

RESEARCH PAPER BY
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PANEL OVERVIEW

WHAT'S MY ROLE IN SOCIETY?

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Today's young Africans, who are both highly educated and technologically connected, have both the skills and the tools to drive the continent forward to the next stage of its development. This group will provide the next generation of political and civil leaders with a new vision of their country and the continent – a continent that is experiencing a huge demographic bulge that could power Africa into its next generation of growth – if Africa's youth gets the support it needs with policies and priorities from government and the private sector. How can this generation engage with its leaders and help shape its own future?

Regional challenges

With its population aged 15-25 topping almost 600 million people, Africa is the youngest continent in the world (*Dalberg, 2014*). Africa's youth today are more digitally literate, connected and educated than their parents' generation. The British Council reports that over the past 40 years, higher education expanded at twice the global rate. University enrolment even doubled between 2000-2010 (*British Council, 2014*). As the continent closes the gap between educated and non-educated youth, and increases the number of students enrolling in tertiary school, more students are politically engaged and eager shape growth on the continent. At the same time, the youth bulge faces extreme job competition, and limited opportunities for entrepreneurship due to an ineffective education system and poor infrastructure.

Underemployment and unemployment in sub-Saharan Africa is higher than most regions of the developing world. The International Labor Organization (ILO) reports that labor markets in developing countries are challenged by an oversupply of labor, a scarcity of capital and a combination of traditional and "modern" economies (*ILO, 2013*). Women and girls, people with disabilities, and youth, in particular, are marginalized. Sub-Saharan Africa's young people face even greater employment challenges than their counterparts in other developing countries. In 2013 the global youth unemployment rate was estimated at 12.6% compared to the sub-Saharan African youth unemployment rate of 20% (*ILO, 2013 and OECD, 2014*).

The 2014 [Train My Generation Survey](#) illustrated that youth who were polled cited unemployment as their biggest concern about their future. The survey also showed that 28.5% of youth polled felt that improving education was the most important factor for long-term development in their country, while 19.5% felt that job creation was the most important factor.

The African Union argues that young people who are unable to find work experience face more social exclusion, which can lead to increased violence, mental health problems and conflicts (*African Union, 2011*). Unless the private and public sector works to tackle these issues by engaging their youth in decision-making, countries risk losing the investment provided by education and this potentially creates a politically frustrated population. Civic participation is one method for reducing youth poverty and decreasing youth unemployment and violence. Engaging youth through civic participation has many benefits including improving young people's sense of pride and teaching this population meaningful and useful skills for the labor market (*African Union, 2011*).

Policymakers can also emphasize improved training programs for entrepreneurial skills. There are few formal training programs for jobs in the informal economy including repairs, artisanal activities and hairdressing. Because these jobs are in the informal sector, policymakers traditionally ignore the importance of training programs to develop skills in the informal economy. However, in the informal sector, household enterprises can be a potential source of employment if policymakers focus on creating apprenticeship programs and affordable technical training (*World Bank, 2014*). The ILO argues that informal apprenticeship systems need to be recognized as essential training. Informal apprenticeships are a popular and affordable option because apprentices pay for training with their labor (*ILO, 2009*).

Other methods for increasing entrepreneurial skills are to equip youth with ICT skills. ICT skills can have an impact on multiple levels including providing distance-learning instruction and equipping students with valuable technology skills. MOOC (Massive Open Online Courses) for example have been particularly effective in providing students with quality education without a cost. The UNECA notes that ICTs can help youth participate in civic discussions, further emphasizing their soft skills (*UNECA, 2006*).

Recommendations from the Dalberg, African Union, UNECA, UNDP

- Setting up programs for mandatory service in public, private and civil society sector positions could offset student tuition and would also place recent graduates in positions, which would ease unemployment anxiety (*Dalberg, 2014*)
- Policymakers should focus on creating more ICT infrastructure. MOOC (Massive Open Online Courses), provide students with quality education without a cost. ICTs can help

youth participate in civic discussions and further emphasize their soft skills (*UNECA, 2006*)

- Governments should equip young people with vocational skills specific to the labor market, and develop entrepreneurial skills apprenticeship and internship programs (*African Union, 2011*)
- Governments should strengthen and create youth organizations and establish national youth parliaments which can help consult young people in the decision making process (*African Union, 2011*)
- Youth wings of political parties should work with governments to provide capacity building for young members including skills training and mentoring (*UNDP, 2012*)
- Governments should ensure youth involvement in all phases of voter education campaigns and support youth-led community development and volunteering organizations that liaise with tribal leaders and government authorities (*UNDP, 2012*)

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