

African Youth Report | 2011

| Addressing the youth education and
| employment nexus in the new global economy |



Economic Commission for Africa

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Acronyms and abbreviations

AUC	African Union Commission
ICT	Information and communication technology
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

Foreword

The majority of Africa's population is below the age of 30 years. This poses peculiar challenges, including the nature and level of education provision for young people and their quality employment within an increasingly complex and rapidly changing global environment. As we revitalize and promote regional integration, we need to ensure that young people are equipped with social and market-related skills which will enable them to be well integrated young adults as well as being competitive at the national, subregional and global levels.

Current efforts have gone into building young Africans' knowledge and skills through the provision of basic levels of education and vocational training. However, in the new global economy, young people need to acquire more than just basic education, and curricula should be influenced by the current rate of globalization and regional integration. Investing in education and skills development for young people should therefore go beyond increasing basic literacy rates to assure dynamic, multifaceted knowledge-building at higher and tertiary levels. This will go a long way in preparing young people for the evolving labour market.

Although there has been a considerable increase in primary school enrolment, with the majority of African countries on course to achieving the targets of universal primary education and gender parity in education, access to post-primary schooling is still a challenge for most young people in Africa. Overall participation in tertiary education is low, and very few young people from vulnerable groups such as girls, persons with disabilities, young persons living in rural, remote and marginalized areas, young people caught up in conflict situations and orphans have the opportunity to access higher education because of limited resources to meet education costs, amongst other challenges. Cultural beliefs and practices in many instances still have an impact on female participation in education, and many national policies, plans and programmes do not address the multidimensional nature of gender inequalities in education and their implications for girls' right to education.

The need to invest in human capital through education and skills development for young people remains of paramount importance to Africa because of the return on education and the contribution to poverty reduction and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals on the continent. Returns on education are all-encompassing and have implications for peace and security if support for effective social integration, as well as training and meaningful employment, are not provided for young Africans.

As argued in this report, young people need an enabling environment politically, economically and socially to thrive in our countries. They need to be empowered so that they can be represented and participate in decision-making processes that affect their lives. Though Africa has made progress in providing education and skills for more young people than ever before, youth unemployment and underemployment remain a major challenge. Innovative approaches and in-depth analysis of youth issues at both the design and implementation phases of policies and programmes are needed to ensure effective delivery and better outcomes towards a great future for the young women and men of Africa.

We hope that this second edition of the Africa Youth Report will help all stakeholders to identify strategies that can be used to ensure that the education and skills provided for young Africans at all levels is not only responsive and innovative, but positions them well as key players and assets in the development of their countries and the globe.



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