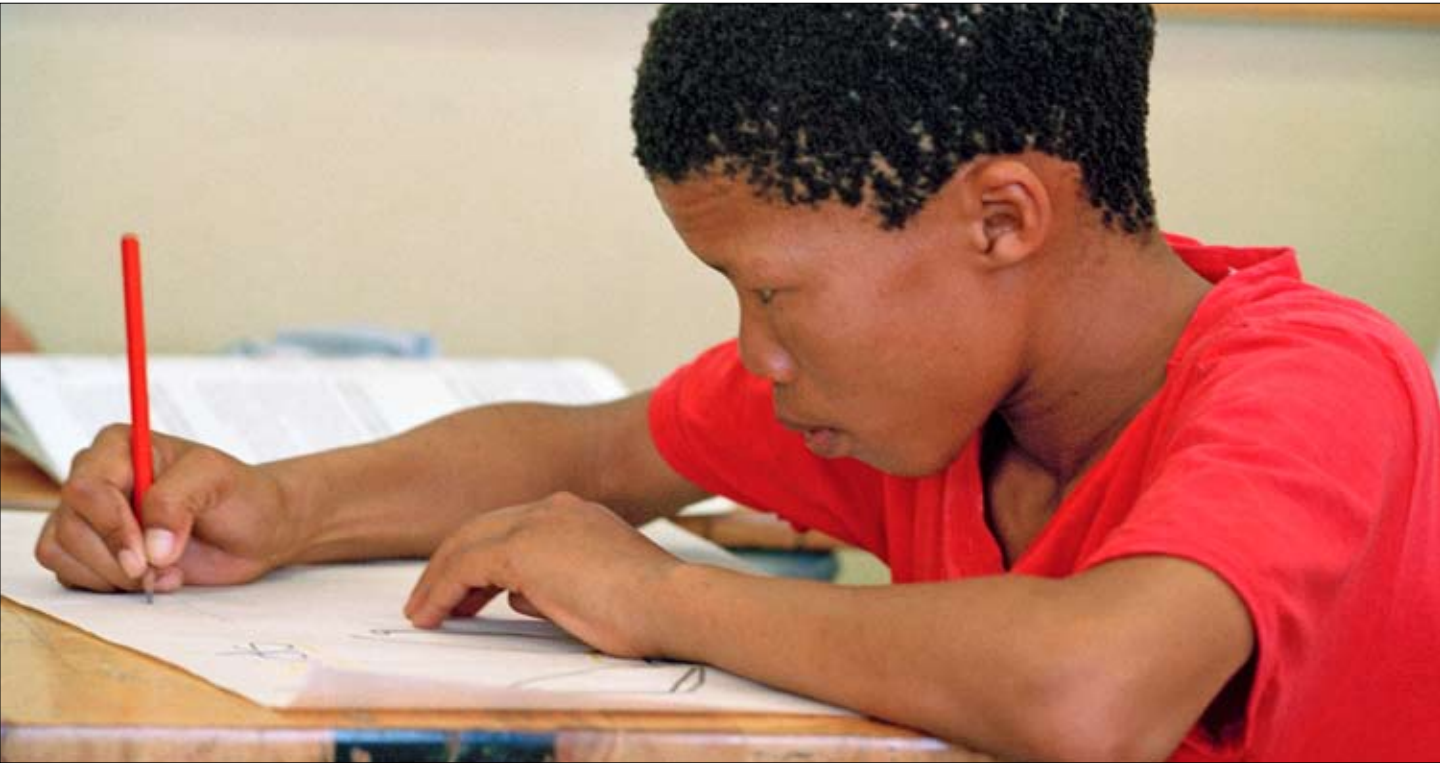


II. Analysis of initiatives on youth education and employment



Over the past three decades, much attention and emphasis have been devoted to youth education and employment. International, regional and subregional commitments, instruments, protocols, declarations and plans of action on youth have been adopted, and African education and employment policies have been developed from these initiatives (*see list of instruments and commitments in annex II*). Significant resources have been allocated to address youth education and unemployment in the formal and informal sectors, including vocational training. In addition, there has been tremendous advocacy surrounding achieving universal primary and secondary

education, but the quest for desired outputs and outcomes from the implementation of these policies and programmes continues.

This chapter analyses the competitiveness of African young people in the light of existing education and employment commitments, initiatives and strategies and the relevance of such commitments, initiatives and strategies in the new global economy, which affect the demand for labour and the supply dynamics of youth employment.

A. Global level

Various global commitments and initiatives in the field of youth were adopted as early as 1965, when a Declaration on the Promotion of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples was adopted in line with the United Nations Charter. Later, instruments like the World Programme of Action for Youth were adopted with priority action in the fields of education and employment for the years beyond 2000. The Programme of Action, which drew on the proceedings of such conferences as the World Summit for Social Development, was updated in 2007 to include a component relating to youth in the global context.

In 2000, more than 200 political leaders from all over the world, including African leaders, endorsed a declaration that ushered in the Millennium Development Goals. Although only Goal 8 of the MDGs specifically mentions young persons, the remaining goals also directly or indirectly relate to youth.

During the United Nations General Assembly meeting in November 2009, the year 2010-2011 was declared International Year of Youth, with the theme of "Dialogue and mutual understanding". The Assembly called upon all Member States, specialized agencies and funds and programmes of the United Nations system to take advantage of the Year and advocate youth development at the national, regional and international levels.

B. Regional level

At the regional or continental level, initiatives and frameworks such as the 2000 Dakar Framework for Action on Education for All and the African Union's Plan of Action for the Second Decade of Education for Africa (2006-2015) were adopted to provide key guiding frameworks for African countries

and promote the right to education and the development of relevant skills as important instruments for access to decent work.

The African Youth Charter, which comprehensively takes into account education, employment and issues affecting African youth in the diaspora, as well as youth quotas in regional, subregional and national institutions, is a demonstration of political will to support youth policies and programmes at the highest level. Adopted in Banjul in July 2006 by heads of State and government, the Charter is a political and legal framework for action that takes stock of the current situation of youth in Africa. Of paramount importance are articles 13, 14, 15 and 16, which deal with the issues of education, skills development, poverty eradication, socio-economic integration of youth, sustainable livelihoods, employment and health. The Charter is a unique and important instrument that safeguards the interests of African youth by taking into account African world views with respect to youth development. It stipulates that the goals of development are attainable only where youths are aware of their responsibilities, as well as the complementary role of the family and government. In addition, the goals of youth can be attained if national governments implement the Charter and prioritize youth issues, taking into consideration the fact that young people are of current importance besides being potential future leaders.

The Fifth African Development Forum, held in 2006, was dedicated to youth development because many African development stakeholders acknowledge that the key to political stability, social development and economic prosperity lies in harnessing the potential of youth. The ultimate objective of the Forum was to deepen understanding of strategies at the regional and national levels for translating the potential of youth into practical benefits. Following the youth forum, the African Union declared an African Youth Decade from 2009 to 2019 to ensure that youth issues continue to be prioritized.

During the Seventh African Development Forum, held in 2010, young people called for efforts to “promote youth-led solution-oriented adaptation and mitigation in climate change issues and processes and accelerate the implementation of existing legal instruments and policies, such as the African Youth Charter ... and the Convention on the Rights of the Child”.

Recent reviews of commitments with youth components such as the outcome document from the Ministerial Conference held in 2009 to conduct an African regional review of the implementation of the Programme of Action adopted at the International Conference on Population and Development led to an increased commitment from policymakers to intensify the country-level implementation of youth-related policies and allocate adequate budgets for the purpose.

C. Subregional level

At the subregional level, several regional economic communities have developed youth strategic plans, established umbrella youth organizations and discussed youth issues extensively in their legislatures. With the advance of regional integration and the promotion of common markets as well as trade areas, the Economic Community of West African States and the East African Community have opened up borders to facilitate employment and education opportunities. Universities in East Africa including Dar es-Salaam, Makerere and Nairobi and universities in the Southern African Development Community such as the University of South Africa and Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University have created consortiums with other universities in their subregions as well as relationships with universities in Europe and North America.

The East African Community recognizes that young people in East Africa are important stakeholders in the Community's implementation processes since they form a substantial cohort of the population and can influence policy formulation and participate in community mobilization/sensitization and policy implementation thanks to their creativity and energy. The Community therefore encourages governments and organizations, including youth organizations, to implement civic education initiatives that include making citizens aware of opportunities, rights and responsibilities within the Community, while urging individual governments, young people and other development partners to promote growth and youth employment as key priorities of the Community's agenda.

The area of the Middle East and North Africa has also recently witnessed a positive change as a result of prioritizing youth issues, which has resulted in the expansion of educational attainment and a reduction in gender disparities in educational attainment. However, education and skills training have generally been of limited quality and relevance and have remained mismatched with the needs of the economy and society. These circumstances have hampered young people's access to employment opportunities in several countries in the area. The countries of the area also assist in the school-to-work transition through formal education, attachment to the labour force, vocational training for young people and skills training and development. They also regard young people as a productive labour force and a driver of future growth, and accordingly active labour market initiatives for youth, retraining and skill development opportunities are vigorously pursued.

The Economic Community of West African States has mobilized efforts to develop a strategy that will address the challenges faced by young people. Acknowledging that young people are often victims of a vicious cycle of poverty,

inadequate education and employment, the Community's youth policy centres on mobilizing young people to get them involved in regional integration and subregional development processes. It recognizes that well-equipped, knowledgeable, disciplined and sophisticated young people in the subregion will not only guarantee sustained economic and socio-economic development, but will contribute to achieving the ideals of subregional integration.

The Southern African Development Community has a youth platform that brings together young people from different countries of the community to advocate sustainable youth development strategies and initiatives and is driven by youth organizations and individuals from the member States which coordinate efforts through advocacy for youth participation in policymaking at various levels, funded research for youth development strategies and work with stakeholders on a consultative basis to improve youth initiatives across the region.

D. National level

Initiatives have been undertaken by individual African governments to address both youth education and employment, including the formulation of youth policies and the mainstreaming of youth issues into national development plans and poverty reduction strategies. Many countries have put in place a framework to address youth issues, in the shape of a national action plan on youth employment, a national youth policy or a National Youth Council, or have allocated a budget line for a Youth Ministry or Council. Some countries, as mentioned in later chapters, are raising skills and promoting employability in post-conflict situations by encouraging and instating vocational training and adult learning. These efforts have fallen under article 12 of the African Youth Charter, which focuses on national youth policy and advises national policymakers to create and develop comprehensive and coherent national youth policies.

Evidently, Africa is not lacking in youth employment and education policies geared towards improving the quality of education, promoting social cohesion or enhancing innovation. However, despite national, regional and international efforts and commitments, the region continues to make slow and uneven progress in youth education and employment in the context of an increasingly globalized world.

This has been attributed in part to the lack of youth-related policies in countries that have still not adopted commitments like the Africa Youth Charter or other programmes related to youth and development. However, some countries with national policies have not effectively mainstreamed them into eco-

conomic activities, while in others, though the mainstreaming has taken place, the outcomes and impact of the policies have been minimal.

Disparities in definitions of youth in global and regional commitments also make it challenging to execute, coordinate and harmonize youth-related programmes. As a result, the gap between the situations facing young people and the application of policies warrants deeper analysis, which could lead to better-concerted efforts in developing the potential of the continent's young people at all levels.

Given the current scenario in the field of youth education and employment, would it be fair to assume that a lot of emphasis has been placed on the formulation of youth policies based on past experience to determine present and future outcomes? Or have countries continuously stated and reiterated the same basic and traditional policies without critically analysing whether they are implementable or not?

Policymakers should explore why rapid economic growth has not translated into the creation of sufficient youth employment opportunities, and whether African young people are sufficiently well equipped to participate and compete in the evolving global economy. More advocacy and research is needed for policy formulation on the key linkages between youth education and employment and how the education-employment nexus can be harnessed to make African youth competitive globally.

1. An enabling policy environment

At all levels, countries seem to be making strides in creating an enabling policy environment for youth participation in development. However, there is more to achieving desired outcomes of the policies in place than simply creating an enabling policy environment.

If they wish to maximize education gains and minimize underemployment and unemployment, African countries may have to consider embedding aspects of education and employment policies at the time of designing macroeconomic frameworks to ensure that these issues are sufficiently addressed, in addition to stabilizing their economies. Countries could then evaluate their macroeconomic frameworks, and suggest how they could incorporate education and employment policies.

Credible macroeconomic frameworks that take into consideration the future and minimal politicization of monetary policy decisions would lead to economic stability, thus increasing productivity in the region. Again, since member States

are promoting regional integration, it is important that the macroeconomic frameworks take into consideration the precise national circumstances as well as the subregional dimension.

Multiple approaches have to be used, as there is no single way to create positive labour markets. Some would argue that a universal approach in some countries would be ideal because of the large numbers of vulnerable people. Whereas others would advocate for targeted interventions through active labour market policies that specifically target disadvantaged youth. In any event, a healthy macroeconomic framework should be stimulated with high private-sector-led growth, investment and job creation.

The lack of demand for labour stemming from insufficient growth has a significant impact on unemployment and underemployment, particularly among young people. It remains the toughest barrier to tackle in emerging economies. While there are other macroeconomic and investment climate aspects that play a role in addressing employment growth, active labour market measures such as wage and training subsidies can motivate employers to recruit young people.

2. Active labour market policies

In order to formulate initiatives and strategies that properly address youth employment challenges, policymakers must understand labour market barriers that hinder youth from securing full and decent employment. For this purpose, labour market information systems, as well as supply and demand analyses, can provide a comprehensive picture of the labour market barriers affecting young people. Some of the most salient labour market barriers facing young people are: job skills mismatch (both technical and non-technical); labour demand barriers, such as observed discrimination by employers towards young people on grounds of lack of job experience, insufficient exposure to a working environment and bad stereotypes; and information gaps between job seekers and potential employers and barriers to the creation and development of businesses, particularly in gaining access to financial, physical and social capital.

Since some experts have heavily criticized fragmented approaches, skills development programmes must be linked to the labour market to improve the employability of young people. Effective youth employability strategies must combine skills development, employment services and entrepreneurship-related interventions. Counteracting the mismatch of technical skills among young people entails facilitating access to vocational training, creating an enabling environment for the development and expansion of a competitive job training

sector and providing effective active labour market programmes to unemployed young people and those living in isolated areas where the market does not reach or working in the informal economy. Additional measures include workplace training and retraining schemes, the promotion and improvement of apprenticeship schemes and subsidized training programmes that offer employers financial incentives to provide on-the-job training, and the delivery of entrepreneurship skills training for young people seeking self-employment opportunities.

Against a background of globalization, instead of formulating more policies, countries could perhaps think of introducing educational and employment reforms to enable African citizens to work in different jurisdictions without necessarily having to physically relocate from their countries. **Other employment reforms could include aligning** remuneration to productivity, and making employment a part of career development in the context of global and regional integration. Employers could also provide their workers with relocation grants.

Subsequently, in order to bring about such reforms, the capacity of public institutions has to be strengthened so that they can collate labour market information in order to anticipate future skills needs and priorities and appropriately align primary, secondary, tertiary and vocational curricula.

African countries could also learn from best practices in countries with flexible labour markets, such as the United Kingdom, which have been applauded for lowering unemployment during the global recession that mainly affected young people. In October 2010 the level of employment in the United Kingdom was reported by the Office of National Statistics to have risen to 70.7 per cent. However, while adopting a flexible labour market might be ideal for some African countries, especially in a context of regional integration, some experts have criticized flexible labour markets for increasing wage inequalities, while others have acknowledged their role in lowering levels of unemployment and inflation.

The importance of integrated approaches in tackling youth employment issues in a sustainable manner should be stressed. In African countries with large informal sectors and rural populations, limiting efforts to reforming labour market institutions and implementing active labour market policies is not likely to have a large impact on the status quo. Governments should also take a well-rounded approach that aims to expand job and education alternatives in rural areas, promote mobility, encourage the private sector and create an environment that is conducive for business and self-employment.

In order to shape policies on youth, education and employment in the global economy, it is helpful to consider a range of scenarios that may describe pos-

sible future realities. Here we present three such scenarios to illustrate how decisions taken today may play out in the future.

E. Possible scenarios in the year 2040²

Scenario 1

By 2040 many of the positive expectations of the previous decades have been met, following full integration among regional economic communities in Africa and wider integration of African economies into the global economy. After years of promoting appropriate school curricula and developing youth skills to a very high (and relevant) standard, investment in infrastructure has also paid off and entrepreneurship has resulted in real opportunity. Employers are now spoilt for choice as graduates and other young people supply experience, education and applicable skills. Similarly, job seekers now feel that the time they have spent studying and accruing skills is translated into tangible job opportunities. A range of African cities have become global and regional hubs for creative and green industries. All of this has been enabled by leaders who have emphasized the need to match national economic planning with education and training, as well as relevant global partnerships with a world that shows a desire to engage fully with Africa. There are obvious economic gains as African countries take advantage of the demographic dividend: the power of African youth will be central to navigating the close of the twenty-first century, when the dividend may become a liability as the youthful continent follows in the ageing footsteps of other world regions.

Scenario 2

The years preceding 2040 have placed focus and emphasis on internal and regional markets. Labour-intensive investments employing low-skilled labour are the order of the day, and training priorities are concentrated around construction, manual labour and servicing of investments. Most highly skilled labour is still “imported” from other regions. National plans do not include the development of a “world class” working class that can compete with others on the global labour market: the prevalent view is one of internal markets, in which Africa consumes what it produces. Though this has meant an inability

² Scenarios are not predictions, but simply plausible future environments that may result from a set of decisions taken today. Short illustrations and examples of such outcomes are provided here. Other scenarios are possible and indeed likely. There is value in mentioning these three outcomes for 2040: it is to highlight that the future is not predetermined and that the environment may change over time to reflect the policy (and other) choices and the different priorities and objectives of the different stakeholders. A more in-depth exercise would increase the value of testing policy decisions over the long term.

to shine internationally, the move of many young people in Africa towards sustainable farming and catering to local and regional markets has resulted in African economies becoming environmentally sustainable and climate-aware. However, this comes at a price: the proliferation of “organic” farms catering to the wealthy and choosy across Africa has been insufficient to lift the (growing) millions out of poverty. Although this dimension has been debated and analysed for decades, progress has taken place, but the realization that Africa is too small a market has once again been blamed for creating insufficient economic growth and employment. Africa is once again reviewing its youth employment strategies.

Scenario 3

Very early on, at the time of the Youth Decade, some African leaders have come to terms with their shortage of skilled (and unskilled) labour; this was highlighted in their inability to provide enough local workers to complete major construction projects, like roads and railways, which were paid for by international investors and donors. This unique situation prompted a two-pronged strategy under which Africa would emerge as a winning and renewed continent in 2040. But since there was no Africa-wide consensus, each country went its own way - perhaps one catalyst for this mosaic of approaches was the continually failing (and eventually declared defunct) Doha round of trade negotiations. The strategy thus became to enter into as many bilateral investment treaties and regional agreements as possible and generate the labour to service specific investments as they were formalized. This “sing and match” strategy worked for a while, early on, and worked best for countries that proved to be the most flexible in agreeing to such treaties and in their labour force. However, over time, it became apparent that generations of workers, though skilled, became obsolete because their skill found no application in the local market once international investments had reached completion or had moved to other countries. So, after an initial frenzy of activity, many countries have come full circle: a small internal market and no jobs for their young people. The old spectre of exporting labour to countries in the growing global economy has once again become, in 2040, an outcome of misguided and short-term strategies.

In conclusion, while stakeholders have their own aims and strategies in youth education and employment initiatives in Africa, African young people should be made accountable for and owners of the commitments made, rather than leaving them to governments as sole owners. Governments should play their role in translating the commitments made into programmes, as well as ensuring adequate youth participation at all levels, including in organizations such as the African Union and other continental and subregional organizations.