
MAKING INTERNSHIP POLICY A MUST

*Ann-Marie Bassie,
Samuel Palmer and Mary Nelson*



With high rates of unemployment, and a sharp decline in GDP in recent years, economic prospects for young people are limited. To address these challenges, the National Youth Commission (NAYCOM), the Ministry of Youth Affairs (MoYA), and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) established a Graduate Internship Programme (GIP) to boost the employability of graduates by increasing the number and quality of internships. So far, 70% of the 791 interns placed have acquired permanent jobs.

Sierra Leone's unemployment rate is amongst the highest in West Africa, and Ebola has made it worse. According to the 2014 Labour Market survey, the unemployment rate is also higher among young people than among older people (5.9% versus 2.2%), and over 80% of the country's young people live below the poverty line of US\$2 per day.

Sierra Leone's economy is attempting to recover from the twin crises of a sharp decline in the price of its primary export commodities and the outbreak of Ebola. Annual GDP growth declined from 20.7% in 2013 to 4.6% in 2014, and to a 20.3% contraction in 2015. This sharp decline in GDP, coupled with a depreciation of the national currency, has further limited economic prospects, especially for young men and women.

The vast majority of young people therefore have little chance of securing and retaining a decent job. The situation is particularly aggravated by a labour market mismatch with graduate training and tertiary education, whose curricula are yet to be aligned with current job market demands. This contributes to shortages of skills at various technical and managerial levels. And the rapid rise in the country's unemployment rate has become a major source of concern, not only economically, but also socially. Large numbers of unemployed youths are a potential source of insecurity given their

vulnerability to recruitment into criminal and violent activities.

The GIP

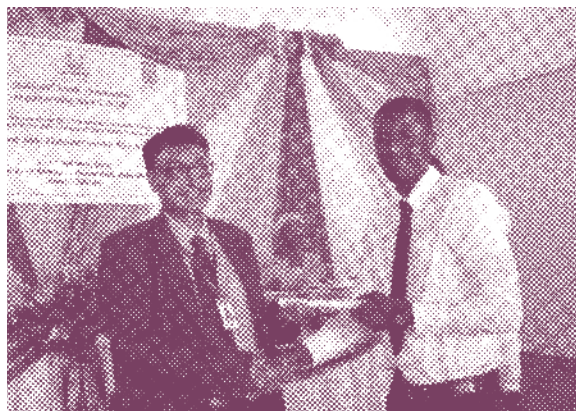
To address this high rate of graduate youth unemployment and underemployment, the Graduate Internship Programme (GIP) initiative began to be implemented in 2011 by the National Youth Commission (NAYCOM) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Sierra Leone. The objective of the programme is threefold: (1) increase the number of young people benefitting from productive internship opportunities nationwide; (2) increase the overall quality of the internship experience, so as to actually contribute to the employability of the intern and maximise both the social and private return of the initiative; and (3) ensure equal opportunities for young men and women (aged 18–35 years) to access merit-based internship positions.

GIP is an employment facilitation programme, geared towards bolstering the employability of young university/college graduates for the labour market, through structured 4-month internships within private, public and non-governmental (NGO) sector organisations, to enhance their employable skills and making them productive assets for the labour market.

Cover Interns

Left Award of Certificate of completion to an intern

Right Former UNDP Country Director awarding certificates to interns



Implementation of GIP involves prospective interns, prospective employers and NAYCOM/UNDP. The interns have the chance to develop professional skills and an understanding of a profession, while placement institutions are able to identify and recruit motivated and capable individuals.

Activities start with a pre-placement and preparation phase, which basically considers:

(a) The recruitment of placement institutions, starting as soon as the programme is launched each year until all specified interns are placed. Recruitment is based on specific criteria: the institution should be able to provide the unemployed graduates youths with job apprenticeship opportunities that will expose them to skills and experiences relevant to the current labour market and enhance their employability. It should be prepared to provide a mentoring plan for each intern within two weeks of their start, and should prepare a concept note before the start of the programme, detailing the scope of the internship they will provide. This will include an induction and training plan.

(b) Recruitment of interns. The recruitment exercise for potential interns occurs nationwide in June each year, targeting graduate Sierra Leoneans nationwide through an application process, using established selection criteria.

(c) Orientation and training of interns. The most qualified applicants are selected, and in August they undergo a two-day training and orientation session on ICT, professional tips, soft

and life skills. The training provides graduates with the skills they need when exposed to a formal working environment, and when dealing with work place challenges. Crosscutting issues such as gender, reproductive health, environment and other key questions are also included, providing a holistic approach to the scope of the curricula.

(d) Placement of interns. The GIP Implementation Team, in partnership with the employing institutions match the interns' profiles to institution requirements until all specified interns are placed. Interns travel to the defined employers throughout the country where they spend 4 months learning and contributing. Each intern is paid a stipend of approximately US\$70 for the internship period.

A second phase covers the necessary monitoring and supervision of the programme. This is done on a quarterly basis and includes monitoring the effectiveness of supervisors, mentors and their line managers responsible for the internship programme.

Debriefing sessions are conducted once a year by NAYCOM and UNDP, in collaboration with the placement institutions, towards the end of the internship programme. Debriefing sessions help to determine if interns leaving placement institutions have had a positive experience, and it provides valuable feedback for programme planning for the following year.

Last, an annual graduation ceremony marks the successful completion of the implementation of

Addressing youth employment

“The availability of the interns in our organisation made our work easier and faster. We will always be willing and ready to receive and accommodate more interns every year.

GIP is a timely intervention for graduates and it's a footprint to employment possibilities by virtue of their ethical character and performance during the learning process. I thereby suggest or recommend to scale up the number of beneficiaries and if possible extend the internship period for the interns to be

better exposed and to acquire more knowledge and job experience.”

Musa Khalil Koroma – Founder & Executive Director – Global Youth Network for Empowerment and Development

Young people are often caught in a vicious circle where the lack of experience prevents them from obtaining a job, and the lack of work prevents them from obtaining experience.

GIP and awards certificates to interns who have successfully completed the programme.

Many lessons learned

Our experience has shown that the recruitment of employing institutions and interns should take no more than 2 months. Online applications would be one way of streamlining the process. This will also expose graduates to the internet and computer usage. At the same time, we have seen that

- coaching and counselling sessions, as part of employer supervision, reinforced positive attitudes and performance of interns;
- data collection by GIP is an important element that captures information on placement institutions, and the number of interns supported and those who have acquired permanent gainful employment/or not;
- the participation and willingness of government placements for interns provides a big boost for GIP.

It is clear that placement institutions play a crucial role in providing the orientation and training for interns and should be supported in ensuring orientation sessions with their staff or team before placing interns in those institutions.

Why is GIP successful?

GIP is unique because it is the only internship initiative designed and implemented in collaboration with key state institutions for youth (NAYCOM and the Ministry of Youth Affairs).

GIP provides high-impact work and educational experiences. This is timely, given the worldwide economic downturn and the need for employees to have broad and flexible skill-sets in order to evolve within a highly volatile world of work. As mentioned, 70% of the 791 interns placed so far have acquired permanent jobs; monthly stipends are paid to the interns through a money transfer system, allowing them to be paid efficiently and safely. Not surprisingly,

“My placement taught me a lot about timeliness and helped me improve my organisational and timekeeping skills. I had very little exposure to IT before and I learned how to use a computer for the first time. I also developed facilitation skills. Before the placement I was a shy person but now I feel confident about facing a crowd. My supervisor was helpful and supportive.

I want to go back to college for further education so I am now looking for job where I can earn money. I would like to do a degree in Community Development Studies

with a focus on health. I believe my experience with Child Fund will help me to find another job.”

Victoria Bangura

“I knew little about London Mining before taking up this internship and I was very keen to learn more about the iron ore industry which I have not been exposed to before. I got to work with both national and expatriate staff. I had a good relationship with my supervisor who was very supportive throughout. He has kindly recommended

me to be one of the ten interns London Mining plans to take on into full employment. We are waiting to see the results of that.

The experience of being an intern has been very stimulating. I found myself getting up very early each morning to get into work as soon as I could. I think this is a great programme and a great opportunity for graduates seeking employment. I hope very much it will continue.”

Francis Ibrahim Nwokelo

the internship opportunity is in high demand by unemployed graduates, with an average of 1,000 applications for 150 internships positions per year.

A very positive factor is that GIP staff members work as a team. They brainstorm and review critical issues together and arrive at a consensus, and are open to other views to enrich the programme. And GIP has developed Standard Operating Procedures to ensure that the internship programme is managed in a systematic way which enhances learning for the interns and provides added-value for the institutions as a result of having trainees as interns.

The programme has led to the establishment of the National Youth Service (NYS) Scheme to accelerate the generation of sustainable inclusive and decent pathways to the job market. It caters for university and college graduates and provides job opportunities to young people by placing them in institutions for 12 months. In 2017, 500 youths were recruited and in 2018 this will be scaled up to 1,000 young people. The emphasis now is in the necessary institutional capacity building, so as to ensure that the initiative is eventually sustained by the government.

Ongoing success

The success of GIP, and the demand for it, suggest that a national internship programme can be a key strategy in addressing issues of employability in Sierra Leone. The programme will be maintained until the Government of Sierra Leone takes complete ownership of it. An expanded national programme would therefore seek to involve a greater number of institutions and a larger number of graduates.

An extended information campaign should be implemented to recruit a wider number of employers. This should include a focus on employers of strategic importance to the economy of Sierra Leone who could help to identify skills gaps in the country. At the same time, we think that to improve the effectiveness of the interns, a 3-day orientation training course would enable GIP to impart all of the knowledge and skills required by placement institutions.

One of the main points raised is that employing institutions should ensure that orientation sessions with their staff are conducted before placing interns, and that more ways must be found to motivate female graduates to take part in the programme.

This is one of the results of the process started by the "Capitalization of Experiences for Greater Impact in Rural Development" project, implemented by CTA, FAO and IICA and supported by IFAD.
<http://experience-capitalization.cta.int>

"This programme is geared in the right direction in terms of reducing graduate unemployment by enabling them to develop work-based skills. It is also making a contribution in terms of changing employer attitudes towards young people. More organisations should think about introducing graduate trainee schemes which bring in interns with a view to training them up so they become fully-fledged staff members."

Agatha Bangurah, Child Fund Sierra Leone

The Ministry of Youth Affairs should assess the contribution of internship programmes towards employability and skills development of young graduates. In line with this, they must develop a national internship policy as soon as possible, to guide all internship programmes. NAYCOM is pushing for this through the ministry of Youth Affairs and is trying to put together a policy document.

An internship policy will legally mandate the government, and other institutions, to provide internship opportunities for students, including the required space, supervision, experience, financial resources and opportunities. This is more likely since the establishment of the NYS Scheme. An internship policy will also guide recruitment, retention, duration and other issues around national internship programmes.



Ann-Marie Bassie works as Programme Specialist/Programme Manager, Youth Employment and Empowerment Programme, UNDP Sierra Leone.

E-mail: ann-marie.bassie@undp.org



Samuel Palmer is Programme Specialist/Deputy Team Leader at the Inclusive Growth and Sustainable Development Cluster, UNDP Sierra Leone.

E-mail: samuel.palmer@undp.org



Mary Nelson works as Project Coordinator, Strengthening Access to Health-Care, UNDP Sierra Leone.

E-mail: marynelson1302@yahoo.com

Country: Sierra Leone

Region: West Africa

Date: June 2017

Keywords: Internships; education; capacity development; youth; policy