

CHAPTER

4





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CHAPTER IV

YOUTH EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT: EXPLORING THE NEXUS

All countries stand to benefit from having a healthy and well-educated workforce with the knowledge and skills needed for productive and fulfilling work and full participation in society. (United Nations, General Assembly, 2015b, para. 27)

YOUNG people face numerous challenges affecting their development and well-being. Among the greatest of these challenges are unemployment and the lack of decent work for youth, which many countries have struggled unsuccessfully to address. Similarly, despite the progress made in raising basic literacy rates, many countries have been unable to provide their youth populations with quality education and the skills they need for the world of work. As the global youth population continues to increase, greater investment is needed to enhance young people's education and employment opportunities in order to leverage their human capital. Without such investment, quality education (Goal 4) and decent work (Goal 8) will remain out of reach for youth in many countries.



The two previous chapters explored key issues facing young people in the realms of education and employment within the wider context of achieving sustainable development; the present chapter examines the critical nexus between the two areas. During the formative period between childhood and adulthood, young people begin to define their aspirations, pursue economic independence and establish their place in society. For many, this period includes the transition to the world of work. The reality is that for a substantial number of youth, the transition from school to work is not easy or smooth but instead represents a period marked by instability and frustration. For these young people, participation in the labour market is characterized not by decent work but by income insecurity and poor job quality. For those able to find a job, informal sector work and underemployment are common, while many others face prolonged

periods of unemployment at the start of their transition to the workforce. During these extended periods without decent work, the skills young people acquired as students are eroding and declining in economic value.

Many youth in developing economies can only find work in the informal sector, and with poor job security, low wages and limited opportunities for on-the-job learning, such youth often find themselves among the working poor. Education past primary school is often out of the reach of young people living in poverty and those who are otherwise vulnerable or marginalized, as they are expected to help cover their family's more immediate needs, and this early exit from education further limits their future employment options. The importance of education in expanding job opportunities in the school-to-work transition period is particularly evident in these circumstances.

BOX 4.1.

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT FOR LOW-INCOME YOUTH

REACH

Viet Nam has one of the world's fastest growing economies, and significant skills mismatches are emerging as the country's education and training system struggles to keep up with growing and changing labour market demands. Increasing numbers of jobs are calling for higher skill levels, intensifying the already serious challenges faced by disadvantaged youth with limited educational attainment.

REACH is an NGO that provides vocational training and employment assistance to disadvantaged youth in Viet Nam. Since 2008, REACH has run a number of short (3- to 5-month) hospitality and information and communications technology (ICT) courses for young people from low-income families. Technical skills development is complemented by non-cognitive (soft) skills and sector-specific English language training. Students learn from tutors as well as industry guest lecturers and through an online platform.

While strong industry links in a booming economy are crucial, REACH also has a clear focus on identifying and meeting the needs of disadvantaged youth. Prior to the start of a course, each trainee is visited at home. This serves the dual purpose of building a relationship with the family and developing a better understanding of the individual context of the learner. Because some learner backgrounds may include trafficking or sexual violence, counselling is offered to students both within the programme and, where necessary, by external specialists.

Source: UNESCO-UNEVOC (2017a).



While youth in developing economies face unique and difficult challenges in this transition, youth in developed economies also often find the transition to work increasingly marked by frustration with poor labour market outcomes, unemployment, underemployment and prolonged periods of waiting for opportunities aligned with their expectations and educational investments. Although such frustration is temporary for most, prolonged unemployment and delays in securing a first job can impact career trajectories and economic, psychological and emotional well-being. There is evidence that delays in transitioning from school to work can have a negative long-term impact on career development and even salaries (Nelson and Reiso, 2011; Gregg and Tominey, 2004). Although the share of youth in the total population and the labour force has declined in developed economies, their ability to successfully enter the labour market and begin their careers has been limited and remains under threat.

INVESTING IN SKILLS DEVELOPMENT TO FACILITATE THE TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO WORK

A growing body of evidence-based research indicates that education and training, when supported at the macro level, are important means of enhancing youth employability. Young people need relevant skills, knowledge, competencies and aptitudes to help them obtain jobs and establish career paths. As the demand for skilled labour rises owing to globalization, technological advancements and the changing organization of work, quality education and appropriate training will be key to addressing employment challenges. The education-employment nexus is pivotal to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

Ensuring that present and future generations of youth have the tools they need to successfully navigate the school-to-work transition and secure decent work is

essential for the well-being of both young people and the economy as a whole. Work is the foundation on which economic stability and prosperity are built. Putting the skills and talents of young people to productive use contributes to economic prosperity for entire populations and helps to reduce economic inequality and eliminate poverty. Support for education, training and employment lies at the foundation of international efforts to improve economic outcomes and to strengthen prosperity and security among the nations of the global community. The alignment of education and skills with the needs of the labour market enhances opportunities for decent work. This dynamic relationship between education and employment constitutes a key component of the 2030 Agenda.

THE SKILLS MISMATCH

Traditional education systems and training programmes have done little to resolve the often significant mismatch between the skills new entrants possess and those required by employers in today's rapidly evolving global economy. Skills training programmes provided by governmental, non-governmental and international organizations can be an important means of bridging skills gaps and providing youth with opportunities to acquire job-relevant knowledge. These include targeted vocational training programmes and, increasingly, training programmes aimed at providing youth with life skills centred around effective communication and negotiation, decision-making and problem solving, leadership, personal finance management, and critical thinking. The effectiveness of such programmes depends largely on the quality and duration of the training and the programme's ability to target specific market demands. In this regard, the best programmes are developed in coordination with private sector employers, as this approach ensures alignment with market needs and makes employers aware of the training. Programmes that couple training with

**BOX 4.2.**

THE IMPACT OF HUMANITARIAN SITUATIONS ON THE TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO WORK

The transition of youth from school to work can be disrupted by conflicts, natural disasters, or other humanitarian crises. During and after periods of disruption, training programmes and employment initiatives are essential to helping youth strengthen their economic prospects and rebuild their lives. In such scenarios, there are unique dimensions of the challenge of youth employment to consider. In situations of war or armed conflict, for example, employment opportunities are reduced, options for sustainable livelihoods become scarce, and services and social mobility are severely disrupted. Young people have greater difficulty travelling outside of their villages or communities to look for work. Internal displacement also alters local dynamics, as populations have to adapt to and survive in new and more precarious socioeconomic environments.

The displacement that often occurs in the types of extreme situations described above can have a devastating impact on youth who are ready to enter the labour market. Most young refugees find themselves residing in crowded camps, without access to formal schooling, training opportunities or formal employment. While humanitarian agencies and aid groups are often able, in time, to provide such services to youth, there is one important and enduring barrier to employment among young refugees: in many host countries, refugee status precludes work in the formal economy. This effectively restricts refugees to working in the camps or in the informal sector elsewhere, where they are vulnerable to exploitation.

work experience (including short-term internships) can facilitate job placement for youth at the conclusion of the programme.

All youth can potentially benefit from the training programme enhancements described above. However, for vulnerable and marginalized youth and young people living in poverty, specific challenges and extenuating circumstances may also need to be taken into account in training programme design and delivery. During periods of upheaval or conflict, it is especially important to realistically assess the restrictions and limitations characterizing the labour market and job prospects for young people (see box 4.2).

ADVANCES IN TECHNOLOGY AND AUTOMATION: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Technological innovation and automation are rapidly changing the nature and context of work for the young people of the world. Advances in ICT have greatly increased the productivity of workers and enabled the creation of new jobs and industries. Youth are particularly well-positioned to benefit from these developments, given their early familiarity with digital technologies and their openness to exploring their application in an ever-widening range of new and existing contexts.

Technological innovation is responsible for creating new employment opportunities, but it also represents a threat to more traditional forms and sources of work. While youth are better positioned than older, more established workers to navigate the challenges of skills development and retraining that may be required to secure a role in the new economy, many youth remain excluded from such opportunities. The digital divide between developed and developing economies is closing as more young people in the developing world gain access to



digital technology and as technological advancements offer an opportunity for enterprises in the developing world to compete on a more level playing field with those based in the developed world. However, a large gap in technology access remains and is reinforcing the economic exclusion faced by youth living in extreme poverty in the developing world.

For young workers around the world, advancements in automation and, increasingly, in artificial intelligence (AI) are putting unprecedented pressure on job availability. Concerns about automation and its impact on jobs are nothing new. In the early days of the industrial revolution in England, the introduction of machinery into manufacturing led to large-scale revolts among workers led by Ned Ludd out of concern that automation would put

them out of work. While job losses ensued, increased productivity led to more job creation overall, and today the term “Luddites” is largely used to describe those irrationally resistant to technology. Today’s challenges related to automation will also undoubtedly cause economic dislocation, but this should be offset, as it was in the past, by massive increases in productivity and the creation of new opportunities as yet unforeseen.

Presently, the main concern is that automation and the increased capacity of AI to more efficiently handle repetitive tasks—not just in manufacturing but in a wide range of services—may be moving too quickly to allow society to keep up and adjust. For today’s youth, expanded automation impacts not only those on the production line in factories, but also farm workers, restaurant



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staff, journalists, and even highly skilled professionals such as scientists and lawyers. For most, advancements in the foreseeable future will enable greater productivity. However, there is a growing and very real possibility that technological advancements will begin to have significant wide-scale displacement effects on the current and next generation of youth as they prepare for the transition from school to work.

Importantly, technological advancements in the so-called gig economy—in which web-based service firms such as Uber link individual workers with

customers—are already redefining traditional relationships between employers and employees. Such enterprises offer income-earning opportunities to a broad range of potential workers as independent contractors, but they are shifting the burden of taxation and regulation to the self-employed and undermining the potential of organized labour to ensure that worker protections are in place.

Given the speed of technological advancements, it is essential that policymakers and society as a whole begin focusing on how institutions can adjust to ensure that

BOX 4.3.

CASE STUDY:

FOSTERING YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN RURAL COLOMBIA

PROGRAMA JÓVENES RURALES EMPRENDEDORES

The Programa Jóvenes Rurales Emprendedores (Young Rural Entrepreneurs Programme), developed by the Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje (National Training Service) in Colombia, represents a well-recognized example of efforts to promote youth entrepreneurship. For about a decade, the programme helped young people establish innovative, productive and sustainable businesses in rural areas. It supported locally viable enterprise options including agricultural, agribusiness, service and manufacturing activities. Employing a targeted skills development approach, the programme provided vocational training to unemployed youth in high-demand sectors, and additional modules supplied these youth with entrepreneurship and business management training. While the programme was open to all youth, it particularly targeted vulnerable groups, including displaced persons and indigenous groups. Importantly, training was supported by efforts to secure access to finance for aspiring entrepreneurs who joined the programme. Productive youth-led business projects were able to access seed capital grants from a fund managed by the President's office, as well as specialized financing from Banca de las Oportunidades, Fondo Emprender and Economía Solidaria.

Originally piloted in 167 municipalities before its expansion nationwide in 2009, the programme undertook a rigorous impact evaluation to assess its longer-term effects on beneficiaries. The study found that the programme had a positive impact on the income of graduates. Nearly three quarters of the beneficiaries finished the programme with a business project to pursue, and participation increased the likelihood of starting a real business by over 75 per cent. Moreover, training provided during the programme improved the ability of beneficiaries to manage business finances, establish productive relationships with customers (reflected in the punctuality of client payments), build networks with other businesses, and minimize conflict with partners and suppliers.

Source: Steiner, Rojas and Millán (2010).



workers are protected from wide-scale job loss, increased income inequality, and general disempowerment. To date, most institutions have been reactionary in the face of technological change, playing catch-up in terms of reforming educational systems, labour regulations, business policies and practices, and social safety nets. Educational systems around the world need to undertake structural changes so that they are equipped to provide youth with the flexibility, adaptive capacity, problem-solving skills, and entrepreneurial mindset they will need to compete in a rapidly changing work environment. Regulators, labour unions and the private sector need to think more about how labour market regulations should be adapted to the new environment and how the interests and rights of workers can best be protected. may need to be adjusted to address new challenges including covering an increasing number of retiring workers, absorbing the costs of retraining workers, and potentially covering the basic income needs of millions of new unemployed workers.

YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Interventions designed to empower youth to start their own businesses are increasingly part of the youth-oriented development agenda. With the high levels of unemployment in many countries, entrepreneurship is seen as a means of engaging ambitious youth in creating their own employment opportunities while also generating work opportunities for other youth. Entrepreneurship is a path suitable for some young people but must be viewed in the context of a broader youth employment strategy and not seen as the main approach to youth employment.

Approaches to youth entrepreneurship promotion and support vary widely around the world. Generally, training programmes include modules on creating a business plan and starting and running a business in the local environment, and they may also incorporate the development of life skills including securing and managing

business finance. Building on this foundation, the most successful programmes follow through in helping youth launch their businesses, providing small start-up grants and links to financial service providers. As with other skills training, the effectiveness of such interventions varies based on the quality and duration of training and the depth of the intervention. The best programmes provide continued support not just with financing but with the incubation of start-ups, mentoring, and facilitating access to potential investors. Costs can be high, but the impact and cost-effectiveness can be improved by careful targeting of beneficiaries throughout a programme's life cycle.

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT FOR SUSTAINABLE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT: THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT APPROACH

The past decade has witnessed the emergence of a new approach to thinking about the issues explored in this chapter. Drawing initial theoretical inspiration from Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen, experts in skills development (Wheelahan and Moodie, 2011; McGrath, 2012; DeJaeghere, 2017) and in youth development (Bonvin and Galster, 2010; Dif-Pradalier, Rosenstein and Bonvin, 2012; Hollywood and others, 2012) have sought to adapt and apply Sen's approach to these areas.

The human development approach is beginning to gain policy traction. Its influence can be seen in the *Human Development Report 2015: Work for Human Development* (UNDP, 2015), the UNESCO TVET Strategy for the period 2016-2021 (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2016), and the Commonwealth Secretariat's Global Youth Development Index (Commonwealth Secretariat, n.d.).²⁷

²⁷ Detailed information on the Commonwealth Secretariat's Global Youth Development Index is provided in chapter V of the present Report.



At the national level, there has been discussion of the notion in countries such as Australia and South Africa.

Crucially, the approach includes young people from the start, focusing on their voice, agency and well-being as the core of any strategy for youth development. From Sen (1999), it includes both positive and negative freedoms. Positive freedom—the freedom *to*—is at the heart of Sen’s notions of capabilities, functionings and agency. This is about what young people have reason to value with regard to what they want to be or do, and the extent to which they are able to realize those valued outcomes. Sen also puts forward the notion of negative freedom—the freedom

from. Second-generation human development thinkers have taken this further; Deneulin (2006) encouraged a wider consideration of the structural barriers to achieving human development, and Alkire (2007) pioneered thinking about the multidimensional nature of poverty. Skills development and human development writers have added to these insights; as sociologists rather than economists, they look much more into the interplay of structure and agency at the individual, community and societal levels.

With its emphasis on human flourishing, the human development approach recognizes that education and work are valued both in and of themselves and for their

BOX 4.4.

CASE STUDY: ENHANCING SKILLS DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG WOMEN

YOUNG AFRICA

Young Africa (YA), a small international NGO founded in the Netherlands in 1998, set up its first project in Zimbabwe but over the past two decades has expanded its operations to include programmes in Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia and Zambia. Like several previous schemes in Southern Africa, Young Africa tries to make up for the lack of a strong informal apprenticeship model in the region. YA rents premises and provides shared services to groups of local entrepreneurs who offer training for local youth. The programme focus is on providing young people with the technical, business and non-cognitive (soft) skills necessary for success in micro and small enterprises. Graduates are supported in setting up their own enterprises and receive business advice through the programme for up to six months.

There is a clear sense that youth, particularly young women, face structural obstacles as well as skills deficits. At the Beira centre in Mozambique, local women entrepreneurs have set up a crèche. This acts as a business and a training provider but is also, most crucially, a facility that allows more young women to participate in the range of training programmes on offer across the centre.

Targeted training is also provided to orphaned female youth through the YA Hostel Programme in Mozambique and Zimbabwe. A social worker and a night matron help these young women develop life skills, including health maintenance and managing a home. Each hostel grows much of its own food, building the skills of the young women in vegetable gardening and poultry keeping. The orphan programme is showing strong evidence of a reduction in risky sexual behaviour, and 83 per cent of graduates make successful transitions to employment or self-employment. The programme is able to cover operational costs, though set-up costs for new centres must still be covered by external funding.

Source: UNESCO-UNEVOC (2017b).



contribution to wider human flourishing. However, it also acknowledges that both education and work can undermine human flourishing (for example, through gender-based violence in education or precarious work). The human development approach acknowledges the power of education and work but also recognizes the need to examine how both actually operate and what the practical consequences may be.

This approach has influenced the UNESCO TVET strapline of “skills for work and life”, embodying the concept that skills development cannot just be about employability but must support wider human flourishing. Within this framework, the transition from education to work is seen as part of the wider transition from youth to adulthood. DeJaeghere (2017) points to how, in East Africa, training leads to young people gaining trust from others in their communities; this, in turn, leads to access to various forms of capital, which allows youth to improve their lives. In the case of the State of Palestine, Hilal (2012) shows how training gives young women the opportunity to earn enough income to be able to get married if that is what they envision for their lives.

With the human development approach emphasizing the importance of starting from what young people envision as a good life, it has been necessary to address questions about how such visions are formed and communicated. Sen has long been concerned with the problem of adaptive preferences—the ways in which people’s visions of a better future are limited by what they can imagine given their current circumstances. For instance, if no one in the community has attended university or secured a well-paid formal job, is it unlikely that young people will even be aware of the possibilities of such future directions. More recently, attention has also been focused on the danger of unrealistic aspirations, or the misalignment between employment ambitions and education-related factors such as attainment levels, course choices, and academic performance (grades expected

or earned). Such considerations have led skills for human development scholars to focus on how young people can be supported both to envision better futures and to overcome obstacles that could prevent aspirations from being realized.

In writing about youth transitions to work, human development authors emphasize the importance of recognizing that not all work is good and that young people might be right in not wanting to take some forms of work or stay in them. Illustrative of this is the distinction between opportunity entrepreneurship and necessity entrepreneurship, particularly given the fact that far more young people are likely to experience the latter than the former.

THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT APPROACH AND THE GREEN ECONOMY

The human development approach has tended to focus on the immediate challenges of poverty. However, since the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals, there has been a stronger focus on intergenerational aspects of poverty and human flourishing and greater awareness of the need to ensure that sustainability remains a priority in all aspects, phases and processes of human development. This suggests that any approach to building skills for sustainability must minimize the costs and risks of any transformation for people living in poverty and make them secure in enjoying the positive aspects of sustainable development. There are dangers attached to green industries, for example, in that the greening process takes the dirtiest, most precarious, and least decent work away from people in poverty but often leaves them with no work at all and increased costs for cleaner fuels.

If youth are to benefit from green skills policies, they need targeted education and training, as green jobs



typically require higher skill levels. However, it will also be necessary to determine how the most vulnerable youth, many of whom are already out of education, can be compensated for the immediate costs of greening. More radically, the human development approach supports the adoption of policies and practices that work with what those in deepest poverty know and can do so that the causes of greening and social justice can both be served (McGrath and Powell, 2016).

While the human development approach is only one way of thinking about the education-employment nexus, it provides a unique perspective for strategies that move from the language and practice of employability and entrepreneurship towards foregrounding decent work and livelihoods, active citizenship and human flourishing as the ultimate goals of policy and practice.



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

HOW SECURING QUALITY EDUCATION AND DECENT WORK FOR YOUTH ADVANCES OTHER SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Advances made in quality education and decent work for youth are mutually reinforcing, but progress in these areas contributes to the achievement of other Sustainable Development Goals as well.



Sustainable Development Goal 1: *no poverty.* Decent work is essential for moving youth and others out of poverty. Successful efforts to ensure that young



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people have the opportunity to secure decent work will help developing countries meet their goal of reducing by at least half the proportion of men, women and children living in poverty. The social protection systems considered under Goal 1 should include labour market regulations that provide minimum protections for workers. Progress made in achieving the Goal 1 objectives of ensuring that all individuals have equal rights to economic resources and access to basic services, property rights, inheritance, natural resources, technology and financial services is essential to improving outcomes for working youth, particularly own-account workers and micro business workers seeking greater sustainability and resilience.



Sustainable Development Goal 3: *good health and well-being.* Good health and access to health care can have a significant impact on youth education and employment outcomes. Improving access

to sexual and reproductive health care, including education and information on sexual and reproductive health, helps ensure that young people, especially young women, can make informed choices about when to have children. Delaying the age of first childbirth can increase the chances of young women staying in education and securing decent work. Sexual and reproductive health education can also provide information on how to prevent the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV, leading to better outcomes for youth. Reducing harmful substance use (target 3.5) increases the likelihood that youth will stay in education and secure and retain decent work.



Sustainable Development Goal 5: *gender equality.* Achieving gender equality is a prerequisite for realizing all the Goals, including positive educational and employment outcomes. Girls and young women continue to face barriers to participation in

education, especially beyond primary school, and this has an impact on their ability to secure decent work. Improving labour market prospects and outcomes for women is an essential aspect of moving towards gender equality, providing the basis for increasing women's full and effective participation in economic life as well as in decision-making in domestic, political and public life. While improvements in labour force outcomes and the protections afforded to women therein will support the overall objectives of Goal 5, it is important to highlight the benefits to working women from concurrent gains in specific targets for Goal 5. Here, the adoption of stronger safeguards against exploitation will better protect young women and encourage increased labour market participation. Providing women with access to sexual and reproductive health services and control over reproductive rights will improve their ability to plan the size of their families and balance personal investments in family and work. Affording women equal rights to property ownership, inheritance, and financial services will empower them as own-account workers, entrepreneurs and business owners. Importantly, recognizing the vital role that women play in family care and domestic work (through the provision of public services and social protection mechanisms) better enables them to transition in and out of the labour force in balance with family responsibilities. At the same time, encouraging public policy that promotes the sharing of household responsibilities between men and women will help reduce the double burden many young women bear.



Sustainable Development Goal 9: *industry, innovation, and infrastructure.* A broad goal in itself, Goal 9 lies at the heart of creating the labour demand needed to bolster youth employment in both developed and

developing countries. International efforts to promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization will constitute a primary force for creating jobs for present and future generations of young people on the scale required to



address current and projected unemployment challenges. Importantly, Goal 9 includes a focus on small-scale industrial enterprises, with particular emphasis on increasing their access to financial services and integrating their output into international value chains. Such efforts are vital if SMEs are to become the engines of job creation they potentially represent. Likewise, infrastructure and ICT investments will provide the foundations on which competitive businesses are built, while enabling—in the context of public-private partnerships—increased opportunities for local private sector growth and immediate job creation. Improvements in infrastructure also facilitate mobility and access for young women, youth with disabilities, and other young people excluded from effective economic participation.



Sustainable Development Goal 10:

reduced inequality. Promoting decent work for youth means promoting decent work for all young people, regardless of class, ethnic or religious background, sexual orientation, or disability status. In this regard, eliminating discriminatory labour market regulations and practices around hiring and firing is essential.

Governments must prioritize the adoption and enforcement of laws and policies that effectively combat wage and employment discrimination. Goal 10 incorporates a broad range of objectives, including targets focused on effecting planned and well-managed migration policies and on reducing costs associated with workers' remittances so that young migrants are better able to support family members back home.



Sustainable Development Goal 12:

responsible consumption and production.

Education and employment are inextricably linked to responsible consumption and production. Target 12.8 seeks to ensure “that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature”, and an associated

indicator (12.8.1) focuses specifically on the role of education, measuring progress based on the “extent to which (i) global citizenship education and (ii) education for sustainable development (including climate change education) are mainstreamed in (a) national education policies; (b) curricula; (c) teacher education; and (d) student assessment”. Under Goal 8, which focuses on decent work and economic growth, target 8.4 calls for “improving ... global resource efficiency in consumption and production and [endeavouring] to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation”. In the pursuit of job-oriented economic growth, attention must be given to the economic devastation the global community experiences from the pollution, global warming, and waste associated with unregulated production and rampant consumerism. As consumption and production habits change, so too will the nature of the jobs and skills required to support them. Steps should be taken to ensure that youth are provided with the skills needed in those industries that promote sustainable solutions to environmental challenges.



Sustainable Development Goal 13:

climate action. Target 13.3 stresses the importance of improving “education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning”, and its accompanying indicator (13.3.1) uses as a measure of progress the integration of these issues into secondary and tertiary education—which has direct relevance for youth. Target 13.b focuses on promoting “mechanisms for raising capacity for effective climate change-related planning and management in least developed countries and small island developing States, ... focusing on women, youth and local and marginalized communities”. The potential for such capacity-building in these areas should translate into expanded employment opportunities for youth.



CONCLUSIONS

Progress in the realms of quality education and decent work is mutually reinforcing and acts as a catalyst for progress towards other Sustainable Development Goals. For countries still grappling with high unemployment rates, ensuring decent work for youth is an almost impossible endeavour. Similarly, many countries are struggling to provide youth with education and skills that will adequately prepare them for the rapidly evolving labour market. Where youth population growth rates are high, greater investment in young people is needed to harness their human capital. Putting the skills and talents of youth to productive use contributes to economic prosperity and reduced poverty and inequality—all of which are key objectives of the 2030 Agenda.

When implemented jointly with governmental, non-governmental and international organizations, targeted vocational training programmes and programmes focused on the development of life skills (including effective communication and negotiation, decision-making and problem solving, leadership, personal finance management, and critical thinking) can help ensure that young people are in a better position to secure and retain decent work in a competitive labour market. The involvement of a wide range of stakeholders in the development, support and delivery of training contributes more effectively to bridging the skills gap and provides youth with expanded opportunities to acquire job-relevant knowledge. Training programmes and employment initiatives are particularly crucial for young refugees, as they can assist youth in building their economic lives.

Increased automation and the higher skill requirements attached to digital technologies are also affecting employment prospects for youth as they transition from school to work. Although young people are generally more familiar with digital technologies than are older adults, they do not always have access to the education

and training they need to secure employment in the digital economy, and increased automation is putting many traditional jobs at risk. Access to advanced technologies and relevant training is uneven, resulting in the exclusion of low-income youth and youth living in poverty, particularly in developing and least developed countries. During what may prove to be a lengthy transition period, policymakers need to improve the adaptability of institutions to ensure that young workers are protected from the large-scale displacement of jobs by technology.

A key component of the education-employment nexus is youth entrepreneurship, which can benefit greatly from a holistic approach to skills development. Basic modules on generating a business plan and starting and sustaining a business can provide a solid foundation for continued support, including mentoring for potential young investors. Integrating the development of life skills in entrepreneurship training is also critical. The human development approach holds that young people should be directly involved in shaping their futures, and in this context, the voice, agency and well-being of youth should inform any strategy for skills development and broader youth development.

The human development approach provides important insight into the role education and work both play in human flourishing. Proponents of this approach argue that not all work is good, and that young people may be justified in not wanting to accept or remain in some types of employment. This notion is worth exploring in the context of sustainable development, mainly because it represents a strategic shift from the rhetoric of employability and entrepreneurship to a more practical, people-centred approach aligned with the imperatives of decent work and sustainable livelihoods. This discourse dovetails with the nexus of education and employment, particularly in their role as a cornerstone supporting the achievement of other Sustainable Development Goals.