



# Y o u t h E m p l o y m e n t   a n d   E d u c a t i o n

## **1. Why is youth employment and education important?**

Almost two-thirds of the population in Africa is below 25 years of age. More than 20 per cent, or almost 189 million, are youth between 15 and 24 years of age. This share will remain more or less constant for the next 10 years. Every year about 9 million young people enter the labor market.<sup>1</sup> High unemployment, underemployment, and low enrolment rates in secondary academic or technical education is prevalent in most African countries. Without education, a decent job and prospect of a meaningful future, young people can feel excluded. Especially young men might use their energy for more extreme causes and fuel instability and violent conflicts that can have regional and international repercussions.

Youth, however, also represents the potential for development. Most African countries face a great challenge in securing better and more education and training for its youth and provide better employment opportunities.

Youth unemployment is a symptom of (i) lack of employment opportunities in underdeveloped and low-growth economies; (ii) high rates of population growth; and (iii) low literacy and numeracy levels, poor quality education of limited labor market relevance.

This paper focuses on employment and education of youth. It seeks to highlight some facts and trends and raise key issues on how the international development co-operation can be made more effective in addressing the needs of the young. It is recognized that young people also face many other challenges, including health issues, including HIV and AIDS, access to influence, security etc.

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<sup>1</sup> Economic Commission for Africa: Economic Report on Africa 2002

## 2. Youth and employment

Although fertility rates have been declining in recent years, the population of Africa is among the youngest and fastest growing in the world. Of the total population in Africa (see Table 1), 62 per cent of the population were below 25 years of age in 2005.<sup>2</sup> Between 2005 and 2015 the youth population in Africa is expected to grow by 36 million. These young people will demand education and/or jobs. The youth labor force is expected to grow by more than 22 million, to almost 135 million in 2015. Providing quality education and productive employment for this large population group presents a serious challenge, and opportunity, to Africa.

### African population, youth population and youth labor force

	1995	2005	2015
Total population in millions	723	905	1,115
Population below 25 years in millions	459	564	666
Share of below 25 population in total population in per cent	64	62	60
Youth population in millions	142	189	224
Share of youth in total population in per cent	20	21	20
Youth labor force in millions	88	112	134
Share of youth in total labor force in per cent	31	31	29

Source: ILO, Economically Active Population and Projections (EAPAP) database; available at <http://labosta.org>

Youth unemployment in Africa was estimated at 20 per cent for men and 19 per cent for women in 2005 (ILO, see Annex 1). Youth unemployment rates are about three times the unemployment rates of adults in Africa, and youth unemployment is higher in urban areas than in rural areas. The number of unemployed youth grew by 30 per cent from 1995 to 2005. In addition to the unemployment rate, which is measured in relation to the labor force, a large part of youth in Africa can be classified as “inactive”, i.e. not part of the labor force (under education or completely outside the labor force). The youth inactivity rate in Africa is very high, estimated at about 40 per cent in 2005, and more than 50 per cent of young females are not in the labor force.<sup>3</sup>

Most young Africans in work have employment that is characterized by long hours, low pay and no security. Many young people working in the informal sector are “working poor”, i.e. earnings are still below US\$1 a day.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> ILO: Regional labor market trends for youth: Africa, September 2006.

<sup>3</sup> The definition of this “inactive” group not in the labor force includes students.

<sup>4</sup> ILO estimates: Global employment trends for youth, 2006. Especially sub-Saharan Africa has seen an increase in the number of working poor from 36 million in 1995 to 45 million in 2005, many of whom are young.

The higher rate of poverty in rural areas – and better employment prospects in urban areas – has contributed to high rural-urban migration rates in many African countries, leading to concentrations of youth, and unemployed youth, in rapidly growing urban centres and with the number of urban poor on the rise in some countries.

The African Union has adopted a Youth Charter establishing a series of rights of young people including the right to gainful employment.<sup>5</sup> The UN Secretary-General has initialized the Youth Employment Network (YEN), and ILO has done work and analysis on youth employment issues. Although there have been numerous smaller initiatives and projects implemented directly focusing on youth employment, it appears that so far there have been very few, if any that have been scaled up or had a broader impact.

### 3. Youth and Education

There is a positive relationship between the quantity and quality of primary and secondary education and economic growth. People with education have healthier families and reduced fertility rates. This is especially true with respect to educating girls and women. Educated people also tend to be more active citizens in political life. Improved human capital is conducive to higher quality of public servants and of public service provision.<sup>6</sup>

#### *Education expenditure*

Compared to global levels of public education expenditure, Africa invests significant resources in education relative to GNP, e.g. in sub-Saharan Africa the share of public education expenditure is 5 per cent of GNP, or 17.5 per cent of total public expenditure, although with large variations between countries. However, due to the low level of GNP, spending per capita in absolute terms and per student is still very low.

On average, low-income countries allocate almost half of total education expenditure to primary education, around 28 per cent for secondary education, and around 16 per cent for tertiary education. Variations in expenditure allocations are large, and examples from Africa vary from Burkina Faso with the highest spending of 71 per cent on primary education to e.g. Eritrea choosing to spend 48 per cent on tertiary education<sup>7</sup>.

#### *Primary education*

Africa has made great progress in gross enrolment in primary education. Today more than 95 per cent are enrolled in primary education and about 63 per cent complete primary education. However, there is still an estimated more than 30 million children of school going age who are out of school. The primary school age population will continue to grow for a number of years.

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<sup>5</sup> African Youth Charter, adopted by the AU in 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Global Monitoring Report 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Global Monitoring Report 2008

There has been a tendency that the quality of primary education has suffered in some of the countries, which have achieved significantly increased enrolment rates in recent years, and that a high level of drop outs can be associated with low quality. However, there is also solid evidence that investing in good classrooms, textbooks and teachers improves the impact of education.<sup>8</sup>

Primary education in itself is rarely enough to prepare young people to contribute to development in a globalizing world.

#### *Secondary education*

Demand for and participation in secondary education is growing as a consequence of the expansion of basic education. Average secondary net enrolment ratio is still only 25 per cent of primary school graduates. Less than a third fail to complete lower secondary education to enrol in upper secondary grades. More than 70 million children of secondary school age do not have access to secondary schooling.<sup>9</sup> In all of these statistics, boys are better off than girls, urban pupils better off than rural pupils, pupils from wealthier homes better off than those from poorer homes. However, these disparities have significantly decreased in recent years.

Competitiveness, especially in high value added and knowledge based sectors, depends on knowledge, skills and competencies associated with abstract reasoning, analysis, language and communication skills, and the application of science and technology. These skills are acquired through secondary schooling.

#### *Technical and Vocational Education and Training*

Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) is in short supply in most African countries. It is estimated that only 6 per cent of secondary students are enrolled in TVET in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>10</sup>

Few African countries have developed comprehensive systems for TVET that encompass the many private and public, formal and non-formal schools. In many countries, the private sector and labor market organizations are not involved in designing systems and training programmes at different levels. Training is therefore often not demand driven. External support for TVET has not been very successful, and has been declining for some years.

Yet, TVET is necessary to provide skills and opportunities for young people for better employment, in a situation where many African countries are facing a shortage of skilled

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<sup>8</sup> World Bank, OED: "Books, Buildings and Learning Outcomes: An Impact Evaluation of World Bank Support to Basic Education" (2004)

<sup>9</sup> DFID: "Expanding Access to Secondary Schooling in sub-Saharan Africa" (2006)

<sup>10</sup> Global Monitoring Report 2008

workers. There appears to be renewed interest and momentum in this area in many African countries and some donor agencies.<sup>11</sup>

### *Tertiary education and research*

Africa is seriously lagging in tertiary education and research. In Sub-Saharan Africa the gross enrolment rate for tertiary education is around 5 per cent, compared with 23 per cent in East Asia and 30 per cent in Latin America.<sup>12</sup> There appears to be an increase in many African countries in investment in tertiary education, not least in private universities.

The public/social benefits to higher education may be relatively high and justify more targeted public investment in higher education and research.<sup>13</sup> It also appears from cursory evidence that the link between higher education, research and the private sector is relatively weak in many African countries. Effective investments in higher education require students to have a basic education foundation of reasonable quality.

### *Quality*

The issue of quality encompasses, among other things, that enough instructional time between the pupil and teacher is ensured; that sufficient textbooks and learning materials are available; that secure and uncrowded learning spaces – schools – are available; and, that well-qualified teachers are teaching in school. Quality of education is also associated with economic growth.<sup>14</sup>

There is no doubt that parents will invest more in their children's education when expected returns are likely to rise.

### *Equity*

Many countries have abolished school fees at primary level.<sup>15</sup> This has narrowed the disparities between richer and poorer households. There is also some evidence that positive incentives (e.g. providing meals) enable poor households to send children, not least girls to school.

Public spending on primary education is neutral, from an equity perspective. However, this is not so in secondary education where the richest 20 per cent receive 39 per cent of spending, while the poorest 20 per cent receive only 7 per cent. Inequality is even higher for tertiary education, where 54 per cent and 5 per cent go to the richest and poorest quintiles respectively.<sup>16</sup> The costs of post-primary education are prohibitive for many families, and boys'

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<sup>11</sup> The High Level Panel set up by the African Development Bank recommend in its report that TVET should be a focus area for the Bank, Investing in Africa's Future, 2007.

<sup>12</sup> African Development Bank: "Investing in Africa's Future" (2007)

<sup>13</sup> Bloom et al.: 2006 "Beyond Private Gain: The Public Benefits of Higher Education"

<sup>14</sup> Global Monitoring Report 2008

<sup>15</sup> There are many other costs to families, however, of school uniforms and books and opportunity costs.

<sup>16</sup> UNESCO Institute of Statistics: Global Education Digest 2007

education are often supported before girls' education. Girls tend to have a larger work burden in domestic chores that will prevent them from effectively attending and benefiting from education, ending their education cycle earlier than boys. This is the case in particular in countries with high HIV & AIDS infection and mortality rates. The illness and death of breadwinners put a strain on household resources and girls are often required in the home to replace lost human resources and/or care for the sick relatives or orphaned siblings.<sup>17</sup>

Millions of young people, especially girls, have only had limited access to education or no access at all. There are in many countries private and public initiatives aimed at providing "second chances" to youth at different levels of education.

#### *Brain drain – brain circulation*

Sub-Saharan Africa has the world's highest proportion of students studying abroad (6 per cent), and many of these do not return after their studies.<sup>18</sup> UNCTAD estimates that around 30 per cent of Africa's university educated professionals live outside the region. These skilled workers, doctors, engineers etc. are attracted by the better living conditions and the more attractive career opportunities abroad. This is a loss to Africa. On the positive side, significant remittances from abroad often result.<sup>19</sup>

Better absorption capacity of the economies and labor markets in Africa, including reasonable conditions and opportunities for skilled labor could help reduce migration. Policies that can increase economic growth are therefore crucial. Furthermore, education investments and development of the education supply must match the level and needs of the economy and labor market.

Considering the high current level of migration there may be a need to consider how to better manage migration and encourage the return of more experienced migrants from abroad, including as technical advisors.

The bottom-line therefore remains: Investment in education, at all levels, is not only important to fulfill children's right to education. It is a necessary investment in development. It is perhaps the single most important tool in breaking perpetual cycles of intergenerational poverty. But it will only work, if the education system offers relevant quality education to children and their families at affordable costs. If the education systems do not fulfill both of these parameters, the inevitable conclusion for many families is that they are better off sending the children to earn an income or helping out in family operations. Similarly, education in the longer run will only be valuable to individuals and communities if it leads to improved prospects for gainful, decent work. Therefore, education and vocational training must be linked closer to the needs of the

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<sup>17</sup> ILO: Working paper on HIV/AIDS and Child Labor no 6: HIV/AIDS and Child Labor in Sub Saharan Africa: A synthesis report, 2003.

<sup>18</sup> Center for Global Development: Beyond the ABCs: Higher Education and Developing Countries (2008)

<sup>19</sup> In 2005 and estimated USD 7 billion, Gupta et al. Making Remittances Work for Africa, 2007.

(future) labor markets, especially in economic growth sectors (formal and informal) in countries in Africa.

#### 4. Key Issues

Is there a case for increasing support to education at secondary, technical and tertiary levels – as well as primary – in a way that is sustainable? (*employment relevance; economic and financial sustainability of investments; quality; equitable access; girls' education*)

How should resources for investments in education and vocational training be allocated to best match national growth and employment strategies? (*targeting education supply to growth strategies, projected labor market skills demand as input to design of education system; how to ensure demand driven investments by involving private sector and labor market organizations*)

Brain drain or brain circulation – could it be managed or even leveraged for the benefit of development? (*managing migration; ethical recruitment; exchange programs;*)

What kinds of initiatives for youth employment should be promoted? How should they be formulated? How should they be sustained?

How can international assistance to education and employment generation for youth be improved? (*rethink current aid modalities, long-term cooperation agreements/contracts, respect and facilitate national policy-making; special initiatives for youth (self) employment generation*)

## Annex 1:

## Labor market indicators for youth in Africa, by sex and sub-region, 1995 and 2005

	1995			2005		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Youth unemployment ('000)	17,098	10,259	6,839	21,865	13,156	8,709
Sub-Saharan Africa	13,074	7,684	5,39	17,536	10,512	7,024
North Africa	4,023	2,575	1,448	4,329	2,644	1,685
Youth unemployment rate ( per cent)	19.5	20.1	18.6	19.5	20.1	18.7
Sub-Saharan Africa	17.4	18.3	16.3	18.0	19.1	16.6
North Africa	31.8	28.3	40.5	29.5	25.4	39.6
Ratio of youth-to-adult unemployment rate	3.2	3.4	2.9	3.0	3.3	2.7
Sub-Saharan Africa	3.3	3.6	3.0	3.0	3.3	2.8
North Africa	3.3	3.5	2.8	3.5	3.7	2.9
Youth share of total unemployment ( per cent)	59.3	59.8	58.5	57.4	58.3	56.2
Sub-Saharan Africa	61.1	62.3	59.6	59.5	60.8	57.7
North Africa	54.0	53.4	55.0	50.3	50.1	50.7
Youth employment ('000s)	70,655	40,777	29,879	90,157	52,325	37,832
Sub-Saharan Africa	62,013	34,264	27,749	79,813	44,552	35,261
North Africa	8,642	6,513	2,13	10,344	7,773	2,57
Youth employment-to-population ratio	49.6	57.0	42.2	47.9	55.1	40.5
Sub-Saharan Africa	56.4	62.3	50.5	53.8	59.7	47.8
North Africa	26.7	39.6	13.4	25.8	38.3	13.0
Youth not in the labor force (inactive) ('000)	54,572	20,441	34,131	76,294	29,413	46,881
Sub-Saharan Africa	31,415	19,518	50,933	21,827	13,064	34,891
North Africa	19,681	7,377	12,304	25,361	9,894	15,466
Youth inactivity rate ( per cent)	38.3	28.6	48.2	40.5	31.0	50.2
Sub-Saharan Africa	31.7	23.7	39.7	34.3	26.2	42.6
North Africa	60.8	44.8	77.5	63.3	48.7	78.4

Source: ILO, Global Employment Trends Model, 2006.

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