



Economic Commission for Africa

Youth and Employment in Africa



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Introduction

1. Africa's population is very young. Young people make up more than 50% of the population of the countries of Africa, the region that the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) serves. These young people are a potential resource for growth and social development if gainfully and productively engaged. But they could also be a source of devastating social tension and conflict if not. In many countries, the degree to which youth can contribute to the possibilities of their countries in particular and the continent in general is constrained by circumscribed life chances, job opportunities being one of the major circumscriptions. The countless number of jobless young people on the streets of major African cities bears ample witness to the limited job and other opportunities that the youth of the continent have. Yet the development of the continent rests squarely on them; it is through them and by their agency that the vision and noble intentions of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) can be developed. And it is through them that Africa can make progress towards the realization of the Millennium Development Goals, among which are the goals of halving extreme poverty and halting and reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS by 2015.

2. The problem of youth¹ unemployment is not peculiar to Africa. However, the factors driving the phenomenon differ across continents. In Europe and North America, for example, the increasing capital intensity of production, labour unions, labour market regulations, the minimum wage, and generous welfare benefits are among the important factors believed to be driving youth unemployment. In Africa, these factors are not as important. The main drivers of youth unemployment in the region are: a) the generalized lack of employment opportunities due to the underdevelopment of the economies; the employment prospects of Africa's youth are diminished by the already high rate of unemployment and underemployment; b) high rates of population growth; c) sluggish or stagnant economies; d) small formal private sector; d) low literacy and numeracy rates; e) poor quality education and an education sector that increasingly equips young people with limited industrial skills. Attempts to address the problem of youth unemployment in Africa must of necessity examine how these factors are implicated in the phenomenon.

3. This brief paper is an attempt to explore the problem of youth unemployment^{2 in} in the subregion. Its purpose is to contribute to the ongoing policy conversations on interventions to promote youth employment in Africa. It consists of three sections. Section 1 discusses the youth unemployment situation in Africa. It also discusses the consequences of inaction if governments do not act and the challenges that governments face as they attempt to deal with the problem of providing meaningful jobs for their young. Section 2 examines some good practices. Its purpose is to highlight innovative approaches to youth employment in some African countries worthy of emulation by others. Clusters of issues that are important for designing policies to tackle the problem of youth unemployment are discussed in Sections 3. Section 4 concludes.

1. There is no generalized definition of the term "youth". In Mozambique for example, youth is defined as the 14 - 35 age group; in Uganda, it is the 13 - 35 age group and in Nigeria, youth are defined as the 6 - 30 age group and in Australia, it is the 12 - 25 age group. The United Nations defines youth as the 15 - 24 age group. This paper uses the UN definition of youth.

2. The International Labour Organization has done a considerable amount of work on this problem. This paper draws substantially from that body of work.

1. Current Situation

4. This section discusses, albeit briefly, the youth unemployment situation in Africa. It begins with a caveat. Data on unemployment in general in Africa are lacking and weak where available. The International Labour Organization's "Key Indicators of the Labour Market 2001 - 2002" has data for only ten African countries (See Table 1 in the appendix); And even then, not the most recent data. In any case, given the magnitude of the problem, one really does not need to have data to recognize that youth employment is and should be a priority in Africa. Population data show the proportion of the population under 18 to be as high as 55% in countries as diverse as Benin, Niger and Zambia. On average, each year in Africa, there would be 8.7 million new entrants into the labour markets for whom jobs would have to be found. The tightness of the labour market owes in part to the fact that the development of productive employment has not kept pace with increased labour supply.

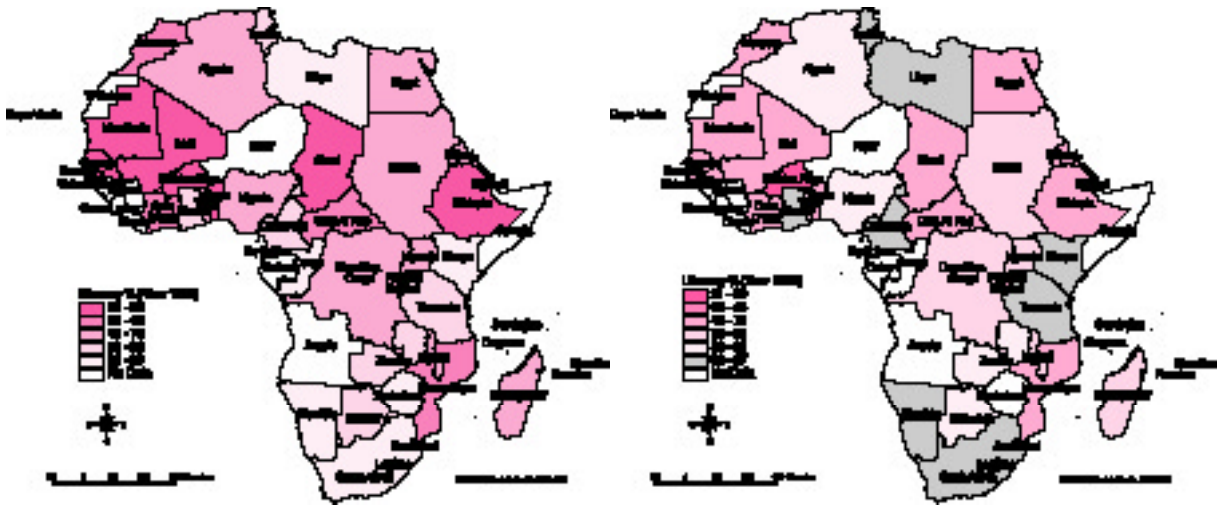
5. Young people accounted for a significant proportion of the unemployed. The very limited ILO data paint a depressing picture: It shows a youth unemployment rate of 23.8% in 1995 for **Mauritius** with the share of youth unemployed to the youth population at 12% (13.9% for males and 9.9% for females). In 2000, 55.8% (57.9% for men and 53.3% for women) of **South Africa's** youth were unemployed. Youth unemployment is no less of a problem in the wealthier countries of North Africa. Youth unemployment rate was 38.7% in 1990 for **Algeria**; 34.4% in 1995 for **Egypt** and 35% in 1998 for **Morocco**. And 57.9% of South Africa's 15-24 year-olds were inemployed in 2000 (World Bank, 2002). In light of the slow rate of economic growth and high rates of population growth, it is unlikely that the situation in these countries has improved significantly. Yet, the economically active population of the continent is projected to increase at 2.94% annually between 1997 and 2010. It would be growing more rapidly than the population at large, and faster than in other regions. This presents great dangers as well as immense possibilities.

6. How can high youth unemployment rates in Africa be explained? One reason is without doubt the generally poor health of African economies. The demand for labour is derived from the demand for final products. When an economy is not growing, output demand falls and with it, the demand for labour. The employment prospects of young people are often diminished when an economy is contracting. Young people often have no job histories, no job-specific skills, and very low employment-related social capital to enhance their attractiveness to employers.

7. Population growth is another factor contributing to youth unemployment. The average annual growth rate of the African population is about 3% (UNDP, 2002). The proportion of young people has been growing at a rate faster than the rate of population growth, resulting in an increase in the size of the working age population. As a consequence, the number of new entrants into the labour market has also been increasing. But this increase is accompanied by declining economic activity of young people resulting from increased participation in school, the discouraging effect of depressed economies, distorted view of the future because of HIV/AIDS, and difficulties young people have finding a job in a depressed economy.

8. Education may also be contributing to the rising youth unemployment. The average level of literacy of the

Figure 1: Africa Literacy Rate



Data Source: UNDP. Human Development Report

new labour market entrant in most African countries has been rising since independence (See Figure 1 below and Table 2 in the appendix).

This is positive. But it is among this segment of the population that youth unemployment is most concentrated. Africa's schools have not succeeded in equipping Africa's youth with the skills needed for a successful labour market tenure. And they are yet to succeed in preparing them mentally for the world of work. Many consider available jobs as beneath them. Furthermore, given the sometimes low wages paid, one of the reasons for the higher youth unemployment rates may be that young people tend to spend more time looking for a job. Subjected to paternalism, many young job seekers with high education levels and high job expectations may be more likely to "shop around" for a suitable job rather than settle on the available job.

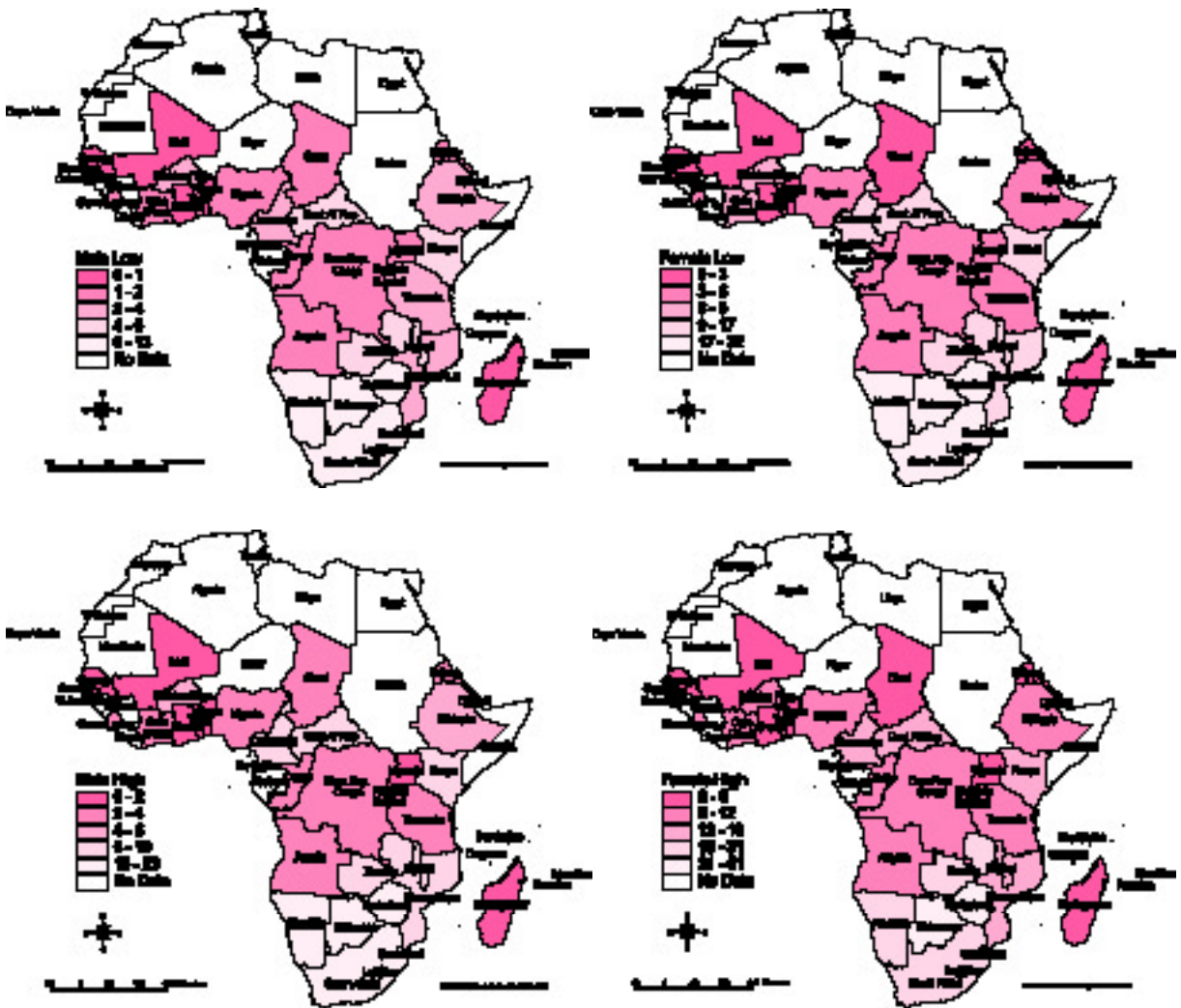
1.2 Challenges

9. It is not easy to deal with the problem of youth unemployment as evidence from around the world shows. In Africa, efforts to meaningfully address the growing crisis of youth unemployment must address five main challenges: the challenge of HIV/AIDS, the challenge of reforming the education sector, the challenge of promoting economic growth, the challenge of promoting female employment, and the challenge of rural youth unemployment.

The Challenge of HIV/AIDS

10. Africa is the continent, at the moment, most affected by HIV/AIDS. The epidemic is depleting the continent's

Figure 2: HIV Prevalence Rate Among Young People, 15 - 24 years old, 2001



Data Source: UNAIDS Report on the Global HIV/AIDS, 2002

very low level of the stock of human capital and thinning its youth population. As shown Figure 2 below, the estimated HIV prevalence rates for young people aged 15 - 24 is high. In Botswana, for example, it is estimated that approximately 45% of females in that age bracket are HIV positive.

Yet this age group that is most vulnerable to HIV/AIDS belongs also to the most productive segment of the population. Lacking resources, it will be difficult for many countries in the region to replace the many educated youth who have been (and who will be) lost to HIV/AIDS, leaving millions of uneducated and difficult-to-educate young people for society to cater for. Meager resources that would otherwise have been invested in schools, job creation

and expanding the opportunities for youth have been expended on treatment and care for the victims. The disease has impoverished many households. In many countries, this has resulted in an astronomical increase in the number of orphans, street children, and child-headed households who are marginalized from many productive opportunities. It is affecting in significant ways the decisions of young people with respect to acquiring human capital and the skills necessary for a successful labour market tenure. HIV/AIDS is thus a major challenge facing Africa's youth and a major variable to take account of as programs are developed to deal with the unemployment problem.

The Challenge of Education Reform

11. Against the backdrop of the high knowledge-intensity of production technologies and consumer products that increasingly characterize the modern economy, a consensus has emerged that Africa's education sector is in dire need of reform because it has failed to produce workers with the skills and aptitudes needed by this new economy. The sector is being called upon to produce the skilled manpower, generate the new ideas, and incubate the new technologies this new economy requires. It is widely recognized that the ability of these institutions to respond to these new needs is limited as can be deduced from the enormous mismatch between the skills produced by the education sector and the skills needed by the labour market. In many countries, the education system has, as a result, been blamed for the rising rate of youth unemployment. Reforming the education sector to make it more responsive to the changing skills need of the economy may not be a panacea for the youth employment problem, it is, nonetheless, of compelling importance.

The Challenge of Promoting Economic Growth

12. Eliminating poverty is the moral debt that African governments owe to their people. The introduction of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) offers a significant opportunity to deepen the focus on broad-based participatory growth strategies for poverty reduction. One of the strategies for poverty reduction is, without doubt, employment. However, very few African countries have explicitly included employment-promoting growth strategies in their PRSPs as a quick look at a number of poverty reduction strategy papers prepared by a number of African countries shows. Indeed, no attention is paid to the problem of job creation in general and youth employment in particular. This needs to be addressed. The challenge therefore lies in designing mechanisms for promoting sustained pro-poor economic growth through employment-promoting strategies.

The Challenge of Promoting Female Employment

13. Young women bear a disproportionate burden of unemployment as the data presented in Table 1 show. Unemployment rates in most countries among females are higher than male rates. Young African women in many cases tend to have lower labour force participation rates than males. Many young women facing dismal employment prospects fall disproportionately into the urban informal sector and subsistence-oriented agricultural activities. Factors such as cultural and other biases against the training of girls, labour market discrimination etc may account for the high rate of female unemployment. African countries therefore face the challenge of improving the employment prospects of young women.

The Challenge of Rural Youth Unemployment and Underemployment

14. According to some estimates, over seventy percent of Africans live in rural areas. This implies that the majority of Africa's young live in rural areas and, dependent as they are on rain-fed agriculture for their livelihood, many are unemployed and under-employed for most parts of the year. A large number migrate to the cities in search of

jobs, thus swelling the number of unemployed youths in urban areas. African countries therefore need to design and devise innovative policies to make agriculture an attractive employment option to young people as part of a comprehensive strategy to combat youth unemployment.

1.3 Socio-economic and Political Context

15. The context for action on youth unemployment in Africa has changed. The new context is characterized by the resumption of growth in many African countries. According to the ECA (2002) Africa grew at an annual rate of more than 4% in 2001 in spite of the global slowdown resulting from the events of September 11, 2001. The context is also characterized by the cessation of conflict in much of the region, an impulse towards regional integration, globalization, and democratization. While the resumption of growth is good news, it is unlikely to make, in the short to medium term, a dent on unemployment because the employment elasticity of economic growth is low.

15. Africa's many conflicts in a rather strange way provided "employment" for millions of young people. As soldiers in various armies, they received food or pay in exchange for their labour. However, the cessation of conflict in countries such as South Africa, Sierra Leone, Mozambique, Angola, and Rwanda has released into the labour market millions of young job seekers many of whom lack the skills or attitude required for employment. This is putting pressure on labour markets in countries and compelling governments to design innovative strategies to reintegrate these youths into orderly society.

17. The context of action on youth unemployment in Africa is also affected by the efforts of African countries to integrate their economies. The birth of the African Union, which seeks to create a common African economic and political space, provides a new prism for looking at the problem and a new framework for considering solutions. An Africa where free movement of goods, services and labour is the norm will result in common policies, the integration of labour markets, and the expansion of employment-generating intra-African trade. Finally, globalization, the increasing integration and interdependence of the world's economies, has a significant impact on youth employment policies. In the globalized economy, youth need to acquire new skills and to constantly update the skills they currently have or risk being marginalized and excluded from economic activity. Human capital is thus of immense importance.

1.4 Effects and Consequences in the Absence of Major Initiatives

18. Youth unemployment and under-employment poses a risk to societies. The consequences of this problem, if no major corrective initiatives are taken, could be disastrous for countries. The link has now been established between youth joblessness and social problems like drug abuse, petty crime and single parent families. Poverty is the fertile ground for the recruitment of child soldiers. Health is an early casualty. Unemployed youth are much more likely to engage in risky behaviour which could increase their vulnerability to contracting HIV/AIDS. Youth unemployment wastes valuable human capital, and causes serious social distress. Jobless youth are often marginalized and excluded from the larger society. The social exclusion can lead to alienation from society and democratic political processes, and subscription to radical and even terrorist ideologies.

19. One very visible consequence of youth unemployment in Africa is the rising rate of crime. The conditions under which people in a society relate to each other is an often neglected but equally important measure of social

progress. In Africa, high crime rates have come to characterize many countries. South Africa, for example, is reputed to have one of the highest rates of victimization in the world. Crime has increased in various parts of Africa at an alarming rate. For instance, in the 1990's, Africa had the second highest homicide rate - second to Latin America (UNDP, 1998). The high crime rate is a symptom as well as evidence of the breakdown of social conditions. It increases the cost of doing business. It is ironical that this development, which severely limits the freedoms of citizens, has occurred at a time when democratic rights have been expanded in many countries.

20. Crime may be a consequence of unemployment, but it is also an additional factor causing youth unemployment through its effects on the economy. Crime affects the economy through a number of channels. First, it increases the cost of doing business for the private sector and of providing public services. Resources that would otherwise have been invested in increasing output and funding education and health are diverted to crime prevention. Second, it reduces the planning horizon for firms and households; firms are discouraged from making long-term investment while the rate of saving by households falls, resulting in a decrease in the supply of loanable funds. Finally, because crime increases the cost of doing business, the high rates of crime reported across the continent may reduce the attractiveness of Africa as a destination of foreign investment.

2. Good practices: What works

21. The urgency and seriousness of the problem of youth unemployment in Africa have induced a number of innovative programs across the length and breadth of the continent. The International Labour Organization has documented some of these programs or good practices. The ECA itself has an innovative programme in partnership with CISCO to address the problem of unemployment among young female adults. A number of these programmes are discussed in this section.

2.1 Harnessing the innovative spirit of disadvantaged, young Ghanaian women: Citi Savings and Loans Ltd.

22. Ninety-two percent of Ghanaian women work in the informal sector. There, they face traditional gender-biases that direct credit and hence entrepreneurial opportunities to men. When the government of Ghana (GoG) began to implement a structural adjustment program in the 1980s the situation worsened as more men entered the informal sector due to lay offs in the public services and in the hitherto protected industries. The GoG undertook several initiatives including the PAMSCAD (Programme Action for the Mitigation of the Social Consequences of Structural Adjustment) to help vulnerable groups. The coverage of these programmes was limited by lack of donor support; training programmes failed to lead to jobs for those who were trained because of the mismatch between the skills they acquired and the skills needs of employers; and, in many cases post-training support was not available to establish beneficiaries in employment.

23. Lack of credit and lack of access to credit was identified by the government as one of the factors impeding success. An innovative program to enable access to credit was therefore an important policy concern. In 1992 Citi Savings and Loans LTD was incorporated and licensed by the Bank of Ghana to operate as a non-bank financial institution with the objectives of mobilizing deposits, granting loans and providing financial services to informal sector micro and small businesses which hitherto had no access to the facilities of traditional banking institutions.

24. Citi began by setting up branches in peri-urban centers of the capital city, Accra. It developed an innovative approach to interface the non-formal market place with the formal using canvassers at the grassroots market services among women groups and individual sellers. In addition, it helped in forming peer groups among women, conducted credit education; and worked closely with the “susu” (informal savings and credit associations) operators. Two specific financial products were designed, namely, “Adom Bosea” (for mostly foodstuff retailers and the kayayoo- teenage girl porters in the local markets) and “Mmoa Bosea” (mostly for chopbar or food caterers, and dressmakers).

25. By 1997 Citi had a patronage of about 10,000, with 2000 of them being men! Citi adopted “a group concept”, where savings and loans were mobilized and delivered on the basis of group involvement in identifying needy customers. The good news is that many kayayoo, girls offering portage services at the local markets and living on the streets at the mercy of unscrupulous gang boys, have been able to move into better occupations such as hairdressing and are off the street.

26. The program’s success is due to many factors among which are the following: a) providing vocational training out of its profits for the poor illiterate youth; organizing them into small groups; targeting assistance in the form

of credit and enterprise formation to groups demonstrating the potential for enterprise development; and providing basic management training. In addition, Citi gives moral support to these women under its Career Mentoring and Entrepreneurial Development Resources programme.

2.2 Good Practice in Training: Youth Enterprise Society (YES), South Africa

27. A good example of a best practice in the area of youth training for employment is the Youth Enterprise Society (YES) in South Africa. The YES program was initiated by Ohio State University in 1989 at the instance of South Africa's youth and their teachers. It is an extra-mural activity that runs throughout the year. Students in grades 7 and above are enrolled. The mission of YES is 'to empower young people, through enterprise, to become masters of their own destinies. Or, put another way, to help more and more young people to become business creators rather than simply job seekers'. It thus seeks to help alleviate unemployment by encouraging young people to consider entrepreneurship as a career option. Participants develop business competencies through a range of activities. Schools provide their premises, teachers serve as advisors/facilitators, and young men and women, along with community leaders, educationists, business leaders together contribute to "create awareness and interest in free-market entrepreneurship as a career option amongst young people", demonstrating the high potential of partnerships between the public education sector and multiple stakeholders for achieving effective education and training. YES has succeeded because it is an active response to a felt and identified need of a community and because of the commitment of all the stakeholders.

2.3 Good Practices that Work: National Open Apprenticeship Scheme in Nigeria³

28. Nigeria has had a history of innovative youth employment programmes. In the 1980s, the government of one of the States, Rivers State, launched an agricultural employment programme directed at youth. The most innovative of the programmes is the National Open Apprenticeship Scheme (NOAS) introduced by the Federal Government in 1987. The NOAS is an attempt to link education and training and the workplace. Managed by the National Directorate of Employment in the Ministry of Labour and Productivity, the NOAS provides vocational education and training to unemployed youth in over 100 occupations. It utilizes production facilities such as workshops and technical instructors of private industries, government institutions and, by way of a sub-contracting arrangement, way-side craftsmen and tradesmen (informal sector operators).

29. Unemployed youth and school-leavers are trained for a period of 6 months to 3 years under reputable Master Craftsmen. They are also taught management, business and administrative skills to reinforce their understanding of the trade in which they are involved and to complement the practical training received. Since its inception, over 600,000 unemployed youth have been trained in over 80 different trades. More than 400,000 of these started their own micro-enterprises. Nearly 50,000 unemployed youth are currently undergoing training.

30. An offshoot of NOAS is the School-On-Wheels programme, which is essentially a mobile training scheme

3. This discussion is based on Kanyenze, G. et al. 2000. "Strategies To Combat Youth Unemployment and Marginalization in Anglophone Africa". Harare, Zimbabwe: ILO

designed to provide vocational training to school-leavers and other unskilled persons in rural areas. The programme is of a three-month duration, after which the graduates are absorbed into NOAS. Over 21,000 youth have benefited from the programme since its launch in 1990. Another related scheme is the Waste-To-Wealth Scheme under which youth are trained in the techniques of converting waste material into useful objects such as snail shells, bamboos and horns into decorative, valuable household goods. At least, 8,000 people have been trained under this scheme since its inception in 1990.

31. In order to prevent NOAS graduates from falling back into unemployment, NDE launched a resettlement programme in 1991. Under the project, NOAS graduates are provided with equipment to start their own businesses. Close to 6,000 graduates of NOAS benefited from this scheme.

2.4 Cisco Internet Networking Technology Training for African Women

32. Education and training are a major activity of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). The Commission, in partnership with infoDev of the World Bank and Cisco Systems Inc., has launched a Cisco Internet Networking Technology Training Course for African Women at its Information Technology Centre for Africa (ITCA) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

33. The training course follows the established curriculum of the Cisco Networking Academy Program. The training course involves a fully sponsored six-month residential course. It provides young women cutting-edge knowledge and skills, empowering them in an area that is quickly gaining importance in our society.

34. In this project, 20 to 25 African women are trained each year over a two-year period in innovative technology of Internet networking design, maintenance and use. In the first training course completed 2002, 28% of women were under 25. The course encourages all age groups but with a special focus on young women, high school, college, university graduates or those whose education has been cut short, thus, these young women benefit from this specialized training where there is current market demand in their specific countries.

35. The program addresses major issues such as: a) the digital divide between men and women; b) the shortage of Africans skilled in the new technologies, c) countering the brain drain, maintaining continuous communication and follow up on their activities at the country level.

36. The program has shown high success, expressed by the desire from all participants to shift from their jobs due to both prospects and learning opportunities. This is demonstrated by the fact that majority of the participants of the first course are currently employed in ICT-related jobs, such as computer teacher, internet service provision, development networks, and so on. The impact and relevance of the training is diverse though. The young women are willing to learn and get on-job training since for many it is their first jobs or second. Thus, they need to build experience and gain the necessary skills.

3. Critical areas for discussion: Best opportunities for promoting youth employment in Africa

37. This section focuses on education and training, youth entrepreneurship programs, Public Works Programme, and Sound Macroeconomic Management.

3.1 Education Reforms and Training

38. It has been noted earlier in this paper that the mismatch between the skills produced by Africa's educational institutions and the skills required by the labour market is a contributory factor to the growing youth unemployment rate. Attempts to modernize and refocus the educational system in the 1980s and 1990s were stymied by cuts in education expenditure recommended as part of the package of reforms under the structural adjustment programmes of that period. But African education still needs to be reformed to make it responsive to changing labour markets. This reform must of necessity include the introduction of more vocational schools and vocational counseling, especially including preparation for productive farming and rural enterprise.

39. Equally important is the need to improve labour market information provided by schools, and strengthening the involvement of other stakeholders, especially the role of employers in defining the content of vocational education. Job search techniques must be part of the curriculum as the paternalistic nature of African societies encourages many youth to still depend on parents and relatives to find them a job. Training in skills will need to include changing the attitude of youth towards employment: promoting preference of work over unemployment, especially concerning the first job; promoting preference of salary over gifts and handouts, and preference of training over unemployment.

40. Courses taught in schools must be relevant. School-to-work transition is an important criterion according to which the relevance of an education system to labor market needs can be measured. It is important that the period between when a student graduates from an education institution and first destination employment be shortened as much as possible. This requires not just a growing economy; it also requires that African education institutions must make themselves more responsive to the labour market. To shorten the transition, the training programs must not be exclusively devoted to the skills needs of the formal sector. They should also address the skills needs of the informal sector, as this sector is an important employer of youths in many African countries.

3.2 Promoting Entrepreneurship among youth

41. An important policy and organizational question is how best to organize/motivate youth to become entrepreneurs and move into self-employment, to become 'job creators instead of job seekers. Governments can do this by promoting youth entrepreneurship. This approach is based on the notion that the promotion of entrepreneurship among young people is a means of youth development, economic empowerment and employment creation. Entrepreneurship enables youth to develop skills and acquire life-skills that may be of value in other endeavors. It also enhances their sense of self-worth. A whole subset of issues is involved here. Among these are: a) Promotion of business role models and mentoring programs, b) Business competitions for youth, c) Growing the family-owned business and dealing with cultural problems - developing an enterprise culture; d) Credit and subsidies.

Can Governments offer credit to youth on concessionary terms to enable them start their own businesses?, If not, can governments limitedly subsidize business started by youth, e) Creation of “business parks” in secondary schools and universities to serve as incubators of business ideas and projects generated by young people.

42. But governments need to be strategic in their promotion of youth entrepreneurship. Governments should concentrate on those activities where youth are known to have comparative advantage. For example, computers and software development, information and communications technology.

43. The organized private sector can be an active partner in the promotion of youth entrepreneurship. It can provide internship and apprenticeship programs to young people. Governments can encourage the private by putting in place conducive policies. Governments could, for example, subsidize the wage bill of firms that grant internship and apprenticeship programs to youth. They can also give incentives such as tax holidays, concessions, or deductions for the private sector to enhance youth employment.

44. Success in creating youth entrepreneurs varies from country to country. There is no need to reinvent what has worked elsewhere. Countries need to build and expand on the practices and programmes that have been identified to work. They need to learn from each other, to share and exchange experiences with one another. A Learning Group/Network which provides a forum for mutual learning could be consequential for sustaining successes in this area. Africa governments may wish to consider setting up a “Learning Group on Youth Employment”. An example of such a learning group is the ECA-initiated Poverty Reduction Strategies Paper Learning Group (PRSP-LG) which provides a forum for African countries to exchange ideas and lessons on their PRSP experience.

3.3 Public Works Programme

45. Furthermore, African governments can promote youth employment in a number of ways. They can set up employment services whose main tasks will be placement, vocational information and guidance, and provision of labour market information to reduce informational asymmetries between employers and job seekers. Unfortunately, not many countries have agencies providing these services.

46. Governments can also directly create employment for youth through employment generation programs. In practically all ECA member states, this has been a natural reaction of governments to increasing youth unemployment. Politically, it shows concern of the government for the plight of youth. Two types of public works programme can be distinguished. The first type consists of public works programme that provide for food, pay or a combination thereof in exchange for the work. The second is a set of direct employment programmes that focus on youths using labour-intensive technologies.

47. Labour-intensive public works have been the tools of choice to deal with economy-wide shocks. Financed by the central government and executed either by central organs or by local organizations, including NGOs, they are designed to a) reduce long-term unemployment through the creation of short-term jobs, b) provide workers with job-specific skills through on-the-job-training, c) involve the private in the creation and maintenance of jobs. There is a wide range of public works programmes in place in ECA member states. In Ghana, youth are employed in afforestation and urban sanitation programs. In Nigeria, youth have been employed on government agricultural plantations, and through the National Directorate for Employment, many have received concessionary credit to enable them start their own businesses.

3.4 Sound Macroeconomic Management

48. Sound macroeconomic policies have a potential role to play in efforts to deal with youth unemployment. One of the problem facing Africa's labour markets is the low rate of aggregate (economic) growth. If aggregate growth rates can be accelerated then employment growth will occur and unemployment, including youth unemployment will fall in the long run. The problem, however, is devising and designing economic policies that would result in sustained economic growth (and by implication, employment growth).

49. The experiences of other countries suggest a range of policies that African countries can put in place to promote economic growth and create good quality jobs for youth. First, they need to liberalize their trading regimes as economic growth is clearly linked to exports, as is the case, for example, for Mauritius. African countries possess substantial agricultural and natural resource goods which can be exported. In thinking about trade liberalization, it is important to note that policies on exchange rate, interest rate, tariffs, export free zones, capital controls, credit allocation, agricultural taxation, inflation, also matter for growth. Important though these factors are, their impact on employment in general and on youth unemployment in particular will, however, operate primarily through the type of export growth that they promote.

50. A sound macro-economic environment is not enough. African governments need to promote active peace and conflict resolution to reduce unproductive, non-employment creating military expenditures. Peace, many studies show, is fundamental for macro-economic stability, economic growth and development.

Conclusion

51. This paper has briefly discussed the problem of youth unemployment in ECA member countries and proposed a number of recommendations. The discussion in this paper has not been exhaustive. Nonetheless, the paper has drawn attention to a number of issues that are of importance to policy. The first is the need for timely, accurate and reliable data on youth unemployment in Africa. The lack of data is an impediment to informed and evidenced-based decision-making. As mentioned elsewhere in this paper, of 53 ECA member states, the ILO has youth unemployment data for just ten countries. Even for those countries, the data are dated and discontinuous. Therefore, not only do countries need to improve their overall data collection capabilities, they also need to focus more on collecting youth data. This requires increased allocation of resources, and capacity development and the construction of a database on youth unemployment.

52. The paper has also highlighted a few innovative youth employment practices in the region worthy of emulation and scaling up. Obviously these are not perfect programmes. They can be improved. And finally, the paper has suggested a few areas for program and policy initiatives.

53. The Economic Commission for Africa, recognizing the magnitude of the problem and convinced that urgent action needs to be taken, has undertaken a number of activities to mobilize action. The Commission, through the Regional Development Centers has undertaken some studies and organized a number of meetings on the employment situation in Africa. Youth employment problems will be a major issue during the Commission's fifth African Development Forum - a gathering of African policy makers, civil society, academics, and Africa's partners to discuss an identified pressing problem of the region - which will focus on labour market and employment issues.

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Appendix

Table 1. Youth Unemployment in Selected African Countries

Country	Latest Year Data	Youth unemployment rate (%)		
		MF	M	F
Ethiopia	1992	0.5	0.8	0.5
Mauritius	1995	23.8	21.4	28.1
CAR	1990	0.6	1.0	0.1
South Africa	2000	55.8	57.9	53.3
Burkina Faso	1991	1.8	2.7	0.7
Niger	1990	0.5	0.8	0.1
Algeria	1990	38.7	46.2	14.4
Egypt	1995	34.4	24.5	59.0
Morocco	1998	35.0	34.7	35.9

Source: Key Indicators of the Labour Market 2000-2001 (ILO)

Table 2: Youth Literacy Rate in Africa, 1985 and 2000

Country	HDI Rank	Youth literacy rate (% age 15-24)	
		1985	2000
Seychelles	47		
Libya Arab Jamahiriya	64	86.7	96.5
Mauritius	67	89.3	93.9
Tunisia	97	78.3	93.4
Cape Verde	100	77.0	88.1
Algeria	106	69.5	89.0
South Africa	107	86.8	91.3
Equatorial Guinea	111	89.1	96.9
Egypt	115	57.0	69.8
Gabon	117		
Sao Tome & Principe	119		
Namibia	122	84.7	91.8
Morocco	123	48.3	67.4
Swaziland	125	81.5	90.4
Botswana	126	78.2	88.3
Zimbabwe	128	90.2	97.2
Ghana	129	74.8	91.0
Lesotho	132	85.1	90.5
Kenya	134	85.0	95.1
Cameroon	135	81.7	93.7
Congo	136	87.8	97.4
Comoros	137	55.8	58.7
Sudan	139	57.7	77.2
Togo	141	56.9	75.4
Madagascar	147	67.7	80.1
Nigeria	148	64.7	86.8
Djibouti	149	66.8	84.0
Uganda	150	65.3	78.8
Tanzania	151	77.4	90.6
Mauritania	152	37.9	48.9
Zambia	153	77.2	88.2
Senegal	154	34.9	50.7
Congo, Dem. Rep.	155	61.4	81.7
Cote d'Ivoire	156	42.9	65.0
Eritrea	157	55.9	70.2
Benin	158	33.9	53.1

Table 2: Youth Literacy Rate in Africa, 1985 and 2000 (cont'd.)

Country	HDI Rank	Youth literacy rate (% age 15-24)	
		1985	2000
Guinea	159		
Gambia	160	35.2	57.1
Angola	161		
Rwanda	162	65.9	83.3
Malawi	163	59.3	71.1
Mali	164	34.9	68.3
Central African rep.	165	45.1	67.2
Chad	166	39.0	66.6
Guinea -Bissau	167	38.0	58.2
Ethiopia	168	37.5	54.8
Burkina Faso	169	20.9	34.6
Mozambique	170	43.2	60.6
Burundi	171	45.5	63.9
Niger	172		
Sierra Leone	173		
Developing countries		78.4	84.6
Least developed countries		52.3	66.0
Arab States		63.1	79.1
Sub-Saharan Africa		61.7	77.7
South Asia		57.4	69.6

Source: Human Development Report 2002

Table 3: HIV Prevalence rate (%) in young People (15-24)

Average for	Female		Male	
	Low Estimate	High Estimate	Low Estimate	High Estimate
Subsaharan Africa	9.07943	14.6363	3.82829	6.204
Angola	4.14	7.33	1.61	2.85
Benin	2.97	4.46	0.94	1.41
Botswana	29.99	44.98	12.86	19.29
Burkina Faso	7.78	11.67	3.18	4.77
Burudi	7.98	14.11	3.58	6.33
Cameroon	10.09	15.25	4.33	6.55
Cape Verde				
Central African Republic	10.83	16.25	4.66	6.99
Chad	2.79	5.77	1.55	3.2
Comoros	....	....	....	....
Congo	5.08	10.52	2.13	4.42
Cote D'Ivoire	6.67	9.95	2.34	3.49
Democratic Rep.	4.27	7.55	2.11	3.74
Djibouti	....	....	....	....
Equatorial Guinea	1.8	3.74	0.91	1.88
Eritrea	3.1	5.49	2.01	3.55
Ethiopia	5.65	9.99	3.17	5.62
Gabon	....	....	....	....
Gambia	0.88	1.82	0.34	0.71
Ghana	2.08	3.86	0.95	1.76
Guinea	....	....	....	....
Guinea-Bissau	1.94	4.02	0.69	1.43
Kenya	12.45	18.67	4.8	7.21
Lesotho	24.75	51.4	11.31	23.49
Liberia	....	....	....	....
Madagascar	0.19	0.28	0.05	0.08
Malawi	11.91	17.87	5.08	7.62
Mali	1.35	2.81	0.89	1.84
Mauritania	....	....	....	....
Mozambique	10.56	16.78	4.41	7.84
Namibia	19.43	29.15	8.88	13.32
Niger	....	....	....	....
Nigeria	4.68	6.99	2.39	3.59

Table 3: HIV Prevalence rate (%) in young People (15-24) cont'd.

Average for	Female		Male	
	Low Estimate	High Estimate	Low Estimate	High Estimate
Rwanda	8.96	13.44	3.93	5.9
Sao Tome and Principe				
Senegal	0.43	0.65	0.15	0.22
Seychelles				
Sierra Leone	4.88	10.19	1.61	3.36
Somalia	....	....	....	...
South Africa	20.51	30.76	8.53	12.79
Swaziland	31.59	47.38	12.18	18.27
Togo	4.75	7.12	1.64	2.48
Uganda	3.7	5.56	1.59	2.38
United Rep. Of Tanzania	6.44	9.67	2.84	4.25
Zambia	16.78	25.18	6.45	9.68
Zimbabwe	26.4	39.61	9.9	14.85

Source: UNAIDS Report on the Global HIV/AIDS 2002