



How can we not only create **skills** that match the labour market, but also **quality jobs** that match the aspirations of young people?"

-Steffi, 29

UN Photo/Martine Perret
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CHAPTER II

PREPARING FOR WORK

RELEVANT HIGHER EDUCATION – LET’S FOCUS!

Education can take many forms. These include: formal education (through academic mainstream schooling, including technical and vocational instruction for youth¹); informal education (learning that takes place outside of institutions); special education (for those experiencing intellectual/physical disability); and non-formal education (life-relevant knowledge and skills acquired both within and outside educational institutions).

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, during the adolescent years it is formal education which is “the most effective base for developing learning and life skills”.² Furthermore, while the number of adolescents outside the formal education system – just under 74 million in 2008 – has been declining, there are large regional variations. Secondary education suffers from particularly high levels of global inequality. Most rich countries are close to universal secondary school enrolment, while developing countries lag behind.³

Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2011: secondary and tertiary education statistics

Sub-Saharan Africa has registered rapid increases in secondary school coverage. Enrolment ratios have increased by 40 per cent since 1999 – the most rapid growth rate in the world. Mozambique has increased secondary enrolment five-fold.

Despite these impressive increases, youth in sub-Saharan Africa are half as likely to be in secondary school as youth in the Arab States.

Secondary school attendance and completion are strongly influenced by poverty, location and gender. People aged 23 to 27 in Cambodia from the wealthiest 20 per cent of households have secondary completion rates of 28 per cent, compared with 0.2 per cent for the same age group from the poorest households.

¹ While technical and vocational enrolment has increased in most regions globally, there are significant variations; with central and eastern Europe having the largest percentage (19 per cent) of secondary school students enrolled (United Nations, Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2011a).

² United Nations, Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2011a, p. 54

³ *ibid.*

Tertiary education has been expanding world-wide, with 65 million more students enrolled in 2008 than in 1999. Much of the growth has occurred in East Asia and the Pacific, with China alone increasing the number of tertiary places by more than 20 million.

The upshot is that already large global disparities in tertiary enrolment ratios are widening.⁴

Although access to formal education is extremely important, it is equally important to focus on quality; how effective it is. This is particularly significant in the increasingly skills-based global economy, where “higher [secondary/tertiary/vocational] education systems play a vital role in skills development”.⁵ Unfortunately, here too, there are large global inequalities, and some of the gaps are widening. The Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2011 states that, “Access to tertiary education is expanding more rapidly in richer than in poorer countries. Left unchecked, this development is likely to have major implications for future patterns of economic growth and globalization”.⁶

Indeed, the Africa Youth Report 2011⁷ emphasizes that, “A critical analysis of the current education situation in the region has led stakeholders to believe that there seems to be an overemphasis on enrolment numbers rather than attendance and the relevance of education.” This sentiment was also echoed by the majority of the participants in the e-discussion on youth employment.

High-quality multifaceted education has a positive impact on decent jobs. This was highlighted at the 7th Youth Forum of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) held in Paris from 17 to 20 October 2011. The 7th UNESCO Youth Forum final report⁸ acknowledges the correlation between practical education and ever evolving employment needs, whereby a recommendation for Education, no. 8, states:

“In response to employment challenges, we strongly encourage Member States to expand the scope of education by including entrepreneurial skills and training opportunities, and intergenerational partnerships for youth aligned to rapidly changing labour market needs, particularly in non-traditional fields, such as e-learning.”

Furthermore, the Young Foundation encouraged readers to look past the headlines and take the time to listen, understand and act. A representative of the Foundation, Gemma Rocyn-Jones, reported that:

⁴ Source: United Nations, Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Institute for Statistics, Data Centre (UIS database).

⁵ The Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2011 (ibid.)

⁶ The Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2011 (ibid.)

⁷ United Nations, Economic Commission for Africa, 2011

⁸ United Nations, Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2011b

“The key recommendations of [a 2011 publication] *The Way to Work: Young People Speak Out on Transitions to Employment* [(Kahn, Abdo, Hewes and others, 2011)] were echoed [...] in a report on global unemployment trends by the International Labour Organization. This has called for education and training to improve its relevance to labour market needs and for broad-based partnerships between everyone who plays a role in a young person’s transition to employment, including employers. Perhaps it is time for everyone to move past the headlines, stop talking at each other and start listening so that expectations and aspirations can become aligned”.⁹

Indeed, this call was further echoed by participants on the e-discussion platform: let us start listening and collaborating in a meaningful way.

WAKE UP: QUALITY EDUCATION GOES HAND IN HAND WITH DECENT WORK

From 18 to 24 October 2011, week II, the e-discussion platform was open to all to discuss the realities of how their education systems have prepared them (and their peers) to access employment. There were more than 300 comments posted by young people from more than 95 countries across the globe – including from Peru, Senegal, Kenya, Yemen and India. Although the e-discussion invited the views of young people aged 15 to 30,¹⁰ as well as representatives of youth-led organizations, comments during week II were received from young people between the ages of 19 and 29. Therefore, the present chapter may not capture the views of all adolescents. In addition, there were at least 845 people (ages unknown) who accessed and viewed the platform during the week.

This chapter explores education in its broadest sense, as the foundation for working life, with a focus on views regarding educational quality and relevance to labour markets. While some positive comments were shared, the overall consensus was that many educational systems and institutions around the world are still insufficiently tailored and aligned to the dynamic needs of the labour market. As Bwenje, a young Ugandan states, *“instead of training young people to seek jobs, they should train students to create jobs.”*

⁹ Rocyn-Jones, 2011

¹⁰ This is taking into account both the United Nations definition of youth (15- to 24-year-olds) and many local cultural contexts and understandings.

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE SAY:

How well do you think that your formal academic or training institution has prepared you for decent jobs?

ON THE UPSIDE

- Several participants from Asia, the Caribbean and the Middle East shared positive experiences as foreign students studying at universities abroad. Yasmyn, 24, from Guadeloupe (currently studying in Canada), said that in comparison (to her home country), *“young people here [in Montreal] are highly trained.”* Sara, from Yemen, who studied at the American University in Dubai, went further to say that she found her communication course *“extremely practical and hands on.”* They both agreed that they felt well prepared to find a job once they completed their studies.
- Rishabh, 21, from India and several others also noted that the experience of finding a job back in their home country was, however, easier than in the country where they had studied.
- There was debate amongst young Indians as to the quality of tertiary education in their country. Kirthi, 24, from India, however, noted that as an emerging economy, India has a:

“Fairly well-balanced education system [...] most of our colleges are well-equipped with curricula that offer both practical and theoretical knowledge, in the form of both course study and internship options that help students understand the exact demands of their chosen paths. Medical school requires a mandatory house residency that teaches students hands on, law and engineering schools require students to take up internships.”

ON THE DOWNSIDE

- Posts such as this one from Dayo, 26, in Nigeria were common: *“My academic training did not prepare me for paid employment at all. I cannot still believe that we were taught programming languages that were not in use any more like Pascal, Cobol, and the like (I did computer/mathematics). We had to read and pass, not read to understand and apply.”*
- The general consensus was that *“academic institutions are focused too much on theoretical learning, and not enough on practical skills”* (Ivan, 26, with the Youth Section of the Union of Autonomous Trade Unions of Croatia). Ivan went on to say:

“Schools are not equipping young people with some of the skills required for employment such as entrepreneurship, negotiation and networking skills. There is a lack of mentoring and guidance within schools on how to access employment. Only certain careers, such as medicine or law, seem to require practical experience to validate the final qualification.”

- The frustration among participants was evident: Bijay, 27, from Nepal commented: *“The education in Nepal is producing educated unemployed youths. For example, last year I visited a rural district, Rolpa. The youth got vocational training; house wiring for young men and sewing for females, but only 5 per cent got a job or became self employed after.”*

This example also illustrates the persistence of occupational sex segregation.

- Furthermore, several participants noted that the private and State employment sectors also need to collaborate more effectively with educational institutions (in order to communicate their needs). Schools and private enterprises lack coordinated and consistent linkages with each other, as Sanda_87 commented:

“Universities are not connected and do not cooperate with national and international companies in a way that provides their students with practical education, including how to work with people from different countries.”

It is, however, important to note that this is not the case in all countries; one young Egyptian reported that there is a *“booming trend in Egypt from private institutions that are providing trainings to match careers [with] labour market trends.”*

- Many participants also expressed frustration and even anger over the inequalities experienced in education systems across the globe. There remain great divides (particularly with regard to quality teaching) between private and public institutions. What is more, Emad, 28, from Egypt, working with Etijah, Youth & Development Consultancy Institute, observed that *“institutions also tend to push and support only the best students to access employment,”* and leave the ones who actually need the most support behind. Education is often only available for the best-off [...] and some young people with limited resources still find it difficult to access.

FINAL INSIGHTS

We were reminded by Matthieu Cognac, the International Labour Organization’s Regional Specialist on Youth Employment in the Asia-Pacific region, (talking on the APYouthNet podcast) that, “obtaining degrees by itself is not an end to employability.”

Instability and political unrest: Awa, 30, from Cameroon left all of us with a stark warning:

“Most students have no career guidance, no formal or informal trainings on CV/résumé development, job searching guidance, and interpersonal skills. With this mindset, youths find themselves confronted with the work world and its ever increasing challenges. The consequence among many is immediate frustration and desperation, and instead of serving as assets to their communities, they are instead liabilities. I say it is just a matter of time before the youth of most sub-Saharan African [countries] feel the multiplier effect of the Arab Spring.”

In your country, what kinds of resources and services are available to support you and other young people in achieving your career aspirations?

ON THE UPSIDE

- Several of the participants from around the world acknowledged that their schools offered career guidance aimed at orienting students for the labour market, such as information on scholarships, trainings, internships and apprenticeships.
- Participants from India and Martinique cited the existence of educational fairs for students in their countries, whereby both schools/universities and the private sector (local businesses) shared information about opportunities and possible career paths available to young people. Some schools provide seminars and career guidance aimed at orienting students to the labour market, offering options for further scholarships, trainings, internships and apprenticeships.
- Several participants noted that their country had dedicated programmes for youth employment, such as the Plurinational State of Bolivia’s “Programa Mi Primer Empleo Digno” (or My First Decent Employment Programme), and the National Employment Fund in Cameroon. Yet no one in this discussion appeared to have any direct involvement in these programmes.
- Many young participants were also interested in future employment opportunities within the United Nations. Hira, 23, with Y-Peer in Pakistan remarked that there were several opportunities, such as the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) Online Volunteering service, and that for her, getting country experience was important: *“that was when the doors opened for me!”*

ON THE DOWNSIDE

- Schools do provide support for students in the form of advisers/career guidance, but most participants shared the view that this is not enough. In addition, these support services are not available in every school.
- Even when resources and services exist, the lack of information about them prevents students from accessing them. These resources are also often only available for people who live in urban areas and/or come from wealthy families. Yanira, 29, from Colima, México told us that:

“According to a study of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Mexico ranks third with regard to the number of young people between 15 and 29 who neither work nor study. One root cause is that in my country there are large scholarship programmes from entry level to professional graduate/doctoral levels [...] I think it is very important to raise awareness and generate a host of actions for the benefit of all young people.”

FINAL INSIGHTS

There were some interesting country examples of national youth employment funds, most notably, reported by Jose from the Dominican Republic. He commented on the strengths of the Institute of Professional Technical Formation (INFOTEP), which encourages and builds professional skills among students. In addition, the Dominican Republic also has a Youth and Employment Programme (“Juventud y Empleo”) funded by the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank. Similarly, Cameroon has a National Employment Fund and Integrated Support Project for Informal Sectors (PIAASI).

Do you think that volunteerism and internships can adequately prepare young people for future paid employment? Do you have any personal examples to share?

ON THE UPSIDE

- Most participants believed that volunteering (2011 was the European Union Year of Volunteering) and internships are a vital part of an education: such opportunities make an individual stand out when seeking a job. Not only do they provide an “*opportunity to learn, but also an opportunity to put into practice new skills,*” says Seabe, 23, from Botswana. Thus, young

people are able to familiarize themselves with a work environment and explore channels to network. Young people in this discussion all encouraged one another to get engaged in volunteerism and internships, with Bijay, 27, from Nepal concluding that, *“volunteerism has a double benefit: youth can develop their experience and skills and the government’s development plan can be successful.”*

- Bob, 24, from Freetown in Sierra Leone told us: *“In my country, those young people benefitting from employment are those who are most connected to politicians. They will only create a short-term job for young people for a while, and later the whole thing will just die down [...] But there is an international organization called Restless Development that creates employment for young people through volunteerism and internships on a yearly basis. They have engaged a good number of youth who are just finishing their high school level of education.”*
- One participant from Yemen, Sara, explained how useful it was to start an internship while she was still studying. This allowed her to apply her studies, to boost her self-confidence and to make useful contacts:

“I would definitely encourage any young individual to go out and intern in different companies as much as they can. From my personal experience, doing internships while studying helped me to apply what I studied and implement it in the real world. These experiences boosted my confidence, and enhanced many aspects of my personality and social skills.”

- Edith, a third-year undergraduate from Ghana, confidently remarked that, *“I have plans to start my own media and graphic design company so I can also employ many Ghanaian youth. All of these opportunities and more that I cannot put on this page were a result of my interest in volunteering. I joined a media child rights advocacy group (Curious Minds) in 2001 as a volunteer when I was 11 years old. Most of the advocacy is done through regular radio programmes of national radio, quarterly magazines (the Springboard magazine), colloquiums, community outreach and outside broadcasts. Over the years, this experience exposed me to many issues and capacity-building sessions.”*

ON THE DOWNSIDE

- Internships can be used by employers as only a source for cheap labour. Internship conditions can be exploitative and do not always lead to employment, despite an intern’s demonstrated skills and motivation. Seabe, age 23, from Botswana told us:

“I have submitted more than 80 CVs around the world in search of a job related to my degree, but I’ve had no luck. I remain hopeful though. Despite the internship programmes and trying to find

a job, I've been trying to get my own small business ventures started, but as I mentioned before, investors seem sceptical."

- The rural/urban divide was discussed among participants, several of whom highlighted that internships are often only available to the well-off and those living in urban areas. In addition, a lack of access to information about internship opportunities prevents young people from seizing them.

FINAL INSIGHTS

Internships/volunteering can foster social entrepreneurship [...] Tiburce, 26, from Benin (residing in India), who works with the Global Youth Innovation Network, told us:

"I created my own social business to help other young people to have a better understanding of what the marketplace requires. I am working on raising a new generation of African entrepreneurs. I wish the education system in African countries would integrate innovative advanced or complete solutions that help young people study and be an added value to the community. Theory should be 30 per cent and practice 70 per cent."

A challenge to us all from Tati: *"I think we need young people to be more proactive: we need to be linked up with research projects and volunteer opportunities in order to better understand the workplace."*

In your view, what role should vocational training play in preparing young people for the labour market? Does vocational training lead to stable and decent jobs?

Vocational training is being increasingly recognized as a sound mechanism to promote decent jobs. During week II of the e-discussion, the International Youth Foundation (IYF) launched the Tanzania Youth Scholars initiative. This initiative aims to increase access to quality vocational and entrepreneurship training and secondary education opportunities for 1,800 orphans and vulnerable children and young people through educational scholarships. The five-year programme is funded by the Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) of the President of the United States through that country's Agency for International Development (USAID). It's one to watch!

ON THE UPSIDE

- Eighty per cent of participants in the second week shared the view that vocational trainings are a very valid option for gaining practical work experience. They prepare trainees for jobs that are based on manual or practical activities, traditionally non-academic, and equip them with tangible relevant skills. One such example came from the Advanced Business Community (ABC), a student community established in 2007 at the faculty of commerce of Cairo University. Its aim is “to reduce the gap between the theoretical teachings at Egypt’s commercial colleges and the practical world.”
- One of the participants from Malindi in Kenya, 26-year-old Ayshah, informed us that, “*high school drop-outs*” present a big challenge in her town. According to Ayshah, “*the Digital Opportunity Trust (TOT), as well as [the United States Agency for International Development] USAID Aphia II Kenya initiative, offer training to marginalized youth who are trained as ambassadors of change [...] I have seen such training making a difference,*” she told us, “*in terms of them being role models and trying to find ways to sustain themselves in a positive manner.*”
- Yasmyn, 24, from Guadeloupe informed us that, there: “*you get vocational training from the age of 16 and you get a diploma in practical skills 2-3 years later.*” She commented that this is largely positive and that she has seen her peers grow more confident and independent because this system enables students to follow their chosen career paths, which may be outside of traditional curricula. She has seen peers, aged 18, securing employment in the vocations they studied.
- Germany was cited as a leading example in terms of integrating apprenticeships into education by Steffi, 29, from Germany. Typically, students enter a two- to three-year apprenticeship at the end of secondary education, with rotating periods between technical college and working in a company. Steffi went on to say that:

“The German model of apprenticeship programmes is the result of strong commitments negotiated through tripartite social dialogue and is part of the wider German industrial relations and social security system (the apprentice and employer contribute to the social security system and the apprentice is covered by wider collective agreements, etc.). So, in this case, vocational training can lead to decent employment. But with the increase in ‘flexible’ employment practices (outsourcing, etc.) and short-term orientation and economic transformations over the past decades, we can also witness a shift towards a two-tiered system for young workers in Germany: there are those who enter apprenticeships after school and will probably get a decent job, and those who are either unemployed or part of Germany’s growing low-wage and precarious sector (“McJobs”). So, if we look at ideas for other countries, we need to take into account that vocational training is always part of a bigger employment picture, including cultural and political values and the wider economic structure.”

ON THE DOWNSIDE

- Most participants shared the view that vocational trainings are not always easily available or accessible. Governments could do more to inform and reach out to diverse sections of youth populations.
- Vocational trainings are not always valued by employers. There remains some stigma, and they are often perceived as an opportunity for young people who do not have the capability to follow traditional academic pathways.
- Several participants commented that opportunities for vocational training (or access to information about them) remain limited and scarce, and that such training does not necessarily lead to decent and well-paid employment.
- Furthermore, Roger from Ghana told us that, “many young people, particularly the poorest, are starting work too early without the basic skills that could make them marketable. Students are completing secondary schools without having the skills that allow them to adapt to changes in the labour market.”

FINAL INSIGHTS

Gaining vocational experience in a post-conflict environment...

Anna, 22, from the United States told us her story: *“In 2010, I had the opportunity to conduct research in Gulu, Uganda. While working in the area, I was able to gain a better understanding of the manner in which conflict impacted the community. The deep-seated impact of the war was visible not only in the economic and political spheres but also in the intangible, societal dynamics of the community. After working with several community members, however, I was also able to see the way in which the war highlighted the strength and determination of the community to recover from such far-reaching devastation. From that point forward, I decided to dedicate my studies to working with communities in conflict and reconciliation in order to help translate such resiliency into reconstruction. I also learned that, while grounding education in an academic context can be beneficial, experiential learning is also crucial to gain an accurate understanding of a situation or issue. I thus hope to continue my education by attempting to understand conflict from an academic standpoint while working to complement this knowledge base with real world experience.”*

How do you view the role of non-formal education in job preparation? How has informal education influenced your job preparedness?

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), non-formal education refers to:

“Organized and sustained activities that take place both within and outside education institutions. Depending on country contexts, it may cover adult literacy, basic education for out-of-school children, life skills, work skills, and general culture. Non-formal education programmes do not necessarily follow the ‘ladder’ system, may have differing durations, and may or may not confer certification.”

ON THE UPSIDE

- Many participants commented that non-formal education is an important part of their overall education, because it allows young people to acquire skills they would not normally access through formal education. Therefore, it is important for two reasons:
 - 1) It *“strengthens the skills of people who have been marginalized from formal education”* (said Charles, a young African); and
 - 2) It offers a different set of skills which are not provided through formal channels (Lauren, a young Latin American).
- One participant, Yasmyn, 24, from Guadeloupe commented that practicing cultural activities is also a good way of receiving informal education. She cited the example of attending traditional dances. This experience has benefited her in two ways:
 - 1) Teaching her about the history of her country; and
 - 2) Strengthening her transferable life skills in perseverance: *“these skills are really helping me now that I’m looking for an internship,”* she reports.
- For Ayshah, 26, from Kenya, her informal education has been through participating in seminars and trainings with young people who have a different background than hers, such as drug users.

Tweet Corner

From week II of the e-discussion

Uno de los problemas para elegir una carrera es la falta de información, según estudiantes <http://t.co/Kp6xYhVq> [One problem with choosing a career is the lack of information for students.]

RT @UNpYouth: [In Morocco, some people with a degree in any field don't even have the chance to find a decent internship] #youthjobs <http://t.co/xq0iFmGv>

RT @Rajdai: [Policymakers need 2 give alternatives 2 youth, n encourage #entrepreneurship n alternative careers] #youthjobs <http://t.co/iTUvhunN@UNpYouth>

ON THE DOWNSIDE

- According to some participants, non-formal education is not valued or recognized by some employers.
- In addition, Daniel, 28, from Switzerland and the United Kingdom and a member of the United Nations Youth Association Network (UNYANET), shared with us that:

“Non-formal education is important, but it sometimes lacks the option to actually prove what you have learned. This is connected to volunteering [...] if you learn how to organize a panel discussion for your association, by someone who has done it already, you will be able to organize it, but you will not be able to actually prove it - besides adding the ‘flyer’ to your application.”

FINAL INSIGHTS

We are reminded that opportunities do exist to access non-formal education.

Angelica, with TDM 2000 International (a network of European youth organizations), told us:
“I would like to say that the European Union every year spends millions of euros in support of the education (formal and non-formal) and training of youth. There are many programmes, from Youth in Action to Life-Long Learning and to Erasmus for young entrepreneurs, and many, many more, that support financially the personal and professional development of young people. All of them are based on intercultural learning. I am not talking about the usual trainings in classrooms with teachers or experts – sure, you can find these as well – but mainly they are based on non-formal education, which is a well-established methodology that supports the learning of people of every age.”

Are there any social/political/cultural factors which you perceive to be obstacles/challenges to your candidacy for employment? Can you provide any examples of overcoming such challenges?

- Many of the participants voiced their perceptions of age discriminatory practices across the labour market. Several commented on different forms of discrimination, including: age, gender, geography, nationality and ethnic background. Crispin, with Aube Nouvelle pour la Femme et le developement (ANFD), informed us of such issues in the Democratic Republic of Congo, *“where [an estimated] 90 per cent of youth are unemployed. Those who are employed are found in urban centres. While all young people living in rural areas are losing out [...] [inequalities exist:] a) Girls and boys have the same opportunity to study, [but] if their parents have little money, [...] they only send boys to study, and leave the girls [out]. b) The indigenous peasants form a group excluded from development activities. Finally, young people incur serious barriers to participation in work.”*
- In addition, several participants believed that access to government jobs is largely based on nepotism and contacts, i.e. jobs are often given to people who know someone already working in a given department. Some participants also observed that these jobs are further often assigned to people from the governing political party.

Some country examples:

- The private sector in France was cited as permissive of discriminatory recruitment practices by requesting candidates to include a photo of themselves in their CVs.
- Yanira, 29, from Mexico told us, *“I started at the lowest position in a government department, but I gained respect as they saw my ability, honesty and commitment to work together [...] the most important thing is to not give up and learn new things every day.”*
- In Peru, Maclovio, 27, with the “Organización, Asociación Educativa Ñam Sumi Perú” posted: *“I was at a workshop and at that time I was doing work with indigenous university students, one day I was extremely disappointed to hear and see that in my country there are still vestiges of hatred, and discrimination [...] the opinions expressed by so many young professionals against Indians was shocking: telling them ‘to return to their village, because they are ignorant’. This social selfishness [...] prevails in our environment [...] and is why there is a divide between public and private universities. Universities should espouse social development, inclusion and equality, if we want to see it in our society.”*

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According to the United Nations Human Settlements Programme's (UN- HABITAT) 2009 Urban Youth Survey,¹¹ cities offer young people with higher levels of education greater opportunities to integrate into urban life than they do for the less educated. These findings point to education, especially for females, as a key driver in accessing the opportunities that come with urban life and taking advantage of them. Do you agree with this?

Participants from India, Kenya and Botswana all agreed. Kirthi, 24, from India told us: *“I think this statement is considerably true in India. Young people who have higher education on their side have a greater shot at landing jobs that let them be a part of urban life.”*

Participants further commented that employment-related resources and services for young people are often not available in rural areas. Where they are offered, a lack of awareness or information may prevent rural youth from benefitting from them.

On disability and the role of information and communication technologies (ICTs), Awa, 30, with Impact Creators in Cameroon, commented:

“Youth civil society leaders, the physically challenged [and others] all have to participate and develop gender-friendly legal frameworks, and then propose them to their home governments and multilateral and bilateral organizations. The creation of multimedia [information and communication technology] ICT centres in rural areas will tremendously increase access to information for both male and female as well as physically challenged youths. We cannot undervalue the prowess of social networking sites nowadays as a tool for mobilization, citizenship and activism (political, social, etc).”

¹¹ United Nations, Human Settlements Programme, 2010

Vote Corner:

What are your top 1-3 recommendations for policymakers towards ensuring young people are adequately and appropriately prepared for the job market?

The top three recommendations as voted by participants on the International Year of the Youth Facebook page were:

- 1) Provide practical opportunities and encourage entrepreneurship and alternative careers (72 per cent of votes);
- 2) After policies are put in place, ensure that they are enforced and implemented (17 per cent of votes);
- 3) Ensure practices in the work place are inclusive, non-discriminatory and promote equal opportunities (11 per cent of votes).

In addition to the above, several other recommendations were proposed. Most notably:

The majority agreed there is a need to improve the quality of education and to make it accessible to all young people. This requires tailoring curricula more effectively to the labour market, including through the development of practical skills (proposed by Muhamad, 20, with the Asian Law Students Association).

Mechanisms should be put in place by governments in partnership with the private sector; so that institutions are supporting internships and vocational training at scale and in a broad range of disciplines.

Vocational training, apprenticeships and non-formal education should be more widely recognized by employers as valuable components of a rounded education, which in turn would increase candidates' employment credentials and contribute towards a more stable labour market.

All governments should provide spaces for young people to share their views and discuss the issues they face with regard to education and employment (Yasmyn, 24, from Guadeloupe).

Governments and the private sector should ensure that information is widely available to all segments of the youth population and support those social groups which experience the most difficulties in accessing and completing education, such as young people living in extreme poverty and in rural locations, young women and youth with disabilities.

Yanira, 29, from Mexico suggested the following: "1) I recommend that before graduating from university, the government should assist with internship programmes at prestigious companies, whereby youth can acquire responsibilities and increase their competitive qualities. 2) According to the labour market, the government should create a fund to train young leaders in all of the main national educational institutions. They would promote the scheme internationally as well. 3) Design a strategy between governments and students, in which young people demonstrate their capabilities through community service, applying their knowledge in other countries, and empowering them to develop their team skills – preparing them for a working life."

FINAL INSIGHTS

Jelena, a participant at the X Central European Initiative Youth Forum, held in November 2010 (in Montenegro), informed us of the Forum's recommendations relating to education and employment of young people: *"The recommendations are based on the needs, experiences and good practices of Central European countries that were represented at the Forum."*

The outcome recommendations focus on "Strengthening instruments and programmes for the successful entry of youth into the labour market" and include (X Central European Initiative, 2010):

- Provide entrepreneurship learning in schools
- Provide opportunities for young people starting a business (loans, training, subsidies)
- Provide extensive and continuous analysis of market needs
- Provide education and training programmes that are tailored to market needs
- Provide social and economic integration of early school leavers/drop-outs
- Strengthen and promote the use of information centres and career counselling
- Promote volunteering as an excellent way of gaining knowledge, skills and competencies, and incentives for professional mobility
- Provide recognition and quality assurance in education and training
- Raise awareness of employers about the importance of non-formal education
- Increase visibility of youth in communities, promote and encourage the proactive role of youth

In addition to the Youth Forum above, the International Trade Union Confederation in Berlin organized an open space forum, entitled "Decent work for youth - lost in globalization?" in October 2011. More than 80 young people from 25 countries took part. Ivan, 26, with the Youth Section of the Union of Autonomous Trade Unions of Croatia, informed us that:

"Upon completion of the international conference, participants signed an open letter, called 'Young trade unionists call for action on youth employment at the International Labour Conference 2012,' which will be referred to the International Labour Organization, the International Trade Union Confederation and other trade union organizations around the world."

CHAPTER CONCLUSIONS

With regard to youth transitions from education into the work place, some key themes emerged from week II. These were:

Many higher education systems and institutions around the world are still insufficiently tailored and aligned to the practical and dynamic needs of the labour market. As Ivan, 26, from Croatia eloquently stated, *“academic institutions are focused too much on theoretical learning, and not enough on practical skills.”* All types of higher education, including formal, non-formal and informal are essential tools for young people to succeed in the labour market.

Developing leadership qualities among diverse youth is vital if innovative solutions to job scarcity are to be found at scale. Not only are such qualities (often associated with life skills, such as problem-solving and critical and creative thinking) empowering on a personal level, but they are also coping mechanisms for young people during difficult economic, social and political times. Hikmat, 21, from Afghanistan reflected:

“I believe that passion and commitment is the key for a strong leader to do what’s right and the best for their country folk or followers. In my opinion, a great leader doesn’t need to be reminded of what to do, instead [s/]he shows excellence in what [s/]he does, such that [s/]he walks what [s/]he talks.”

Encouraging the capacity of youth to be proactive is vital during challenging times. Hira, 23, from Pakistan (studying in the United States) urged fellow participants to:

“Check the websites of country offices of large international organizations in your own country, it always helps. Talk to people and be very proactive. That’s my advice for all the young people! At this age, we expect that everything would come to us easily, but no one gets it until they put in an effort!”

Internships and volunteering can offer young people opportunities to develop their life skills and help increase their chances of finding a job. Furthermore they may even contribute towards youth supporting peer learning, such as young entrepreneurs like Janine, from South Africa, who told us:

“I am working on a concept that is looking to place young college and university grad[uate]s in projects that give them real experience. Not internships where they get coffee and update lists. There are internship opportunities available, but they are heavily centred around the areas of engineering, [information technology] IT, finance and law. I want to begin with the areas of grad[uate]s from the marketing, communications and digital sectors. I also want to start a platform for volunteering for youth, an area with tremendous opportunities.”

For more comments on entrepreneurship, see chapter IV.

But the question remains [...] how can we meet the aspirations of young people? An e4e - Education for Employment: Realizing Arab Youth Potential video clip suggests some of the linkages between education and future employment. Steffi, 29, remarked on the e-discussion platform after watching the clip that:

“The e4e education for employment initiative could not have come at a better time, as it addresses problems that go beyond the Arab World. Youth unemployment remains one of the biggest challenges in the Asia-Pacific region, where youth account for half of the region’s jobless - and the skills mismatch being one part of the problem. I agree that the solution must come from a united effort among governments, the private sector and educational institutions, but also, importantly, the trade unions and civil society actors to make sure that the rights of young workers to decent work are always part of the mix. In some cases (especially in the developed world), we have witnessed an increase in precarious employment for young people, who have often little choice but to accept whatever job they can get, so a crucial question remains - how can we not only create skills that match the labour market, but also quality jobs that match the aspirations of young people?”

Indeed, this was one of the questions debated by organizations and Heads of State at the Building Future Education MENA [Middle East and North Africa] events in October 2011. The private sector certainly has a stronger role to play with regard to improving education and increasing the employment opportunities for the youth of today.

CASE STUDY

Loubna, 23-year-old woman from Morocco

I am a 23-year-old female student from Morocco, majoring in finance with a minor in international studies. As required by my international studies programme, I undertook my first volunteer position for a period of one month in 2007 with a Moroccan youth-focused non-governmental organization (NGO). Later, I volunteered with several education-focused NGOs, until I started to work with an organization that deals with women's rights and family affairs, called Fédération de la ligue démocratique pour les droits de la femme (FLDDF). My hard work resulted in being elected — as the first young woman under 22 — to the Fédération's Board of Directors. What is more, I was responsible for the Fédération's youth branch, whose main activities involved educating young people about current life issues and engaging them in civic life.

Through my academic programme, I participated in national and international conferences about cultural exchange, politics and the environment, and have come to understand that today's major world issue is the environment and sustainability. In fact, the climate in Morocco is changing for the worse and is having a negative impact on the country's agriculture. This year, I participated in the Rio+20 preparations by working on influencing the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) on behalf of Moroccan youth in order to reflect their perspective on environmental changes and the action that they can take in their communities regarding sustainable development.

My involvement with Rio+20 led me to work with the Earth Charter, where, in October 2011, I was appointed as Country Activator Focal Point in Morocco. This position has given me the opportunity to enlarge my network in the sustainability field in order to collaborate with other Country Activator Focal Points, mainly in Africa. I am now even more involved in environmental issues and am trying to link these with issues of unemployment, gender and education, focusing on rural areas where agriculture is the main source of livelihood and on green jobs. I am looking forward to making my community more aware about our environment, as it is our Earth that we live in and that will be for us and for future youth.

I am currently seeking to be a focal point on climate change for North Africa within YOUNGO (the constituency of youth NGOs participating in United Nations climate change negotiations) for the next Conference of the Parties (COP) conference. My volunteer work is providing valuable experience needed to achieve my related career goals. Volunteering with organizations helps to develop practical skills that are needed in the labour market. It also helps to learn more about today's issues and how they are related to one's own community, as well as to build strong networks with youth from around the world, so that knowledge and experience is shared.

CASE STUDY

Yasmyn, 24-year-old woman from Guadeloupe

Born and raised in Guadeloupe (a French island in the Caribbean), the “butterfly island”, I left for Paris at age 18 to pursue my dental medicine studies. Yet I soon discovered that this field was not personally fulfilling. Instead, I decided to switch to a bachelor’s programme in biology, ecology and evolution. Following a deep desire to broaden my horizons and further travel, I applied to an environmental science master’s degree programme in Montreal, Canada. A few months later, I settled in Montreal, a small, peaceful and stress-free city that I love!

FINDING AN INTERNSHIP: BELIEVE IN YOURSELF AS STRONGLY AS YOU EVER HAVE!

In October 2011, the time arrived for students to find an internship. My interest was in the national and international environmental institutions located in Montreal. What does finding an internship entail? Is it convincing a recruiter that you are the student s/he is looking for? But how? By drawing on your professional experiences, regardless of their number; your personality traits, such as flexibility, efficiency, productivity, versatility and creativity; and your skills. This seemed very difficult for me, as I had been in the environmental field for just under two years, and had had only one internship experience.

Another problem I had to confront was that, here in Canada, foreign students are in competition with Canadian citizens. Even if you have the best profile, your immigration status might lose you a job to a citizen.

Compared to other students, I was feeling underqualified and inadequate. I did not know how to persuade recruiters to choose me and to trust in me if I did not do so myself.

Two interviews later, I had still not found an internship. As I pondered the situation, buoyed by chocolate, I realized that, in fact, fear was holding me back from achieving my personal goals. In early December 2011, when I was interviewed for the third time, I decided to remain relaxed, and to put the immigration issue out of my mind.

A couple of weeks later, I was pleasantly surprised to learn that the Ministry of Environment of Quebec selected me as the new intern for its Environmental Evaluation Department’s office for renewable energy.

This experience has taught me that you have to believe strongly in yourself and remain persistent in the face of barriers. When you equip yourself with the right tools, you can achieve your dreams and succeed in life. Fear only makes us weaker, so never give up hope. And above all, love yourself and stay positive!

Additional resources

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