

## Executive summary

Young Africans are the key to an African renaissance and will remain players in and advocates of social transformation and development in many spheres. The enormous benefits young people can contribute are realized when investment is made in young people's education, employment, health care, empowerment and effective civil participation. Several initiatives on youth education and employment have been undertaken in Africa, but these need to be deepened in order to exploit the full potential of young people in contributing to poverty reduction and sustainable development.

This report seeks to promote new and deeper knowledge of the potential of African young people and the broad conditions that have an influence on this potential. It acknowledges the predicament of African young people today, noting that they share visions and aspirations that are seemingly beyond their reach, yet are essential elements of today's societies and the future which awaits coming generations. Accordingly, the report focuses on the youth-education-employment nexus in a global economy, because having access to education and later to employment is a precondition for poverty reduction, political stability, peace and security, and sustainable development. Well-educated young people are a source of efficient and productive labour, and a highly skilled and motivated workforce is essential to remaining globally competitive. The report analyses the interdependent relationship between education and employment and the challenges and opportunities facing African young people in these two realms within the context of regional integration and globalization. It provides information, describes best practices and poses questions that policymakers should take into consideration when working on issues that affect young people.

So far, significant emphasis has been placed on prioritizing education and employment in youth development at the global, regional, subregional and national levels. However, tackling the education and employment challenges faced by African young people continues to be a problem requiring more concerted and innovative efforts. Policies on youth education and employment that aim at improving the quality of education, promoting social cohesion and enhancing innovation have been developed in almost all African countries, but the

degree to which they have been mainstreamed into macroeconomic plans and activities remains minimal.

The report asks and examines whether African young people are getting relevant education and skills training; whether education and employment policies are sufficient and effective in securing the future of Africa's next generation; whether there are enabling policy environments for labour markets; and to what extent African young persons are competitive locally, subregionally, regionally and globally.

Despite the progress made in ensuring the provision of universal primary education, it is imperative to ensure the continuation of education to secondary and tertiary levels to prepare youth for an ever-changing globalized labour market and to ensure that high-quality education throughout is backed up by concerted efforts in the first three grades of schooling.

The report acknowledges that rates of education returns, although higher in African countries than in other regions, do not automatically guarantee employment opportunities as there is a mismatch between training and skills development and available opportunities. Tertiary institutions are producing more graduates in social sciences than in engineering or those oriented towards the biological sciences, implying that the current education curricula in many countries do not match the demands of local and international labour markets.

Young Africans need to be competitive in international labour markets. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) should be utilized to improve education and employment opportunities. ICTs can make education and skills development accessible to many young people, for example by extending opportunities for business process outsourcing in many sectors where workers do not need to leave their home countries to seek employment opportunities.

Furthermore, opportunities presented by the creative economy, where young people are developing careers through arts, media and design, green jobs, value addition for natural resources and ecotourism, are potential contributors to African economies and a conduit that could ensure the inclusion of youth in various sectors.

As African governments strategize on ways to reduce youth unemployment and underemployment and address challenges relating to the working poor, the report puts forward the following key messages:

- A change of attitude towards young people and by young people in Africa is essential. Many initiatives have been put in place, but much remains to be done. Clearly, as with the lessons learned from gender and development, stereotypes and the attitudes of both young people and the general population slow progress towards youth development in Africa. Analysing youth education and employment issues should therefore take into consideration historical, psychological and political dimensions. Understanding the context in which programmes and policies are set, and whether the beneficiaries will appreciate them, is crucial. This requires the proactive involvement of all stakeholders, including civil-society organizations, faith-based organizations, the private sector and government.
- An integrated approach to solving youth development issues and addressing education and employment should be employed. Currently many interventions related to youth development are fragmented, including skills development. A new school of thought and a great deal of innovation in addressing education systems, school-to-work transitions, hard and soft skills development and youth employment are required to change the status quo significantly. As a framework for youth development in Africa the continued implementation of the African Youth Charter and the prioritization of youth development during the Youth Decade (2009-2018) is imperative in order to achieve positive outcomes and a better life for young people in Africa.
- In an era of the promotion of regional integration and rapid globalization, African governments should take proactive measures that harness the potential and competitiveness of their young people in the global economy. These measures will vary from one subregion to another and will include, but will not be limited to: enhancing infrastructure; training and retraining to address skill shortages in the region; reforming immigration policies; promoting policies of inclusion and the right to education and work; and strengthening social protection systems, which would increase demand, protect people and support change in society.



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