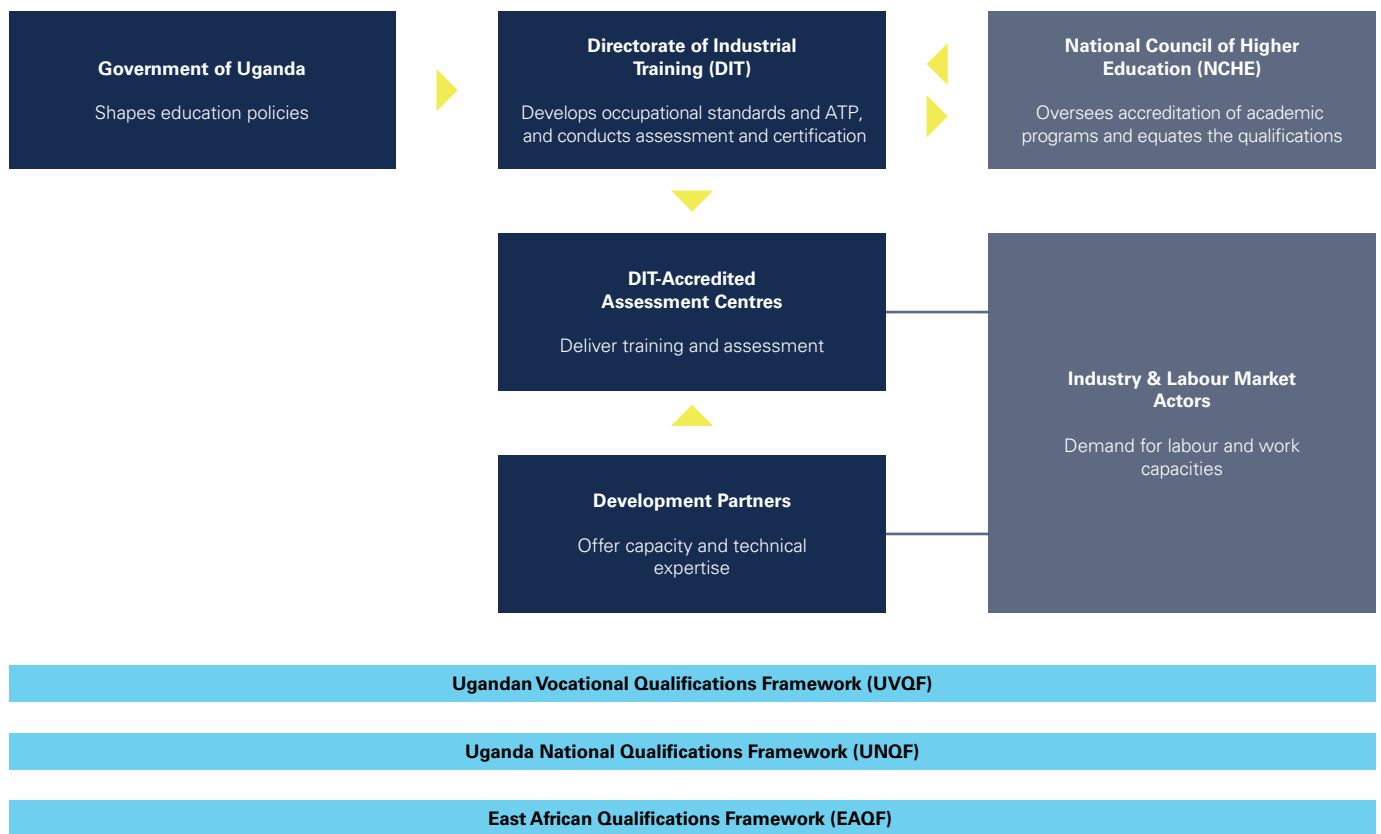
# Strategic Suggestions for Way Forward



In the pursuit of advancing education and bolstering employability for young people in Uganda, this model envisions a transformative landscape for short, targeted learning programs with a concerted effort involving key stakeholders and alignment to industry needs. The micro-credentialing initiatives in Uganda, as indicated in the reflections and analysis in the previous section, offer innovative educational pathways that are closely aligned with market demands and community needs. These programs are pioneering in their approach to bridging the skills gap, emphasizing practical, hands-on experience and direct industry engagement. They present not only a response to the immediate needs of youth

employability but also a long-term investment in Uganda’s socio-economic fabric. Despite the success of these programs, challenges remain in ensuring national standardization and recognition, as well as equitable access across all regions and demographics. However, the opportunities to enhance these programs are plentiful, especially through increased collaboration with industry stakeholders, expansion of digital and remote learning platforms, and the integration of micro-credentials into the national educational framework. These steps are vital for solidifying the role of micro-credentials in fostering an inclusive, skilled workforce capable of driving forward national development.

**Figure 2:**  
Overview of the Ugandan training system



This study proposes an integrated system for micro-credentials that meets the diverse needs of Ugandan youth, empowers them with relevant skills, and actively engages various stakeholders to support a robust and dynamic workforce.

The following framework outlines a strategic blueprint for developing and implementing a micro-credentials system in Uganda that is robust, responsive, and sustainable. This framework

provides clear guidance for engaging diverse stakeholders—including government ministries, educational institutions, industry leaders, and international partners—in creating a harmonized ecosystem for micro-credentialing. It aims to establish a culture of continuous learning and skill development that is accessible to all Ugandans, ensuring that the country's workforce is equipped to meet the challenges of the present and the opportunities of the future.

Micro-credentialing stakeholder	Proposed responsibilities
<b>Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Advance the integration of micro-credentials into the national education system, setting a timeline for the integration phase.</li> <li>▶ Organize a series of national dialogues with stakeholders from academia, industry, and vocational training centers to formulate and standardize emerging micro-credential qualifications that are in high market demand.</li> <li>▶ Develop a recognition framework for micro-credentials that allows for credit transfer and articulation into higher education programs.</li> </ul>
<b>Directorate of Industrial Training (DIT)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Develop a comprehensive set of occupational, training and assessment standards for micro-credentials, ensuring alignment with both national and international workforce requirements.</li> <li>▶ Increase the number of DIT-accredited micro-credential providers.</li> <li>▶ Raise awareness among potential providers about the new accredited standards.</li> </ul>
<b>Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MoGLSD)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Map out existing workforce development strategies and identify areas where micro-credentials can be embedded.</li> <li>▶ Facilitate workshops and collaborative sessions with industry stakeholders to determine current and future skill needs.</li> <li>▶ Craft targeted micro-credential programs for vulnerable and marginalized groups, ensuring their integration into the labour market.</li> </ul>
<b>Other Government Entities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Review and identify infrastructural gaps that impede access to micro-credential programs, particularly in remote and rural areas.</li> <li>▶ Invest in the development and expansion of technological infrastructure and learning spaces necessary for micro-credential delivery.</li> <li>▶ Propose and evaluate financial incentive models to encourage the adoption of micro-credentials among learners and providers.</li> </ul>
<b>UNICEF and Other Development Partners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Lead pilot projects to innovate within the micro-credentials space, incorporating the latest educational technologies and methodologies.</li> <li>▶ Mobilize additional resources through partnerships and alliances to support the expansion of micro-credential programs.</li> <li>▶ Integrate micro-credentials into broader educational initiatives that align with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).</li> </ul>
<b>Private Sector</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Establish a private sector consortium to contribute to curriculum development for micro-credentials, ensuring they match industry trends.</li> <li>▶ Set up internship and job placement programs for micro-credential graduates, potentially through a collaborative platform with education providers.</li> <li>▶ Invest in employee development programs that leverage micro-credentials for upskilling and reskilling.</li> </ul>



# Conclusion

It is evident that micro-credentials represent a transformative opportunity for Uganda's educational and economic landscape. The research study underlines the potential of micro-credentials to equip the youth with market-relevant skills that meet the evolving demands of the Ugandan markets and beyond.

The proposed strategic framework for the implementation of micro-credentials emphasizes a collaborative, multi-stakeholder approach to create enabling policies, ensure quality and relevance of programs, and provide infrastructural support.

The engagement of UNICEF and other development partners is crucial to drive innovation and resource mobilization, while the private sector's role in curriculum development and providing real-world experience through internships and job placements is invaluable.

The DIT is suggested to oversee and harmonize the various facets of the micro-credentials' ecosystem, ensuring effective implementation and sustainability.

In closing, micro-credentials stand out as a key element in the strategy to enhance youth employability and entrepreneurship, ultimately contributing to Uganda's socio-economic development. The execution of this framework, underpinned by robust policies, quality assurance, and an inclusive approach, is expected to transform the landscape of education and training in Uganda. It paves the way for a future where every young Ugandan has the skills and opportunities to contribute meaningfully to the nation's growth, fostering a resilient and adaptable workforce for the emerging digital economy.

## References

- Evans, D. K., and A. Popova. (2016). What Really Works to Improve Learning in Developing Countries? An Analysis of Divergent Findings in Systematic Reviews. *World Bank Research Observer* 31 (2): 242-270.
- FCDO (Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office). (2022). *What Works Hub for Global Education: Business Case and Summary*. London: FCDO.
- Inter-American Development Bank. (2022). *A World of Transformation: Moving from Degrees to Skills-Based Alternative Credentials*, Inter-American Development Bank and Workcred, Washington D.C., <http://dx.doi.org/10.18235/0004299>.
- Kässi, O. and V. Lehdonvirta. (2022). Do Microcredentials Help New Workers Enter the Market? Evidence from an Online Labor Platform. *Journal of Human Resources*, <https://doi.org/10.3368/jhr.0519-10226R3>.
- Kato, S., V. Galán-Muros and T. Weko. (2020). The emergence of alternative credentials. *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 216, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/b741f39e-en>.
- O'Sullivan, T. (2020). Lessons from 'MOOCs for credit'—Turning non-formal learning into formal credit. *Open Impact Conference*, Kampala, Uganda. [http://business-school.open.ac.uk/sites/business-school.open.ac.uk/files/files/Events/oic-papers/PAPER-ID-13\(1\).pdf](http://business-school.open.ac.uk/sites/business-school.open.ac.uk/files/files/Events/oic-papers/PAPER-ID-13(1).pdf)
- OECD. (2021). *Micro-credential innovations in higher education: Who, What and Why?* *OECD Education Policy Perspectives*, No. 39, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/f14ef041-en>.
- Shakaba, C. (2012). News report from NTV Kenya: Govt, professionals meet on EAC integration. 29, October 2012, Online Video Clip: time 0:17, YouTube. Retrieved 25 October 2023 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZHqExh089tw>
- Uganda Bureau of Statistics. (2021). *National Labour Force Survey 2021. Main Report*.
- Uganda Directorate of Industrial Training (n.d.). *Qualification Standards*. Retrieved from <http://dituganda.org/qualifications-standards/>
- Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports. (2008). *Revised Education Sector Strategic Plan 2007-2015*. Retrieved from [http://www.education.go.ug/files/downloads/Revised%20Education%20Sector%20strategic%20plan%202007-2015\(1\).pdf](http://www.education.go.ug/files/downloads/Revised%20Education%20Sector%20strategic%20plan%202007-2015(1).pdf)
- Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports. (2011). *Skilling Uganda, BTVET Strategic Plan 2011-2020*. Retrieved from [http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Uganda/Uganda\\_BTVET\\_Strategic\\_Plan\\_Final%20Draft\\_8July2011.pdf](http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Uganda/Uganda_BTVET_Strategic_Plan_Final%20Draft_8July2011.pdf)
- Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports. (2012). *The Education and Sports Sector Annual Performance report FY 2012/13*. Kampala, Uganda: Ministry of Education and Sports. Retrieved from [http://www.education.go.ug/files/downloads/ESSAPR%20FY2012\\_13.pdf](http://www.education.go.ug/files/downloads/ESSAPR%20FY2012_13.pdf)
- Young, M. (2005). *National qualifications frameworks: Their feasibility for effective implementation in developing countries*. (Skills Working Paper No. 22). Geneva: International Labour Organization. ISBN: 92-2-117275-9

## For every child

Whoever she is.  
Wherever he lives.  
Every child deserves a childhood.  
A future.  
A fair chance.  
That's why UNICEF is there.  
For each and every child.  
Working day in and day out.  
In more than 190 countries and territories. Reaching the  
hardest to reach.  
The furthest from help.  
The most excluded.  
It's why we stay to the end.  
And never give up.

Published by **UNICEF**  
UNICEF Uganda  
PO Box 7047 – Kampala, Uganda

© United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) 2024

unicef   
for every child