

Youth Unemployment and Regional Insecurity in West Africa



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Acronyms

ACOPAM	Cooperative and Organizational Support to Grassroots Initiatives
AFRICATIP	Association Régionale des Agences d'Exécution des Travaux d'Intérêt Public
AGETIP	Agence d'Exécution des Travaux d'Intérêt Public contre le Sous-emploi
ALP	Accelerated Learning Programme
AREED	African Rural Energy Enterprise Development
AU	African Union
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
DESA	Department of Economic and Social Affairs (United Nations)
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EIIP	Employment Intensive Investment Programme
EITI	Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FNPJ	Fond National pour la Promotion de la Jeunesse
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GOPEC	Groupe Opérationnel Permanent d'Etude et de Concertation
GSB	Growing Sustainable Business
HIPC	Heavily Indebted Poor Countries
ICRISAT	International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
ILO	International Labour Organization
IPEC	International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour
MFI	Microfinance Institution

Acronyms

MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MIGA	Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NOAS	National Open Apprenticeship Scheme
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OHADA	Organisation for the Harmonisation of Business Law in Africa
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
SIYB	Start and Improve your Business
SUF	Slum Upgrading Facility
UEMOA	Union Économique et Monétaire Ouest Africaine
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UN-HABITAT	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNOWA	United Nations Office for West Africa
WFP	World Food Programme
YEN	Youth Employment Network

“Tens of millions of youth across the continent lack prospects of decent work. This is not only a tragic waste of a precious human resource. It can also have security implications for almost every country in Africa, since desperation often leads young people to fall prey to warlords, criminal gangs or illegal migration syndicates.

Here in this sub-region, the UN Office for West Africa and its partners have just published an important report on the links between Youth Unemployment and Regional Insecurity. I urge you to explore its recommendations.”

Extract from Statement by
UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan
at the France-Afrique Summit,
Bamako, Mali 3 December 2005

Preface

In recent months, television networks across the world have shown footage of scenes that many viewers found shocking.

Waves of mainly West African youths were witnessed flinging themselves against the steel wire surrounding the Spanish enclaves in Morocco in a desperate bid to find a passage to what they regard as opportunity – the opportunity to work for a decent living, an option that appears all too often lacking in their countries of origin. As long as youths in the region regard their prospects for securing work in West Africa as unattainable, they will continue to try to escape from what seem to them to be lands of ‘non-opportunity’.

Current levels of unemployment among young men and women in West Africa are a ticking time bomb for the region and beyond. In some countries, such as Sierra Leone, the number of young people lacking proper work exceeds 50%.

This is not just a social disaster and

a huge wasted economic asset. Ever-rising joblessness among youths¹ and the desperation that accompanies it undermines the possibility of progress in those countries in the region that are emerging from conflict. It also risks destroying the political and social structures even of countries that are at present stable, especially when combined with West Africa’s alarming demographic trends. In short, the future of the entire region is threatened by the growing numbers of youths who lack prospects of ever being able to work for a reasonable living.

Until this situation changes, the likelihood of having genuine peace, security and development in West Africa will remain small. At the same time, pressures to migrate illegally and dangerously to parts of the world where opportunities seem more available will continue to mount, with varying consequences for the receiving countries.

As the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, put it recently, youth employment offers “the most obvious bridge between the development

and security agendas embodied in the Millennium Declaration”, since a poor economic and social environment can foster conditions in which people are recruited into armed conflicts in their own and neighbouring countries. The burden is borne by “all those living in communities and societies where youth unemployment is the root cause of destructive and self-destructive behaviour, ranging from activity in neighbourhood gangs to membership of local militias, where unemployed young people desperately seek not only income, but also recognition and a sense of belonging.”²

The Secretary-General was describing global trends, but there are few regions of the world where this description would be more applicable than West Africa.

In its Presidential Statement of 25 February 2005, the Security Council reaffirmed the urgency of finding lasting solutions to the problem of youth unemployment in West Africa in order to prevent the recruitment of such youth by illegal armed groups. This followed the Security Council Mission to West Africa in July 2003, which reported that, “In every country visited, the mission heard about the problem of unemployment, particularly among young people, and how this was a perennial source of instability in West Africa.” The mission expressed the hope that the United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA)

would undertake a major collaborative effort with its partners to devise a practical and concerted regional approach to this pressing problem.³

In response, and at the request of the Secretary-General, UNOWA established a task force of concerned agencies in the UN system, and has been working with a number of other partners, especially the Secretary-General’s Youth Employment Network (YEN), civil society organizations and individual experts. The current report is the product of those efforts, as well as improved inter-mission cooperation among the UN’s peace operations in West Africa. We are very grateful for the help of all of UNOWA’s partners who have kindly assisted in these efforts, in particular the ECOWAS Secretariat in Abuja, the YEN Secretariat based at ILO Headquarters in Geneva, the Conflict Prevention and Peace Forum (CPPF) in New York, and the UNICEF Regional Office for West and Central Africa in Dakar.

This report – the first in a series of issue papers by UNOWA – is not an economic study per se. Nor is it a political paper advocating a specific ideology or policy. Its purpose is to address, as concisely as possible, a series of issues relating to youth unemployment in West Africa and to present some relevant recommendations that could assist policy-makers and other people of influence to draw their own conclusions about what concrete actions ought to be taken.

This paper insists on only one point: that something needs to be done urgently to put an end to the situation whereby so many of West Africa's most qualified and dynamic youths feel compelled to court hardship, danger and death in ever more desperate attempts to breach Fortress Europe. For their sake, as well as that of the countries and societies from which they come, it is crucial to create more opportunities for the youth of West Africa. Many different actors, including development partners, can and should play a role in this vital common endeavour.

Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah
Special Representative
of the Secretary-General
for West Africa

Overview and summary

Youth unemployment – and its corollary, underemployment – has become a central political-security issue in West Africa, in addition to being a socio-economic one. Its causes lie in both spheres, as do its effects. Youth who are able-bodied but unskilled, jobless and alienated, have been ready to take up arms in exchange for small amounts of money – together with the promise of recognition, loot and “wives” – and are more likely to be drawn into the influence of warring factions or criminal gangs to gain this “empowerment”.



This unemployment fuels conflict and crime, both of which then in turn increase unemployment still further by their effects on economic performance, investor confidence and social, physical and institutional structures. Job creation, therefore, is a key tool for conflict prevention.

Cross-border recruitment of young people for armed conflict is all too common in the arc of territory extending from Guinea-Bissau to Côte d’Ivoire. Combined with many other cross-border

problems in West Africa – including small arms, mercenaries, illegal checkpoints and drug-trafficking – the issue of youth unemployment cannot be solved on a country-by-country basis alone, but requires a regional approach both in dealing with its negative effects and in devising a strategy for reversing it.

An important dimension of youth unemployment analysis is gender. Youth – boys and girls – face different social roles and thus the ramifications of unemployment are often different,

depending on gender. Girls' pre-defined roles within the family and in society can limit their options and make them more vulnerable to violence.

Three major problem areas relating to gender can be identified:

1) In post-crisis countries, the incentives to give up arms must be strong and must offer sustainable solutions on an individual level for boys and girls, respectively. In neighbouring countries as well, the incentives not to pick up arms must be competitive when young people are exposed to recruiting campaigns by emissaries of foreign troops.

2) When confronted with unemployment, girls are more often than boys driven into prostitution in order to provide food for the family. In doing so, girls risk STDs due to unprotected sex, as well as early motherhood, which can deepen the spiral of poverty. Girls and boys must be empowered to (re-)gain power over their lives and bodies following conflict, and income alternatives to prostitution and "body-for-food" survival strategies must be offered promptly.

3) Promotion of young women and men with diplomas should be given a high priority by all actors. A larger proportion of girls with higher education will in the course of time change the proportion of women in decision-making positions, promote equality and provide role models for young girls and boys. The estimated rate of unemployment among youth in sub-Saharan Africa is thought to be three times higher than among older adults, though no reliable figures exist partly since millions of youths are

grossly under-employed or compelled to work under poor conditions in the informal sector. Of course, youth in themselves are not the problem. The Report of the Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change cites an African woman asking, "How have we let what should be our greatest asset, youth, become a threat to our security?"⁴ The continued disregard of their aspirations may well provoke instability since youth are often at the forefront of denunciations of injustice and demands for reform. The vast energies of youth should be treated as a potential asset for society, both in the design and implementation of national and regional development programmes, rather than as a threat or a liability.

The case for investing in youth, although reiterated at the level of rhetoric, particularly during election campaigns, is rarely put into practice. The challenge is for West African Governments, development partners, and civil society organizations to tap into this vast potential. Investment in job creation and increased employability for young men and women could provide massive returns. Indeed it has been estimated that halving the rate of youth unemployment in sub-Saharan Africa could add up to 19% to Gross Domestic Product (GDP).⁵

Creation of employment for unskilled youth may be the priority in terms of turning what is currently a threat to stability in parts of West Africa into a positive force for development. At the same time, however, jobs also need to be created for large numbers of highly trained graduates for whom quality jobs are extremely hard to find, leading

to a flight from the region of some of West Africa's brightest hopes for the future. Increasing numbers of these will be tempted to take the path of immigration to Europe and the US, during which many may fall victim to criminal immigration syndicates. It is a tragedy that many of the region's young people seem to have, almost as their highest aspiration, the idea of stowing away inside an aircraft's undercarriage or a truck container in order to take themselves away from Africa, where they cannot find proper work, to what they see as lands of opportunity in Europe or North America.

Recent events in Morocco – where hundreds of West African youths tried to storm European enclaves – may have shocked people the world over. But we ought to recognize that such scenes are likely to pale into insignificance compared to what we could be witnessing in, say, 20 years' time, given the likely vast increase in the number of unemployed youths in the region, as well as in their levels of desperation in the face of the lack of opportunity at home. If serious initiatives are not taken to address the absence of job opportunities in West Africa, both the region itself and those countries which young people try to reach will bear the consequences.

At the African Union (AU) Extraordinary Summit on Employment and Poverty Alleviation held in Burkina Faso in October 2004, the AU and the International Labour Organization (ILO) placed employment at the heart of the fight against poverty. Heads of State reiterated the recommendations made by the High-Level Panel of the

Youth Employment Network (YEN) and stressed the need for an integrated employment strategy focussing on: i) entrepreneurship, ii) employability, iii) equal opportunity, and iv) employment creation.

This integrated approach rightly stresses both demand and supply factors. Awareness of the gravity of the issue of youth unemployment may be growing. This is a positive development, but genuine commitment to taking actions to resolve it seems less apparent.

Current demographic and urbanization trends in the region are among the highest in recorded history anywhere. It is estimated that there may be 430 million people living in West Africa in 2020, resulting in an increase of over 100 million inhabitants in just 15 years. As the Sahel and West Africa Club puts it, "This demographic growth will be embodied by the predominance of youth seeking employment; increased urbanisation; pressure on land and food security; socio-economic infrastructure needs for an expanding population; heightened migratory movements, etc."⁶

Millions of people live in appalling slum conditions in the vastly expanding cities of the region, where the numbers of unemployed youth rise year after year at a prodigious rate. In addition to the demographic growth rate (Niger has the world's highest rate of births per woman, 8.0, and those of some other West African countries are almost as high⁷), one of the key factors behind urban unemployment in West Africa is the exodus from rural areas on the part of millions of young men and women. In Burkina Faso, for

instance, 93% of migrants to cities are young people under 35 years in search of employment.⁸ The reality behind this phenomenon is under-employment and lack of possibilities in rural areas (the “push factor”), combined with the often mistaken assumption that employment possibilities in the big cities are better (the “pull factor”). Measures to reduce youth unemployment need to be taken with these factors in mind.

Although the focus of this report is on West Africa as a region, and the majority of the recommendations are relevant to several countries within it, it is not suggested that an area as vast as West Africa, with all its disparities and particularities, is an economically or politically homogeneous zone. Nor should West Africa’s youth population be seen as an undifferentiated mass for whom employment must be found. Rather, jobs programmes should specify which types of youth are being targeted, and consideration with regard to gender must be taken. Youth themselves – both

boys and girls – must be genuinely engaged as partners in all efforts to address the problem.

Some of the recommendations contained in this report focus on West African countries emerging from conflict, others on those where a functioning Government exists. Some are directed at those Governments, others at development partners, including the United Nations system, and a few at the private sector.

For those recommendations that imply the use of additional resources, decision need to be made on how much of these are to be provided by development partners and how much by the reallocation of national budgets. Individual West African Governments, which have the primary responsibility for finding jobs for youths, already have many competing national priorities and limited means to meet them. It is hardly reasonable to expect them to try to implement each recommendation in all



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areas of activity identified as a priority by every external “advisor”, and it is up to them to decide how to deploy the means at their disposal.

Revenues from natural resources such as oil, diamonds and timber, which in some cases have fuelled conflict and in turn aggravated unemployment, could be better used to fund some of the initiatives proposed in this report. Other priorities in order to help create employment are orienting existing public investments and emergency relief in favour of greater impact on job creation, curbing corruption, creating an enabling environment for domestic and foreign investment, and supporting a legal system which fosters a culture of predictability and accountability.

One of the recommendations of this paper is the establishment of a small regional sub-office of the Youth Employment Network (YEN), the membership of which comprises the World Bank, the United Nations Secretariat and the ILO. Having a regional focal point for the issue, tasked with working closely with ECOWAS, would greatly facilitate the implementation of many of the other recommendations made to increase employment among the youth of West Africa.

West Africa’s prospects for development and stability will be undermined for as long as current demographic trends, economic policies and governance practices keep tens of millions of youth without jobs and in despair for their future. The international community has not been short of initiatives in the past, and some West African Governments have

recognized this issue as a priority. They have made efforts to act on it. However a greater commitment is needed. But true commitment towards addressing this question is another story.

The present report contains a number of recommendations that are practical, specific, and feasible. The chapters are not laid out in terms of priorities. Covering different spheres of activity by different actors, they all represent important means of reducing unemployment and action needs to be taken simultaneously on each front. Some recommendations focus on supply (in the areas of vocational training, employability and entrepreneurship); others on demand (employment intensive works programmes, and improving the business environment in order to boost economic growth). A comprehensive, integrated and regional approach is needed to address this ever more serious problem for West Africa.

II.

Improving the business environment

As described in the recent report of the UK-sponsored Commission for Africa, “The cost of business has often been too high in Africa, whether due to inadequate infrastructure, excessive regulation or corruption.”⁹ The actions required to change this state of affairs in West Africa lie mainly in the domain of the Governments, working in coordination with regional organizations, such as ECOWAS and UEMOA, and international partners. Infrastructure is dealt with in the next section of the report; this section looks at other ways of improving the environment for doing business. Progress towards deregulation, commercial justice and property rights changes would need to be made in several countries of West Africa. The African Union’s NEPAD programme has proposed an Investment Climate Facility the main objective of which will be to assist African countries to put in place improved and simpler policies and regulations that facilitate investment, competition, trade and job creation and business generally. This will require support from many quarters.

Greater levels of transparency are a prerequisite for attracting investment.

The current anti-corruption campaigns in countries such as Nigeria should be sustained, expanded and emulated elsewhere.

New Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) could make a major contribution to employment generation, and it is essential that Governments of the region, assisted by their partners, help to create an enabling environment for this investment. At the same time, FDI should be evaluated to ensure that it stimulates rather than crowds out employment-generating domestic investment.

Lack of transparency has been especially acute in industries that are primarily extractive in nature, and this has undoubtedly contributed to corruption, poor economic performance and high youth unemployment in countries with abundant natural resources. Other West African governments should follow the example of the Nigerian Government in supporting the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), coordinating their efforts with the EITI secretariat in London.



trade in many parts of the region. As such, they do much to hold back economic growth and employment. The harassment that takes place at borders and illegal checkpoints also includes gender-based violence, particularly in conflict areas. Initiatives to raise awareness and to facilitate free circulation of persons and goods therefore

Multinational corporations must also do more to apply the principles of transparency and accountability in their West African operations. The recently-approved revenue management system for Liberia¹⁰ could serve as a useful basis for similar policies in other countries.

Increased regional economic integration would improve the climate for growth. At the inter-governmental level, ECOWAS is currently developing a welcome large-scale initiative to facilitate the free movement of goods and services. Stricter observance of the relevant ECOWAS protocols would lead to increased growth and employment prospects. Priority activities planned by ECOWAS in this regard include: general information and sensitization campaigns, translation of protocols into local languages, training and capacity-building of national security and customs officials, and the establishment of border patrol units to monitor the presence of illegal check-points.

The illegal check-points, bitterly nicknamed “cash-points”, are a significant impediment to free circulation and

must include this dimension. West African Governments must do more to clamp down on illegal checkpoints. This aspect of security reform is a vital one, and strong signals from Governments that these check-points will not be tolerated could serve as a significant deterrent. Increased levels of economic activity and therefore employment will speedily result in areas where illegal check-points are removed.

One important step that Governments of the region could take to encourage a business-friendly environment would be to carry out a major review for reducing the number of procedures for business startup, the “commissions” that need to be paid and the delay in obtaining an authorization. Governments could also facilitate business start-up by creating accessible one-stop sources of information and guidance to inform young people about regulations and appropriate procedures to be followed.

Recommendation 1 : UNOWA and UNODC, as well as other international partners, especially the EU, should assist

ECOWAS in the preparation of annual reports on transparency in each of its member states. Independent bodies, including audit firms and appropriate civil society organizations, such as local chapters of Transparency International, could be sub-contracted to undertake much of the necessary research for these reports which would highlight progress in the fight against corruption and point out where additional work is needed. In addition, the accountancy profession should be promoted at universities and, as part of corporate responsibility programmes, major international accountancy firms might consider mentoring aspiring young accountants in West Africa to build up the region's capacity in this area.

Recommendation 2 : Support should be given to ECOWAS by both development partners and West African Governments to assist initiatives to raise awareness and to facilitate free movement of persons and goods. In this regard, UNOWA should help organize workshops for customs and other officials on different sides of a border to improve observance of ECOWAS protocols and to reduce the harassment of traders that often takes place at borders and illegal checkpoints. ECOWAS and its partners, including the OECD's Sahel and West Africa Club and UNOWA, should target specific zones for improved collaboration regarding cross-border infrastructure and harmonized customs rules and regulations. The Organization for Harmonisation of Business Law in Africa (OHADA) could also assist ECOWAS in this area.

Recommendation 3 : Governments of the region should each initiate a public review of procedures required to start up a business. Based on the publicized results, Governments would be in a position to take the necessary steps for improving the country's business environment.

III.

Investing in infrastructure and public works

Poor physical infrastructure is a major brake on West Africa's development, since it raises the costs of producing goods and services to levels that make them uncompetitive. Improving a country's infrastructure through labour-intensive public works schemes can create large numbers of jobs, and also remove this impediment to economic growth. In this connection, improved energy supply, irrigation systems and road networks (particularly in rural areas) are essential requirements for economic growth. Infrastructure projects with social benefits – slum upgrading, the building of community centres, schools and health facilities – can also be used to create jobs for the unemployed. There are infinite possibilities for public works, some of which can be targeted towards specific groups, such as war-affected youth. Public works programmes are a potential entry for youth into the labour market, and a mechanism to extend skills for on-the-job training. What is required is an initiative to select the most important schemes and present them to development partners and private investors.

An area where public works programmes have been relatively well managed is the

AGETIP,¹¹ a programme first conceived in Senegal to sub-contract, coordinate and supervise the execution of public works with a view to providing jobs for unemployed youth. The programme has been successful in creating jobs for young people because of its clear objectives, a strong political will to implement them, and the support of development partners. With an additional training component, enabling short-term employees to upgrade their skills, it could be even more effective. AGETIP is a good example of private-public partnership, absorbing the unemployed through labour-intensive contracts, using the private sector in project execution while involving government in planning and budgeting. It has been successfully replicated in 10 other West African countries, operating under the umbrella of AFRICATIP.

Governments in West Africa and elsewhere in the developing world spend vast amounts on new infrastructure. Even a minor adjustment in the way these funds are channelled could have a significant impact on job creation. Some areas of infrastructure (road and railway construction and maintenance, irrigation, afforestation, etc.) are especially labour-

intensive. In construction projects where the emphasis is on imported equipment, the cost of labour may be as low as 10% of project costs. Using a labour-intensive approach can take the share of employment costs in the project up to 40%, with the same investment and technical standards, therefore creating up to four times as many jobs. In addition, credible studies suggest that each job directly created leads to 1.5 additional jobs created indirectly, thanks to effects on increased local demand and purchasing power. Employment-Intensive Investment Programmes (EIIP), since they provide jobs and training to mainly unskilled youths, can therefore produce combined benefits both for poverty alleviation and economic growth.

Governments of the region should review their bidding and tendering procedures and regulations to ensure that they do not discriminate against small-scale labour-based contractors in favour of larger companies that use labour-saving mechanization techniques imported from overseas. The latter methods may offer greater opportunities for corrupt practices, which is why increased vigilance is required by Governments and transparency watchdogs to ensure that local labour-intensive bids are not discriminated against. The international community, especially development partners, also have a role to play in encouraging West African Governments to pursue EIIPs.

Some countries in the region, including Senegal with its GOPEC¹² and Green Sahel programmes, have in the past created hundreds of thousands of temporary jobs in rural areas, using relatively small

investments. Tree planting, with all its environmental benefits especially in combating desertification, is an area of activity which has been shown to generate large numbers of jobs for relatively low capital costs. West African Governments should work with development partners to expand projects in this field.

Promotion of renewable energy is another means of expanding youth employment while also contributing to sustainable development and environmental protection. Renewable energy allows actors to make visible progress with small investments and can stimulate employment-generating growth by increasing energy supplies in previously deprived areas. The African Rural Energy Enterprise Development (AREED), supported by UNEP and the United Nations Foundation (active in Senegal, Mali, Ghana and other countries on the continent) offers rural energy entrepreneurs assistance in training, business planning and start-up financing. To promote the development of this new sector, Governments should help environmental and development partners to disseminate information and technical know-how on solar, water, wind and biomass energy, and should encourage the private sector to come up with business plans to market renewable energy.

One form of renewable energy that seems especially suitable for many areas of West Africa is the use of cheap solar cookers. Trees and forestlands in the region have been disappearing at such an alarming rate, largely owing to the rising demand of fuel-wood, that the costs of charcoal have become a major drain on family income, while women and girls are obliged to walk

ever longer distances in search of wood. Where appropriate, propagation of this simple technology would be a source of employment for many women, if funding could be identified. Correspondingly, freed in large part from the immense chores of searching for fuel-wood, maintaining fires and stirring food, hundreds of thousands of women could be empowered to participate in income-generating employment.

One form of public works programme that has proved beneficial to West African populations, both socially and economically, are the food-for-work projects managed by the World Food Programme (WFP). Efforts should be made to widen the number and scope of these projects, especially in post-conflict recovery situations where large numbers of demobilized combatants and returnees suffer from unemployment. Girls and young women driven into prostitution during the conflict can also benefit from food-for-work programmes. It is recognized, however, that food for work is not a lasting solution for creating self-sustaining employment. It should be used either in emergencies or in start-up phases before projects become sustainable.

Recommendation 4 : Each of the 15 UN Country Teams in the ECOWAS region should review public investment proposals in their countries using such criteria as: i) the number of jobs they can create compared to the amount of investment required, ii) their social or economic utility, and iii) their sustainability; and iv) gender analysis. Each UN Country Team, working with the Government and other

partners, could compile a list of proposals for a consolidated regional public works programme in West Africa that might be submitted by YEN and ECOWAS to development partners in 2006. The ILO's Employment-Intensive Investment Programme could support this review process with respect to NEPAD's Infrastructure Project Preparation Facility and the proposed Investment Climate Facility in order to evaluate and increase the impact of their portfolio of investment and infrastructure projects on employment creation.

Recommendation 5 : AGETIP programmes should be reviewed, expanded and sometimes refined in order to cope with the growing numbers of unemployed youth. Governments and partners should support the feasibility and impact studies currently being developed by the ILO and AFRICATIP to better harness the employment potential of the donor grant and loan resources being channelled through AGETIP programmes.

Recommendation 6 : Governments, development partners and UN Country Teams should identify suitable EIIPs in each West African country and then push for their implementation. Debt cancellation or relief initiatives, such as the G8 Gleneagles Plan of Action of July 2005 and the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative, should include provisions whereby resources saved through debt relief can be redirected not just toward

the social sectors, but also to create infrastructure using high labour-intensive methods.

Recommendation 7 : Special focus should be placed by Governments of the region and their development partners on labour-intensive programmes such as farm-to-market roads and irrigation to increase the productivity and competitiveness of agriculture and reduce the rural exodus. Similarly, as tried elsewhere,¹³ Governments should consider promoting labour-intensive infrastructure development for organized youth groups undertaking agricultural activities in green belts around urban centres. As women are often key actors in agricultural activities, gender implications should be considered in the design of projects as well.

Recommendation 8 : In the area of renewable energy, Governments and development partners should try to mobilize business support to help youth and women's groups in rural areas set up renewable energy projects which could provide revenue and boost local job demand. Pilot projects for locally-adapted measures such as solar cookers should be launched by NGOs and United Nations agencies in cooperation with local authorities and other development partners.

IV.

Promoting other areas for action

Political priority should be given to creating youth employment as a matter of national urgency, with job creation mainstreamed into macroeconomic and sectoral (agriculture, industry, services and labour) policies. Public investment programmes – such as road construction, slum upgrading, irrigation and energy supplies – are employment-related programmes that West African Governments could emphasise more in their poverty reduction strategies. To this end, Poverty Reduction Strategy papers in the region should be reviewed for their job-creating potential for youth and performance indicators should include youth employment.

Agriculture and industry in West Africa should be integrated through reciprocal production and demand. Since it is the agricultural sector that will provide local sources of raw materials for many industries, local production (fruit, poultry, agro-business, etc.) should be promoted where possible and raw materials transformed within the region. This is rightly a major concern of ECOWAS, which could consider undertaking a study examining its Member States' imports and the potential for production

or substitution of some of these imports either nationally or regionally.

Working closely with their partners, West African Governments should assume a leadership and coordinating role to ensure that various employment programmes for youth are complementary. At the local level, where conditions are likely to vary from district to district, they ought to work to ensure that training centres, employment offices, and micro-finance providers are linked, sharing information and referring job-seekers to one another.

Linked to a coordination exercise, Governments should undertake capacity building, together with development partners, of all the institutions that will be used to help create youth employment, if programmes in this area are to have a chance of being sustainable. National Youth Employment Agencies, as successfully established in Mali, Senegal and Mauritania, should be set up throughout the region, and their performance evaluated on a periodic basis.

Child labour in its various forms including organized begging, such as the *enfants talibés* should be actively combated and

concerned Governments should take the lead in doing this. Some forms of child labour could be taken on by youths, and the replacement of working children by working youths would be a double benefit. At present the YEN and the ILO's International Programme for the elimination of child labour (IPEC) are developing programmes on the linkage between youth employment and child labour including its application to demobilized child and youth soldiers. UNICEF and ILO should work to ensure the implementation of relevant conventions, and continue efforts to mobilize the private sector against child labour and ensure enrolment in schools for the most vulnerable children (with

New information and communication technologies (ICT) offer significant opportunities for job creation since they allow young people to receive the information they require to increase their education, as well as knowledge of how and where to find income and employment-generating opportunities. Working with the private sector including telecommunications companies, Governments of the region should seek to increase internet access in slums and larger villages. Internet cafes and computer training centres in themselves provide quality jobs in target areas, and if combined with "one-stop information resource centres" could have a multiple effect.



priority given to girls) or the poorest households through the waiver of school fees or the provision of free school meals and education materials.

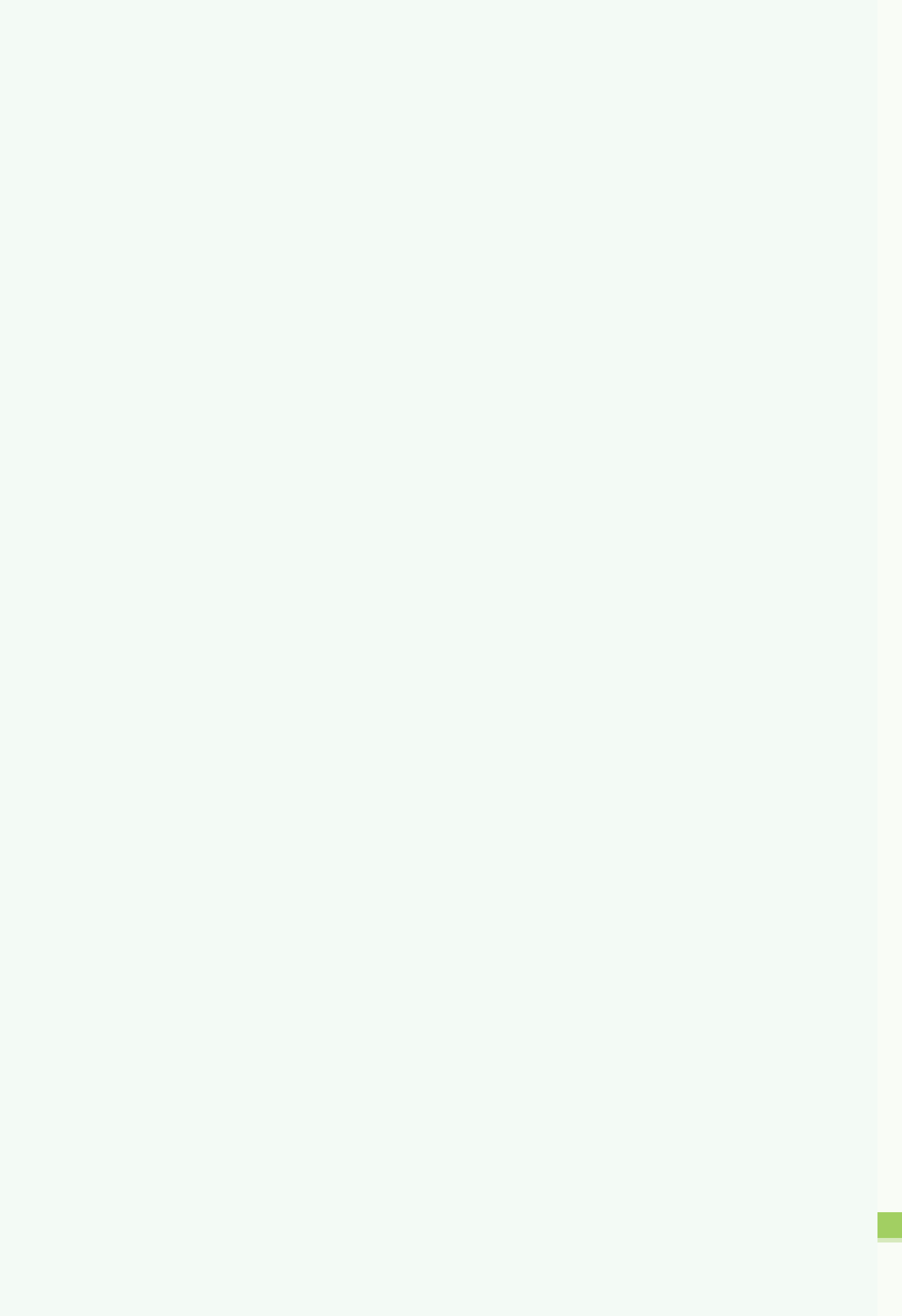
The Advanced Information Technology Institute in Ghana is a good example of an effort to train graduates in new technologies. It is linked to over 200 community internet centres that are

being established in rural areas. They are partly funded by UNDP and could additionally assist traders in such areas to receive timely market information also enabling job-seekers to find employment opportunities.

Youth organizations, trade unions and the business community ought to be part of the decision-making process from the design to the implementation of programmes addressing youth employment. Governments and development partners could do more to involve youths at all stages.

Recommendation 9 : At the national level, Governments should designate a high-level focal point to coordinate the many various actors involved in youth employment, possibly through the setting up of national youth employment networks. These may include chambers of commerce, leading private companies, parastatals, micro-finance institutions, vocational training programmes, and ministries such as Labour, Finance, Agriculture, Equipment and Public Works, Industry, Social Affairs, Youth and Sports, and Planning. To promote equality of opportunity, the national high-level focal point should include capacity on gender issues. The IT sector, for example, tends to attract more boys than girls, which perpetuates the information gap between sexes. Gender awareness is thus a major challenge for the national high-level focal points and other actors in the field.

Recommendation 10 : The YEN's partner organizations (ILO, World Bank, UN), in collaboration with ECOWAS, should explore how ICT industries can provide new jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities for young people, provide financial support to help schools and universities to acquire software and hardware, and develop specialized ICT courses for both teachers and students. The private sector should be encouraged to contribute by supplying equipment and services.



V.

Involving the private sector

Although Governments in West Africa and their development partners will have to take major steps to deal with the threat posed to political and social stability by the growing numbers of unemployed youths, most of the employment generation that will be needed to absorb them will come from the private sector. This is particularly the case in an era of shrinking public sectors. Reliance on private companies to do the heavy lifting may be wishful thinking given the reluctance even of domestic investors, let alone their international counterparts, to sink capital in a region with weak rule of law, rampant corruption and standards of governance that have led to frequent conflict. As the UN Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Ibrahim Gambari, has said, “People are not going to invest in countries of conflict, and without investment, both domestic and foreign, they are not going to have production. They’re not going to have employment and it’s a vicious circle.”¹⁴

Nevertheless, given a reduction in conflict and improved records of governance, it should certainly be possible to attract private investment to

the region since there is clear potential for significant profit.

The private sector should be actively engaged in the question of youth unemployment in West Africa. They ought to be systematically provided with more information about investment opportunities and also consulted about what they would want to see before making a decision to invest.

The Growing Sustainable Business (GSB) scheme helps to reduce investment risk and enable commercially viable, pro-poor business investments in some African countries. It aims to encourage investments in countries not normally targeted by the business community, and as such it can enable the private sector to contribute to the advancement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by creating income-generating opportunities, especially in areas of high youth unemployment.

In terms of their relations with the private sector, West African Governments should not only take steps to attract investment, such as through improved transparency

practices, but also actively encourage private sector companies (using various incentives as appropriate) to increase employment and invest in local communities. AngloGold Ashanti is a case of a company that has tried to demonstrate corporate responsibility in its areas of operation in Ghana by establishing social services and skills apprenticeships. However, there is a great deal more that large private – as well as state-owned – corporations could do on behalf of the environment and local communities in the areas where they operate, including additional job creation.

A number of countries in West Africa have an appropriate environment, especially in their main cities, for the outsourcing of certain activities by large international companies. National governments should undertake a review of the potential in each country, in order to present opportunities that exist for outsourcing, call centres or data processing units to appropriate companies in the private sector or other institutions.

One private sector-led initiative active in many countries in the world, including Nigeria, Gambia and Ghana, is Youth Business International, whose objective is to mobilize the global and local business community to help unemployed youth set up their own businesses. Volunteer business mentors are allocated to each participant who also has access to a support network from the local business community including access to finance. Imaginative initiatives of this nature ought to be

expanded and replicated, and national chambers of commerce, with the assistance of ILO, should focus their efforts in this regard.

Recommendation 11 : Working with the UN Global Compact Office, UNOWA should organize roundtables inviting companies who are already present in the region or who would be interested in investing there if the right opportunities were presented. These meetings should look not only at what companies would be prepared to do in purely commercial activities, but also to explore possibilities of the longer-term programmes that many companies, including UNILEVER, Ericsson, and Tetra Pak, have initiated in Africa in the framework of corporate governance.

Recommendation 12 : The principal stake-holders of the Growing Sustainable Business Initiative – UNDP, UNIDO, ILO, UNEP, OHCHR – should endeavour to make the scheme operational in West Africa. This is an exercise that will require actively seeking out corporate partners who could be interested in investing in the region, and UNOWA could assist in this regard.

Recommendation 13 : Ministries of development cooperation might consider the possibility of temporarily subsidising selected private companies from their countries whose business activities in West Africa would create employment for youths and who might not be able to proceed in the absence of such a subsidy.

VI.

Ensuring vocational training and apprenticeships

West African youths are on the average better educated than their parents. Unfortunately, this does not mean they possess more employable skills.

are essential. Training does not in itself lead to the creation of jobs. It can however, make it possible for trainees to take advantage of opportunities in the



Indeed, the reverse may be the case, especially for meeting the demands of stagnant local labour markets. The low level of enrolment in secondary schools is in large part responsible, and improvements in training programmes

labour market that would otherwise be closed to them. Effective training that is based on real labour market demands could greatly benefit economic growth in West Africa.

In each country of the region there is a need to identify i) demand for skilled and unskilled labourers and ii) the most appropriate training to supply it. The Government, UN Country Team and other international partners in each West African country should agree on who would be best placed to carry out an analysis of labour market demand. In some cases it may be the Ministry of Labour, working with ILO, UNDP, the World Bank, the Chamber of Commerce, a professional association or private firm commissioned to prepare it. In order to provide a regional picture of labour demand, these country labour analyses would be shared with the secretariat of the ECOWAS Integration Programmes and the YEN. The analyses could also propose new models for vocational training that are tailored for each country and province.

Once national labour demand has been analysed, there is likely to be a need to upgrade existing training centres or establish new ones. In addition, such centres ought to maintain a constant dialogue with local employers to keep their curricula updated.

In crisis countries, in order to facilitate reconstruction and the integration of conflict-affected youth, the emphasis should be on training for skills demanded locally which provide rapid income generation.

Using labour-intensive methods for rehabilitation of damaged housing, public buildings and roads, and clearing up the remnants of war, is often the highest priority, it requires the

teaching of appropriate skills backed by adequate supervision, building materials and money for salaries.

Post-conflict situations are in many respects a break with the past and can provide a possibility to change gender stereotypes in a society. The transition out of conflict offers an opportunity to move beyond “traditional” gender roles and patterns with respect to labour division. Organizers of vocational training courses and on-the-job training should be alerted to these opportunities.

In these post-conflict situations, West African Governments, development partners and UN Country Teams should design on-the-job training programmes and also collaborate to see that such programmes are supplemented by part-time catch-up education or Accelerated Learning Programmes (ALP), which ought to include methods of non-violent dispute resolution.

Skills training should be wide enough to avoid pigeon-holing a participant in too narrow an area of employability. Vocational training centres in Liberia, for instance, have started to offer courses in combined skills based on local requirements. For example, garages prefer to employ mechanics who can also drive; transport companies want drivers who can do basic engine repair; home economics courses teach women cooking, soap-making and tailoring so that they can adapt their skills to what is lacking in local markets. This is a positive development when compared to an earlier DDR programme, during

which thousands of girls were taught to make soap, resulting in a surge of supply without matching demand.

Young people often need both entrepreneurial and vocational skills to start a business and to market their services and products, and courses should include both. Basic entrepreneurial courses should also be universally taught in secondary schools and universities in the region.

Targeting vulnerable groups in order to make them employable is important. People with disabilities are one example, young women traumatized by rape another, and former fighters exposed to drugs a third. In order to avoid stigmatisation and to facilitate reintegration, these groups should be included in existing vocational training services. However, where specific needs exist, vocational training courses should be specially designed, incorporating additional elements, such as psycho-social counselling support, and will need to be of longer duration.

Refugee camps and other locations hosting displaced people are especially appropriate places for providing training courses because of their concentration of people with time on their hands and the possibility that – once the crisis in their home country is over – their new skills will be essential for reintegration and reconstruction. UNHCR and ILO should work together to expand training programmes in areas hosting populations displaced by ongoing crises. Such programmes should also focus on participants from host communities so as not

to create tensions between host and displaced populations.

Technological changes and new growth industries should be part of any regional employment strategy. Perhaps the most striking example is the huge proliferation of mobile telephones in West Africa during the past five years. Techniques in mobile telephone repair should be a key component of new vocational training courses. Some of the major telephone manufacturers whose models are widely used in the region could be approached for sponsorship by UNIDO or other interested agencies, including NGOs and chambers of commerce. Similar to the International Youth Foundation's Entra 21 initiative with companies such as Nokia, which supports youth employment activities in Latin America, it could be useful if the YEN Secretariat were to advocate for a similar scheme to be undertaken in West Africa.

Apprenticeships are an area with significant potential for training youth, with the added possibility of a job offer upon completion. National youth programmes should subsidize apprenticeship schemes by providing stipends to trainees and encouraging private and public enterprises to take on apprentices. Governments should consider appropriate incentives (possibilities include tax credits, wage subsidies, etc.) for companies to employ apprentices.

An interesting programme in this area is the National Open Apprenticeship Scheme (NOAS) of Nigeria, which has provided vocational training in

over 100 occupations to unemployed youth, who are also taught business and administrative skills to complement the practical training received. Over 600,000 unemployed youth have been trained through NOAS since 1987, a large proportion of them in rural areas as part of an effort to slow the migration to cities. With the assistance of ECOWAS and the UN Country Team, the Government of Nigeria should evaluate the NOAS experience to draw the lessons learned.

An innovative scheme to reduce youth unemployment, provide training at the same time, improve the environment and facilitate the introduction of environmentally sensitive technologies with income generating opportunities for youth has been put in place in both Lesotho and Gambia. In partnership with the respective Governments, UNDP has established National Environment Youth Corps in each country. Targeting school drop-outs in particular, unemployed youths are trained, equipped and organized in groups to carry out environmental rehabilitation and income-generating activities in both rural and urban areas. Fields of activity include tree-planting, market gardening, bee-keeping, eco-tourism, soil conservation and collection and separation of recyclable materials. Consideration could be given by UNDP to initiating similar schemes in other countries.

Recommendation 14 : In each West African country, Governments and development partners should agree on who would be best placed to undertake an analysis of labour market demand.

Recommendation 15 : Vocational training courses should be a priority of all international responses to post-conflict situations, and on-the-job training included in employment-intensive works programmes. These courses should combine several related skills in one course. Mobile telephone manufacturers ought to be approached to sponsor programmes designed to teach mobile telephone repair and maintenance.

Recommendation 16 : Apprenticeships should be encouraged, including through Government incentives to private companies ready to employ apprentices. In addition, with the assistance of the UN Country Team, the Government of Nigeria should evaluate the National Open Apprenticeship Scheme and, if appropriate, expand it in rural or economically marginalized areas. ECOWAS and the YEN may consider encouraging the replication of this experience in other countries of the region.

VII.

Encouraging youth entrepreneurship and microfinance



Advancing a culture of apprenticeship among youths is central to economic growth and thus job creation in West Africa. Surveys indicate that a significant proportion of young people would prefer to be self-employed rather than salaried. Finding ways to realise the business ideas of young people, and then promoting micro- and small-scale enterprises would be one way to bring this about. The ILO trains partner organizations at local and national levels, in “Start

and Improve your Business” (SIYB) methodology, including through the development of business teaching materials for training entrepreneurs. An enlarged ILO-run SIYB programme to this effect in West Africa could prove beneficial, as could the use of successful young entrepreneurs as trainers and role models. Well-publicised awards for successful entrepreneurship and targeted radio programmes could also improve motivation.

Microfinance is a tool successfully used world-wide for starting new businesses in developing countries. Frequently, however, youth are denied access to microfinance programmes, largely because they can be seen as a high-risk group for credit. There is therefore a need to assist youths in setting up small cooperatives in order to secure loans for starting businesses. Microfinance to enable self-employment is especially important in West Africa, since informal activities make up such a large proportion of the economy. Self-help groups (or tontines) have a long tradition in the region and can be used as a basis for microfinance institutions. Members of these groups guarantee

each others' loans, and when group members have collectively been able to accumulate some capital, the group can itself become a savings and loans agency. There are cases, for example in Niger, of tontines contributing to local income-generating projects by bringing together unemployed youth with a shared interest or project idea, and using a collective contribution to submit it to existing micro-credit agencies.

More schemes are needed for offering credit or subsidies to youth for starting their own businesses. Interest rates from the formal banking sector in parts of the region can be as high as 30%, and youths are often not eligible (for reasons to do with security, collateral, or experience) for loans even at such rates. The Government of Senegal has a National Fund for the Promotion of Youth,¹⁵ which is supposed to enable young people to obtain loans for starting or developing businesses. Such programmes should include follow-up support mechanisms to those receiving loans in order to optimise their chances of success and to ensure that the loans are repaid as scheduled. It is essential however, that Government programmes in this area are not seen as politically motivated. In addition, projects should be selected in labour-intensive sectors such as agriculture and infrastructure and must be linked to other employment-promotion structures operating in the country.

Microfinance is especially useful for women and youths in the informal economy. One example is the Citi Savings and Loans Ltd. in Ghana, which since 1992 has helped thousands of

young women who previously had no access to finance by mobilizing deposits, granting loans, and providing financial services. The Lift Above Poverty Organization in Nigeria similarly assists poor women by providing credit for income-generating activities.

Studying the lessons from successful major microfinance initiatives implemented outside of the region (such as Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme in Pakistan, and Compartamos in Mexico) would prove useful for West Africa. Partnerships between microfinance institutions (MFIs) and commercial banks can extend the impact of small-scale financing. Citigroup has recently set up its own special microfinance group; and the growing recognition that microfinance can be profitable for commercial lenders is a welcome development.

Making microfinance more accessible is only part of the issue; it is also important to organize awareness-raising campaigns for microfinance programmes, particularly in rural areas. In southern Mali, the credit union Kafo Jiginew has used audio tapes as a marketing tool to explain in the local language micro-credit and what is available for local farmers. Those candidates for microfinance whose projects have been refused should have it explained to them why they did not receive funding and be encouraged to re-apply. Conversely, a bonus for good credit management could be included within the contract as an incentive to develop a culture of savings, a vital component of an enterprise culture that is so needed in West Africa, where family and cultural-

religious obligations make the idea of savings for investment hard to attain. Counselling in money management once the loans have been granted should be part of microfinancing initiatives.

Organizing youth into cooperatives increases the likelihood of loan repayment and therefore encourages institutions to provide financing. The ACOPAM programme (Cooperative Support for Grassroots Development), designed to combat the effects of drought in the Sahel countries, was considered by ILO to be one of its most successful employment-generation programmes. It organized people at the grassroots level into cooperatives to improve food security and living conditions through joint land management and irrigation schemes, cereal banks, the marketing of products and savings and credit schemes. In its last phase (1996-2000), the programme created 56,000 new jobs. ACOPAM produced a wide array of manuals translated into local languages, which it disseminated among its partners and are still available. Its experience should be re-examined and consideration given to replicating its more successful strategies in other countries in West Africa.

Market gardening in the vicinity of urban areas, especially major ports and airports to enable access to export markets, is an area where relatively small investments could lead to new labour-intensive enterprises. The fact that it is now easy to buy green beans from Senegal in New York is an encouraging example of what can be achieved in this area. Governments, local chambers of commerce and FAO should encourage

such projects, including through facilitating start-up money to youth entrepreneurs where necessary. Where irrigation is a problem, small-scale low-cost irrigation schemes such as that pioneered by the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) office in Niger should be considered.

Improving conditions in the vast and desperate slums of West Africa's cities would have a profoundly beneficial social impact. It also is an area of activity that could provide significant employment for youths. The problem, not surprisingly, is lack of financing. UN-HABITAT's recent Slum Upgrading Facility (SUF) seeks to develop financial instruments that could help to make slum upgrading more attractive to financial investors.

Recommendation 17 : Since microfinance has a particular relevance for youth and women, West African Governments, together with their development partners, should look at the examples mentioned in this section and those of other self-help groups. Replication of the most successful ones, as appropriate, using lessons learned, should be a priority area of activity. In addition, Governments should ensure that the national legislation is in place to facilitate the operation of microfinance institutions.

Recommendation 18 : Working with development partners and the UN Global Compact, Governments should examine how major banks could help expand

microfinance in West Africa and consider launching an initiative in this regard.

Recommendation 19 : Development partners should respond to the appeal to provide support for UN-HABITAT's Slum Upgrading Facility, which could lead to improvements in appalling urban living conditions in West Africa, boost local economic activity and absorb large numbers of unemployed youth.

VIII.

Collaborating with development partners in post-crisis situations

Youth unemployment is a matter of such importance that it needs to be addressed at every stage of a crisis, in order to prevent conflict onwards. It is widely accepted that the socio-economic and political marginalization of youth and their subsequent manipulation

integral part of both humanitarian and reconstruction strategies.

In this connection, it is important for UN Peacekeeping Operations, DDR programmes and international agencies to start building capacities



in Sierra Leone and Liberia played a major role in fuelling the conflicts in those countries. Since it is an immediate as well as a development need, job creation should be an

of national employment actors within the first months of the post-conflict phase, having started planning even while the crisis is ongoing. These capacities would include the creation of

vocational training facilities, chambers of commerce, mechanisms for reintegration of demobilized combatants, including selective measures to strengthen the capacity of receiving communities, are essential assets. Although the importance of creating an environment of economic expansion and good governance, including reform of the security sector, is recognized as a prerequisite for a successful DDR programme, it is rarely put into practice by the international community. This often requires greater funding and effort beyond already-expensive DDR programmes. In addition, too often the “R” in DDR is relatively ignored, with long-term highly damaging consequences.

In Sierra Leone, some programmes benefited youth organizations and had a calming effect on restive youths in a post-conflict situation. The skills acquired by youth enrolled in the programmes either enabled participants to secure jobs or encouraged them to start self-employed activities. It is important to avoid training ex-combatants in fields that they might identify as their preference but which do not relate to market demand. The feelings of frustration and helplessness that led people to take up arms in the first place return when they cannot find a job after training, and thus make them liable to re-recruitment. Those responsible for DDR programmes should ensure that training courses are based on market demand, and also supplemented by the teaching of entrepreneurial skills and access to investment capital.

Where possible, local production of agricultural tools should be encouraged, especially when large numbers of such tools are needed, for instance in a post-conflict phase when farmland is being reclaimed by entire communities. Blacksmiths in the areas concerned, if sufficiently supported with equipment and raw materials, could produce the required tools that would enable young people to carry out agricultural work.

A largely under-utilized area of job creation particularly relevant for countries recovering from or threatened by conflict, is investment in the basic infrastructure required to jump-start stalled economies and to benefit those who might be otherwise tempted to take up arms. Agricultural feeder-road construction, solid waste management, reforestation, slum upgrading, irrigation systems, anti-erosion works and small dams, and the rehabilitation of markets, schools and community health centres have proved effective in rebuilding war-torn economies and at the same time creating the new jobs required to ensure durable peace. Training for small-scale labour-based contractors combined with procurement procedures which do not discriminate against these enterprises, can triple the employment impact of infrastructure investments without compromising quality, cost-effectiveness or implementation schedules.

To encourage private companies to do business in West African countries coming out of conflict, there is a need to provide investors with Political Risk Insurance. The risk factor may often

be overstated, however risk cover is an essential building block to greater investment. One mechanism for this is the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA) of the World Bank Group.

Border areas, especially those adjoining countries that have recently known conflict, are often highly disadvantaged in terms of state services (social and security) and economic activity. Youth unemployment tends to be particularly high in these areas leading young people to migrate to cities or to join armed bands. As part of their integrated strategies for selected border zones in West Africa, ECOWAS and UNOWA should treat youth unemployment as one of the most important areas of action.

Recommendation 20 : Development partners in post-conflict situations should encourage local production of basic tools by providing blacksmiths (to take one example of an existing profession) with bellows, scrap metal and other materials. In order to create further employment benefits, such assistance to blacksmiths could be made conditional on their agreement to hire apprentices.

Recommendation 21 : In post-conflict situations, organizations responsible for reconstruction should ensure that labour-intensive public works programmes are the chosen method for reconstruction and jump-starting war-affected economies (see earlier section). In this area, “quick impact projects”

that make a rapid difference to the lives of demobilized combatants,¹⁶ are an essential asset.

Recommendation 22 : As called for by the Commission for Africa report, developed countries should support the MIGA fund to insure investors in post-conflict countries, thereby enabling the funding of job-creating projects for which investments would otherwise not have been found. Projects selected for MIGA should make employment-generation, one of the selection criteria.¹⁷

IX.

Observations and additional recommendations

Unemployment both impacts and is impacted by the broader economic and political situation. Although the poor standards of governance in many parts of West Africa in recent decades – leading so often to conflict – lie at the root of the region’s economic stagnation, some responsibility also lies outside the region. Millions of unemployed youth will never see a significant change in their condition, nor will their countries experience proper stability unless there is real economic growth in the region. Possibilities for such growth will remain illusory as long as West African countries are unable to export freely much of their agricultural produce to foreign markets. Whatever the importance of home-grown causes, there is also a link between unemployment in West Africa and the farm subsidies, trade barriers and dumping practices of some OECD countries. Developed countries must accept that they too have a responsibility for the region’s troubles even if some Africans have been too ready to blame Northerners for what are primarily Africa’s own failures.

It is in the area of trade concessions that OECD countries can do the most to rectify the damaging effects of some

policies. As Paul Wolfowitz, President of the World Bank, has put it, “It is trade, not aid, that holds the key to creating jobs and raising incomes. It is trade that will allow poor countries to generate growth.” But progress in this field “will not happen if the rich countries see opening their markets only in terms of pleasing their domestic interest groups.”¹⁸

A factor which greatly exacerbates unemployment rates in West Africa’s cities is the massive ongoing rural exodus in the region, the slowing of which will need to be addressed by special measures targeted at rural areas, as recommended by the AU Extraordinary Summit. In that respect, such measures could help reduce unemployment in both rural and urban areas. Agriculture is the dominant sector in most West African economies, employing the largest portions of the labour force. Given both the relative importance of farming and concerns about the rural exodus (which, aside from its social effects, also has a negative impact on food security as local agriculture loses its labour force), employment-led growth strategies for the region should focus on both agriculture and non-farming activities in rural areas.

With so many different areas of activity relevant to youth employment and so many actors involved in the different stages of the process in West Africa, there is a need for coordination, guidance and encouragement. The Youth Employment Network (YEN), created under the impetus of the Millennium Declaration¹⁹ and comprising the UN Secretariat, ILO and the World Bank, has outlined roadmaps for Governments to formulate policies aimed at creating youth employment. With one of the highest rates of youth unemployment in the world, West Africa needs special attention from YEN, and the establishment of a sub-office.

The aim of such an office is not to create a new bureaucracy or organization, but rather to keep costs to a minimum by housing three to four experts in an already-existing institution. It would serve as a clearing-house for collecting information from all countries of ECOWAS, and the elaboration of national youth employment reviews and action plans. The office would monitor progress at a regional and national level, as well as help coordinate activities and information-sharing including on best practices among the national Governments and between the UN system, Governments and the ECOWAS secretariat. It would also coordinate resource-mobilization approaches to development partners and assist countries to develop and implement national action plans.

Expanding the work of YEN in West Africa cannot just be done by creating a small office. As the Commission for Africa report recommended, developed

countries should provide an additional \$30 million over three years to expand YEN's activities to 25 sub-Saharan countries. In these countries, the YEN's partner organizations would help Governments to draw up national action plans for youth employment, a process that is already advanced in a few countries of the region such as Senegal. YEN's efforts in West Africa could be supplemented by the appointment, within UNDP country offices, of a focal point for youth (as exists already in UNDP Sierra Leone) to help prepare national youth policies and link them with national development policy frameworks.²⁰

Just as insecurity in one country of the region is a threat to security in others, so employment policy cannot be addressed from a solely national perspective. This is especially true where States and Governments have become weakened by conflict. A political process must be initiated to address youth employment for West Africa as a whole without expecting national governments to solve the question individually. Mali, Nigeria and Senegal, as the three YEN lead countries located in West Africa, should be encouraged to provide political leadership on youth employment in the region and to work closely with the proposed YEN sub-office to carry the lessons to other countries of the region.

There are currently no clear funding mechanisms for youth, and as a result financial resources are scarce, ad hoc and short term. The establishment of a regional funding mechanism for youth (as well as other human security issues in West Africa) could be enormously



beneficial, and this is something YEN and its core partners could explore.

A coherent approach to youth employment must be adopted, integrating supply and demand-side strategies. It is important but not sufficient to increase investments in education and vocational training since there is no point in making young people “employable” if the economy cannot produce additional jobs for new entrants to the labour market. Supply-side measures need to be complemented by demand-side ones. Employment creation should be a central goal, and not just a by-product, of government policies for investment and economic growth. Effective coordination by the relevant ministries with a regional overview facilitated by the proposed new YEN sub-office, will be essential.

Discrimination against girls and women has led to girls receiving less education and learning fewer skills, which in turn reinforces discrimination

in the job market. A major barrier to young women’s employment is the occupational segregation whereby women are expected to work only in a narrow range of occupations and industries with lower wage rates than for men. The result is that millions of young African women are obliged to work in the informal sector, often in appalling conditions, and are vulnerable to sex-work and human trafficking.

Young men and women should be regarded as assets, catalysts for development rather than as passive beneficiaries or worse, a potentially destructive force for whom employment must be found.

The active participation of youth in economic, social and political processes helps to minimize the risks and costs of exclusion and enhances the likelihood of youth policies and programmes being implemented successfully. Efforts have to be made to make West African youth feel

more empowered – politically, socially and economically. Governments and development partners should do much more to involve youth in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of rural and urban development strategies.

Recommendation 23 : In support of the recommendations by the AU Extraordinary Summit, ECOWAS, UNFPA and UNOWA should work together with international and local partners to devise specific practical recommendations addressed to the Governments of the region and their development partners on slowing the rates of rural exodus, massive urbanization, and demographic expansion, all of which will otherwise keep youth unemployment at levels likely to pose serious long-term threats to regional peace and stability. Family planning is clearly one element of this. Since agricultural investment is another, the close involvement of the World Bank, FAO and UNDP should also be sought.

Recommendation 24 : Discussions should be held between ILO, UNOWA, DESA, the World Bank, and ECOWAS on setting up a YEN sub-office for West Africa. The new office should work closely with the ECOWAS Youth and Development Centre, which has been established in Burkina Faso.

Recommendation 25 : In order to reduce the disadvantages faced by young women in West Africa in finding employment, Governments of the region should set targets to

rectify gender disparities in access from primary school to tertiary level vocational guidance and training, labour markets and equal pay. It would help if employment data was collected on a sex disaggregated basis. There should also be a specified proportion (in some cases up to 50%) of young women among beneficiaries for various programmes relating to vocational training and public works.

Recommendation 26 : Given the importance of ending the sense of exclusion and disempowerment felt by millions of youth in the region, it is important to provide youth organizations with assistance in areas such as budgetary management, and Ministries of Youth should be given resources to provide this support. Efforts should then be made by Governments and development partners to meaningfully involve these youth organizations in policies and schemes that will have an impact on their future.

The recommendations contained in this report are clearly not exhaustive. However, they cover a broad range of ideas – both on the demand side of job creation for youths and on the supply side of improving their employability – which, if taken together and acted on systematically, could have a considerable impact. There is certainly no single “silver bullet” for ending the scourge of growing numbers of under-utilized and desperately frustrated youths throughout West Africa. What is required is a broad but integrated approach involving many actors working on different fronts.

Such an approach could go a fair distance towards reducing the joblessness that will continue to hold back the region from making the security, social and economic advances that it so badly needs, and by so doing it could help to restore hope. Making West Africa's youths believe that they can have a decent future, involving real jobs and a voice in society, if they stay in their region – and not only if they succeed in crossing the Mediterranean or Atlantic – needs committed actions over a sustained period. The costs of not following this course are too high to contemplate.

WEST AFRICA



WEST AFRICAN INDICATORS - POPULATION

	Total population (millions)			Annual population growth rate	Urban population (% of total)			Total fertility rate (births per woman)		
	1975	2003	2015		1975	2003	2015	1970-75	2000-05	
						2003-15				
Benin	3.2	7.9	11.2	2.9	21.9	44.6	53.5	7.1	5.9	
Burkina Faso	5.9	12.4	17.7	2.9	6.3	17.8	23.2	7.8	6.7	
Cape Verde	0.3	0.5	0.6	2.2	21.4	55.9	64.8	7.0	3.8	
Côte d'Ivoire	6.6	17.6	21.6	1.7	32.1	44.9	51.0	7.4	5.1	
Gambia	0.6	1.4	1.9	2.3	17.0	26.2	27.8	6.5	4.7	
Ghana	10.2	21.2	26.6	1.9	30.1	45.4	51.1	6.7	4.4	
Guinea	4.2	9.0	11.9	2.3	16.3	34.9	44.2	6.9	5.9	
Guinea-Bissau	0.7	1.5	2.1	3.0	16.0	34.0	43.5	7.1	7.1	
Liberia*										
Mali	6.2	12.7	18.1	2.9	16.2	32.3	40.9	7.6	6.9	
Mauritania	1.4	2.9	4.0	2.7	20.3	61.7	73.9	6.5	5.8	
Niger	5.3	13.1	19.3	3.3	10.6	22.2	29.7	8.1	7.9	
Nigeria	58.9	125.9	160.9	2.0	23.4	46.6	55.5	6.9	5.8	
Senegal	5.3	11.1	14.5	2.2	34.2	49.6	57.9	7.0	5.0	
Sierra Leone	2.9	5.1	6.9	2.5	21.4	38.8	47.6	6.5	6.5	
Togo	2.4	5.8	7.8	2.5	16.3	35.2	43.3	7.1	5.4	

* Reliable figures not available for Liberia

All figures are from the 2005 UNDP Human Development Report . Available at: www.hdr.undp.org.

WEST AFRICAN INDICATORS - EDUCATION & ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY

	Youth literacy rate (% ages 15-24)		Adult literacy rate (% ages 15-24)		Net secondary school enrolment ratio (%)	Internet users (per 1,000 people)	Cellular subscribers (per 1,000 people)
	1990	2003	female	male			
Benin	40.4	44.4	22.6	46.4	20	10	34
Burkina Faso	..	19.4	8.1	18.5	9	4	19
Cape Verde	81.5	89.1	68	85.4	58	44	116
Côte d'Ivoire	52.6	59.8	38.2	60.1	21	14	77
Gambia	42.2	..	30.9	45	33	..	..
Ghana	81.8	..	45.7	62.9	36	..	36
Guinea	..	..	..	..	21	5	14
Guinea-Bissau	44.1	..	24.7	55.2	9	15	1
Liberia	57.2	70.8	39.3	72.3	18	..	..
Mali	27.6	24.2	11.9	26.7	..	..	23
Mauritania	45.8	61.3	43.4	59.5	16	4	127
Niger	17	19.8	9.4	19.6	6	..	..
Nigeria	73.6	88.6	59.4	74.4	29	6	26
Senegal	40.1	49.1	29.2	51.1	..	22	56
Sierra Leone	..	38.2	20.5	39.8	..	..	..
Togo	63.5	74	38.3	68.5	27	42	44

* Reliable figures not available for Liberia

All figures are from the 2005 UNDP Human Development Report. Available at: www.hdr.undp.org.

Notes and references

- ¹ The United Nations statistical definition of youth comprises people of 15-24 years of age. However, for the purposes of this report, youth refers to people up to the age of 30.
- ² Global Analysis and Evaluation of National Action Plans on Youth Employment. Report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly, 19 July 2005, A/60/133.
- ³ UN Document S/2003/688.
- ⁴ *A more secure world: Our shared responsibility*, United Nations, 2004.
- ⁵ From ILO report, *Global Employment Trends for Youth*, 2004.
- ⁶ “Food security over the medium and long term in the Sahel and West Africa,” Statement by Norman Lauzon, Director, Sahel and West Africa Club, OECD. Paris, September 2005.
- ⁷ Human Development Report 2004, UNDP, New York.
- ⁸ Makha D. Sarr, Documents de Stratégie de Réduction de la Pauvreté : Possibilités de Promotion de l’Emploi des Jeunes, January 2002.
- ⁹ *Our Common Interest*, Report of the Commission for Africa, London, March 2005, p. 218.
- ¹⁰ Governance and Economic Management Assistance Programme (GEMAP).
- ¹¹ Agence d’Exécution des Travaux d’Intérêt Public contre le Sous-emploi, launched by the Government of Senegal in 1989 with the support of the World Bank and the African Development Bank.
- ¹² Groupe Opérationnel Permanent d’Étude et de Concertation
- ¹³ National reviews and action plans submitted by the Governments of the United Republic of Tanzania and Pakistan to the Secretary-General in response to General Assembly resolutions 57/165 and 58/133. Cited in paragraph 34 of the Report of the Secretary-General 19 July 2005, A/60/133.
- ¹⁴ Interview with Ibrahim Gambari by Barbara Crosette, *The InterDependent*, Fall 2005.
- ¹⁵ Fond National pour la Promotion de la Jeunesse.
- ¹⁶ As recommended by the Report of the panel on Peace Operations (S/2000/809).
- ¹⁷ Commission for Africa report (Chapter VII, para 57, p. 224). See also Recommendation 4 above.
- ¹⁸ Paul Wolfowitz, “Everyone must do more for Doha to succeed,” *Financial Times*, 24 October 2005.
- ¹⁹ Goal 8, Target 16: to “develop and implement strategies that give young people everywhere a real chance to find decent and productive work”.
- ²⁰ *Youth and Violent Conflict: Society and Development in Crisis? A Strategic Review with a Special Focus on West Africa*. UNDP Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery, 2005.

Since the publication of the first edition of this report in December 2005, considerable progress has been made by UNOWA, the YEN Secretariat and their partners, including UNIDO, to coordinate efforts and combine resources towards the implementation of the report's recommendations.

In particular, the Governments of Sweden and United Kingdom have provided seed funding for establishing a YEN/UNOWA sub-office for youth employment and regional security in West Africa as per recommendation 24 of this report. The sub-office, the "Youth Employment Unit for West Africa", will serve as a focal point for youth employment initiatives in the region.



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