

# Constructing Futures

## Case study: Elliot Dusey



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

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

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

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

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

Elliot is 22 years old and joined the YIEDIE programme in February 2017. After completing his six-month training placement in plumbing in August, Elliot continues to train with his Master Artisan in Takoradi and hopes to work internationally in the future.

‘Only now do I realise just how important I am as a plumber. Even so-called rich men and women rely on me. Before they can bathe, use the toilet or wash their hands, they need my skills. Should they ignore me once they have received what they want from me, I won’t beg them because eventually they will require my services again, when they have a blockage in their bath, toilet or sink. It is only then when they will realise that we all need each other.’



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After I left school, I had a job selling products in a plumbing store. Customers would ask lots of questions and I gained an interest in the trade. I learnt a lot and thought I could be a good plumber, if I ever wanted to enter the trade. But, in reality, I didn’t want to become a plumber, because I loved to teach. Growing up, I always wanted to be a teacher because I love to spend time with people and have an impact on their lives. But as time went by, I realised I didn’t have that option. I worked in voluntary tutoring and organised classes but it wasn’t enough money, as I received only moderate fees from parents. At one point I had a chance to teach in a school, but entered plumbing college because I knew plumbing would pay more than teaching. My father works as a bricklayer and my mother as a trader to support my younger brother and sister. I do not live at home and any money I get from working, I contribute to my parents.



Looking at other young people’s lives I feel empathy, because I know if they too had support they could have learnt a trade

Everyone tried to motivate me to become a plumber. When I told my father I was considering it, he said that I must be a teacher – like a lot of parents here, he wanted me to have a white-collar job as it holds more respect in Ghana. Later, he realised that there is more money in construction and allowed me to join. I accepted and my boss introduced me to YIEDIE and said that if I was interested I could attend the training programme.



The fact I could gain a technical certificate convinced me to do it. Without the certificate you might be able to work locally, but joining companies would be difficult. YIEDIE gave me tools and safety equipment which was vital. You cannot work without these things because your life would be at risk at any given time, and even before you go into a client's home to do an estimate, you need a measuring tape. I also love that YIEDIE supervises us at our workplace – I appreciate that they want us to be the best we can be. We feel very supported in our training.

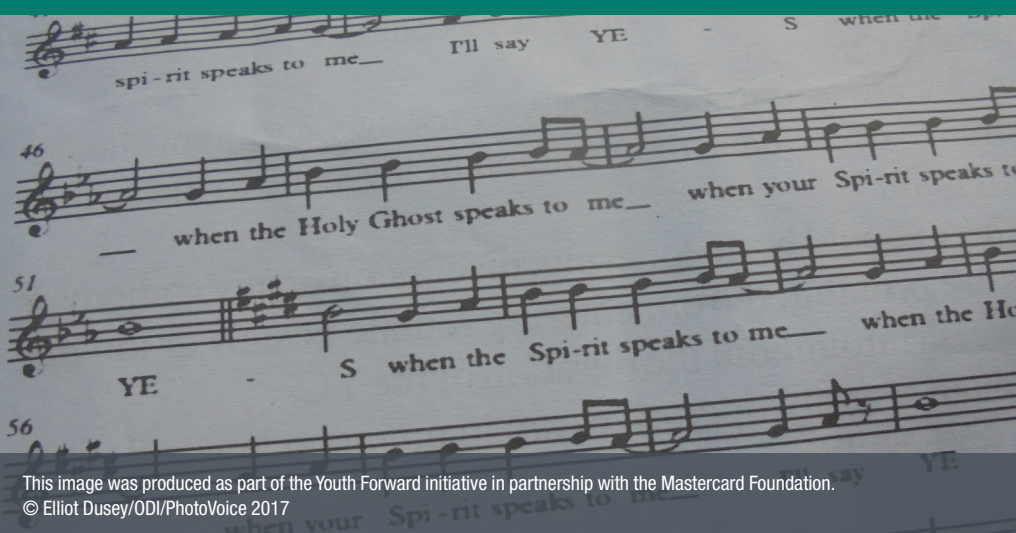
For other young people who want to enter plumbing, they have to find a Master and pay fees. You can spend between 600–1000 Cedis (£95–£155) on fees and tools before you are even trained. Due to this barrier, many young people divert to other forms of employment, often trading. Looking at other young people's lives, I feel empathy because I know if they too had support they could have learnt a trade.

I have been able to acquire skills from my training but I still need more knowledge. I do not want to limit myself to my Master and instead want to learn several types of plumbing and work outside Ghana. I should not need to beg a customer to come to me, as we need each other.

I have never regretted becoming a plumber. In many ways, I see myself as a doctor – if you have a problem at home you can call me. You will always need my service.

My Master gives me five Cedis (80 pence) a day, which is not enough as I need to feed and clothe myself, while also trying to save. I walk to work and I choose either a morning or afternoon meal. By doing this I manage to save two Cedis a month. I hope to one day move out of this tough financial situation, but for now I need to manage and work towards getting out of it. One must press on for something better in the future.

I cannot complain though as I am not the only one working for my Master, and there are seniors and juniors who also need paying. I am fortunate to have such a good Master who is professional and who makes sure we keep contracts. I have heard from other colleagues that they wish they had a Master as kind as mine. Some of them often do not receive compensation from their Masters when they finish work. As well as that, some Masters favour certain trainees over others, do not supervise trainees or make them work overtime.



**'In fact, before I entered into plumbing training, I had little desire to work in the industry. To earn money, I worked in a store selling plumbing materials. My passion was for teaching and music but it was not God's will for me to continue with these paths. You accept the situation you are handed, and learn to make the most of it.'**

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All of my colleagues at the workshop are men. Plumbing work is stressful and we work long hours throughout the week. For a woman, working in plumbing is difficult. Men go home and sleep but women have chores to do. A woman might wake up early and have to bathe her siblings before she even comes to work – that is not easy. I think there should be leave and holiday options for women, or early finishes so that they balance their responsibilities.

There also needs to be more motivation; if we had female Masters, it would encourage women to join the sector.

Teenage pregnancy is another major problem, preventing women joining the industry. I think better sex education is the solution. For women to get security from a Master, there is pressure and they might harass. To prevent it further, they need to report it but this requires evidence, which is difficult to obtain.

I heard a story of a women who worked in the sector and now owns a successful plumbing business working abroad. She will have been very determined to make it in a male-dominated industry.

My plan for the future is to be an international plumber and I would love to work outside Ghana. I realise that to achieve this, I need to continue learning and find other companies outside of Ghana. This will not be easy ... but I am optimistic.

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

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

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

**PhotoVoice** is a UK-based organisation that specialises in participatory photography projects for social change. For more information about their work, visit [www.photovoice.org](http://www.photovoice.org)

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