

Prevalence of Unemployment Amongst Youth in Africa

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There is no unique cause of the youth employment challenge in the African region. Rather, a combination of factors contributes to the situation that has become a top political priority for the region. Youths account for 60% of all of Africa's jobless, according to the World Bank. In North Africa, the youth unemployment rate is 25% but is even greater in Botswana, the Republic of the Congo, Senegal, and South Africa, among others. With 200 million people aged between 15 and 24, Africa has the largest population of young people in the world. The African Development Bank stated that in most African countries, youth unemployment occurs at a rate more than twice that for adults.

In sub-Saharan Africa, unemployment rates remain relatively low, as the majority of employable active youth cannot afford not to work. However, these youth regularly suffer from under-employment and lack of decent working conditions. Of the 38.1 per cent estimated total working poor in sub-Saharan Africa, young people account for 23.5 per cent. Young girls tend to be more disadvantaged than young men in access to work and experience worse working conditions than their male counterpart. Employment in the informal economy or informal employment is the norm.

In North Africa, unemployment rates among a generally more educated labour force are quite high (23.8 per cent estimated in 2012) and projected to remain high over the next five years. Unemployment can arguably be considered to be at the root of the Arab Spring uprisings. At the same time, labour force participation rates for women are the second-lowest in the world (33.4 per cent in 2012, right after the Middle East). The Brookings Institution report highlights that more than 70% of the youth in the Republic of the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi, Mali, Rwanda, Senegal and Uganda are either self-employed or contributing to family work.

It is the norm that if the youth are not unemployed, they are under-employed they do menial jobs like working in factories and labourers. Under-employment however, is not a solution to poverty states the International Labour Organization (ILO), which reported in 2016 that up to 70% of African workers were "working poor," the highest rate globally. ILO also states that "the number of poor working youth has increased by as much as 80% for the past 25 years." As events in North Africa [the Arab Spring] have shown, lack of employment opportunities can undermine social cohesion and political stability. The militant group Boko Haram, for example, has found it easy to recruit jobless young people.

In the view of the high youth unemployment rate in Africa, interventions are definitely required to alleviate this unfortunate situation experienced by the young and gifted youth in Africa. Responsible authorities in the African region and Non – Governmental organisations in these respective African countries can work hand in hand in coming up with the relevant interventions like a model that begins with a **labour market scan**, which aims to identify companies' recruitment needs, the situation of the youth, and the mismatch between the skills they have and the skills they need to find a job. The contents of the pieces of training are developed based on the findings.

Young people follow pieces of training in essential soft and hard skills, such as career counselling, life skills, and work and technical skills. They are either trained to be ready to work in a specific sector or to become entrepreneurs. Responsible authorities, as well as Non- Governmental Organisations, can help bridge the gap between training and employment by supporting young people in finding job placements or starting their own enterprise.

After the training, responsible authorities can continuously monitor the progress of each youth for a minimum of six months to ensure its programmes have long-lasting positive effects. Non – Governmental Organisations can help enrol youth in alumni networks which can assist in connecting the youth with valuable job-related resources. Responsible authorities could partner with the private sector at local level to identify the labour market demand. This could also help raise awareness and improve the attitudes of the private sector on setting up decent working conditions, promoting youth employability and gender equality.

Whether or not youth are enrolled in school, receiving training or working, has important implications for future economic growth, development and stability. If overlooked, youth unemployment has the potential to have significant and indelible social repercussions. Youth unemployment can lead to social exclusion and unrest. Investing in decent job creation however, as well as in education and training opportunities for the youth, will help them find their place and contribute to more prosperous and stable societies.

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