


# Innovation to Harness Youth Entrepreneurial Potential

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## ABSTRACT

Youth face challenges like unemployment, poverty, career gloom, poor mentorship, resources shortage, including access to facilities and information. A small percentage of the millions of high school graduates continue with tertiary education. The untested and tried millions of youth possess potent innovation and creativity that could contribute to socio-economic transformation in general and more so for the transition of Southern African states. Some of these youth join the labor market and others become entrepreneurs for survival but lack skills, creativity, and innovation. Here the circular economy presents opportunities and gives a chance to exploit their innovation and creativity potential. Adopting an exploratory method and data collection from the extensive literature review, interviewing experts, and personal experience, the objective of this study is to deliberate how innovation can harness youth entrepreneurial potential for much needed social and economic development. Stakeholders' feedback and insights sync with the literature on circular economy and inclusive innovation.

## KEYWORDS

Africa, Education, Employment, Entrepreneurship, Information, Technology, Youth

## BACKGROUND

Youth unemployment is one of today's big global challenges. The United Nations, for statistical purposes, defines 'youth', as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, without prejudice to other definitions by Member States. The definition of youth seems to be term that is very subjective and related to culture (Youth Entrepreneurship, 2013). In this study the youth is defined as entrepreneurship self employment of people younger than 30 years. It is important to note that young people younger than 30 years account for half of global population. Due to various factors (including lack of experience or lack of skills) young people are at much higher risk of being unemployed, but also underemployed. According to International Labor Organization (ILO, 2018) unemployed young people (aged 15-24) account for 45 percent of 191 million of globally unemployed. The World Bank estimates that we need 600 million new jobs in the next 10 years just to keep global employment rates constant and according to the International Labor Organization, 73.3 million of the world's unemployed are young people (about 36%). Youth entrepreneurship offers innovative solutions for economic growth among young people. But youth enterprise initiatives are still relatively new to global development (Baporikar, 2020a). Youth unemployment has scourged the African continent, with rates for Sub-Saharan and North Africa as of 2016 being 13 percent and 30.5 percent, respectively (Africa Capacity Building Fund, 2018).

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While North Africa has the highest rate of unemployed youths in the world, Sub-Saharan Africa continues to have the highest youth working poverty rate globally at 70 percent. The youth bulge estimated at an annual 12 million joining the labor market poses a challenge to sustainable development, and could prove socially or politically destabilizing as well. ACBF Report (2018) acknowledges that the youth can be a positive force for development when provided with the knowledge and opportunities they need to thrive. In particular, young people should acquire the education and skills needed to contribute in a productive economy, and they need access to a job market that can absorb them into its labor force. Improved education levels present many opportunities for Africa's youth population is not only growing rapidly, but is also getting better educated, with estimated at 137 million 20 to 24 year olds to have acquired secondary education by 2030; while 12 million of the same age group would have had tertiary education.

The labor market is not able to absorb the millions of youth post secondary school or tertiary education. Thus, according to ACBF report there is an exigent need for African countries to enhance the entrepreneurship eco-system for youth and formulate a sustainable youth entrepreneurship strategy. This could be done by increasing access to capital, access to space, and business contacts, pro entrepreneurial policies, Support programs that could improve the chances of self-employment include business mentoring, leadership training, business planning and access to credit. Countries that have implemented successful inclusive innovation programs include Algeria (Youth Employment Support), Burkina Faso (Youth Employment and Skills Development Project), Kenya (Youth Enterprise Development Fund), Nigeria (The TEF Entrepreneurship Program and The Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria program), Senegal (recognition of skills acquired in informal training) and Uganda (The Youth Venture Capital Fund, 2018).

## **Southern Africa Region**

Southern Africa comprises of 12 countries Angola, Democratic Republic Congo, Congo, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Zambia, South Africa, Botswana, Namibia and Malawi included ocean states of Mauritius and, Madagascar The region has total combined population of 300 million people (World Bank Report, 2016). Economic activities include agriculture, mining tourism and services. The region's socio-economic activities are well coordinated under the Southern African Development Community (SADC). The region enjoys high intra regional movement of students, labor and trade.

The SADC protocol prioritizes among its many goals the promotion of education, gender equity and youth empowerment. Pro-education policies include no child is left behind, free education, affordable fees especially for under privileged rural population, free health care/subsidized fees structures. Southern Africa education system is divided into 7 years of primary education, 4 to 6 years of high school and 3-4 years of university/tertiary education. The region like any other African countries faces problem of school drop outs and a high number of school leavers failing to enter tertiary education.. The identified reasons for early exit and stoppage in studies includes lack resources, broken family, lack of infrastructure, HIV scourges, natural disasters, high failure rate of more than 60% who fail to pass five subjects at Ordinary level, access to education, poor learning facilities and teachers, no mentoring.

The panacea of high youth numbers joining the labor market without skills creates a major socio-economic problem for the region and other African countries. The challenge for national governments is how to create a new future for group of budding youth? The need to impart skills and unlock the potent potential they possess. Pro entrepreneurship and Inclusive Innovation policies are being implemented at national and regional and continental levels.

## **Issues and Concerns**

Studies on the youth empowerment have highlighted barriers to youth development and empowerment to include. According to Generation Entrepreneur (2019) barriers to youth entrepreneurship development include lack of finance, skills or infrastructure, gender discrimination, fear of failure,

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