



*Making A Life: A Youth Employment Agenda*  
Anna Barford & Katarzyna Cieslik  
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Murray Edwards College,  
University of Cambridge, UK

A detailed review of the literature on this subject  
and youth survey results, are presented in the  
first report in this series:

*Getting By: Young People's Working Lives*  
Anna Barford & Rachel Coombe  
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[https://www.geog.cam.ac.uk/research/projects/  
decentwork/publications/](https://www.geog.cam.ac.uk/research/projects/decentwork/publications/)

# FOREWORD

One of the biggest global challenges we face now is the lack of decent work for young people in low income countries. This workshop in Cambridge was aimed at getting this on the agenda, and doing it the right way by having young people fully involved from the outset. They are the ones with the energy and imagination to tackle the issues. This report brings together the discussion about what policies are needed, what can be done in practice, and what research would help: an urgent agenda to take the world forward.

Game changers and their supporters, at Murray Edwards College, Cambridge.

**Dame Barbara Stocking**  
President,  
Murray Edwards College,  
University of Cambridge

**Perry Maddox**  
Chief Executive,  
Restless Development



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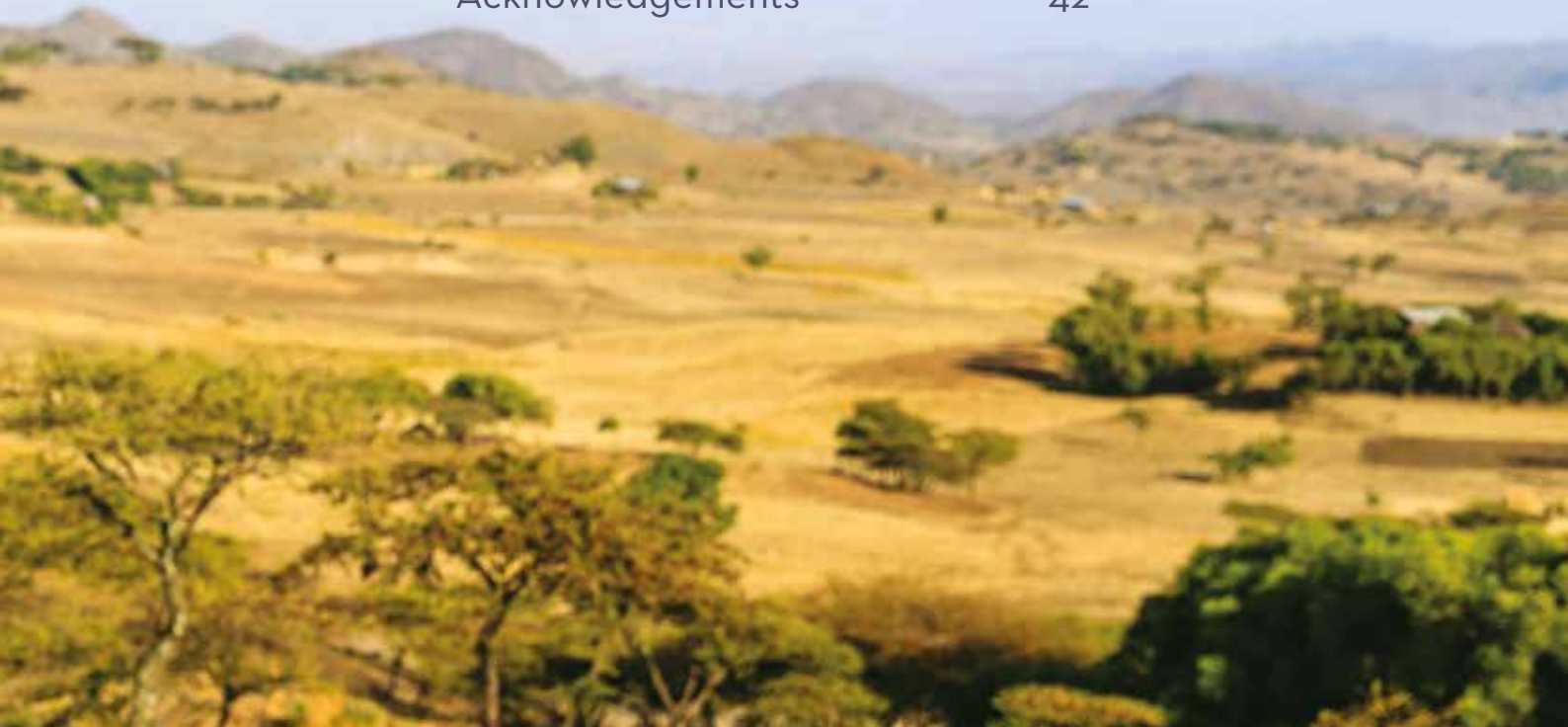
*Getting by and making a living are not enough, let's talk about making a life.*

SULAIMA RAMADAN, PALESTINIAN  
CHILDREN AND YOUTH RIGHTS  
ADVOCATE IN THE WEST BANK



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# GAME CHANGERS

*Young adults from Africa, Asia, the Middle East and the Caribbean ensured that youth voice was a cornerstone of the 'Getting By' workshop.*

## VISA DENIED

Not all the young people invited were able to attend due to their visa applications being denied.

### STEPHEN GOMIS

A self-employed small-scale pig rearer in Kaolack, Senegal. He has participated in International Citizen Service with Y Care International, working with other volunteers from the UK and Senegal on community development projects.

### MARIE CHRISTELLE IGIHOZO

Marie founded an entrepreneurship club for students and is project co-ordinator for the Rwanda Pharmaceutical Students Association, which supports young people to make informed healthcare decisions.

### REGINA GERALDINE NAGAWUKI

A women's rights activist and social entrepreneur, the Founder of Giraal Africa, a hybrid enterprise with a social mission to empower women via business skills development and inclusion in the garment industry value chains.



**MARWA AZELMAT**

Represents the UN Youth Gender Innovation Agora, Morocco, where she advocates for the advancement of the Gender Equality Agenda in the Middle East and North Africa Region through promoting women and girls in ICT and Innovation.



**INOTA CHETA**

Co-founder of the non-profit She Entrepreneur, Inota promotes female economic empowerment. She has served as a Global Leader of Restless Development's Youth Power Project, and on the board of Action Aid's Global Platform Zambia. Inota studied Economics, Statistics and Finance.



**BENEDICTA DAWSON-AMOAH**

Youth Think Tank  
Researcher and evaluation specialist in the Youth Inclusive Entrepreneurial Development Initiative for Employment project. She works to create youth economic opportunities in Ghana's construction sector through technical and entrepreneurship training.



**JEVANIC HENRY**

A youth leader, environmentalist, community activist, and co-founder of the Youth Climate Change Activists network, tackling environmental issues and raising awareness about climate change in St Lucia and the Caribbean region.



**MUHAMMED KISIRISA**

Founder of nongovernmental organisation Action For Fundamental Change and Development, which offers literacy courses, vocational and entrepreneurship skills training in the informal settlement of Bwaise, Kampala.



**YVONNE AKINYI OCHIENG**

Program manager of Nzumari Africa, a youth-led community organisation working on sexual and reproductive health and women's entrepreneurship skills in the informal settlements of Nairobi.



**SULAIMA RAMADAN**

Palestinian children and youth rights advocate working in vulnerable areas around the West Bank. She is a co-founder of Puppets 4 Kids theatre project, which aims to empower and educate disadvantaged children and youth through play.



**MONEERA YASSIEN**

Social entrepreneur and a human's rights activist working on women's empowerment in Sudan. Moneera is a recent economics graduate and she volunteers as a mentor to other young women in Sudan.

# INTRODUCTION

*The 'Getting By' workshop focused on the pressing need for sufficient, decent work for young people in lower income countries.*





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***Youth leadership is a largely untapped resource for development. When genuine youth leadership happens, it can mobilise communities at speed and at scale, yet decision makers and funders face challenges around how to engage youth.***

PERRY MADDOX, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF RESTLESS DEVELOPMENT

“

***In St. Lucia, there is 49% youth unemployment, despite booming tourism. Climate change is a key challenge and puts youth livelihoods at risk as extreme events such as hurricanes are on the rise, posing a risk to entrepreneurs while insurance costs skyrocket. Yet there are also opportunities for ecotourism, and eco-entrepreneurship.***

JEVANIC HENRY, YOUTH LEADER, ENVIRONMENTALIST, COMMUNITY ACTIVIST

## THE ‘GETTING BY’ WORKSHOP

Of the generation born around 2000, who will turn 30 when the Sustainable Development Goals are due, a typical man born in China would be married with children, and working in the formal sector; a typical woman born in Africa would be single with children, working in the informal sector. Diverse livelihood portfolios, high levels of informality and gendered patterns of work contribute to a varied landscape of work for young people in Africa and Asia. Young people are creative and innovative, empathetic and proactive, eager to engage in volunteer and civil society projects. Yet constrained economic conditions may increase the risk of young people committing crimes and becoming involved in conflict.

In April 2019, Murray Edwards College (University of Cambridge), partnering with the international youth



NGO Restless Development, hosted an international, multi-sectoral workshop on youth employment in lower income countries. What was distinctive about the workshop was the participation of eight young people from the Middle East, Africa and the Caribbean who shared their personal experiences of 'getting by'. Other workshop participants included representatives of governments, NGOs, universities, industry and international organisations. The workshop emphasised that young people should not be seen as the problem but rather as active agents shaping their own working lives.

This report summarises key findings of the workshop in the areas of policy, practice and research. Each chapter begins with the recommendations generated by presentations and discussions. The content of this report reflects the experience, understanding and expertise gathered from youth and adult delegates during the 'Getting By' workshop. We conclude with an agenda for change.

## THE YOUTH EMPLOYMENT CHALLENGE

The workshop opened with a panel discussion in which young people identified key challenges surrounding work. This highlighted (i) the high levels of underemployment and working poverty, (ii) highly gendered patterns of labour force activity, (iii) lack of social protection, and (iv) the informal sector's dominance. The prohibitive costs of registering a small enterprise (partly for want of progressive taxation schemes) hinder formalisation of many nascent companies. Lack of family support, mentoring, and capital were further obstacles



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*In Zambia, the informal sector provides 90% of youth livelihoods, but the informal sector only provides sustenance, with minimal growth. Indeed, just getting by. How can we promote, teach, and hone entrepreneurship?*

INOTA CHETA, YOUTH LEADER AND ENTREPRENEUR

“

***The informal sector is often ignored or disregarded while it is now the main provider of youth livelihoods. The informal sector provides hands-on training and soft skills; this should be acknowledged and appreciated by the formal sector, recognised as actual work experience. The lack of social protection is also a big issue.***

BENEDICTA DAWSON-AMOAH, EVALUATION SPECIALIST IN GHANA

“

***Uganda has the highest youth unemployment rates in all of sub-Saharan Africa. I help young people to establish their own microenterprises. But they come up against the challenge of prohibitive costs: taxation (e.g. VAT), income tax, social media tax, mobile money tax and licencing costs.***

MUHAMMED KISIRISA, FOUNDER OF NGO ACTION FOR FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT

► recognised by the youth participants. Last but not least, the uncertainties and impacts of climate change on both national policy and private sector investment schemes, and the natural resources at the base of rural livelihoods, were repeatedly discussed.

Although many young people currently focus on ‘getting by’, the young participants made clear their aspiration to inform decision making and to run their own affairs. In the lead up to the workshop, Restless Development and the University of Cambridge surveyed 263 young people in lower income countries and found that kinship and family networks are an important enabler of young people’s transitions into work.<sup>1</sup> The absence of such support can be incapacitating. The survey respondents hoped for the following changes: integration of demand and supply-side interventions, regulation of working environments, attention to structural issues, and promotion of entrepreneurship. Young people also stressed the need to keep consulting and involving them in the process.<sup>1</sup> ●





Word cloud created by delegates during the youth panel discussion.

# POLICY

*Good policy is critical to improving labour market outcomes. Particular attention should be paid to young people's needs, the creation of decent jobs, and the value of unpaid and domestic work.*



## RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. Engage young people in the design of context-specific policies

Policies must be designed according to local needs and intended recipients. Ideally, young people should be involved in the process of defining the problem and designing solutions. It is also important to establish mechanisms for accountability.

### 2. Attend to demand-side interventions

We need to think carefully about which demand-side interventions will boost the need for labour. Options include subsidised employment, labour market reforms, and promotion of inclusive growth. Governments might consider expansionary fiscal policies – investment in sectoral development and supporting the development of specific industries.

### 3. New jobs should be decent, and socially, environmentally and economically sustainable

Job creation should simultaneously address other pressing issues, such as climate change, poverty, and access to education. Holistic and inclusive policy development, sensitive to equity, gender, disability and caring roles can have broad positive impacts.

### 4. Improve working conditions and provide social protection

The scale and permanence of the informal sector demands policies that provide social protection, and improve working conditions, whilst encouraging formalisation.

### 5. Recognise the value of unpaid work

The social and economic role played by those who are not in paid employment is undervalued, despite its critical socio-economic role. Policies that value and remunerate unpaid work can reduce gender inequalities.

### 6. Establish minimum standards for ‘decent work’

Consult with a variety of young people, especially the most marginalised and least protected, to develop minimum standards of ‘purposeful and dignified work’. Indicators of decent work might address health and safety, social protection, maximum working hours, minimum wage, and taxation. The standards would apply to the public and private sectors.

### 7. Establish minimum standards league tables

Public league tables would give private companies and donors confidence to invest, and enable consumers to vote with their spending. Youth movements could drive awareness of and accountability to the minimum standards league tables.

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***Rather than shaping young people to meet the needs of the future of work - why not shape the future of work to meet the needs of young people?***

NIALL O'HIGGINS, INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION

“

***Even when women become the main breadwinners, this does not necessarily change their social status. We need to calculate the unpaid work that women contribute.***

MONEERA YASSIEN, SOCIAL ENTREPRENEUR AND A HUMAN'S RIGHTS ACTIVIST

## KEY FACTS

Young people trying to find productive employment or self-employment set out with a significant disadvantage. They have less social and physical capital than older workers – they lack access to credit, have fewer assets to use as collateral, and are less likely to have secure titles to land or other property. They are also less likely to have the contacts and experience that can help them find work, explained Mattias Lundberg of the World Bank. All studies on the causes of youth unemployment indicate a lack of aggregate demand (need) for young people's labour, pinpointed Niall O'Higgins from the International Labour Organization. Workshop delegates agreed on the pressing need to create opportunities for work through demand-side policies (i.e. policies that stimulate the need for labour).

To date, most interventions have focussed on the supply side, improving young people's skills to increase employability, or supporting entrepreneurship through





access to finance, mentoring and skills development. This is not a panacea. Underemployment and working poverty persist as the biggest issues for contemporary labour markets in Africa and these cannot be solved by supply-side interventions alone. More substantial policy change is needed to address this issue urgently and at a large scale.

A question that resonated throughout the policy discussions was: **What economic and social policies are required to meet the challenges?** This helped to identify focal points and sensitivities for policy making.

## DISCUSSION POINTS

### Policy making context

In many governments, responsibility for youth employment is the remit of multiple ministries, often fragmenting provision especially when ministries are themselves competing for resources. This can result in failed interventions. For instance, attempting to boost employment through education is unlikely to succeed, without considering financial constraints, lack of demand, and poor social protection. ▶



## How can young people contribute to policy?

Many governments support the principle of youth engagement in policy making. However, they do not necessarily know how best to go about this, or may lack the commitment to

engage meaningfully. From their experience of supporting youth advocacy, Restless Development found that young people who are embedded in communities are well positioned

to influence policy making positively. Civil society organisations can facilitate communication between young activists and the government, to foster inclusive decision making.

► Even when governments work in a co-ordinated and collaborative way to tackle youth underemployment, success is not guaranteed. There are many interests, deals and trade-offs involved, and the ultimate policy may end up proving inappropriate for its specific context.

Young people themselves must have a central role in designing meaningful and effective youth policy. This can be achieved if the right mechanisms are created. Since young people make up a large proportion of the populations in many lower income countries, their involvement could have wider benefits for democracy, transparency and accountability. It is hoped that governments and donors come to see youth engagement as an important component of their work.



***On the demand side, we have to look at the private sector and at the factors influencing investment. How can private sector investments to create jobs be encouraged in environments that are unstable, unsafe, and corrupt?***

MATTIAS LUNDBERG, WORLD BANK

## Creating decent jobs for a just transition

Many of the interventions of recent decades – wage subsidies, promotion of self-employment through entrepreneurship, and youth training schemes – have not proved as effective as hoped. This arises from the low demand for youth labour. A closer look at how to stimulate the demand side of the equation is needed. Through expansionary fiscal policies, governments can invest in sectoral development and support specific industries where jobs can be created for young people.

The increasingly urgent challenge of responding to climate change should be addressed in new policies. Green jobs can be created (although other sectors lose jobs) in the shift to a greener economy. Policies to support this transition include investment in and protection of the green sector, complemented by skills training.

Currently there are insufficient policies to regulate emerging sectors. One suggestion is to regulate entry and exit to the new green sector to avoid saturation. However, this raises the question of jobs for the people prevented from entering a new and growing sector. Further, additional regulation can discourage people from switching sector or starting new businesses. There is a delicate balance between creating an enabling environment and protecting the sector so it can grow.

## Co-operative and other business models

Several models of organisation offer a way for people to work together, so as to build economies of scale. This includes co-operatives, producer and marketing organisations that have the critical mass to negotiate group prices and redistribute profits. Although the co-operative model has been overlooked recently, it has potential for empowerment, especially ►

## The youth employment challenge in Namibia

DAISRY MATHIAS. NAMIBIAN PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR

In Namibia, one of the five most unequal countries in the world, young people constitute 36% of the population and youth employment is a major issue. Following the 2014/15 global economic slowdown, economic contraction pushed unemployment up to 33%. Young people, especially young women, are particularly adversely affected. Drought in 2017 led to more job losses in the agricultural sector. Another challenge is that the labour market cannot absorb

the numbers of young people graduating from university.

It is the role of the public sector to establish and co-ordinate a coherent governance architecture. Tourism and hospitality now contribute jobs. The government invests in Vocational Education and Training, aiming to empower graduates with the skills and tools to be self-employed. The government is also tracking the transition of Technical and Vocational Education and Training

graduates into the labour market.

When considering the challenges surrounding youth employment, we must understand this within its wider context. This includes considering the impacts of climate change on livelihoods. When thinking of employment, we often overlook the loss of jobs in agriculture resulting from the combination of protracted droughts and land shortages associated with growth in human settlements.



## POLICY

► in poorer settings. Workshop delegates recommend incentivising group working through deep, sustainable, and context-specific policy.

One example of policy support for youth co-operatives is youth entrepreneurship development funds, set up by several African governments and NGOs, which are only available to groups. This group-focused approach can reduce transaction costs and encourage collaboration, though it is hard to ensure sustained collaboration. Another option is the introduction of tax policies that support the set-up and operation of co-operative businesses. There is scope to advocate for co-operatives amongst development partners with the aim of promoting decent work.

### Managing Foreign Direct Investment

At a very different scale are the jobs created by Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). There is a need

to regulate FDI to ensure that the host population benefits. For instance, in Chinese infrastructure projects in Africa, Chinese labour is often brought in, which limits opportunities for local communities. A regional approach to negotiating the terms of foreign direct investment, backed up by international law, could empower national governments to regulate more forcefully.

Some practical ways to increase local employment benefits from FDI include mandatory local hiring. In St Lucia, 30% of employees must be local. Another option is to impose a 'double bottom line' for private sector firms receiving public or charity funding, requiring both project completion and training of local people. An approach used by the Commonwealth Development Corporation, is to stimulate job creation through investment in existing companies that may be struggling to find finance for expansion. Thus FDI could be harnessed to boost decent jobs and relevant skills.





## Co-operatives in Uganda

**MUHAMMED KISIRISA, FOUNDER OF THE NGO ACTION FOR FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT**

In Uganda, most co-operatives are coffee-growers or dairy producers. These small business co-operatives access small loans. There is a tendency to formulate co-ops based on identity – one for young people, one for women. We

brought these groups together to form one cooperative for the whole parish. The members were trained in leadership, they registered with the government, they have governance structures, and they have funding.

## Regulating, valuing and underwriting work

There is disagreement surrounding how to engage the informal economy. On one hand the vast majority of young people in lower income countries work in the informal sector and there is a rapid pace of job creation. On the other hand, there is a desire to formalise work as this often brings better worker rights and protections.

It is important to determine the commercial and labour regulations appropriate for informal self-employment and informal wage employment, respectively. Suggestions include micro-level start-up programmes offering registration and tax breaks for new companies to simplify formalisation; information sharing and transparency concerning the registration process; and wage subsidies, targeting formalised firms only. Some delegates noted a need to avoid over-regulation, which could increase costs and decrease flexibility of work, negatively impacting young people.

Social protection, understood as policies and programs that allow people to manage economic and social risks,

is closely linked with formalisation, as it depends upon well-functioning taxation. For young entrepreneurs, social protection provides a safety net that allows them to manage risk in business, smooth household consumption when work is not available, and survive economic shocks. Alongside promotion of social protection, legal protections should be enforced, for example, maternity laws and prevention of workplace discrimination against mothers.

One group often regarded as ‘excluded youth’ are those who are neither in employment, education or training (NEET). Niall O’Higgins informed delegates that increasing numbers of young people are NEET. In 2019, the proportion of all young people aged 15-24 who are NEET is 21.4% worldwide; 70% of this group are women. However some NEETs perform essential unpaid reproductive labour, thereby supporting current and future paid workers. Policymakers might consider how their unpaid work might be revalued, remunerated, regulated, and tailored to enable a future transition into skilled, decent work.

The gig economy involves short-term labour market ►



► activities coordinated via digital platforms. These can enable employers from around the world to order a timed and monetised task from workers at a particular unit or hourly price. For young people in lower income countries, gig work may be a better version of the side hustle they're already doing. E-translation services, web design and e-commerce are examples of digital work available through platforms like Upwork, Jumia and Amazon Mechanical Turk. From the perspective of a vulnerable young person, the gig economy comes with the benefits of flexibility and payment. According to the International Labour Organization, the gig economy is one of the few areas where young people earn more than older people. ●

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***Informal employment is not a stepping stone for less educated youth to enter the formal labour market, because they get stuck in it.***

**NIALL O'HIGGINS, INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION**



# PRACTICE

*Throughout the workshop there was an emphasis on ensuring that vulnerable and marginalised young people benefit from practice-based interventions.*





## RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. Improve communication and co-ordination

Co-ordination and communication between practitioners, policy makers and researchers are essential. Advances in digital media and Information and Communication Technology have created an unprecedented opportunity for real-time, low-cost information sharing.

### 2. Fight discrimination

There is a need to better understand and address social and cultural discrimination against young people in the job market and in the work place. Gender discrimination requires particular attention given that young women are disadvantaged in the labour market.

### 3. Foster innovation

To promote business and entrepreneurship it is necessary to foster innovation. Think-tanks, hubs and idea incubators are effective, and have potential to be scaled up. Whilst access to capital is not the most pressing concern, access to youth specific funds could increase young peoples' chances of entrepreneurial success.

### 4. Invest in vocational programs and skills

Revitalisation of formal education, improved vocational and technical training opportunities, and development of essential soft skills will help to meet the demands of the rapidly changing employment market. Consultation with the private and public sector can align training with current labour market needs.

### 5. Leave no one behind

Creating multiple exit points from formal education along with annual certification schemes can ensure that students who do not graduate still acquire useful qualifications. This would particularly support women wishing to continue their education after having children.

### 6. Recognise the informal sector

Considerable experience and professional skills are acquired in the informal sector. Recognising these skills with qualifications and raising awareness about employer discrimination against informal sector workers would support them to transition from the informal to formal sector.

## START

- Instead of aiming to 'get by', think how young people can 'make a life'
- Design interventions for young people within the milieu of families, communities, and institutions
- Connect supply and demand side interventions

## CONTINUE

- Innovation hubs and business incubators
- Mentoring and connect this to apprenticeships
- Solidarity economy, co-operatives, and collective entrepreneurship

## STOP

- Promoting entrepreneurship as the panacea
- Prioritising capital as it is not the main issue for young people
- Assessing interventions numerically, focus on quality

## KEY FACTS

Globally, the youth cohort now entering the job market is the best educated to date. Yet their professional aspirations, shaped by the global media, cannot currently be met by their home countries' demand for labour<sup>2</sup>. In rural areas with few options beyond agriculture, young people are often forced into subsistence entrepreneurship or outmigration.

The work of civil society organisations, NGOs and foundations is skewed towards supply side interventions, offering a variety of business skill building and entrepreneurship promotion programmes for young people. Self-employment cannot provide the solution for everyone. Not all young people have the entrepreneurial drive to bring a small business to scale and village markets can become oversaturated with micro- and family firms. As a result, one out of three new micro-entrepreneurs fails. Finally, due to funding constraints and lack of infrastructure, the most marginalised young people (including young women, rural youth and youth living with disabilities) are often beyond the reach of micro-credit based interventions.

## DISCUSSION POINTS

**Formal and informal learning**

Our discussion about supply side interventions started with a question: what is needed in education and skills development to meet the employment challenge? Are formal or informal education systems more efficient in equipping young people with the right tools to meet job market demands?



While achieving universal primary education was considered the most successful of the millennium development goals, the quality of schooling in several African countries differs dramatically between urban and rural areas. Underfunded rural schools often struggle to instruct their students even in core skills of literacy and numeracy, and outdated curricula and poor infrastructure pose critical challenges. At the same time, public spending is skewed towards higher ►



***You cannot discuss youth matters without youth representation.***

DAME BARBARA STOCKING, PRESIDENT  
OF MURRAY EDWARDS COLLEGE,  
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

“

*There's a lot of talk about formalisation: it's sometimes seen as a panacea to all employment-related issues. In my view, we need to recognise that the informal sector offers young people opportunities unmatched by formal private industry, especially low barriers to entry and immense flexibility. Facilitating the transition from the informal to the formal sector is not the only way forward.*

MATTIAS LUNDBERG, WORLD BANK

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*I do believe we need to start talking more about social protection within work. Social protection is a potent policy tool to protect young people from poverty throughout their professional lives, reduce inequality and social exclusion. The way to achieve it, though, is through formalisation.*

ALEX KENT, RESTLESS DEVELOPMENT

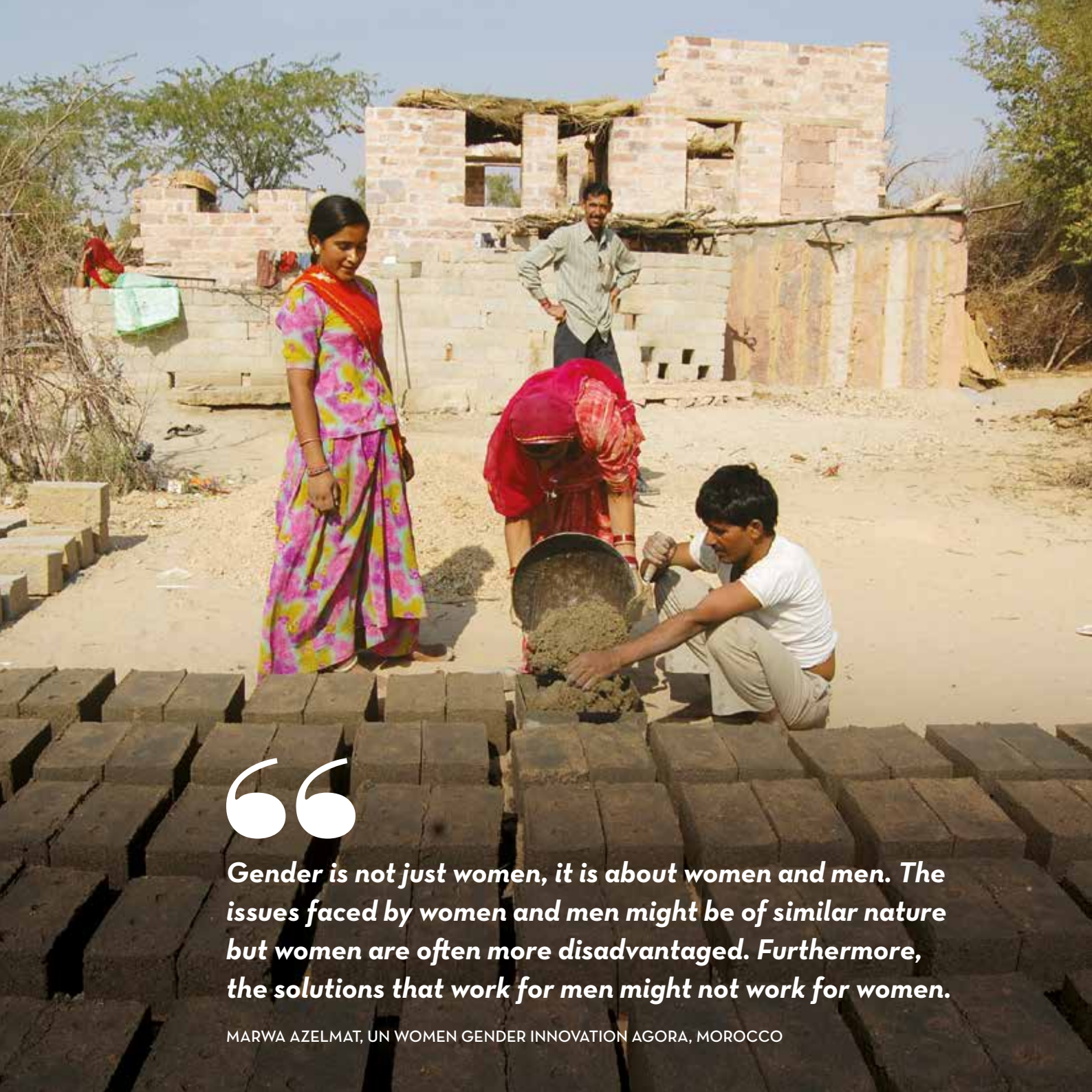
► income segments of the population: governments disproportionately direct scarce resources to higher and tertiary education, a level of attainment only achieved by less than 2% of the poorest. Pupil mentoring schemes can be effective in motivating and empowering students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and such schemes should align with labour market need.

Perhaps surprisingly, technical skills of potential job candidates, though desired, are not the main concern for the prospective employers. Personal integrity, professional approach and high ethical standards are among the most desired features of new recruits. Several practitioners at our workshop mentioned that soft and transferable skills should be the focal point of youth training programs. Unofficial apprenticeships and assistant jobs in the informal sector, often arranged via family and kin networks, are usually the first professional experience of young job seekers. Formal sector employers recognising the value of such hands-on training could be the first step to boost a young person's CV.

Practitioners at the workshop recommended building young people's resilience through long-term mentoring and supervision schemes, integrating formal and informal training. As the job market moves at a fast pace, it is important to develop young people's capacity to absorb change and transform appropriately. Layering several interventions could maximise impact.

## Participation and inclusion

Inclusion of young people in the design, implementation, monitoring and assessment of youth-targeted programmes is not a widespread practice. Top-down management prevails in most interventions, resulting in programs that target the wrong groups or provide training in skills that are not needed. One barrier to ►



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***Gender is not just women, it is about women and men. The issues faced by women and men might be of similar nature but women are often more disadvantaged. Furthermore, the solutions that work for men might not work for women.***

MARWA AZELMAT, UN WOMEN GENDER INNOVATION AGORA, MOROCCO

“

***We observe slow progress in expanding secondary enrolment in South Asia and sub Saharan Africa - and today, secondary school is not where young people acquire their core skills for the job market. The most disadvantaged, the poorest, and many young women, often do not make it to secondary school.***

PAULINE ROSE, PROFESSOR OF INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

“

***In my work, I'm constantly confronted with the power of family and kinship networks. When assessing the role of the many enabling factors, these have time and again proven invaluable, borderline indispensable. At the same time, young people who are deprived of this sort of support are at a huge disadvantage.***

SULAIMA RAMADAN, PALESTINIAN CHILDREN AND YOUTH RIGHTS ADVOCATE

► participation is the additional cost and logistics, and offering transport allowances and scheduling activities outside of school hours would encourage youth engagement.

The Game Changers stressed that young people are a rich and diverse body of personalities and talents, each deserving an individual pathway. They suggested offering a menu of options, along with tailored interventions to meet specific needs. This, they argued, is a way to help young people feel confident, empowered and engaged.

When trying to understand and address the complex challenges that young people face, a variety of approaches to work should be recognised alongside the ecosystems in which these are embedded. Portfolio work requires greater attention, as many young people navigate several jobs simultaneously, both formal and informal, as well as family and community roles. The Game Changers envisioned their future work as being collaborative, perhaps engaged in collective entrepreneurship, cooperatives, and other forms of solidarity economy.

## Innovation

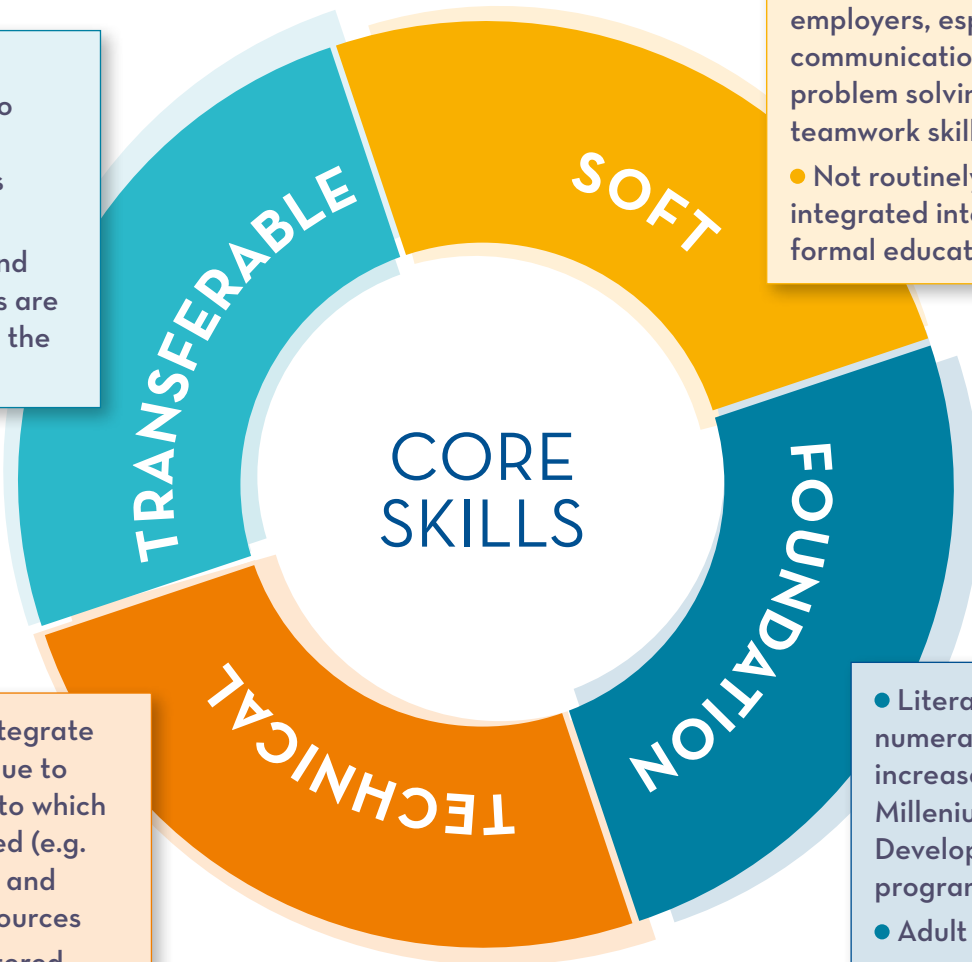
Innovation is a necessary component when preparing young people for the rapidly changing job market. Innovation hubs and idea incubators are in high demand, as they offer access to cutting-edge technology, cultivate creativity and entrepreneurial culture, and provide new forms of training and business support. The young delegates pointed out: urban agglomerations are buzzing with innovation and change. Right now, green enterprises and social business ventures could benefit from support through training and concessional loans/grants. ●

## Soft skills facilitate human connections

## Transferable skills are useful in different job roles

- Highly desired by private sector employers, especially communication, problem solving and teamwork skills
- Not routinely integrated into formal education

- Increasingly important due to workers shifting sectors and jobs changing
- Negotiation and networking skills are often acquired in the informal sector



- Difficult to integrate into curricula due to rapid changes to which skills are needed (e.g. software skills) and insufficient resources
- Could be fostered through apprenticeships and in-company training

- Literacy and numeracy have increased due to Millenium Development Goal programmes
- Adult literacy and numeracy education is in high demand

## Technical skills are required to perform specialised tasks

## Foundational skills make further learning possible

# RESEARCH

*Research needs to be longitudinal,  
and responsive to changeable labour  
markets and global challenges.*





## RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. Build a critical mass of research

More interdisciplinary in-depth research across different geopolitical contexts promises insight into the multifaceted nature of the youth employment challenge. New theoretical understanding can emerge from detailed and integrated case studies.

### 2. Re-examine concepts and constructs

Uncompensated care work, portfolio working and gig economy jobs tend to evade capture by traditional socio-economic tools (e.g. census, surveys). The conventional

distinction between rural, agricultural livelihoods and urban wage employment needs rethinking in light of increasing human mobility and connectivity.

### 3. Prioritise process, impact monitoring, and assessment

There is scope to analyse the impacts of existing youth-oriented interventions. Inclusive and participatory evaluations could assess: (i) impact, (ii) the balance of costs and benefits, (iii) potential for scale up, and (iv) participants experiences and insights.

### 4. Longitudinal research

Longitudinal and cohort studies capture long-term life and employment trajectories. Funding for such projects should be sought, and researchers should strive to maintain long-standing relationships to achieve continuity in datasets.

### 5. Involve young people

Research about young people should involve them. Knowledge co-creation, participatory research and citizen science are just some of the ways to make research more relevant and inclusive.



*I would like to see more research on the informal sector - it is where the vast majority of young people work, develop professional skills, and gain hands-on experience.*

BENEDICTA DAWSON-AMOAH IS AN EVALUATION SPECIALIST IN GHANA

## KEY FACTS

Even though policy makers worldwide are concerned with youth unemployment and underemployment<sup>3</sup>, the issue has yet to be the subject of mainstream development scholarship. While in some regions, young people are nearly three times as likely as adults to be unemployed<sup>4</sup>, most studies have focused on employment in general. We have yet to develop an in-depth understanding of the processes which are unique to young people.

A recent systematic review<sup>5</sup> identified only 113 papers assessing the impacts of active labour market programmes for young people in low- and middle-income countries. They argued that more research is needed, in particular in relation to programs that combine supply- and demand-side interventions to support young people in the labour market. They also stress that reporting standards should be improved to facilitate synthesis of global trends.

We map out a conceptual framework for youth employment research below. Apart from enlisting particular youth-specific themes and topics, we stress the importance of developing consistent categories and metrics, and of interdisciplinary approaches.

## DISCUSSION POINTS

### Data gap versus knowledge gap

Organisations such as the International Labour Organization and World Bank gather panel data on employment, which could be more widely used by researchers. For this reason, it is useful to distinguish between data gap (topics that have not yet been

investigated) and knowledge gap (data are available but not yet analysed). Taking stock of the available secondary data is a first step in designing a future research agenda.

Workshop participants observed that existing datasets often lack granularity. For example, disaggregating employment and education data by gender, or providing a breakdown of the job opportunities created by sector, would allow for a more nuanced analysis and improved policy response.

### Definitions, categories and constructs

Commonly understood to refer to the transition from childhood to adulthood, 'youth' is used to bracket widely differing age groups generally between the ages of 16 and 35<sup>6</sup>. As an analytical category, 'youth' conceals heterogeneity<sup>7</sup> and how diverse geo-political and economic contexts impact sub-groups of young people in distinctive ways.

Several workshop attendees were concerned with what counts as 'work', which is often equated with wage labour, thus discounting or even delegitimising work in the informal sector and uncompensated care work. Similarly, there is a need to understand what 'decent work' means in different contexts as this may vary.

### Global context

The workshop participants were well aware of the complexity of youth employment issues, highlighting global societal and environmental changes (social media revolution, climate change). A comprehensive approach that looks at societal change in conjunction with environmental change is needed. Several stakeholders at the workshop expressed a keen interest in research into the effect of climate change

on youth employment. For instance, while rising sea levels threaten the livelihoods of fishing communities in coastal regions, the growing importance of biodiversity protection generates jobs in national parks and animal welfare organisations.

Researchers might also investigate the impacts of other global societal trends. The gig economy, driven by the digital and Information and Communication Technology revolution, has deeply impacted the employment landscape. Both policy makers and practitioners asked: who is included and who is left behind by these changes? The extent to which education prepares young people for the shifting contemporary job market requires attention.

## Methods, metrics and measures

One of the important issues raised at the workshop was the relative lack of longitudinal and cohort studies. Such studies show how young people's working lives evolve and are shaped by life events. Examples of important longitudinal studies are the International Labour Organization's School to Work Transition Survey and the Young Lives project, which have provided invaluable evidence concerning young people's educational and professional trajectories, as well as worldviews and aspirations. However the time horizons of research funding often preclude long-term studies.

Another methodological issue is the way in which young people's experiences of work are captured by existing tools, in particular in indicators and metrics. Several employment surveys were tailored for full-time, stable, wage employment, so struggle to represent today's situation.

Research on the impact of interventions could be extended. Most impact assessment studies focus on



*If we were to invest in collecting longitudinal qualitative data, we could follow a cohort of young people through their complex journey to make a living and demystify the transitions in a young person's life.*

RACHEL PROEFKE, RESTLESS DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH MANAGER IN UGANDA

short-term effects and one-dimensional indicators, leading to a reductionist perspective on what success is. Thus, suggested improvements include: broadening impact studies; conducting participatory research; and encouraging data collection and analysis by the public (citizen science).

Workshop participants expressed interest in both macro (global, big data) and micro (individual and case study) analyses. Understanding the lived experience of young job-seekers is critical to inform effective policy response that accounts for economic factors alongside the capabilities and aspirations of young people. ●

# AN AGENDA

*Discussions between young people, international organisations, NGOs and academics generated twelve recommendations for action.*



The youth employment challenge has already reached critical levels. Demographic pressures are likely to exacerbate the problem if action is not taken. The magnitude and complexity of the challenge to provide decent work for all young people who want it is considerable, and this heterogeneous group have diverse aspirations, starting points and obstacles, in varied economic, political and social contexts.

The 'Getting By' workshop was convened to engage with the search for effective and scalable solutions to the lack of decent work for young people. The workshop delegates offered many specific recommendations in the areas of policy, practice and research. Here we distill these into a broader agenda for action.

It is hoped that the ideas shared here can stimulate further serious work in this area.

## WORKSHOP RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.** Engage young people in defining the problem and designing solutions.
- 2.** Increase the prominence of demand-side interventions.
- 3.** Design policy interventions to create decent work and address climate change.
- 4.** Recognise the social and economic value of unpaid work.
- 5.** Revitalise education, focusing on formal curricula, vocational and technical training, and creating multiple exit points from formal education.
- 6.** Acknowledge the experience and professional skills acquired in the informal sector.
- 7.** Focus on transitory and soft skills in supply-side interventions.
- 8.** Foster innovation, through think-tanks, hubs and idea incubators.
- 9.** Assess the impacts of existing youth-oriented interventions.
- 10.** Generate longitudinal and cohort studies to capture youth trajectories.
- 11.** Re-examine social science concepts and constructs of work.
- 12.** Co-ordinate the work of practitioners, policy makers and researchers.

# DIRECTORY

## **Action for Fundamental Change and Development**

AFFCAD offers literacy courses, vocational training and entrepreneurship skill development programmes in the informal settlement of Bwaise, Kampala.  
[www.affcad.org](http://www.affcad.org)

## **Amna**

Amna challenges the thinking, actions and policies which contribute to violence against women and gender inequality. We advocate against violence against women by working directly with individuals, diverse communities and agencies to create safer environments for women in Sudan.  
[www.safeamna.org](http://www.safeamna.org)

## **Caribbean Youth Environment Network**

A non-profit, non-governmental organisation focused on empowering young citizens of the Caribbean and their communities to address socio-economic and

environmental issues including poverty alleviation, youth employment, health, and climate change.  
[www.cyen.org](http://www.cyen.org)

## **Giraal Africa Ltd**

We equalise access to information, resources and tools to channel young entrepreneurs (mainly women) towards opportunities. We offer business coaching, mentorships, strategic planning and management to young innovators. Our social goal is to increase meaningful jobs and promote the growth of businesses which are profitable, sustainable, and scalable. We curated the Facebook community A-Game Powerhouse Entrepreneurs.

## **Global Communities**

Youth Inclusive Entrepreneurial Development Initiative for Employment Project, Global Communities, creates economic opportunities for disadvantaged

young people in the Ghanaian construction sector, by offering technical skills and entrepreneurship training.  
[www.globalcommunities.org](http://www.globalcommunities.org)

## **Nzumari Africa**

Addressing the challenges faced by young people by nurturing their talents and using theatre for development. Nzumari Africa focuses on the challenges of dropping out of school, poor housing, and lack of both clean water and sanitation facilities.  
[www.nzumariafrica.org](http://www.nzumariafrica.org)

## **Open Government Partnership**

A partnership between civil society, civil servants, and government leaders, sharing evidence of citizen engagement and accountability.  
[www.opengovpartnership.org](http://www.opengovpartnership.org)

## **Puppets 4 Kids - Yes Theatre**

Through didactic and community puppetry theatre, this work contributes to the empowerment



and skills multiplication among young people who are both in and out of school in the West Bank. Puppetry is used to raise awareness about health and social issues, and to promote psychosocial well-being.  
[www.yestheatre.org](http://www.yestheatre.org)

### **She Entrepreneur**

Offers training to women in business and finance, also runs sector specific boot camps and sets competitions to encourage innovation.

[www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)

[SheEntrepreneurSeita](http://SheEntrepreneurSeita)

[www.she-entrepreneurs.com](http://www.she-entrepreneurs.com)

### **Youth Think Tank**

The Youth Think Tank is a joint initiative of Restless Development and the Mastercard Foundation, which supports young people to carry out research relating to youth livelihoods in Africa.

[www.restlessdevelopment.org](http://www.restlessdevelopment.org)

# ORGANISATIONS REPRESENTED

Action for Fundamental Change  
and Development

Brunel University

Centre for Systems Awareness

Challenges Group

Coalition for Youth Employment

Commonwealth Development  
Corporation

Department for International  
Development

Global Communities on Youth  
Inclusive Entrepreneurial  
Development Initiative for  
Employment

Institute of Development  
Studies

Integrity Action

International Labour  
Organization

LKMCo

Making Cents International

Manchester Metropolitan  
University

Mastercard Foundation

Murray Edwards College

Nzumari Africa

Overseas Development Institute

Puppets 4 Kids

Restless Development

The Cooperative College

UN Women Youth Gender  
Innovation Agora

University of Cambridge

World Bank

Y Care International

Youth Business International

Youth Climate Change  
Activists



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