



Youth and Employment Policies in Africa: Challenges, Aspirations, and Opportunities

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Executive Summary

The future of work in Africa is intrinsically tied to two key factors: the expansion and modernisation of agricultural activities on the one hand, and to the widespread digitalisation of economic activities on the other. However, these factors face a significant challenge in the form of a surge in youth populations across the continent¹. Despite the potential pressure associated with this demographic trend, it can also be viewed as an asset capable of catalysing the overall development of the continent.

This policy review includes an analysis of existing policies aimed to generate youth employment and youth entrepreneurship in Africa, a brief poll among youth in several countries, as well as interviews designed to give initial indications of themes and issues related to endemic unemployment in this segment of the population. It focuses on the identification of major challenges in the future of work for youth, detection of skills gaps, and exploration of the prospects and opportunities in sectors that remain under-explored. It uses qualitative data drawn from individual key informant in-depth interviews, seeking insights about at promoting good policies to increase youth employment, feeding into practical policy discussions taking place at regional and global level, and strengthening work of the International Organisation of Employers (IOE) in Africa on the Future of Work. The review focused on the following ten (10) selected countries representing the five African Union regions: The Kingdom of Lesotho and Republic of South Africa (Southern Africa); The Republic of Uganda and Republic of Kenya (East Africa); The Democratic Republic of Congo and The Republic of Cameroon (Central Africa); The Republic of Senegal and The Federal Republic of Nigeria (West Africa); The Kingdom of Morocco and The Arab Republic of Egypt (North Africa).

Analysis found significant weaknesses in existing policies in some national contexts, or a lack of programmes focused on youth employment in others. Examples include limited or unsustainable funding opportunities, a lack of feedback on funding applications made by young people, limited presence of youth employment programmes (especially in rural areas), weak coordination among various implementing agencies and local steering committees of youth programmes, and stringent conditions attached to grants and loans offered by funding agencies. Furthermore, there is a noticeable lack of awareness about interventions and policies designed by the government or its development partners to promote youth employment.

The review also found that youth face numerous challenges in securing decent employment, including the low economic growth in some of the selected countries, a disconnect between training institutions and the labour market, deficiencies in the education system, job preferences among an upwardly aspiring youth, and limited access to finance and training for youth. Other challenges of youth employment involve limited funding opportunities as well as the unfavourable conditions attached to some grants and loans which may be on offer by funding agencies and development partners. With oftentimes limited geographic access to existing youth

¹ Projections show that by 2030, the number of youth living in Africa will have increased by up to 42 percent.

employment programmes, particularly in rural areas, inefficiencies are exacerbated by weak coordination across various implementing agencies and stakeholders of programmes on youth employment. These macro- and micro-level factors interplay to compound the problem, limiting the impact, opportunities, and effectiveness of programmes on youth employment intended to reduce high rates of unemployment.

In the light of these challenges, the analysis points to the need for more support to be provided to young people and, in the education sector, to move towards preparing young people for future careers through technical and vocational education training (TVET). It also shows a need to improve access to financing and quality training programmes for youth, promote changes in the perceptions and collective mindset towards certain types of jobs, and enhance coordination across stakeholders in public policies and programmes on youth employment.

For young people, the expansion and modernisation in the agricultural sector and the broader digitalisation of economic activities represent strong job prospects, as well as opportunities for innovation and entrepreneurship to generate income. These opportunities can be fully realized and optimized through various initiatives that promote ICT training and skills development, the simplification of micro-funding programmes and through the digitalisation of economic services, administrative processes, and financial protocols that bring more efficient access to enterprising youth populations.

Considering the context of challenges that young individuals face in acquiring employment, it becomes plausible to recommend that the governments of the studied countries follow measures such as:

1. **Decentralise quality TVET:** Extend quality Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) to reach disadvantaged young people in rural areas.
2. **Enhance coordination:** Improve coordination among implementing partners of youth employment programmes and policymakers.
3. **Boost youth participation:** Increase youth participation in all phases of public-sector policy and program formulation to ensure their views and positions are effectively collected and included.
4. **Expand labour-intensive public works:** Accelerate and diversify economic initiatives, including in labour-intensive public programmes, to create more job opportunities for youth people.
5. **Strengthen data collection:** Establish a robust system for data collection at all levels of the economy to gather comprehensive information on youth employment.

6. **Review legislation and policies:** Review existing legislation and policies related to expatriate labour quotas and business licensing processes to safeguard jobs for young people.
7. **Establish job referral centres:** Promote the establishment of decentralised job referral centres where job opportunities and information are shared, and young people receive support for processing job applications. These centres could also facilitate apprenticeships and internships for skills development.
8. **Provide follow-up support:** Implement follow up support mechanisms for youth who have received training, including job referrals, placements, and insertion, to ensure their ongoing success.

These recommendations can be seen in more detail in the full review.



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