

RESEARCH PAPER BY
RICHARD ATTIAS & ASSOCIATES

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PANEL OVERVIEW

IS THE AFRICAN EDUCATION SYSTEM BROKEN?

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Deliver students that are qualified for the jobs that are available

Does the African education system deliver young people that are equipped for the jobs available? Is there enough funding available for vocational training and apprenticeships to get young people into work as quickly as possible?

Regional challenges

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 rapidly growing population of individuals aged 15-24 years old face even greater employment challenges than their counterparts in other developing countries. In 2013, the global youth unemployment rate was estimated at 12.6% (ILO, 2013). In sub-Saharan Africa, youth unemployment was almost 20% (OECD, 2014). However, contrary to common perceptions, African youth with the highest rate of unemployment are from the top income distribution with university degrees. The World Bank attributes this to the fact that families from this sector of the population can afford a safety net to support an unemployed dependent. We can also infer that this sector of the population is looking for wage jobs in the formal economy, which may be harder to find and may take longer to obtain than jobs in the informal sector (World Bank, 2014). The World Bank projects that, over the next 10 years, only 25% of the Sub-Saharan African young population will find a wage job, and only a small fraction of those jobs will be formal jobs in large enterprises (World Bank, 2014).

ILO attributes high unemployment rates to several factors including skills mismatch, which could either be from over-education or under-education. In Sub-Saharan Africa, with the exception of Liberia, Malawi and Togo, the skills mismatch is mainly from under-education (ILO, 2013). Under-education may stem from exclusion from technical and vocational programs due to high tuition

costs, but also from lack of preparation for these programs because of lower quality education at the elementary and secondary level. With Africa's population growing over the next decade, African policymakers will need to focus on creating enough jobs and ensuring that this population has enough skills to succeed in the workplace. This preparation is necessary at the primary, secondary, and tertiary level.

Although Africa has demonstrated significant progress in increasing primary education enrolment, it has some of the lowest completion rates in the world. Only 12 African countries have completion rates for primary education above 80% (UNDP, 2014). More importantly, students who attend and complete primary and secondary school do not necessarily receive quality education. The World Bank reports that in recent international benchmark assessment of ninth grade students, 79% of students from Ghana and 76% of students from South Africa do not surpass the lowest level of math proficiency (World Bank, 2014). Incomplete schooling and inadequate primary education - and particularly in STEM areas - prevents young people from acquiring the base level skills they need to succeed in college and eventually obtain jobs in key sectors on the continent such as energy, business and agriculture.

However, the higher education system is equally inadequate in preparing young students for the workforce. The British Council reports that over the past 40 years, higher education in Africa expanded at twice the global rate. University enrolment even doubled between 2000-2010 (British Council, 2014). Yet youth have not necessarily emerged from universities with quality skills for the workforce, and attendance in tertiary education is marked by socioeconomic inequalities. Most universities are cost-prohibitive for the average African student. The World Bank reports that as of 2009, 26 African countries charged tuition or fees (World Bank, 2011). A UNESCO report illustrates that in sub-Saharan Africa, the expenditure per student at upper levels of public education is higher than it is at primary and secondary levels, but it is often given to individual students in the form of scholarships leading to the inequality of resource allocation (UNESCO, 2011). The quality of education at the tertiary level in Africa varies by country, but budgetary constraints make it generally lower. Teachers at the tertiary level are paid, on average much lower salaries than teachers at the primary and secondary level. This may have implications on lack of pedagogical training and the working conditions of teachers at higher levels of education (UNESCO, 2011). Statistics from the British Council show that universities in Africa report a higher than average student-per-lecturer ratio at 24:1, compared to the global rate of 16:2 (British Council, 2014). The organization's study found that employers were dissatisfied both with African college graduates' soft skills and analytical skills including ability to do teamwork, oral communication skills, problem solving skills and IT skills (British Council, 2014).

Besides four-year university programs, technical and vocational training programs in Africa have also failed to provide students with adequate skills to enter the workforce. Moreover, most training programs are costly. The World Bank reports that training in post-secondary programs is

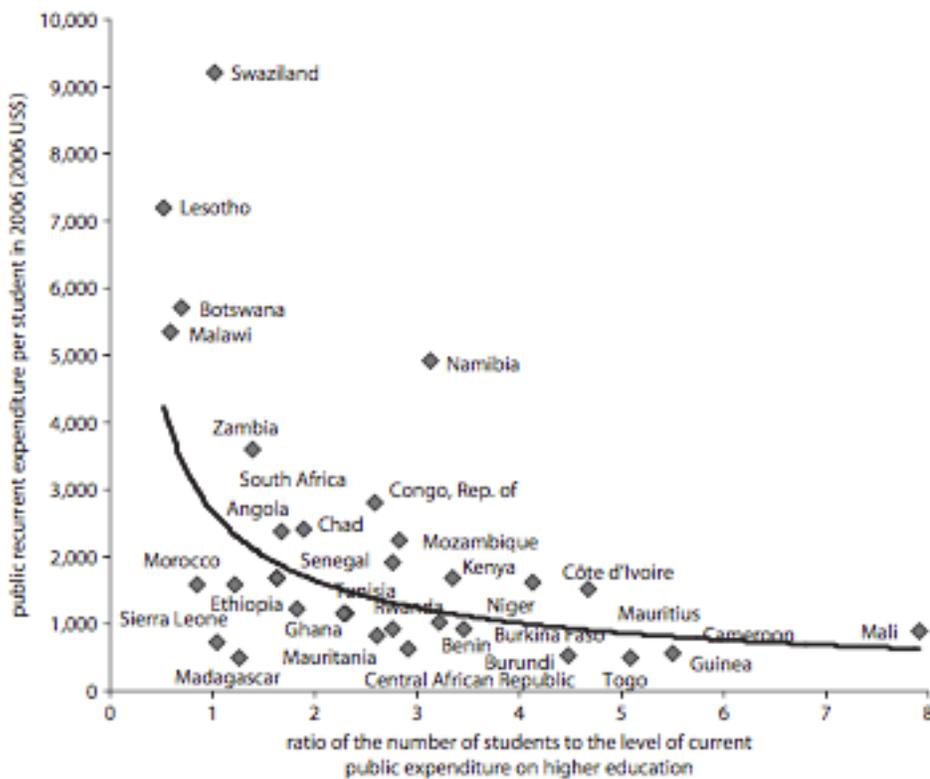
almost three times more expensive than basic secondary education, yet no more effective in preparing graduates for jobs in the private sector. Agriculture training programs including extension programs, and vocational schools also have mixed success rates both due to their costs and rejection by the agricultural community. Low-income youth interested in entering the informal economy and formal economy are particularly at risk for receiving inadequate education. 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 policies that will develop skills in the informal economy. However, household enterprises can be a potential source of employment if policy makers focus on creating apprenticeship programs and affordable technical trainings (*World Bank, 2014*).

Recommendations from the UNDP, World Bank and British Council

- Promotion of STEM subjects combined with involvement in the private sector will improve Africa's education outcomes. To facilitate this process, governments and policymakers should focus on developing national strategies to build capacity within the education system (*UNDP, 2014*)
- Improving classroom pedagogy, teacher professional development and strengthening institutional development will help African countries catch up to world educational standards (*UNDP, 2014*)
- The UN recommends that the public and the private sector should invest in education programs that build skills that could eventually be useful in the labor force. In particular, the government should provide incentives for the private sector and formulate a private investment policy (*UNDP, 2014*)
- Policymakers should promote STEM and the innovative use of ICT in primary education by attempting to provide universal access to ICT devices in early childhood classrooms (*UNDP, 2014*)
- Governments should diversify their financial sources for public higher education by developing income-generating activities and mobilizing resources from the private sector (*World Bank, 2011*)
- In the agricultural sector, vocational training programs have had mixed success, but improved vocational training including farmer field schools and agricultural extension programs may make students entering this sector more competitive. Linking agricultural credit to agricultural extension services can provide necessary incentives and financial backing (*World Bank, 2014*)
- Governments should place emphasis on the informal sector as a potential for job growth by creating market-enhancing programs enabling disadvantaged youth to access training (*World Bank, 2014*)

- Institutions should solicit feedback from employers about the kinds of skills graduates lack in the workforce. Universities and technical schools should also work with employers to design courses or incorporate entrepreneurial and business skills into curricula (British Council, 2014)
- Universities should provide pedagogical training to their faculties to improve the quality of instruction and encourage students to engage in experiential learning through extra-curricular activities (British Council, 2014)
- Governments should provide financial support for training programs and particularly training programs with an internship component for disadvantaged youth. Public private partnerships can help provide the skills that the private sector needs the most. The training programs should be demand-driven and emphasize job-specific skills that the employer can easily provide (World Bank, 2014)

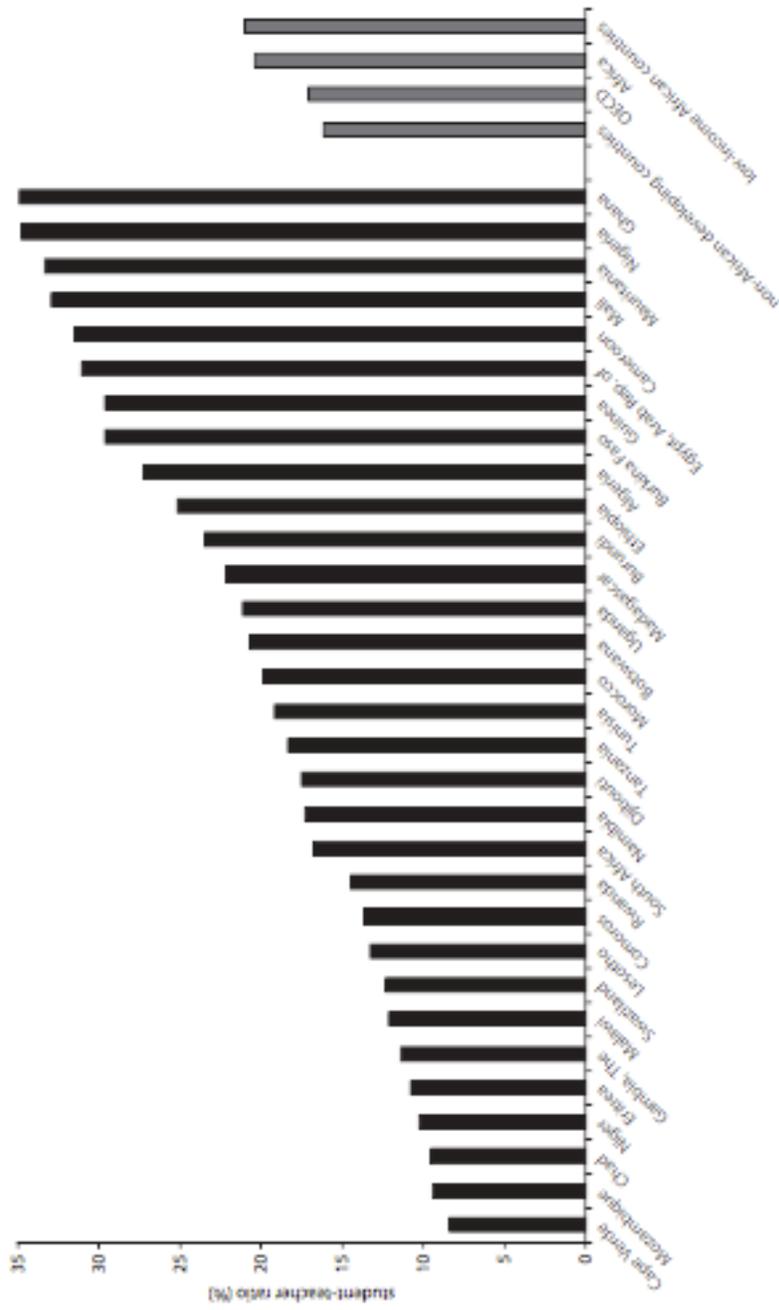
Figure 2.6 Public Expenditure per Student and Ratio of the Number of Students to the Current Level of Public Expenditure on Higher Education in Select African Countries, 2006



Sources: Authors' calculations based on national, UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS), World Bank, and country sector data.

Figure 1 World Bank, Financing Higher Education, 2011

Figure 2.7 Student-Teacher Ratio in Higher Education in Select African Countries, Public and Private Sectors Combined, 2006 (or Closest Year)



Sources: Pöhlé de Dakar 2008, based on UIS country-specific and OECD data.

Figure 2 World Bank, *Financing Public Education*, 2011

Forum Flashback:

NYFA 14: Leon Nzouba, Gabon's Minister of National Education and Vocational Training, felt employment problems began with poor-quality education and that the country needed to focus on reducing class sizes to no more than 30-40 students. Samir Benmakhlouf, Microsoft's Country Manager for Morocco, said that Africa should develop its services and knowledge economy by increasing education budgets. More importantly, he felt that teachers needed more training to incorporate educational technologies into the classroom.

General Director of Morocco's Office of Vocational Training and Employment Promotion, Larbi Bencheikh, emphasized the need to increase the number of vocational and training programs and matching graduates of these programs with jobs.

The Taskforce on Higher Education and Vocational Training, moderated by Jon Foster-Pedley, Dean of the Henley Business School, South Africa, recommended that current curricula should be reassessed, and educational awareness campaigns should be developed. The taskforce also proposed that vocational training should be promoted and there should be more investment in the educational infrastructure.

Further reading:

The Africa Learning Barometer, from Brookings

http://www.brookings.edu/research/interactives/africa-learning-barometer?_hstc=753710.c43a7716123bd0ce48a5ef082415e389.1438013379855.1438013379855.1438013379855.1&_hssc=753710.1.1438013379856&_hsfp=1401021195

Prepared by Angela LaSalle, Program and Research team at Richard Attias & Associates, and Masters International Affairs, Columbia University