

Short Summary
Expert Group Meeting and Youth Roundtable
Strategies for Creating Urban Youth
Employment: Solutions for Urban Youth in Africa

Nairobi, 21-25 June 2004

Introduction

The Expert group meeting and Youth Roundtable was organized by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs with collaboration with UN-HABITAT and the Youth Employment Network (YEN) Secretariat and held in Nairobi at the Gigiri Conference Center from 21-25 June 2004. It brought together experts from different backgrounds and areas of expertise in youth employment, as well as young people from African countries to address the challenges of urban youth employment and young people's hopes for decent employment and reduced social exclusion. The overarching objective of the Expert group meeting and Youth Roundtable was to support the goals and objectives of the Youth Employment Network and focus on the ways individuals and institutions, public and private, plan and manage youth employment creation in cities as well as to promote an exchange of experiences and best practices.

Issues examined included obstacles in urban youth employment, national strategies and policies, good practices and experiences in addressing youth employment, challenges and policy recommendations. Three round tables were devoted to youth entrepreneurship development, UN-HABITAT's strategy on enhancing the engagement of youth, and national experience of Kenya in creating youth employment. The recommendations of the Youth Roundtable were presented to the Expert group meeting.

Experts attending the meeting were from various universities, non-governmental organizations and the United Nations agencies such as the ILO, UN-HABITAT and the World Bank. The Kenyan Government was represented by senior officials from the Ministry of Gender, Sports, Culture and Social Services, Ministry of Housing and Public Works and Nairobi City Council.

Highlights of the main issues discussed

The Expert group meeting noted that young people make up a large share of the population in most developing countries in Africa and suffer a disproportionately from unemployment. The review of global and regional trends in youth employment highlights the fact that young people are mostly employed in the informal sector. Urgent action is required to effectively address this situation to ensure that young people are afforded access to decent work. It was highlighted that preparation of national action plans for youth employment or review of existing national plans ensuring a process that includes the full participation of young people are important and in this regard, the Youth Employment Network can play an important role by providing advice and support to countries when these national action plans are being prepared or reviewed.

It was emphasised that the issue of urban youth employment should be addressed through a holistic approach, rather than through only the lens of economic policy. Urban governance, in particular, is a critical consideration because the effectiveness of local government institutions ultimately determine the participation of young people in decision making and the economic and social opportunities available to young people within their communities. It is a broader issue that touches on the governance dimensions at the local level, particularly with respect to participatory systems, legal regimes, gender relations, spatial planning, linkage between tertiary education and practical training, partnership between public-private and civil society sectors, as well as the connection of these with macro policy management.

For youth at risk, the role of local government in employment creation is an important re-integration strategy. Youth at risk lack opportunities, education, proper housing and other support that are key to a young person's development, and often face drug problems, exposure to human trafficking and the exploitation of young women and girls.

It was acknowledged that in order to effectively address urban youth unemployment more resources are required to be directed towards the needs of young people. There should be adequate resources at the national, regional and local levels to ensure that there is an appropriate enabling economic and social environment for young people that promote their well being, education, training, skills development and access to resources. The international community should ensure

that their assistance to developing countries should address the issue of youth employment in a comprehensive way.

At the macro-economic level, the national action plan for youth employment must be integrated into the overall national employment strategy. Economic growth is a fundamental condition for the creation of the large number of jobs needed by young people. But this is necessary but not a sufficient condition. At the foundation of employment creation efforts it is critical for Governments to devote adequate attention to the education and skills training of young people in order to prepare them for the world of work. In this regard, it was recognized that such education and training should be relevant to the skills required by employers, and that providing multiple skills to young people would make them more adaptable to different skill requirements in different types of jobs.

Many developing countries in Africa have prepared PRSPs. Although recent evidence shows that an increasing number of PRSPs are making some reference to young people, this is often piecemeal and, hence, limited in their scale and potential impact. Moreover, these PRSPs fail to treat youth issues as a major cross-cutting issue. Therefore, there is an urgent need to integrate youth issues, in particular youth employment issues, within the PRSPs. In order to assess the impact of the PRSPs on youth employment, it may be useful to introduce an indicator for youth employment. Young people should be encouraged to participate fully in the PRSP process.

Youth entrepreneurship was shown to be a useful way to promote self employment among young people. However, it was recognized that youth entrepreneurship is not the panacea for the youth employment crisis in Africa because from experience, even where conditions are ideal, less than a fifth of young people have the potential to be successful entrepreneurs. Important work in municipalities in several African cities have demonstrated that employment for young people can be created by actively promoting micro-enterprises — useful models of these can be found in waste recycling, for example.

Young people often lack work experience and professional maturity which can make it difficult for them to secure employment. There are many employers who do not want to take the

risk of hiring young, inexperienced workers, preferring instead to engage older, more seasoned employees. There should be efforts to provide opportunities for young people to gain appropriate experience through a number of ways, including volunteering. All these experiences should be accredited or recognized by employers as appropriate work experience.

Particular attention needs to be paid to the concerns of young women workers, especially since young women tend to have higher rates of unemployment than young men. Moreover, as young women often cluster in low-wage, low-skill jobs, it is essential that job creation efforts place particular emphasis on opening up equal opportunities for young men and women. By the same token, however, particular care should be taken to ensure that job creation efforts are concentrated in industries attractive to both young men and women.

Young people, in general, have not been sufficiently consulted in decision making at the national, regional or local levels in matters that impact significantly upon their lives. Young people should be heard at all levels and steps must be taken to empower them. In order for young people to participate in the PRSP process and macroeconomic policy debate, for example, there should also be appropriate capacity building among young people.

Proposed Recommendations

The meeting concluded with agreement on a set of recommendations on the following actions for creating urban youth employment:

1. Priority should be given to creating youth employment as a matter of national urgency and such action should be mainstreamed into macro-economic policy. Governments should implement the recent General Assembly resolution on promoting youth employment, in particular the commitments to prepare national action plans as soon as possible and to involve young people in this process
2. Urban youth employment should be addressed through a holistic approach. In this regard, attention should also be paid to the issues of urban governance and youth at risk, rather than

relying entirely on macroeconomic policy and labour market interventions. This approach is particularly important as the bulk of young people are employed in the informal economy where the role of local government is critically important.

3. At the macroeconomic level, youth employment strategies and policies must be integrated into the overall national employment strategy. Economic growth is a necessary but not a sufficient condition, Governments must devote attention to the education and skills training of young people. This education and training should be relevant to the skills required by employers, and must be such that young people are more adaptable to different skill requirements in different types of jobs.

4. Youth employment issues should be integrated more directly into the PRSPs. It is useful introduce an indicator for youth employment into PRSPs so that it is possible to monitor their impact in youth employment.

5. Youth entrepreneurship and microenterprise should be promoted to encourage young people to seek self employment. In this regard, it is necessary to provide young people with access to infrastructure, seed money, mentoring and other support services that will enable them to become entrepreneurs or to set up microenterprises

6. Young people often lack work experience and professional maturity which can make it difficult for them to secure employment, and there must be serious efforts to provide opportunities for young people to gain appropriate experience, which is accredited or recognized by employers as appropriate work experience.

7. Despite ongoing efforts, pervasive gender inequality continues to disadvantage young women in both the formal and informal economies, and policies and programmes that address the specific needs of young women facing discrimination in the work place are essential to employment strategies.

8. There should be clear structures for youth participation in policy formation and programme design, in particular the PRSPs. In this regard, the youth employment network provides an important vehicle for promoting the participation of young people.

Outcome of the Youth Roundtable

It was noted that participants of the Youth Roundtable to the Expert group meeting have benefited from the sessions in which they were able to share their common problems and discuss practical strategies for solving the pervasive problems of urban youth unemployment in their cities.

The Youth Roundtable has equally gained insight from the discussions of the Expert group meeting and is pleased to have been a part of the formal proceedings. Throughout the discussions, the Youth Roundtable acknowledged their role and responsibilities to work in greater cooperation with other stakeholders in order to develop effective urban youth employment strategies.

It was stressed that participants of the Youth Roundtable will continue to advocate for their critical role in developing effective policy solutions at all levels for youth employment by using some of the tools explored during the Roundtable sessions. In addition to their cumulative and shared experience, this includes recent UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/58/L.3/133, particularly those paragraphs relevant to the Youth Employment Network and the National Action Plan process; the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, the World Youth Report (2003), and the “Making Commitments Matter” Toolkit; and finally UN-HABITAT’s Global Policy Dialogue on Youth, Children and Urban Governance.

Recommendations

Youth policies and programmes seeking to effectively address youth employment in cities should focus on the following:

1. Create entry-level positions and other opportunities for youth to gain the critical experience required to secure decent jobs in the formal economy including skills training and jobs creation

programmes, internships, strategic interventions to provide job-placement and matching services under a public-private sector partnership.

2. Provide accessible and practical skills training that has been developed with youth input, either additionally or independently of formal education. Training programs should comply with nationally recognized quality assurance standards to ensure training is relevant and appropriate for youth development. Life-long career paths must be brought to the fore of youth employment rather than focusing on “short-term” isolated job interventions.

3. Improve access to financing for youth-led employment initiatives. The resources available to youth are very limited and largely inaccessible. There is red tape and bureaucracy that face youth in the form of demands for security, collateral and experience. Financial companies and credit providers could therefore jointly conduct feasibility studies with young people regarding the proposed business, assist in the development of business plans and make financial projections.

4. Strengthen the commitment and support of institutional partners, such as those involved in the Youth Employment Network, as well as national and local government players that are pro-youth in their approach. The Youth Roundtable would like to see increased and structured youth involvement in the YEN, through its proposed Youth Consultative Group and otherwise, strongly supported by each of its partners – World Bank, UNDESA and ILO. The Roundtable endorses the idea of developing regional guides or toolkits that would facilitate youth working with the YEN.

5. Increase access to participate in macro-economic policy decision-making, especially as it affects youth employment. The Roundtable identified a need for capacity building for engagement at this level. In terms of advocacy and inclusion, youth must be engaged in the creation and implementation of development agendas such as NEPAD, the PRSP process and the MDGs. PRSPs must be localized to enable youth involvement in their translation into concrete programmes of action at the local level.

6. Greater inclusion and access to information for youth on decisions that are being made to benefit them. There are undeniably a number of issues that are affecting young people in African

region, ranging from the exclusion of youth from the labor market as a whole, intimidation by the complexity of entrepreneurship, lack of availability in information, which is worsened by the inaccessibility of the information. Better information sharing and dissemination needs to take place to mobilize youth around positive initiatives and facilitate global policy to local policy connections. The Youth roundtable suggests the additional use of conventional medium such as radio, pamphlets and newspapers.

7. Pay particular attention to youth employment problems in the urban context. The Youth roundtable drew on some of their experiences from the cities of Dar es Salaam , Nairobi, Bosaso (Somalia) and Windhoek (Namibia) and feels it is essential to address youth employment challenges that are particular to cities. For example, there must be policy linkages in addressing slum development through youth employment initiatives.

8. Address the special needs of youth at risk (also related to slum improvement). It is essential to have specific policies and solutions for creating employment for youth at risk, as their needs are quite different and specialized. Special policies and programmes need to be in place that addresses the needs of youth trying to secure decent employment in conflict and post-conflict areas.

9. Address the pervasive gender inequality that continues to disadvantage young women in both the formal and informal economies. Although attached to each of the above recommendations, gender consideration and policies and programmes that address the specific needs of young women facing discrimination in the work place are essential to employment strategies. It is recommended that these should be developed in direct consultation with the young women who are most affected by continued gender discrimination.