



Development Cannot Do Us Apart: Why SDG Interconnections Matter in Reducing Youth Unemployment

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Abstract

Youth unemployment is a major hindrance to Africa's achievement of the 2030 Agenda's aim of sustainable development (Africa Capacity Building Foundation 2017; The World Bank 2009; Wallace 2019; Zimmerman et al. 2013). According to the International Labour Organization, Africa has one of the highest proportions of unemployed youth globally. While between 10 and 12 million young people enter the labour force on the continent each year, only 3 million jobs are created (Africa Development Bank Group 2015). As a result, almost 80% of African teenagers entering the labour field experience long-term unemployment.

Prolonged unemployment causes up to half of the continent's unemployed youth to give up looking for work, undermining social cohesiveness (World Bank 2014; Honwana 2014; Mueller, Rosenbach, and Thurlow 2019; Resnick 2019). Youth who have given up looking for work are called discouraged or inactive youth in labour accounting. They are young men and women who, despite their youth, have given up on looking for work after long periods of unemployment (Africa Development Bank Group 2015; Honwana 2014; Resnick 2019; World Bank 2014).

This study identifies the SDGs most closely linked with reducing youth unemployment (SDG8) in the 34 African countries shown in Figure 1. It uses data from the 2018 Afrobarometer Round 7 survey to examine the prevalent socio-economic circumstances of youth who have given up looking for work.

Keywords: Youth unemployment, SDG, discouraged youth, Africa, gender equality

Purpose

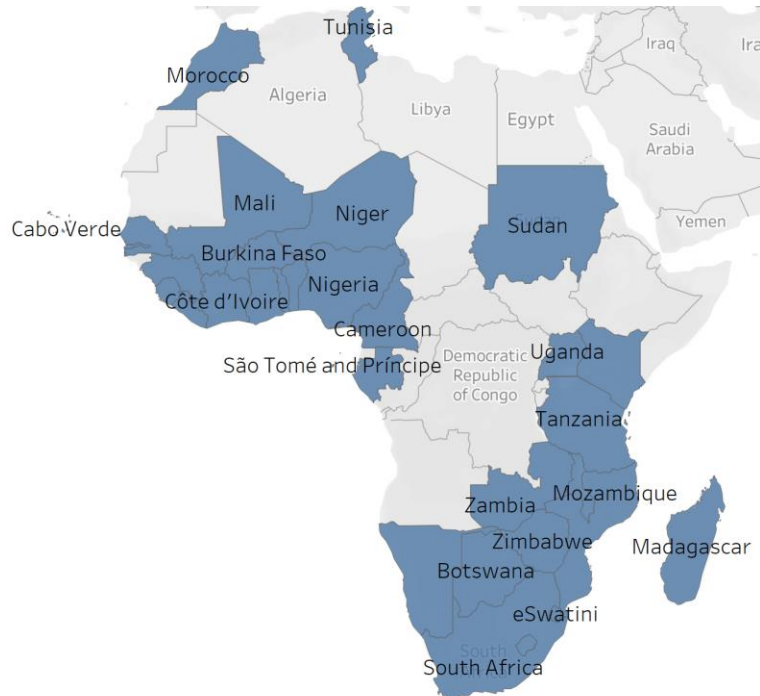


Figure 1: Countries covered in the paper

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of 17 interconnected and indivisible goals that aim to help developing countries achieve long-term progress. While the connections between goals are not obvious, achieving one SDG entails achieving other SDGs as well. As a result, achieving the SDGs will require integrated strategies that take advantage of their interdependence.

This study identifies the SDGs most closely linked with reducing youth unemployment (SDG8) in the 34 African countries shown in Figure 1. It uses data from the 2018 Afrobarometer Round 7 survey to examine the prevalent socio-economic circumstances of youth who have given up looking for work.

Background: Youth Unemployment in Africa

Youth unemployment is a major hindrance to Africa's achievement of the 2030 Agenda's aim of sustainable development (Africa Capacity Building Foundation 2017; The World Bank 2009; Wallace 2019; Zimmerman et al. 2013). According to the International Labour Organization, Africa has one of the highest proportions of unemployed youth globally. While between 10 and 12 million young people enter the labour force on the continent each year, only 3 million jobs are created (Africa Development Bank Group 2015). As a result, almost 80% of African teenagers entering the labour field experience long-term unemployment.

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Defining the Concept of Youth

While there is no universally accepted definition of youth (Gyimah-Brempong and Kimenyi 2013; Mengistu 2017; Tekinda 2017)¹, many individuals and institutions consider youth as a period of transition between childhood and adulthood. Youth, for example, is defined by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as the time during which a person develops the talents and social skills necessary to be prepared for financial gain and the responsibilities associated with adulthood.

The notion of youth according to age differs significantly amongst institutions. For example, although the United Nations statistical division defines youth as 15 to 24 years, the African Union defines youth as 15 to 35 years. The paper defines youth as people between 18 and 35 years old. This is because the Afrobarometer survey only interviews 18 years or older people. The upper limit of 35 years is based on the AU Youth Charter.

Why Tackling Youth Unemployment is Vital to Attaining the SDGs

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) outcomes document identifies young people as a group that has been "left behind". As a result, the SDGs' overarching goal of "leaving no one behind" necessitates a focus on youth, among other demographics.

Not only are young people who are engaged in their society, economies, and politics more productive, but they also contribute to the stability and progress of their communities and countries. Combating youth unemployment is one strategy for keeping youth active in society. The fact that significantly reducing unemployed youth by 2020 is one of the SDG indicators under SDG 8 ('promote sustained inclusive and sustainable growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all') demonstrates the critical nature of addressing youth unemployment for sustainable development.

High rates of youth that have given up looking for a job can lead to political disenfranchisement that causes instability, hindering several SDGs. SDG 8 requires, for example, economic growth and full employment, both of which are impossible to achieve if 80 per cent of young people entering the labour market are unemployed (Langdon, Ritter, and Samy 2018). Furthermore, events such as the Arab Spring, which undermined the achievement of SDG 16, highlight the harmful political and social consequences of a large number of discouraged youths.

¹ https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/04_youth_policy_african_development_kimenyi.pdf, accessed 22 June 2020

Who are the Youth that have Given up Looking for Jobs?

There are two types of accounting for youth employment: those in the labour market and those not (See Figure 2 below). Youth in the labour market include those who work for pay or profit and youth who are unemployed but looking for a job. On the other hand, youth outside the labour force are unemployed youth who are not looking for work (Africa Development Bank Group 2012; ILO 2015; Langdon, Ritter, and Samy 2018; ILO 2018).

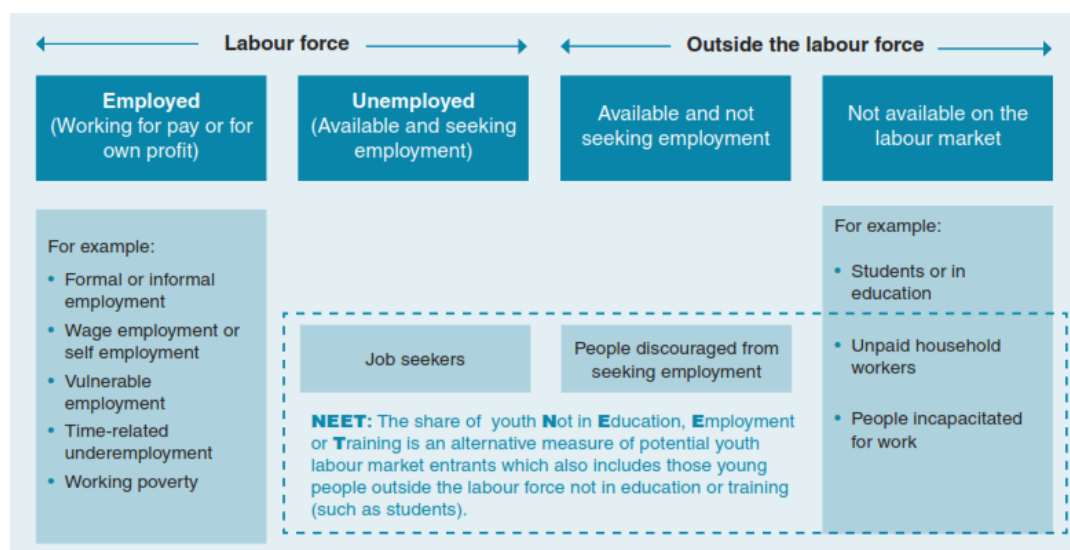


Figure 2: Overview of youth labour market indicators
Source: (ILO 2018)

Discouraged youth or youth that have given up looking for jobs are outside the labour force. They simultaneously exhibit the following three qualities: unemployed, available for work, and not actively seeking employment. Discouraged youth are particularly vulnerable, having given up looking for work after extended periods of unemployment. These youth should be at the top of policymakers' priority lists in society (Langdon, Ritter, and Samy 2018; World Bank 2014; Africa Development Bank Group 2012; UNICEF 2015).

Methodology

Indicator	SDG
Gender	SDG5
Education attainment	SDG4
Location	SDG11
Electricity in area	SDG7
Piped water services in the area	SDG6
Sewage service in the area	SDG6
How often the respondent goes without cash income	SDG1

How often the respondent goes without food	SDG2
How often the respondent goes without medical care	SDG3

Table 1: SDGs examined in the study
Source: Author's compilation

Rapidminer, a predictive machine learning software, was used to model data from the 2018 Afrobarometer Round 7 survey to identify which SDGs, out of nine, are most closely associated with discouraged youths.

Study Findings

Overall Findings

The modelling results indicate that SDGs 4, 5, 6, 7 and 11 are most strongly associated with discouraged youth. These results show that a person's level of education, gender, whether they live in an urban or rural area, access to electricity, and access to piped water sources are the five most important factors determining whether youth are discouraged.

Indicator	SDG
Education	SDG4
Gender	SDG5
Location	SDG11
Electricity in area	SDG7
Piped water service in the area	SDG6

Table 2: Six main characteristics of discouraged youth
Source: Rapidminer modelling results

Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, Botswana, Tanzania, São Tomé & Príncipe, and Eswatini have the lowest rate of discouraged youth among the 34 countries analysed. On the other hand, Guinea, Mali, Malawi, Morocco, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, and Togo have the highest rate of discouraged youth.

Quality Education is Key to Productive Youth

Education attainment is key to determining if youth will give up looking for a job. The modelling results show that youth with secondary education and above are less likely than those with a university degree to give up looking for a job. For instance, only 3 per cent of university graduates and 14 per cent of youth with secondary school education surveyed by Afrobarometer reported giving up looking for work. In contrast, nearly one out of every four (24 per cent) with no formal education said they had abandoned their job search.

The results also show that education is a strong predictor of quality of life. For example, youth without formal education or only elementary school education are more likely to live in areas without sewage facilities, have no cash income, and be food insecure. In contrast, their peers who have completed secondary education are most likely to live in areas with sewage facilities, have a cash income, and be food secure.

Rank	Least vulnerable to being discouraged	Most susceptible to being discouraged	The highest proportion of youth with no formal education	The highest proportion of youth with secondary education	The highest proportion of youth with university education
1	Ghana	Guinea	Niger	South Africa	Sudan
2	Kenya	Mali	Burkina Faso	Nigeria	Botswana
3	South Africa	Malawi	Guinea	Namibia	Gabon
4	Botswana	Burkina Faso	Mali	Zimbabwe	Morocco
5	Tanzania	Ivory Coast	Malawi	Botswana	Tunisia
6	São Tomé & Príncipe	Togo	Uganda	Tanzania	Ghana
7	Eswatini	Uganda	Madagascar	Kenya	Eswatini

Table 3: Ranking of countries by the proportion of discouraged youth and education attainment
Source: Rapidminer modelling results

Therefore, it is not surprising that the countries with the highest percentages of discouraged youth (Burkina Faso and Guinea, Mali Malawi, Malawi, Uganda, Mali, Mali, Uganda, and Guinea) have the highest percentage of youth without formal education. The countries with the lowest rates of discouraged youth, on the other hand, have the largest portions of youth with secondary and university-level education (South Africa, Botswana, Tanzania, Kenya, Eswatini, Botswana, Botswana, Tanzania and Kenya).

Gender Equality and Human Settlements Ensure Youth are not Discouraged

Based on the results, besides education, gender and where someone lives are the two most crucial factors in influencing someone's likelihood of experiencing long-term unemployment and giving up looking for work. Rural youth, in particular, are twice as likely to give up looking for work as their urban counterparts. Similarly, women are more likely than males to abandon their job search.

The consequences of this are severe and worsen the state of discouraged youth. Rural women are less likely to have cash income than their urban counterparts. Unlike their urban counterparts, rural women youth are also unlikely to have potable water and frequently go without cooking fuel, food, medical care, or cash each month. Accordingly, rural youth identified water supply and famine as the most significant development challenges, while urban women identified unemployment as their most pressing development problem.

Access to Electricity and Piped Water is Key to Youth Engagement

Rank	Least vulnerable to being discouraged	Most susceptible to being discouraged	The highest proportion of youth with electricity and piped water
1	Ghana	Guinea	Ghana
2	Kenya	Mali	South Africa
3	South Africa	Malawi	Eswatini
4	Botswana	Burkina Faso	Botswana
5	Tanzania	Ivory Coast	Tunisia
6	São Tomé & Príncipe	Togo	Cabo Verde
7	Eswatini	Uganda	São Tomé & Príncipe

Table 4: Ranking of countries by the proportion of discouraged youth and access to electricity and piped water
Source: Rapidminer modelling results

While discouraged youth stand to benefit the most from access to electricity and piped water, they are also the least likely to get access, according to the modelling results. For example, Statistica reports that 47 per cent of Africans (597 million people) do not have access to electricity. This is mainly attributable to two factors. The first is that the overwhelming majority of families cannot afford the exorbitant cost of power. In Africa, the average retail power price per megawatt-hour ranges from \$490 in Liberia to \$24.4 in Ethiopia. This cost is prohibitively expensive for most Africans, as up to a third of the continent lives on less than \$1 per day.

Without access to energy, a young person's life can be ruined. It obstructs their access to a high-quality education. As a result, they cannot obtain good positions, and many young people abandon their job search altogether. Youth who have access to electricity and piped water, on the other hand, are less likely to feel discouraged.

Conclusion

While reducing youth unemployment is an economic imperative, African countries must invest in SDGs 4, 5, 6, 7 and 11 to meet the SDG8.6 target of significantly reducing youth unemployment for three reasons: (a) education is the most important determinant of discouraged youth, (b)

female youth are more likely to be discouraged, and (c) youth with access to electricity and water are less likely to be discouraged.

Among the SDGs, investing in quality education (SDG 4) is the most important to reducing youth unemployment and attaining SDG 8. A high-quality education system increases youth employment, reduces inequities (SDG 10), closes the gender gap (SDG 5), promotes well-being, and contributes to sustainable communities. Young people can enter the labour force and achieve financial independence. According to UNESCO, each additional year of education contributes around 10% to an individual's average lifetime wages in low-income nations.

As a result, investing in quality education can be a significant catalyst for social and economic transformation across Africa. For instance, a 2011 study of global maternal and perinatal health statistics showed a link between a woman's educational attainment and her risk of dying during pregnancy.

Despite being a fundamental human right guaranteed by Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, many African youth lack access to quality education. A lack of quality education has exacerbated youth unemployment in many African countries, endangering progress toward the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The adverse effects of a lack of knowledge become more evident as a person grows older. Poor education is a key contributor to intergenerational poverty because the children of uneducated adults are less likely to attend school.

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