Work Ready Now! (WRN!) is EDC’s curriculum and approach for delivering effective work readiness training to youth, in and out of school. WRN! helps young people in emerging economies develop the “soft skills” needed to succeed in earning a living. WRN! is unique in that it is based on international standards and is adaptable for integration into literacy and numeracy programs, addressing two major constraints to employment for many youth.

Preparing Youth for the Workplace

It’s difficult to mention Musa Hassan Dek at the Garissa branch of Barclays Bank in Kenya without eliciting a smile. Musa’s path to completing his education had been rocky after changing schools several times due to costly school fees and not having great grades. He admits that afterwards, he was idle for a period of time and didn’t really know what to do with his life. Although he finished a course in marketing, Musa doubted whether there would be opportunities to apply the skills and knowledge he learned. Once he completed his WRN! training however, he used his skills and presented himself professionally, submitting cover letters and CVs, and was hired by the bank’s sales department.

Musa enjoys his job very much because it involves interaction with new people; he is proud of himself for taking the steps to get to where he is today. Work Ready Now! is at the core of EDC’s livelihoods and workforce development projects. This package of services includes training in technical skills, literacy, numeracy, and entrepreneurship, as well as complementary bridging strategies (like coaching, internship placement, and access to financing), and interventions that target the broader economic community.

Consistent with reports that “soft” skills are essential in livelihoods and employment, WRN! youth participants, their families, and employers continually find work readiness trainings to be the most valuable component of the program.
In EDC youth projects, business partners rate “positive values and work ethics” as more important than technical skills. Employers argue that these skills can be taught, but if youth don't have good attitudes, respectful behavior, and willingness to learn, they have difficulty responding to norms of the workplace.

Work Ready Now! is based on over 10 years of designing and implementing work readiness and livelihoods development programs for youth, primarily ages 15–30, in developing and middle-income countries ranging from Mali to the Mekong.

A Customizable Standards-Based Curriculum

The WRN! curriculum is built around a standards-based framework and consists of 8 content modules (see below) that can be delivered in varying amounts of time, from 44 to 100 hours. Modules are designed to be easily adapted to local contexts. The WRN! implementation toolkit supports program staff who create, adapt, and assess work readiness programs.

The WRN! framework establishes learning standards for each area of skills and is aligned with 3 internationally-recognized work readiness frameworks: Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS), Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21 Framework), and the Assessment and Teaching of 21st Century Skills (ATC21S Framework).

Designed for Sustainability

WRN! trainings are typically offered through existing institutions like vocational schools and local youth-serving organizations. WRN! master trainers teach facilitators how to use participatory, learner-centered approaches and provide support beyond the training-of-trainers workshop. EDC builds the capacity of local organizations and government agencies so that they can continue to offer the program after the life of the project.

WRN! Results...

- From 2011 to 2015, over 95,000 youth have attained valuable job skills using the WRN! approach
- In Rwanda, a recent survey found that 97% of program graduates (out-of-school youth) met or exceeded employer expectations. 85% of the 43 employers surveyed said that program graduates performed better at work when compared to other employees.
- Governments of Rwanda, Macedonia and the Philippines have adopted EDC's WRN! curriculum as the national work readiness curriculum at secondary schools and vocational training centers.

Figure 1: WRN! Modules and Topics