Towards a micro-credential country model for Burundi

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

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Table of contents

Tables

Acronyms

AUF	Agence Universitaire Francophone		**NQF**	National Qualifications Framework
BIF	Burundian Franc		**NQCF**	National Qualifications and Credit Framework (Cadre National de Qualification et de Certification)
CURDES	Centre Universitaire de Recherche pour le Développement Economique et Social		**PAEEJ**	Programmeme pour l'Autonomisation Economique et d'emploi des jeunes
EAC	East African Community		**SADC**	Southern African Development Community
FIADI	Femmes Ingénieures Actives pour le Développement		**SADCQF**	Southern African Development Community Regional Qualifications Framework
GBV	Gender-based violence			
ICT	Information and Communication Technology		**UNICEF**	United Nations Children's Fund
ILO	International Labour Organisation		**ULT**	University of Lake Tanganyika.
JRP	Job Readiness Programme			
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization			

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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 model 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 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 will provide context-relevant learnings and intelligence to inform, shape and position micro-credentials in each ecosystem. The working country models may be used internationally as points of reference for future research and debates, including in the ILO and UNICEF. An important purpose of this research is to produce accessible outputs that are not overly dense research reports. The research team will work closely with UNICEF to monitor these outputs, and where necessary the longer denser versions will be used as a basis for shorter and more accessible versions that will be released in the public domain.

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Section 2

State of Micro-Credentials In Burundi

Micro-credentials are a revolution and an evolution in the education system as a new way of acquiring competences. Short courses also known as micro-credentials have appeared to be beneficial to the unstopping evolving and competitiveness of the labour market. Micro-credentials are not only provided in a short period of time, but they also offer multiple modalities and ways of learning.

The traditional tertiary credentials such as certificate, bachelor's degree, master's degree, and PhD have been the main recognized credentials for further education, employment, and professional advancement in Burundi as well as worldwide. Since early 2022 the Burundian education system has implemented an inclusive national framework that recognizes informal and non-formal education to acknowledge and validate learning that occurs outside of traditional formal education settings and align with the formal national qualification framework. There is the need to align the national qualification framework with the East Africa Community (EAC) policies related to the regional qualification system integration process. These certifications, which are outlined in National Qualification and Certification Framework (NQCF), serve as a formal acknowledgement of the acquisition of specific competences from an authorised institution during an extended period.

Over the last decades, there has been an increasing emphasis on education in Burundi. The government has expressed a commitment to the field of education, primarily through initiatives aimed at enhancing the accessibility and affordability of the education system. This is evident in the implementation of policies such as providing free access to primary school. Additionally, recent efforts include the establishment of the NQCF, which acknowledges credentials for the recognition of informal and non-formal competencies. These efforts have been made to encourage literacy as well as reduce unemployment[1].

Despite challenges for micro-credentials to be implemented in Burundi mostly because of the lack of awareness of different stakeholders, trained trainers and limited access to devices and internet, there are many organizations who are giving considerable support in informal and non-formal education. Organisations like UNICEF, through the UPSHIFT programme, CREOP-Jeunes a national NGO, and Word Vision (Refer to the case studies in Section 3 in this document) are making significant contributions towards educating youth with the goal of reducing unemployment.

With micro-credentials in development non-government organisations are exploring channels for recognition by the government through its qualification recognition framework, as there is progress with opportunities and criteria for the validation of informal/ non-formal competences acquired outside of the classic formal education system.

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1   Plan National de Développement-Burundi 2018-2027

The emergence of micro-credentials in Burundi

Education landscape in Burundi

The Ministry of education and scientific research is the authority responsible for regulating the Burundian education system through various commissions including the commission of qualification and certification that analyse mostly files related to technical/ professional training and professions.

The NQCF has structured the education system as following:

▶ **Qualification ladder:** This goes from preschool to higher education assembled in nine levels, for formal education which can be extended up to 28 years or less. And informal education has three levels of qualification.

▶ **Candidate entry profile:** Each level of training has requirements in terms of age and qualifications. From Preschool 1 where a learner must be at least three years old to be admitted, to high studies (university). But because preschool is not a must, a candidate can directly start from Fundamental 1 at a minimum of five-years-old.

▶ **Specific qualification title for each level of study:** Depending on a level, there is a 'fiche appreciation', a 'bulletin', a certificate, a diploma, a 'brevet' and an 'attestation de réussite'.

▶ **Learning outcomes:** Each qualification level is designed with competences, abilities, and skills that a learner should have acquired by the end.

▶ **National credits:** Each level of qualification has an amount of credit a learner must complete to get the qualification. However,

except for higher education, the NQCF does not specify the exact number of credits necessary for the rest of the qualification level.

▶ **Credits transfer system:** It is possible to permanently keep the modules acquired with to obtain a qualification conferring an academic title as well as the credits attached to them. They are also transferable, meaning that a learner can use them in another training programme if the training offer has not changed.

Recognition of informal and non-formal skills

The Burundi NQCF is established as a national reference tool that facilitates readability, comparability, recognition of qualifications and certifications for all levels of training in the education system (including formal, informal, and non-formal education).

The specific objectives of the NQCF consist of:

▶ Making education and training systems more focused on demand than on supply, by strengthening the partnership between learners, the world of employment and service providers education and training;

▶ Recognising skills acquired through formal, non-formal and informal education;

▶ Encouraging lifelong training;

▶ Improving the image and the attractiveness of technical education and vocational training; and

▶ Promoting the international mobility of learners and workers[2].

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2   *Cadre National de Qualification et de Certification* (National Qualification and Certification Framework)

In general, the NQCF covers all qualifications obtained through formal, non-formal and informal education, including qualifications acquired in the workplace as well as processes for validating acquired experience and professional acquired knowledge.

The NQCF has been created to pursue the following objectives to:

► Describe the training levels of the education system, in particular explaining the admission conditions and the qualifications awarded;

► Indicate the skills associated with each level of training;

► Improve information on the national education system;

► Facilitate the comparability of diplomas and increase transparency;

► Facilitate the comparability of skill levels between the traditional system and the technical and vocational training system;

► Define, for each qualification level, the types of descriptors;

► Integrate professional training systems into a framework that has been the subject of common recognition;

► Facilitate mobility between the different training courses through bridges;

► Facilitate the understanding of formal and non-formal professional training titles; and

► Define the basis necessary for the development of procedures, validating acquired experience and professional skills.

The overall innovation that came with the NQCF were the systems for validation of acquired experience and the validation of professional acquired skills.

As stated by the NQCF, the informal system includes self-training and self-assessment processes that lead to three professional skills levels, referred to in French as: '*manoeuvre simple*', '*manoeuvre ordinaire*', '*manoeuvre lourd*'. The non-formal system is organised through targeted training according to available means and demand by various stakeholders, in particular business associations and non-governmental organisations.

To be included in a NQCF, there are qualifications which must meet the minimum standards applied at the national, sub-regional, regional. and international level. To be registered in a NQCF, qualifications must be officially recognized through a credible accreditation and quality assurance mechanism. A credible accreditation and quality assurance mechanism will ensure that qualifications reflect a high standard of educational quality and are recognized as such by relevant stakeholders. Modularization of training in most NQCFs, qualifications are based on training or learning modules which can be combined and accumulated in different ways to promote the transfer of credits and progression in a training and career path.

Validation of acquired experience[3]

The validation of acquired experience (*validation des acquis d'experience*) in Burundi in the NQCF is a procedure allowing any person, whatever their age, level of education, status, to have their acquired professional experience from the informal sector validated to obtain a diploma, title, or professional qualification certificate through lifelong continuing education. The validation allows a learner to obtain, in whole or in part, a diploma, title or certificate of professional qualification registered in the National Directory of Professional Certifications held by the National Conservatory of Arts and Crafts of Burundi. The validation request is addressed to the National Certification Commission. The validation application procedure takes place in two stages:

▶ A preliminary phase, including analysis of the file and publication of the admissibility decision; and

▶ A skills assessment phase within a specialised centre approved by the State.

Validation of professional acquired skills[4]

Under certain conditions, the validation of professional acquired skills (validation des acquis professionnels) certifies skills to accessing a title equivalent to an existing qualification. These conditions are specified in regulatory texts.

Any person, regardless of their age, nationality, status, and level of training, who has a certain professional experience directly related to the certification in question, can apply for the validation of professional acquired skills. The validation request must be sent to the National Certification Commission. The procedure for studying the validation request takes place in two stages:

▶ A preliminary phase of analysis, including the file and publication of the admissibility decision; and

▶ A skills assessment phase during which the Commission calls on a committee of proven experts, including representatives of professional orders in the field concerned.

The validation of acquired experience and the validation of acquired skills can be an entry point for organisations like PAEEJ, which offer tailored trainings to be accredited as competences towards providing recognized micro-credentials.

In the same way that many education institutes are accredited by the government to provide formal education, the same accreditations for private operators in the informal/non-formal education can be a big step toward more inclusion on national, regional, and international labour markets.

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3   *Cadre National de Qualification et de Certification* (National Qualification and Certification Framework)

4   *Cadre National de Qualification et de Certification*

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Section 3

Case Studies
Findings

Table 1:

High level summary of case studies in Burundi

Project	UPSHIFT	PAEEJ	Akazi Keza Programme	World Vision
Funder	UNICEF	Ministry of Sports Youth and Culture	SPARK international NGO	Self-funded global
Status	International NGO/NPO	Government	NGO/NPO	International NGO
Location	Rural	Rural	Urban-Rural	Urban-rural
Target group	Youth & children	Unemployed youth	Unemployed youth Post Secondary School leavers. Female learners	Youth (2 age ranges) with family
Skills focus	Entrepreneurial/ Transversal skills	Agricultural Sector	Skills for entrepreneurship	Individual personal growth focus (nonspecific)
Modality/contact	F2F	F2F	F2F	F2F
Micro-credential in progress	No	Yes	Yes	No

UPSHIFT programme

UPSHIFT is a problem-solving oriented programme driven by UNICEF that has been implemented by other partner organisations. The programme is designed to encourage young people to find solutions to problems that exist in their community as an entrepreneurial initiative. It is oriented to the development of a social entrepreneurship that will encourage participants to create jobs and be financially independent.

Demography of participants

The participants are recruited from members of organizations that are UNICEF partners. Beneficiaries are mostly located in rural areas and range in ages. The UPSHIFT programme has been implemented in collaboration with the following organisations involved in skills development or training: *Umunyinya ASBL*[5], *Femmes Ingénieures Actives pour le Développement* (FIADI)[6], CREOP-Jeunes. All these organisations are supported by UNICEF in advocating for youth development.

The programme targets youth that are jobless. Some may have dropped out of their studies for various reasons, while others have a school leaving certificate or a degree but have not found a job yet.

Brief description of the programme

The UPSHIFT programme has four steps each involving a key activity:

- ▶ **Observation of the environment:**
  Participants analyse existing problems in their community that can be solved.

- ▶ **Conception:**
  Participants formulate the identified problem; participants conceive solutions to solve it.

- ▶ **Construction and test:**
  Participants try out solutions to see which one is most suitable for meeting the initial problem.

- ▶ **Concretization:**
  Participants make a prototype of the chosen solution.

This programme has been implemented since 2018 and is still in operation. It met success from the beginning where all the participants from Rumonge province started entrepreneurial projects with what they learned through UPSHIFT, without having a formal educational qualification.

Approximately 3,000 youth from all over Burundi have benefited from the programme but there are participants who have not achieved in the programme mostly because of rural to urban migration.

The programme targets entrepreneurial skills so that beneficiaries can set up a business in any income-generating domain. The programme happens in-person, but UNICEF plans to digitise it and provide certifications for participants who complete the programme.

According to UPSHIFT trainers, the programme offers practical experience for beneficiaries where they can be trained in the field they choose, but the trainers need to help learners to find an internship. (e.g. if beneficiaries want to open a barbershop, they help them find an informal internship in a functional barber shop where they will learn to cut hair).

Also, the participants are assessed on a competitive basis. At the provincial level,

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5   Local NPO operating in Burundi since 2014, Mental health; Peace; Youth and families development; Action against GBV with an artistic approach combining art and psychology Source: https://web.facebook.com/umunyinya/?_rdc=1&_rdr and https://twitter.com/Umunyinyaasbl/status/1513051563517956101

6   FIADI is "Active Women Engineers for Inclusive Development" See: UNICEF (nd) Terintambwe project: solar stands to empower adolescent girls and young women with skills and income. https://www.unicef.org/burundi/stories/terintambwe-project-solar-stands-empower-adolescent-girls-and-young-women-en-skills-and-income

beneficiaries from different communes (administrative areas such as districts) compete to find the best initiative that will receive limited an amount of financial support for them to start their enterprise.

Credentialing of the programme
UPSHIFT does not award certifications as proof of programme completion, but it is in the process of developing certifications that could be recognized by the government and different partners (e.g. for banks so that beneficiaries can have access to loans). The prevalence of these linkages needs further investigation. Success in these initiatives would be highly important to demonstrate potential pathways for youth toward working or studying in formal work environments.

The UPSHIFT programme is delivered face-to-face which provides learning benefits, but it is not as accessible as online learning and is relatively more expensive than online learning. UNICEF has converted the module into audio-visual and radio formats for learners to access the learning opportunities wherever they are.

Community and wider interface/awareness
Around 3,000 Burundian youth have benefited from the programme and most of the learners have created a successful business and created their own business. There are carpenters, hairdressers, barbers, traders or shopkeepers, fishermen (fishing business), welders, etc.

Sustainability
Upshift programme is a UNICEF Burundi National Bureau initiative and receives funding accordingly through project budgets.
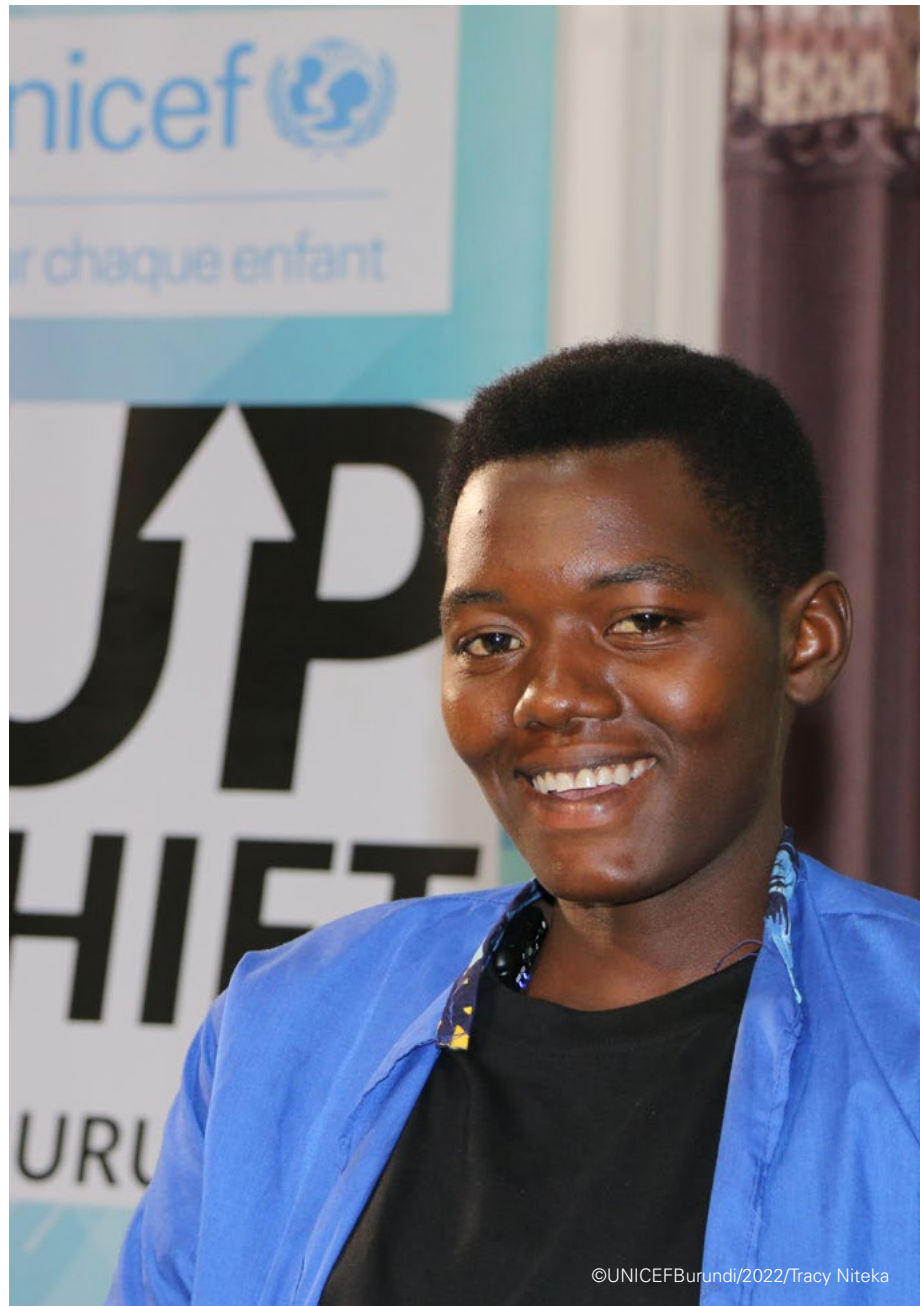
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Programmes pour l'Autonomisation Economique et d'emploi des jeunes(PAEEJ)

The programme PAEEJ (*Pour l'autonomisation* économique *et d'emploi des jeunes*/Programme for youth economic empowerment and employment) is a Burundian government initiative that has been launched by the President of the Republic of Burundi H.E Evariste Ndayishimiye in 2020. PAEEJ aims to reduce the high unemployment rate among youth in Burundi[7].

Brief description of the programme

The PAEEJ programme has three departments focused on addressing the issue of unemployment as follows:

▶ **Training and capacity building:**

In this department, youth have opportunities to receive vocational training in the area of choice (e.g. photography, sewing, modern agriculture and livestock production, hairdressing, etc.) that will help them acquire useful competences. Youth participating in this programme are sensitised to not rely on a salary for traditional occupations (like teachers, bank clerks, etc.) but rather seek to create their own business as the formal labour market does not have enough positions for unemployed youth. After capacity building in vocational training, they move into the entrepreneurship department.

▶ **Entrepreneurship:**

This department offers youth who have completed their capacity building training on how to build a successful business matching their new skills and competences. The next step is getting funded to help them create their start-up.

▶ **Socio-professional integration:**

Since all youth do not have the means to start their own business, the 'integration' department of PAEEJ assists youth in securing internships to gain experience that may help them get their first job. The director of PAEEJ reported that a public institution offering internships agreed to employ 50% of the interns[8].

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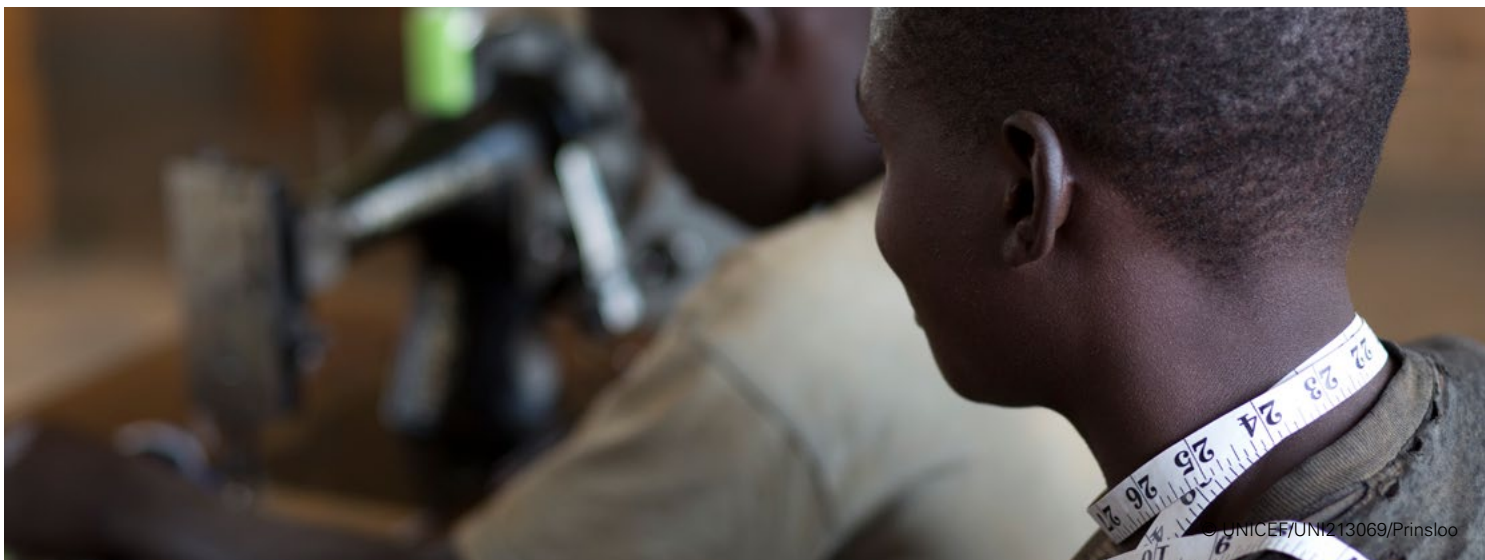
7   https://www.paeej-burundi.org/ (specific URL)
8   https://www.paeej-burundi.org/ (specific URL)

Demography of participants

PAEEJ works in rural areas as well as in urban areas. The government has been able to establish the programme in every province of the country to work exclusively with unemployed youth. Information on the relative distribution of PAEEJ programmes between areas and beneficiaries is difficult to ascertain from available data.

Credentialing of the programme

The programme awards a certificate of completion to those who have completed the programme. However, the certificate provided by PAEEJ is not recognised by the NQCF. The programme is accredited legally as a government entity, but the does not recognise the organisation as an accredited educational institution or its micro-credential.

PAEEJ is making significant improvements in terms of digitising their training. There is an ongoing project to building an online platform that makes training accessible to many youths. The project will also develop digital badges to make the recognition relevant.

Engaging with employers to promote the credentials

Through its socio-professional integration department, PAEEJ directly engages with employers to secure internships positions both in the formal and informal sector, with the possibility of getting job offers.

Community and wider interface/awareness

PAEEJ is one of the most accessible programmes in Burundi due to its presence in every corner of the country. It has been promoting its work through annual exhibitions of projects it has supported. The annual exhibition is called Youth Impulse.

Sustainability

The Burundian government has allocated 48 billion BIF[9] to PAEEJ to sponsor innovative ideas and promising start-ups between 2021 to 2025.

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9   Note: Based on the rate (1 BIF = 0.000351261 USD/1 USD = 2,846.88 BIF). This Is equivalent to 16,86 million US Dollars. Over 5 years this would amount to about 3.6 million USD per year.

Akazi Keza Programme

Akazi Keza is an active programme that has been implemented by Spark Burundi which is an initiative by the Kingdom of the Netherlands Embassy. Akazi Keza case study involved interviews of two main stakeholders that are CREOP-Jeune and Infinity Group. The two organisations are actively engaged in creating employment for youth which is the main focus of Spark. The present case study has been mostly focused on CREOP-Jeune and Infinity Group due to the fact that they are among partners of Spark Burundi that are running the Akazi Keza programme.

CREOP-Jeune, Création des opportunités pour les jeunes (creating opportunity for young people), is a local organisation that works to promote education, employment and entrepreneurship of youth and adolescents. Through its various partnerships with UNICEF, SPARK and AUF (Agence Universitaire Francophone[10]), CREOP-Jeune works toward capacity building, advocacy of youth employment and accessing funding.

Infinity Group is a local firm that is oriented in the human resources area. The firm specialises in helping institutions to recruit employees for them. Through Akazi Keza, Infinity group is running a job readiness programme (JRP) that will be the main focus. The programme aims to help graduate youth to access job opportunities and build their capacities.

Demography of participants
CREOP-Jeune works with male and female youth and also has a project dedicated only to girls. The organisation focuses particularly on unemployed youth in urban as well as in rural areas through projects implemented in 10 of Burundi's 18 provinces.

The JRP of Infinity Group works in three provinces that are Bujumbura- Mairie, Rumonge

and Makamba. The programme provides employability training to graduates between 18 and 35-years-old. The qualifications provide university diplomas for participants from Bujumbura and holders of the technical upper secondary diploma (A2) for Rumonge and Makamba.

Infinity Group also serves as a bridge to employers and job seekers. The firm has a platform where job seekers from all over the country can apply their resume to be contacted whenever there is a position that matches with their CV. They also reach out to universities to help them get the top five candidates from faculties like Economics and Accounting.

Brief description of the programme
The key focus of the organisation is on building capacities for youth to:

▶ **Educate and empower youth:**
   CREOP-Jeune organises entrepreneurship coaching sessions on developing a viable business plan. It guides youth on proper techniques to develop a business concept and practical planning which makes them eligible to get a loan from financial institutions. Some participants are awarded a small capital amount for devising the best entrepreneurial project adjudicated by CREOP-Jeune from current cohorts of trainees. The organisation also provides small enterprises with training on financial literacy and marketing.

▶ **Provide skills for girls:**
   This project equips girls with technical skills related to electromechanical system use.

▶ **Internship and job placement:**
   Through this programme, CREOP-Jeune has partnerships with employers that offer internships and jobs to their beneficiaries.

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10   The University Agency of the Francophonie is a global association of French-speaking higher education and research establishments, the AUF brings together more than 1,000 university establishments on all continents in around 120 countries. https://www.auf.org/

Employers include medical/pharmacy and hotel and catering businesses, in the formal as well as informal/non-formal sectors. Interns are selected after an assessment organised by CREOP-Jeune based on the training offered[11].

Depending on the need CREOP-Jeune offers training in data management, laptop maintenance, medical ethics, marketing, digital marketing, biomedical waste management, hotel management, hairdressing, embroidery, etc. This implies that training is oriented towards employer needs and has relevance to particular occupations or work roles.

It is important to highlight that all programmes of CREOP-Jeune use personalised certified short courses depending on the area of intervention, but some modules are shared to all the programmes.

Modules like life skills, leadership management, professional ethics and professional conduct are common across all the programmes.

For Infinity Group, their JRP programme consists of a training in soft skills that will help the beneficiaries adapt for the labour market. After completing the module, Infinity Group helps those youth land an internship through their customers that are mostly financial institutions. The modules that are taught include communication in a professional environment, basic IT, English, professional efficiency, the pillar of commercial efficiency, CV building, and conflict management.

As Infinity Group is experienced in human resources, beside the JRP the firm runs another programme of capacity building trainings for bank tellers when one of their partners wants to hire some. The specific training helps the firm to provide operational workers that are ready for work.

As part of the Akazi Keza programme SPARK[12], an online platform hosted by Universisté du Lac Tanganyika (a local university in Burundi), is being developed and already has six available modules from which CREOP-Jeune and Infinity Group participants have benefited. However, even though the platform is accessible to CREOP-Jeune and Infinity Group participants, the two organisations continue to provide physical trainings in addition to the online training. The available online modules include time management, communication, teamwork, planning and prioritisation, pillar of commercial efficiency, and 21st century skills.

This is an example of how micro-credential providers can negotiate access to an online resource by collaborating with higher education institutions. Nevertheless, the quality and relevance of content must be considered.

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11   https://creop-jeunes.org/nos-partenaires/

12   SPARK focuses on boosting entrepreneurship in order to create sustainable jobs in the agricultural transformation and non-agricultural sectors among youth in societies affected by conflict. https://spark.ngo/meet-five-youth-led-businesses-scaling-up-in-rumonge-burundi/?fbclid=IwAR0FChKCa8aAG5H0mOVPW5YSAx9DQcU0SUbmUeMgS7Pzlaswm2Arw8jLw2s

Credentialing of the programme

The certificates awarded by CREOP-Jeune as well as Infinity Group are not recognized by the NQCF. However, the organisation negotiates directly on behalf of youth beneficiaries for employment opportunities with enterprises. Youth have a higher likelihood of successful negotiation in organizations where they have received training that is directly relevant to their prospective occupational role.

Engaging with employers to promote credentials

Engagement with employers is one of the main focuses for CREOP-Jeune as a way of creating opportunities for youth. In addition to providing internships to their participants, CREOP has gained partnership with some local employers such as AFRITEXTILE (textiles), SAVONOR PONA (pharmaceuticals), etc. who contact CREOP-Jeune when they want to recruit employees.

And Most of the finance institutions like BANCOBU (one of the biggest banks in Burundi) hire their staff through Infinity Group.

Community and wider interface/ awareness

CREOP-Jeune and Infinity Group through their collaboration with Spark, are strongly committed to engaging as many youth as possible and have reported to have reached 50% of the targeted number of participants in their midterm report.

Sustainability

The Akazi Keza programme has for itself a budget of 4,044,787 Euros for a period of two years that goes from mid-2020 to mid-2024.

The partnerships CREOP has contracted will enable it to sustain their activities especially youth placements in job positions. Among other financial partners, CREOP-Jeune has financial support from SPARK through the AKAZI KEZA project, UNICEF, ACTION AID, CARE-REJA.

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World Vision Burundi

World Vision is a global humanitarian aid and development organisation that provides short- and long-term assistance to children and families living in poverty. It has been working in Burundi for more than five decades.

Demography of participants

The programme works toward developing school clubs and groups of youth in communities. Recruitment is based on the participants' ages--12 to 17-years-old for students and 14 to 22-years-old for out of school youth (including students who have dropped out for at least two years). These categories provide an indication of how providers may focus their programmes according to their age range.

Brief description of the programme

World Vision works on building capacities of out-of-school, unemployed youth and has a separate programme that supports youth who are enrolled as students in formal education. World Vision runs other types of community projects, such as short-term emergency relief, sustainable community, and school programmes.

The World Vision programme has the following modules:

- ▶ 'Active citizenship' is a common module for both groups which is oriented towards self-development.

- ▶ 'Social entrepreneurship', 'Nutrition', and 'Diversity' modules are directed towards students.

- ▶ Out of school beneficiaries learn business management skills, receive vocational training, and learn about modern agricultural methods for local commodity production. For vocational training, participants can choose an occupation they want to enter, and World Vision identifies local practitioners of occupations in the surrounding labour market to mentor them.

Credentialing of the programme

World Vision does not offer certification for its programme. Training is oriented toward individual self-development and not directly for job seeking. However, learners who are still studying acquire additional skills to put on their CV.

Although there is no explicit recognition of participants' competences, the programme has a significant positive impact on their everyday life and can be measured through the incomes received from sales of the commodities they are producing for the market. Unfortunately, evidence of the specific commodities, value and pricing in the market was not available at the time.

Engaging with employers to promote credentials

As the programme is self-development oriented, and encourages youth towards self-employment, there is no direct engagement with employers.

Community and wider interface/awareness

As World Vision has been working in Burundi for five decades, the organisation is well known. Apart from its activities in the area of education, World Vision works on developing many other community-needs like providing clean water, securing health, and encouraging food security and sustainable livelihoods.

Sustainability

World Vision has a worldwide funding strategy and receives support from multilateral agencies, governments, corporations and individuals. The organisation itself has decades of experience in the country.

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Section 4

Towards a Micro-Credentials Model for Burundi

Underpinning principles

Despite the establishment of the NQCF that validate non-formal and informal competences, there is still more to do to ensure the mobility from non-formal/informal education to the formal one.

This barrier contradicts the authorities' expressed commitment to eliminating discrimination against non-formal and informal competences when establishing the NQCF. It is a manifestation of lack of trust in skills gained outside. However, with proper regulators and quality assurance bodies, micro-credentials acquired outside of formal education can gain more credits to the extent where they can be used as an alternative to traditional credentials.

Availability of formal jobs in the local labour market

Micro-credentials are recognized as effective tools for upskilling and reskilling individuals to meet changing job market demands (Masterson, 2022). By focusing on specific competencies,

micro-credentials enable learners to acquire skills that are needed in the labour market and that broaden their skills.

However, in developing micro-credentials it is necessary to consider the distribution of employment opportunities in the labour market. Based on the table below, a limited proportion of the working population in Burundi is engaged in the services and industrial sector, also bearing in mind that employment in services includes government employment. This means that if occupations selected for micro-credentials are in the service or industry sector, it would be important to work with specific employers with a higher likelihood to employ graduates. In the agricultural sector, given that production is mainly based on cultivation and harvesting, credentials could usefully be focused on value addition processes to commodities such as processing, or on making the products more accessible to local markets.

Table 2:

Employment distribution in agriculture, services, and industry as a proportion of total employment in percentages (2019)

Country/region	% of total employment in agriculture	% of total employment in services	% of total employment in industry
Burundi	86	10	3
South Africa	5	72	22
Uganda	72	21	7
Sub-Saharan Africa (excl. high Income)	53	36	11

Source: World Bank (2023)

Table 3:

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
Sub-Saharan Africa (excl. high Income)	n.d.

Source: World Bank (2023)

In the context of Burundi where the informal economy represents more than 90% of the employment landscape, it is obvious that the formal sector has fewer job opportunities than the informal one. The informal labour market is mostly dominated by subsistence agriculture. Introducing micro-credentials could contribute to formalising informal tasks and consolidating the tasks within the scope of formal occupational categories and occupational descriptions. Under the influence of technology on work processes, new skills are becoming relevant to existing occupations. At the same time new forms of technology are necessitating creation of new occupational roles. Similarly, incorporation of indigenous knowledge has impacted medicine, tourism, climate change adaptation, food innovation and agricultural practices. As a result, traditional agricultural practices may undergo transformation towards commercialization though this would likely be subject to availability of other key inputs such as: land size, financing, and transport.

The low completion rate of education in Burundi[13] is an indicator of the degree to which the formal education system is inaccessible. This is why recognizing and valuing prior learning experiences and skills acquired through informal and non-formal means is a solution to the imbalance existing in the Burundian education system. With developing micro-credentials as a way of addressing skills gap and employability, it is important to take into consideration the economic context of a country and available resources.

It is also important for programmes to explore the labour market to identify skills needed and to develop relationships with employers. For example, PAEEJ is working with the *Centre Universitaire de Recherche pour le Développement Economique et Social* (CURDES) and UNICEF to carry out a labour market study that will indicate the jobs needed in the market, for which training will be formulated accordingly.

Familiarity of students with online environments

PAEEJ stated that most courses offered in Burundi are in-person and not online, which was confirmed by the other case study organisations whose offerings are all face-to-face. PAEEJ is in the process of establishing online training

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13 http://www.isteebu.bi/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/EICVMB_Rapport-final_Profil-et-d%EF%BF%BDterminants-de-la-pauvrete_2021-1.pdf

modules together with UNICEF; however, moving content online is difficult and there are questions about managing the process. Additionally, there are negative perceptions surrounding online learning in Burundi, with the mindset that learning online is not really professional. There are also internet infrastructure challenges in the country that create a challenging environment for online learning.

Curriculum, learning design and implementation

Micro-credential credibility requires a high standard and clear guideline. Micro-credentialing is crucial for each step from designing, developing, and assessing informal and non-formal education. Guidelines must outline the expected learning outcomes and assessment criteria as it is for the formal education in Burundi. These guidelines provide a benchmark for the quality and credibility of micro-credentials when aligned with recognized educational standards.

Accreditation processes play a vital role in maintaining a high standard of credentials. Independent accrediting bodies can review and evaluate programmes or organizations offering informal and non-formal education, ensuring they meet specified quality standards. Accreditation may involve assessing factors such as curriculum design, teaching methods, faculty qualifications, student support services, and assessment procedures.

As informal and non-formal competences must build trust, transparent credentialing processes are crucial for maintaining the credibility of informal and non-formal education credentials. Clearly outlining the learning pathways, assessment methods, and evaluation criteria helps learners and stakeholders understand the value and relevance of the credentials. It also enables external parties to evaluate the credibility of the credentials awarded.

Collaboration with Educational Institutions, as CREOP-Jeune does with *Université du Lac Tanganyika* (ULT), significantly enhance the credibility of credentials awarded in the informal and non-formal education system. Partnering with accredited institutions allows for the alignment of programme outcomes, assessment practices, and quality assurance processes. This collaboration ensures that the credentials offered within the informal and non-formal education sectors are recognized and valued by the broader educational community.

Balancing transferable skills and job skills

CREOP-Jeune and World Vision both offer micro-credential modules such as life skills, leadership management, professional ethics and conduct, and active citizenship. These modules are offered across all course offerings by these organizations and are intended to build youth's self-development and are not directly oriented to job seeking. We also observe that progress towards recognizing transferable skills in Burundi is much slower than practical competences. This reflects students and employers' primary interest in skills that are considered fundamental to the productivity of the firm.

Active labour market policies to support work seeking

It is necessary when considering the challenges of supporting marginalised youth towards accessing skills development to consider the vulnerability of households. This is where government social protection policies play a vital role in lowering barriers such as finance and creating a conducive environment for youth to access skills development opportunities through micro-credentials. This does not necessarily only refer to government support of youth as individuals but their family and households as well. The following is a short overview of the available resources for general social protection of communities and strategies to facilitate labour market access.

Recent social protection policies:

▶ **Community-Based Safety Nets:** programmes that provide targeted assistance to vulnerable households such as cash transfers, food assistance, and support for healthcare and education.

▶ **Social Pensions:** introducing social pension schemes for elderly citizens.

Active labour market policies:

▶ **Vocational Training:** aim to equip job seekers with skills that are in demand in the labour market.

▶ **Public Works Programmes:** provide temporary employment in infrastructure projects.

▶ **Youth Employment Programmes:** address youth unemployment through skills training and employment support.

The impact of these policies, if adequately funded and sustained, can create space for youth to participate in micro-credential programmes by indirectly supporting the financial vulnerability of households and their members.

The role of platforms in supporting learning-to-earning

There are a plethora of websites and platforms available online for youth to improve (1) their learning progress and quality, and (2) their chances of finding a job.

In the former, these might include: 'online learning platforms' that can provide a wide variety of learning and network opportunities; 'peer-to-peer learning platforms' can support peer learning with particular skills/occupational learning interests; 'skill-specific communities' can be valuable to current practitioners or new entrants. Also, for students who want to build an online presence, there are 'networking platforms', 'portfolio websites' and 'online qualification verification' sites.

In terms of labour market access, the following resources may be profitable: 'job search websites' that are occupation or industry specific or general; 'freelance or gig economy platforms' that tend to make low-cost opportunities available; 'government job portals' that match unemployed and new labour market entrant workers with employers; and 'apprenticeship matching platforms' support technical and vocational graduates.

However, these resources are usually language-specific, specific to national and regional labour market and more effective in well serviced (e.g. electricity and internet access) densely populated, highly connected urban environments. Consequently, the utility of such resources must be assessed with reference to the demographic and needs of youth participating in the relevant micro-credential.

It is equally important to recognise that electricity is a binding constraint on access to these facilities, which must be consistently available to operate online devices as well as forms of internet access. In the case of Burundi, this most likely applies to roughly nine in ten people across rural and urban areas. Designing micro-credentials for these areas must account for this, which may mean conducting the micro-credential almost entirely face-to-face in most projects.

Table 4:

Informal economy share of national employment in percentages

Country/region	Access to electricity % of population	Rural electrification % of population
Burundi	11.7	3.5
South Africa	84.4	75.3
Uganda	42.1	32.8

Source: World Bank (2023)

Sectoral and occupational directions for micro-credentials

The following are indicative suggestions for economic sectors in which there is likely to be some take-up of micro-credentials. It is necessary to bear in mind that demand for these occupations may be more-or-less location-specific. Investigating the options in the locality of the training will be valuable. Most jobs in rural areas will produce coffee and staples. Coffee has its own value chain, and the world coffee market requires high quality coffee and sound processes, so work in this sector could be rewarding if employers are open to broadening local participation. It is nevertheless inevitable that some graduates will be inclined to migrate. This is because micro-credential graduates, like any job seekers, may be motivated to finding employment in the city where wage levels can be higher than in peri-urban or rural areas.

Furthermore, some occupational routes are dependent on public policy and on the resources of government and the private sector to expand services. Policies and conditions change over time, so skills demand in healthcare will depend on these factors.

► Information and Communication Technology (ICT) related micro-credentials responding to growing demand such as web development, data analysis, and computer programming.

► Agricultural micro-credentials that focus on sustainable farming practices, crop management, and agribusiness.

► Small Business and Entrepreneurship micro-credentials in entrepreneurial skills and small business management.

► Healthcare and Nursing micro-credentials to address a shortage of healthcare professionals especially in the rural areas.

Collaboration between agencies offering micro-credentials, employers and youth

A collaboration between UPSHIFT, PAEEJ, CREOP-JEUNE and World Vision, could explore their various models for the purpose of sharing their experience, expertise, and knowledge (if this is not already in place) that could lead to a more comprehensive and relevant credentialing model as they are all well positioned in the informal/non-formal education and have aligned missions (decrease youth unemployment). It would be interesting to explore what methods would be feasible and would lead to improved benefits for learners.

Alternatively, an effective collaboration of these agencies, employers, and youth especially in relation to skills needs could have potential to lead to better understanding of demand and supply dynamics of micro-credentials. Credentials must be carefully selected for their attractiveness to employers in the labour market and to students depending on their needs and ambitions.

Outline of a credentialing model for Burundi

In the economic and social landscape of Burundi characterised by poor access to internet, hardware devices that result in technology illiteracy together with the predominance of informal economy, the best credentialing option is credentials in a physical format (face-to-face credentials delivery).

However, with the evolving world of micro-credentials and several Burundian youths that have access to proper infrastructures for digital based micro-credentials, it will be necessary to develop digital and non-digital credentials.

Regarding how the programmes from the case studies are usually organised there are some options of credentialing that can come out of it:

▶ **Skills based certificate:**
The four case studies cover a large variety of skills to offer in different fields. This can occur in a stackable credentialing that can be accumulated over time, to earn a higher level of credentials.

▶ **Badges:**
With the development of online delivery platforms some of these organisations are developing (PAEEJ Academy and PrepAkazi-ULT), the digitalization of credentials would be more accessible for learners who have access to the internet.

▶ **Professional certifications:**
A professional certification would leverage professional insertion of youth with the validation of specific skills or knowledge for a specific position or occupation. Professional certificates would be proof of a candidate's effectiveness for a job application instead of advocating for youth to have an internship.
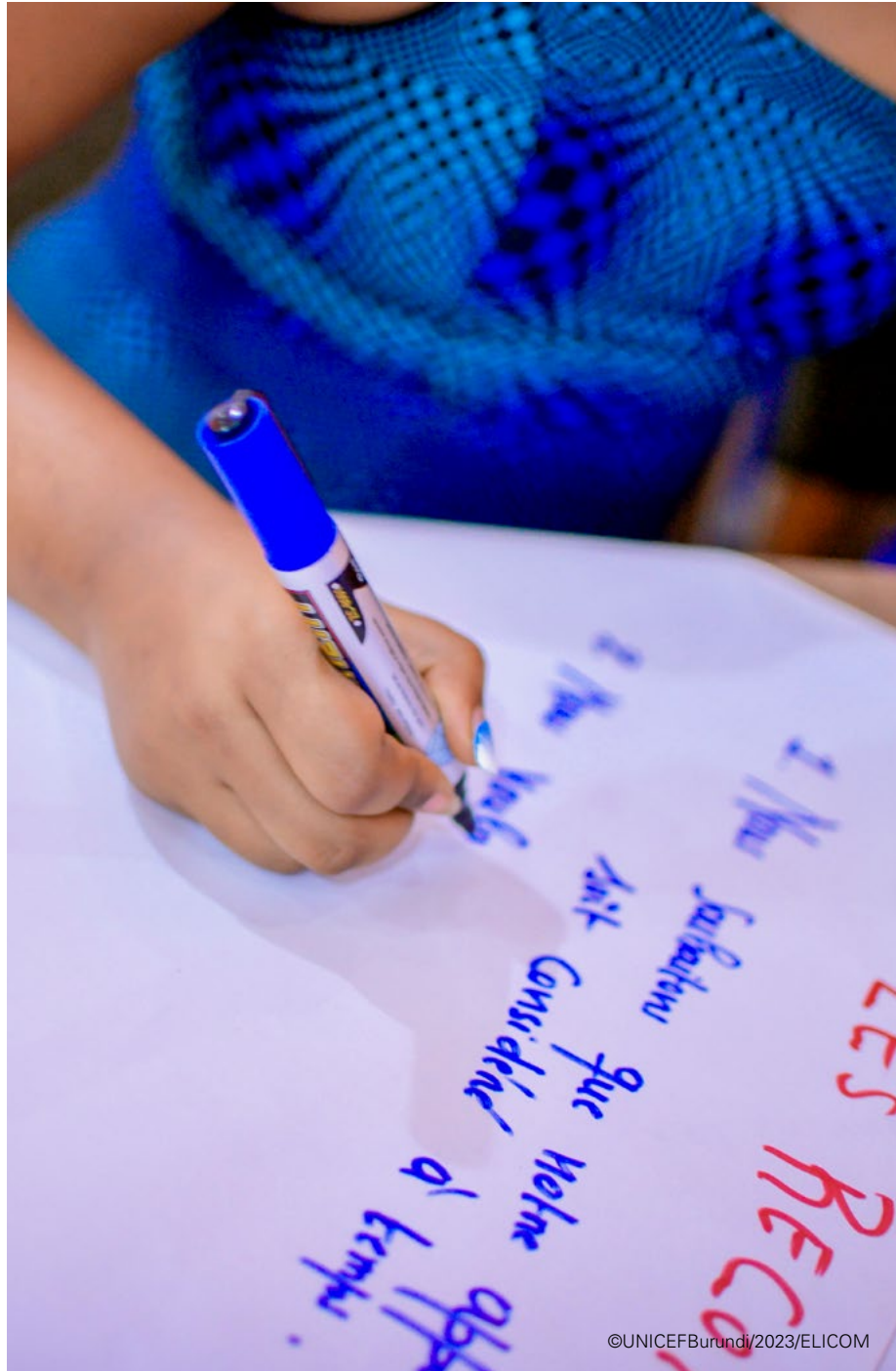
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