



**FUTURE OF WORK
FOR AFRICAN YOUTH**

**CONFERENCE
7 FEB 2019, GENEVA**

www.FoW4AfricanYouth.org

#FoW4Youth

Future of Work for African Youth

7th February 2019, Geneva, ILO

Background

FoW 4 African Youth¹ - a conference jointly organized by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) in partnership with Jacobs Foundation - aimed to enhance the understanding of the current work situation for young people across Africa and the opportunities and challenges with regard to the changing nature of work. In addition to more than 80 online participants², approximately 100 participants from international organizations, private sector, academia, NPOs and civil society organizations joined the event at the ILO headquarters in Geneva.

Welcome note from ILO and SDC

Following the welcome remark by **Sangheon Lee** (Director, EMPLOYMENT, ILO), **Deborah Greenfield** (Deputy Director-General for Policy, ILO) highlighted that the future of work in Africa is a defining challenge. She reaffirmed ILO's commitment to the 2030 Agenda, while stressing ILO's role in addressing the youth employment challenge, such as through the Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth, which has a focus on Africa. She went on to introduce the Global Commission Report on the Future of Work, which features a human-centred agenda. She pointed out the importance of creating a lifelong activity society through promoting lifelong learning, as well as focusing on the needs of youth in education, training and employment. While acknowledging the recommendations proposed in the ILO Global Commission Report, **Thomas Gass** (Vice-Director, SDC) highlighted the exceptional challenges facing African youth, especially those in countries struggling with long-lasting conflict. Despite SDC's massive investments in basic education in Africa, he recognized that improving the critical link between formal education, vocational training and market opportunities is a necessity to facilitate young people's access to the labour market. In support of economic development he emphasized SDC's ongoing investment in vocational training in Africa (CHF 1.8 mi in North Africa and 10.9 in Sub-Saharan Africa), and pointed out that 85% of SDC programmes in vocational education and training were rated as effective. Youth employment in Africa however remains a major concern and this conference offers a chance to learn and discuss challenges and opportunities to address this

¹ The Conference webpage - <http://www.fow4africanyouth.org>

² Live streaming of the event was available on the conference website, while online participants can engage the discussions on the Social Media Wall, which was available at <http://www.fow4africanyouth.org/social-media-wall/>



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topic. It is a unique source of inspiration to dare shifts for greater impact to address the scale of employment needs for African youth.

Part 1: the situation of work for youth in Africa – what do we know?

Opening speech: facts and figures

Nail O'Higgins (Senior Research Specialist, EMPLOYMENT, ILO) and **Sarah Akwei-Marfo** (Global Initiative on Decent Jobs, EMPLOYMENT, ILO) set the scene by introducing the main trends and challenges of the labour market in Africa, as well as their implications. The most striking feature is the size of the youth labour force in Africa, which has been rapidly growing from 61 million in 1990 to 122 million in 2018. However, this has not been met by sufficient job creation, leading to a high youth unemployment rate. In particular, the rate of young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET) is high in the African region with significant gender imbalances. On the other hand, among the employed young workers, more than 50% are trapped in poverty and 95% work in the informal economy without access to social protection.

In order to ensure there will be enough jobs created to absorb the increasing youth workforce, it is important to leverage both demand and supply side interventions through context-specific active labour market policies. Provided that most jobs remain in low productivity agriculture, there is an urgent need to facilitate structural transformation and economic diversification.

Interview: a changing world of work

Maria Prieto (EMPLOYMENT, ILO) and **Maria Marta Travieso** (NORMES, ILO) introduced the main drivers of change influence on the world of work in the context of African youth: demographic shift, particularly the youth bulge; climate change, changing patterns of consumption and production; a blurring line between work and life; globalization and technological development. They went on to discuss the ILO Global Commission Report, in which many recommendations of the human-centred agenda are aspirational for African countries. They include a universal entitlement to lifelong learning, supporting future of work transitions, gender equality, social protection, Universal Labour Guarantee, expanding time sovereignty, promoting investments in key areas (such as the care, rural and green economy, as well as investing in digital, physical and social infrastructure) and the need to revisit the existing business models and measuring indicators. Finally, it was highlighted that the responsibility of facilitating the human-centred agenda lies in 3 levels: 1) country level (governments and national stakeholders to invigorate the social contract); 2) multilateral level (collaboration and coordination of international organizations); 3) the ILO level, in which the ILO, among other, is expected to play a role as a focal point among organizations.



Interview: decent employment for youth in Africa

- **Juan Chacaltana** (Senior Employment Specialist, EMPLOYMENT, ILO) addressed the question regarding the widespread informality among youth. While pointing out the ILO Recommendation 204 on transition to formal economy, he also mentioned the importance of preventing transition into informal jobs, and correcting the growth of jobs through an enabling environment. He introduced Youth POL³ which is an on-line database on youth employment policies and legislations. Given that the first job is key to determine if the person will work in informally or formally throughout their lives (there is a 50% chance that a person that starts in formality will remain there throughout their lives). Thus, it is important to complement the entry job by financial scheme and to offer assets that allow youth to start their business in order to support a move towards formality.
- **Susana Puerto** (Senior Youth Employment Specialist, EMPLOYMENT, ILO) indicated the importance of investing in young people through youth employment programmes, which are proven to lead to positive labour market outcomes. It is necessary to understand the needs of youth and to adapt programmes to those needs accordingly. Furthermore, the interventions should be tailored to facilitate the incentives for youth, as well as service providers to participate in youth employment programmes. The programmes should include monitoring system adapted throughout the implementation.
- **Valeria Esquivel** (Employment and Gender Specialist, EMPLOYMENT, ILO) illustrated how the low supply of care services has contributed to the high NEET rate among young women. She emphasized the necessity of expanding social infrastructure, not only in care services, but also in the education and health sectors, both of which account for less than 2% of employment in Africa. Apart from addressing the unfair distribution of care responsibilities between men and women, enhancing care services and other social infrastructure would be a driver of decent jobs creation.
- **Moustapha Kamal** (Coordinator, Green Jobs, ENTERPRISE, ILO) stressed the importance of sustainable development in the world of work for young people today and tomorrow. Considering that 1.2 billion jobs depend on a healthy ecosystem, he highlighted the potential of transition towards a green economy in job creation, including sustainable agriculture and digital jobs. In the context of African youth, three fields of support are needed: 1) technical support (e.g. skills); 2) business support; 3) breaking financial barriers and promoting a more enabling environment, especially for young entrepreneurs.

Live and online participants were invited to ask questions addressed by the speakers in Part 1. The questions touched upon issues such as the opportunities opened up by technological innovation for African youth in the TVET field, how to ensure better working conditions and safety, the trends of entrepreneurship and self-employment, the role of the older generation and how to bridge the generation gap between older and younger workers.

³ YouthPOL - <https://www.ilo.org/employment/areas/youth-employment/youth-pol/lang--en/index.htm>



Part 2: Harnessing the potential of African Youth

Market place for innovative initiatives engaging youth in Africa

This session consisted of eight presenters, each representing an innovative initiative for youth and hosting an individual booth in the market place. Participants are free to choose the booth of their interest, where they gain deep insights into respective initiatives through close interaction in a small group setting. The topics included:

Social Entrepreneurship (**Lynsey Ferrell**, Change Leader, Ashoka)

[\[video\]](#)

Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth - through a Gender lens (**Susana Puerto**, ILO),

[\[video\]](#)

Evolution of employment services (**Jacqui Ford**, CEO, Federation of African Professional Staffing Organization),

[\[video\]](#)

Vocational and skills development (**Roeland Monasch**, CEO, Aflatoun International),

[\[video\]](#)

Large scale job creation in Nigeria & South Africa (**Ukinebo Dare**, Head of EdoJobs; **Tashmia Ismail-Saville**, CEO, Yes4youth),

[\[video\]](#) [\[video\]](#)

Technologies (**Dr. Eric Otenyo**, Professor, Northern Arizona University)

[\[video\]](#)

Digitalization and Internet (**Evelyn Namara**, Global Community Engagement Manager, Internet society)

[\[video\]](#)

Green Jobs for African Youth (**Kamal Gueye**, ILO)

[\[video\]](#) [\[video\]](#)



Part 3: Voices from the young African workforce

Storytelling and discussion with young African entrepreneurs

- **Wala Kasmi** (Founder and CEO, Youth Decides, Tunisia) shared her digital entrepreneurial story. She engaged in creating a digital platform and providing digital skills development opportunities for youth: her digital hero programme trained 4,000 digital workers so far and it is being scaled up in Libya with support of the government. In addition, having researched on the demanded skills for digital jobs, she has been developing a digital curriculum.
- **Solomon King** (Founder, Fundi Bots, Uganda) recalled his entrepreneurial journey on science education starting in his childhood. Being motivated by his interests in engineering and science, he started his business in establishing a relevant, practical and purpose-based education on robot and computer engineering with the support of schools and communities. This initiative has equipped thousands of youth with skills in robotics, thereby making a smooth transition to work from school.
- **Rotimi Olawale** (Founder and CEO, JRFarms, Nigeria) began by highlighting the fundamental challenge of transitioning from school to work facing all youth in his society. Having started from advocacy activities through media and the meetings with executives of African Development Bank, he set up an agricultural business, which processes cassava into garri, a Nigerian staple. In addition, in partnership with a Rwandan Farmers Coffee Company, he organized a business of exporting packaged and roasted coffee to global markets.

Following the storytelling, audiences have raised questions concerning the scaling up of the digital project in other countries, advices for school leavers, especially youth in search of entrepreneurship, and what is expected from international development agencies in order to support young entrepreneurs.

Part 4: The Future of work for youth in African onwards

Keynote speech Gilles Yabi (Founder, WATHI) reiterated the considerable challenge posed by the continuing demographic growth and the importance of job creation for youth in Africa. The workforce is projected to grow by 40% up to 2030, which requires the creation of 12 million jobs a year to absorb it. While young people are the continent's biggest strength, their potential is compromised by vulnerability and precariousness without adequate job creation. Gilles Yabi emphasized, "We must stop talking about assets and potential, potential is nothing without action". According to him, the issue of employment is vital for peace and security on the continent. Matters of economic development and resource allocation are necessary but insufficient without taking into account employment, which will be THE necessary driving force for political stability. Employment is a crucial issue, as it allows youth to find an occupation, projection and confidence into the future. So far, economic growth in Africa has not led to massive job creation. In order to facilitate the link between employment and economic growth, it is necessary to ensure



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industrialization and transformation, to acknowledge the reality of the informal economy, to create jobs for local production and consumption in key sectors with high potential of job creation such as clothing and food industry. Finally, setting the issue of employment in the larger picture, he underlined three fundamental parameters of transformation that need to take place (i) Political and economic transformation (ii) Cultural transformation - addressing gender equality (iii) Educative revolution.

World café group discussions

- In the **world café group discussion**, three questions were on the table for the discussion among experts and participants: 1) what motivates us as a community of practitioners to engage in this field?; 2) what is most promising from what we have heard today and in which direction should our efforts go?; 3) what are the concrete next steps that we need to take?
- Answers to the 3rd question included the creation of a community of practice, strengthened collaboration between agencies, establish partnerships with youth, investing in ongoing initiatives that have proven successful, etc. A full list of answers is available [here](#).

Twitter engagement

The e-facilitation team of the conference informed participants about the reach of the hashtag of the conference on twitter: organisations (i.e. ILO, EDA, etc.) and individuals tweeted content and relevant information, generating a reach of more than 1 million (number of users who have seen posts containing the hashtag) and more than 3 million impressions (the number of times that users have seen a post containing the hashtag).

Closing remarks by ILO/SDC

Sukti Dasgupta (Branch Chief, EMPLAB, EMPLOYMENT, ILO) commended on the richness of the conversations which offered many concrete takeaways regarding the current situation, opportunities, challenges and solutions. Above all, the discussions have highlighted the importance of knowledge management and partnerships. She highlighted the strength of the ILO's integrated policy approach that takes into account the demand and supply side. Until recently, youth employment interventions have been fragmented, and therefore, unable to make an impact. She made a reference to the Global Initiative of Decent Jobs for Youth, which has engaged over 50 partners to come together to scale up actions.

Thomas Gass (Vice-Director, SDC) reflected on the role of governmental agencies in the world of work. Apart from facilitating policy dialogues and ensuring policy coherence, he also reminded us of the responsibility of the government in promoting sustainable industrialization (SDG 9). His concluding remarks identified the following take aways, namely to 1) establish a new narrative and better data for labour migration to reveal vulnerability, and sharpen responsibility of duty bearers and right holders; and



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- 2) transform education so that young people get connected with the world of work, lifelong learning, ensure the link between formal education and work, and promote vocational training;
- 3) quality criteria to 'walk the talk': being explicit about gender equality in programmes; avoid push-supply side, overcome the silos (e.g. education – training),
- 4) identify and enable promising local initiatives, not only through scholarships and awards, but also through investment vehicles to support entrepreneurs;
- 5) strengthen partnerships not only on a multilateral level, but also with local governments and provincial authorities in walking the last mile with youth e.g. digitalization, thereby overcoming the missing link between administration and entrepreneurs.

Finally, he concluded that the conference had affirmed a strong sense of *community of practice* among different institutions that are committed to find solutions that are 'out there' and find the part of the job that our respective institutions can do to the youth employment challenge.