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Key Considerations in Youth Workforce Development

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*A Report of the CSIS Project on Prosperity
and Development*

CSIS | CENTER FOR STRATEGIC &
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

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Purpose

Against the backdrop of a global youth unemployment crisis and within a broader set of questions and approaches to youth economic inclusion, this issues paper seeks to illuminate complex dynamics and key considerations in preparing the world's young workers, and in doing so provide a framework to inform and influence further investigation and assessment of promising practice and policy. This analysis focuses on equipping and engaging the labor supply to meet the demands of the market while recognizing that questions around boosting demand and job creation, and broader labor market policies such as mobility, subsidies, and minimum wages also warrant further attention.¹

Background

Around the world, youth unemployment has reached staggering levels with the International Labor Organization estimating that 73.4 million youth were unemployed in 2013, up from 69.9 million in 2007. In the European Union, 25 percent of Spanish youth and over 50 percent of Greek youth are unemployed. With some of the highest rates of youth unemployment in the world, one in four young people are unemployed in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. In South Africa, roughly 50 percent of youth 15 to 24 are jobless. By 2013, nearly 300 million young people globally were not in education, employment, or training (NEET).²

These somber statistics comprise the global youth unemployment crisis, one of the world's most pressing problems. Representing not only an immediate challenge for youth, but also indicative of greater long-term labor market challenges with far-reaching economic, development, and security implications. Increasingly, in poor and

¹ Methodology included desk analysis, stakeholder consultations, small roundtable discussions, a high-level public dialogue, participation in the Global Education and Skills Forum, and research/site visits in San Salvador, El Salvador (Programa Supérate); California, USA (ConnectED/Kearney High School, Sacramento, CA); and Berlin, Germany (Siemens Technik Akademie).

² See "Youth Unemployment: Generation jobless," *The Economist*, April 27, 2013, <http://www.economist.com/news/international/21576657-around-world-almost-300m-15-24-year-olds-are-not-working-what-has-caused>; and "Forum issue: Fostering Sustainability," OECD [Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development] Forum, June 2–3, 2015, <http://www.oecd.org/forum/issues/fostering-sustainability.htm>.

middle-income countries, it is difficult for young people, who often support whole households, to gain a sustainable livelihood and work their way out of poverty, the informal sector, or subsistence agriculture. In upper-middle and high-income countries, youths' employment prospects are not faring any better, with limited options and young people often laden with debt. Data reveals that youth are up to four times more likely to be unemployed than adults, while millions of youth are underemployed in part-time, low-wage jobs, in the informal sector or family-based subsistence, or unpaid work. The lifetime earning potential for those who enter the economy late or in low-paying jobs is constrained and undermines national productivity, in poor and high-income countries alike.³ In recent years, the links between economic participation, inequality, and community security, crime, and national fragility have been brought to the forefront of security and development conversations with the Arab Spring, and more recently the riots and demonstrations in Venezuela, Turkey, and Brazil.

The unemployment crisis is fueled in part by the millions of youth who do not have the knowledge or skills to match labor market needs or secure decent work. Among already constrained economic opportunities, young people are underprepared for current and future employment demands. Additionally, large numbers of young people are out of school, or failing to complete secondary school and progress to higher education, distancing them further from education, training, and employment services and opportunities. The problem of youth unemployment is complex, with no single cause and no single solution. The complexity is driven by the global economic downturn and recession, inadequate job creation, structural change, and inefficient youth labor markets, and further exacerbated by workforce limitations. Within this larger issue set, this paper seeks to inform and illuminate a set of central and emerging dynamics to consider in workforce development policy and practice.

What Is Workforce Development?

Workforce development describes the process by which the labor force is prepared, educated, trained, and enabled to be gainfully employed, enterprising, and earning. Workforce development is influenced by (i) education, (ii) apprenticeship and early work experience, (iii) labor market programs—including nonformal training programs that facilitate the operation of labor markets and address the needs of those encountering problems therein—and (iv) labor market policies that influence the investment climate and jobs creation. Beyond worker qualifications and

³ See, for example, David Bell and David Blanchflower, *What Should Be Done about Rising Unemployment in the UK?*, IZA Discussion Paper No. 4040 (Bonn: Institute for the Study of Labor, February 2009), <http://ftp.iza.org/dp4040.pdf>; International Finance Corporation (IFC), *IFC Jobs Study: Assessing Private Sector Contributions to Job Creation and Poverty Reduction* (Washington, DC: IFC, January 2013), http://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/1c91a5804e6f1b89aceacfc4951bf6/IFC_FULL+JOB+REPORT_REV2_JYC.pdf?MOD=AJPERES.

opportunities, there are other forces in the home, the community, and economy that shape the transition to work.⁴

Among bilateral and multilateral donors, workforce development has emphasized the building and strengthening of youths' employment and leadership skills through formal and vocational education programs, extracurricular activities, such as sports, and civic engagement initiatives. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), for example, supports numerous programs that encourage youths' soft and hard skills development, as well as the elevation of the youth voice in grassroots and national programs, such as Yes Youth Can! in Kenya, A Ganar ["to earn"] in Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Palestinian Youth Empowerment Program. Leveraging its country's long history, success, and expertise with dual learning and apprenticeships, German Cooperation's (BMZ's) international workforce development programming is partly school-based and partly industry-based. The focus is on building and strengthening vocational training systems to bring them in line with labor market needs, as well as developing quality standards and establishing in-service training programs for teaching staff, education planners, and school directors. Lessons from the German system are further explored in a later box. The International Labor Organization (ILO) has created its Youth Employment Programme (YEP), which operates a global network of specialists to work with countries to develop impactful youth employment interventions. The ILO also created the Decent Work 4 Youth Platform as an interactive online tool for young people to identify solutions within their communities.

Beyond those highlighted in this paper, there are many successful and promising examples of open education platforms, apprenticeship programs, alternative vocational curricula, nonformal education systems, and other policy and programmatic interventions that are better preparing young people for employment. Yet there is still much to be done to understand the dynamics, identify and scale best practices, and enact policy that better prepare youth for the workplaces of today and tomorrow. Focusing on the supply side and education and training, these are a few of the questions we consider based on literature review, convenings and consultations, field research, and our own analysis:

- What is the state of education access, equity, and quality?
- Does education and training meet demand?
- What to consider when integrating life skills?
- What role do systems and institutions play?

⁴ Arvil V. Adams, *The Role of Youth Skills Development in the Transition to Work: A Global Review* (Washington, DC: World Bank, February 2007), <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTCY/Resources/395766-1187899515414/RoleofYouthSkills.pdf>.

- How is stigma a factor?
- What should we be considering for the agriculture sector?
- How is technology changing the landscape?

Among the conclusions, we identify a number of themes and other emerging issues that warrant further consideration.

What Is the State of Education Access, Equality, and Quality?

Education and training—formal and informal—is the foundation upon which a labor force is built. Yet, youths’ access to education remains constrained in many regions of the world, due to gender, ethnic, regional, religious, and wealth disparities. Recognizing that there has been significant progress toward diminishing gender disparities in access to education, gender continues to be a barrier for many. As evidence, among 12 of the 36 countries in the sub-Saharan Africa region, “less than 60 percent of girls will start their first year of secondary school,”⁵ while the same is true for boys in 10 of the 36 countries. At the same time, the World Bank has found that nearly half of the world’s girls who are out of school live in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. This is an immense group of young girls who, with limited to no access to education, are significantly road blocked from formal and decent employment opportunities and thereby reaching their full potential.

Along with gender, other significant conditions contribute to disparities in educational access. Youth in rural areas, for example, are often further removed from opportunities than urban youth in their access to and duration of education, particularly with regards to secondary school completion, and achieve lower results in assessments of proficiency in math, a basic skill needed not just for employment, but for all economic exchanges that shape a productive life. Further, 50 percent of out-of-school children live in conflict-affected and fragile states, presenting a particularly vulnerable group that has inconsistent or no educational access altogether. Wealth levels also impact the duration of youths’ education, with the poorest more likely to have “less than four years of schooling” than the richest around the world.⁶ Gender inequalities also exist within these measurements of access. Studies have shown the links between education and employment, and with a significant portion of youth faced with disparities in education access, it is not surprising that the youth unemployment crisis is fueled, in part, by the absence of this foundational element.

⁵ Alexandra Hervish and Donna Clifton, *Status Report: Adolescents and Young People in Sub-Saharan Africa: Opportunities and Challenges* (Johannesburg: UN Population Fund, 2012), 9, <http://www.prb.org/pdf12/status-report-youth-subsaharan-Africa.pdf>.

⁶ UNESCO, “World Inequality Database on Education (WIDE),” 2012, <http://www.education-inequalities.org/>.

At the same time, millions of young people are forced out or drop out of schooling. To address the needs and provide out-of-school youth with the fundamental skills necessary to participate in the formal economy, governments have instituted various programs. In the Philippines, for example, where 19 million youth aged 6 to 24 were out of school by 2010, the Bureau of Alternative Learning System (BALS) is implementing the Alternative Learning System (ALS), a program that includes a Basic Literacy Program, Accreditation and Equivalency Program, and Indigenous Peoples Education Program. The program is unique, as it “provides an alternative to existing formal education instruction, encompassing both the nonformal and informal sources of knowledge and skills.”⁷ The classes are held in community learning centers throughout the country, and by 2010 there were 1,681 mobile teachers serving approximately 1.3 million students in 10,000 centers across the country.⁸ This example also points to the role of systems further discussed below.

Additionally, as findings from the *Global Youth Wellbeing Index*⁹ indicate, richer countries see higher results in education than poorer ones; greater resources dedicated to education, higher enrollment rates, and longer school enrollment expectancy have broad economic and development implications. Capacity constraints may be reflected in diminished educational resources, while low quality of instruction, due to poor training standards, can further compromise learning outcomes.

Yet globally, there remains a lack of data on the *quality* of and performance in global education particularly in emerging economies, due to divergent, or altogether nonexistent, measurement standards. While important surveys have emerged over the past decade, such as the OECD’s Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), and the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ), the data presented across these datasets is uncoordinated, incomparable, or omit regions entirely. By improving access without assessing quality, a critical gap remains in understanding the overall foundation that prepares youth for the competitive workforce and economy.

⁸ Republic of the Philippines, House of Representatives, House Bill No. 2727, “An Act Providing for the Establishment of the Alternative Learning System in Basic Education, Strengthening the Bureau of Alternative Learning System in the Department of Education and Appropriating Funds Therefore,” September 10, 2013.

⁹ Claire Delfin, “*Palengskwela*: Bringing the School to the Market,” GMA News, November 29, 2010, <http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/207125/news/specialreports/palengskwela-bringing-the-school-to-the-market>.

⁹ Nicole Goldin et al, *The Global Youth Wellbeing Index* (Washington, DC: CSIS/International Youth Foundation, April 2014), http://csis.org/files/publication/140401_Goldin_GlobalYouthWellbeingIndex_WEB.pdf. See report and data at www.youthindex.org.

Do Education and Training Meet Demand?

Throughout the world, the gaps and mismatches between youths' competencies and job requirements are now well documented and acknowledged by educators, students, and employers alike. It is increasingly recognized that preparing the labor supply means understanding what the market demands—what sectors are growing, what kind of jobs are and will be created, and what competencies and skills are needed. The OECD recognized that the skills gap or mismatch is one of the most pressing issues in the employment sector today, including skills loss, wasted resources, lower earnings, and higher employee turnover associated with “over-skilling.” Countries in the European Union, particularly Estonia, Ireland, and Lithuania, is struggling with this phenomenon, experiencing high unemployment rates coupled with increased job vacancy rates. A recent¹⁰ ILO survey found that across 24 countries in Europe, between 25 percent and 45 percent of the employed are either over-qualified or under-qualified for their job. Similarly, un- and under-employment is highly problematic in emerging economies that are progressively more service based and have an “under-skilled” workforce population. In another ILO survey,¹¹ across 27 low- and middle-income countries worldwide, only 47 percent of employees were considered well matched, with 37 percent undereducated and 16 percent overeducated. In Africa, the African Economic Outlook’s survey revealed that 54 percent of labor market experts identify the skills mismatch as a key obstacle for youth trying to enter the workforce.¹² Similarly, McKinsey recently released a report on “education to employment” in Europe, finding that 74 percent of education providers believed their graduates were prepared for work, but only 38 percent of youth and 35 percent of employers agreed.¹³

On the demand side, labor market assessments and economic studies to determine sectors with growth opportunity are becoming more of a standard practice. On the supply side, technical and vocational education are increasingly being strengthened, elevated, and integrated with academic and professional education to give students an expansive set of skills that align with existing opportunities and thus more future employment options. Similarly, apprenticeships and practical on-the-job experiences have risen to the fore of the solution set. In and of itself, technical vocational education (TVE) is less likely to be successful in addressing broader social problems of diverting demand from higher education, resolving the larger issue of youth unemployment, reducing gender bias in employment, or improving employability of

¹⁰ Skills Mismatch in Europe, “Geneva: International Labor Organization,” September 2014, http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---stat/documents/publication/wcms_315623.pdf.

¹¹ Theo Sparreboom and Anita Staneva, “Is education the solution to decent work for youth in developing economies?,” Work 4 Youth publication series 23, ILO, December 2014.

¹² African Economic Outlook, “Education & Skills Mismatch,” http://www.africaneconomicoutlook.org/theme/youth_employment/education-skills-mismatch/.

¹³ Mona Mourshed, Diana Farrell, and Dominic Barton, *Education to Employment: Designing a System That Works* (n.p.: McKinsey Center for Government, 2012), http://mckinseysociety.com/downloads/reports/Education/Education-to-Employment_FINAL.pdf.

disadvantaged groups. Creating robust connections between schools and employers to produce skills that are used on the job is at the core of making TVE relevant to employment and generating higher economic returns.¹⁴

Beyond rethinking higher education and technical and vocational curricula, the skills mismatch dynamic is also resonating and sparking innovation and change with secondary educators. In the United States, for example, the Linked Learning Program is looking to make secondary education more relevant to career and academic pursuits. ConnectEd, for example, strives to get thousands of high school students in California on the pathway to college and careers through project-led, innovative, demand-driven curricula and pedagogy. Linked Learning works on an assumption that an early introduction to career and technical applied learning is essential. Starting early is particularly important in places where many drop out or stop their education after secondary school. ConnectEd recognizes the importance of project-based, applied learning, as it not only engages students and helps with retention, but supports the development of nonacademic life skills, demonstrates utility of knowledge, widens horizons, and transfers technical skills. It has found that engaging the private sector is also crucial. Consulting with local employers can offer important insight into current and future needs in the immediate community, and in essence brings business into the classroom. As important as it can be for young people to have “real-life” experience in the workplace, this may not be feasible everywhere, and at a minimum bringing business leaders from the community to teach classes, lead projects, and give talks can be invaluable.

What Should We Consider When Integrating Life Skills?

Raising secondary completion rates, improving learning outcomes, reaching out-of-school youth, and ensuring higher education and training are relevant to both local and global employers are crucial priorities. However, beyond subject-matter and technical competencies, youth need other skills to be secure and successful in the world of work. Recognizing that “200 million young people despair because they lack equal opportunities to acquire the skills they need to get decent jobs and livelihoods,” the secretary-general’s High-Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda has called for young people’s access to “education beyond primary schooling, not just formal learning but life skills and vocational training to prepare them for jobs.”¹⁵ USAID’s Educational Quality Improvement Program 3 (EQUIP3)¹⁶ defined three types of “employability” skills that together wholly prepare young people for work:

¹⁴ Adams, *The Role of Youth Skills Development in the Transition to Work*.

¹⁵ United Nations, *A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development*, 2013, http://www.un.org/sg/management/pdf/HLP_P2015_Report.pdf.

¹⁶ See Education Development Center, *EQUIP3 Lessons Learned: Experiences in Livelihoods, Literacy, and Leadership in Youth Programs in 26 Countries* (Washington, DC: USAID, April 2012), http://idd.edc.org/sites/idd.edc.org/files/EQUIP3%20Lessons%20Learned%20-%20Book_0.pdf.

- Work readiness skills—such as identifying skills and interests, setting career goals, writing a resume, searching for a job, and contacting employers—help youth find and obtain employment.
- Performance skills—such as working in a team, time management, and accepting supervision respectfully—help youth meet the social and business requirements of the workplace and keep a job.
- Life skills—such as maintaining health and hygiene, problem-solving, conflict management, and basic financial literacy—help youth manage their lives in a safe and healthy manner and balance work as part of a broader set of demands and opportunities.

Skills development and resulting professionalism and emotional maturity are fundamental for youth to succeed in an increasingly globalized economy, though they can be much more difficult to learn and measure. ConnectEd students and educators at Kearny High School reported that their extra-curricular activities, such as sports and volunteering, were mutually reinforcing in life and soft skills which contribute to improving academic or workforce success. Companies, such as Accenture, have partnered with local organizations to train employees in such skills.

In El Salvador, for example, Programa Supérate, an educational program, is collaborating with public schools to provide youth from gang and crime-ridden communities with a new outlook and skillsets that will enable them to make a successful transition to higher education and professional opportunities, including: English, computing, and core-values. As Supérate’s executive director, Eduardo Cader, told us, “Lifeskills humanize and strengthen our academic program. Since they are taught through an experiential methodology, we can guarantee that our graduates’ proficiency in English and IT is not their only competitive advantage when entering a highly demanding labor market.” Youth equipped with life skills may likely be more marketable, since employers often prefer to teach the technical skills on the job to meet the company’s particular procedures.

Service-based industries, such as the hospitality sector, depend on employees with strong life skills. Recognizing that youth are central to the hospitality sector and that the sector will create 73 million jobs in the next 10 years,¹⁷ Hilton Worldwide seeks to collaborate with universities, vocational schools, and community organizations in an effort to equip young people with critical skills needed for employment. By understanding that vocational skills are transferable and create labor mobility, Hilton Worldwide focuses on creating jobs not only directly in hotels, but in the greater tourism industry and in local supply chains. CEO of Hilton Worldwide, Christopher

¹⁷ Comments from Hilton Worldwide’s Jennifer Silberman at “Global Youth Workforce Development” (conference at CSIS, Washington, DC, January 15, 2014), <http://csis.org/event/global-youth-workforce-development>.

Nassetta, has often stated that its hotels look for entry-level employees prepared with the life skills necessary for a people-centered business, while the technical skills can always be taught on the job.

In this way, the development of “soft” skills can contribute to closing the skills gap among youth, and enable young people to compete in an increasingly evolving, interconnected, and globalized marketplace.

What Roles Do Systems and Institutions Play?

Promoting better linkages in workforce development requires coordinated efforts of actors in the workforce development “ecosystem,” and a better understanding of the processes implemented within the system. Yet this is often easier said than done; defining key objectives can be difficult in a system comprising multiple players with differing motivations. Governments might, for example, strive to implement policies that promote a mobile workforce, while the private sector may prefer a framework that caters to sector training. Homogeneous standards do not work in many contexts, and become a challenge to uphold for all corporations. Nevertheless, supportive systems and institutions are ever more important to promote stability, twenty-first century competitiveness, and economic and social mobility. With this understanding many governments and the private sector are working together to develop and implement employment standards and accreditation systems.

Germany’s Apprenticeship Program (see box below) is a dual-track system that combines learning and training in trade coupled with theoretical studies in vocational schools. Such a comprehensive, dual approach requires cohesion between state governments and businesses. Regulated by the private and public sector, both agree upon the structure and curriculum. Austria and Switzerland’s dual systems are also viewed as successful models. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development’s (OECD) *Skills Beyond School* synthesis report offers a robust review and analysis of postsecondary technical and vocational training systems in 20 of its member countries (including Germany, Austria, and Switzerland).¹⁸

India, too, has striven to build a supportive workforce development system, taking into account the various relevant economic and social actors, in its National Skills Policy. In a country with 60 percent of the population between the ages of 15 to 50, 1 million Indians enter the labor force a month. The National Skills Development Agency has sought to address this challenge and opportunity for India. India seeks to train 500,000,000 people by 2022 through more informal educational means knowing that any solution “will require thinking big, thinking out of the box, and partnering

¹⁸ Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), *Skills Beyond School: Synthesis Report* (Paris: OECD, November 2014), <http://www.oecd.org/edu/skills-beyond-school/Skills-Beyond-School-Synthesis-Report.pdf>.

What Can We Learn from Germany?

Germany's apprenticeships programs are a unique, holistic, and by most accounts successful approach to promoting workforce readiness and youth employment. The German Dual System of Vocational Education, for example, is a dual-track system that combines training in trade (working) with general, job-specific, and "soft skills" knowledge through vocational schools (learning). Apprenticeships last for three to four years, and provide participants with necessary qualifications to participate in a number of employment opportunities. There are currently 1.5 million trainees, 40 percent of whom are female, and 350 training occupations in manufacturing, banking, logistics, and trade, among others. Nearly 470,000 companies, or 22.5 percent, provide the training.¹⁹

Regulated by the federal government, German companies provide training opportunities, while the chambers of commerce, trade, and industry oversee the qualifications exams. The cost per trainee amounts to roughly 15,000 euros per year, and 75 percent of the dual system program's financial burden is supported by companies, while the Federal Employment Agency and the federal states support 15 percent and 10 percent, respectively. The Dual System represents a highly successful collaboration between the public and private sectors, to produce a highly qualified and productive workforce.

Beyond the dual system, some German companies have instituted their own comprehensive training programs. Siemens, for example, runs one of the largest training programs in Germany, with just under 7,000 trainees in the program in 2013. Participants include business students, technical apprentices and students, and Siemens Technical Academy students.

Apprenticeships equip youth with the necessary technical and "soft" skills required to foster a more qualified, productive, and capable workforce. But the benefits don't stop there; the private sector becomes highly skilled, innovative, and flexible, and spends less on special training programs in the long run. Such models, founded in public-private cooperation, are applicable to and scalable in developed and developing countries alike.

Recognizing that there are no one-size-fits-all models, such systems uniformly rely on, from the onset, clearly defined goals, outcomes, and stakeholder roles. Additionally, the private sector must be strong enough to finance and support long-term trainee programs. Such programs also require a strong public sector with the organizational capacity to build, oversee, and evaluate programs. Parties will need a clear regulatory framework by which to operate apprenticeship programs, built on an understanding of labor conditions, employer demands, the development of qualifications system, and a dedication to long-term and inclusive growth. The German apprenticeship program serves as an important model for any country looking to promote sustainable workforce development, but many agree it is not a wholly transferrable system.²⁰

¹⁹ "The Skills Initiative," Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany, Washington, DC, 2013, <http://www.germany.info/contentblob/3846858/Daten/3101511/SkillsInitiativeBrochurePDFalt.pdf>.

²⁰ Dieter Euler, *Germany's dual vocational training system: A model for other countries?* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2013), http://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/fileadmin/files/BSt/Publikationen/GrauePublikationen/GP_Germanys_dual_vocational_training_system.pdf.

with the private sector,” per Govind Mohan, economic minister of the Embassy of India to the United States. Taking into account the vitality of collaborating with the private sector, the National Skill Development Agency has created the National Skill Development Corporation, where 51 percent of the equity is given to private-sector companies in industries such as textiles, real estate, and gems and jewelry. The corporation has a fund totaling \$200 million, from which member corporations can withdraw to support skilling initiatives. Using Germany and the United Kingdom as examples, the initiative also incorporates skills counsels, which create sector-specific performance standards. Currently, 80 million have already been trained, with 50 million in government training. This program aims to tackle the challenges and harness the opportunity for a demographic dividend in India.

Equally important is tackling educational content and policy. In Uganda, *Educate!* uses a blended top-down and bottoms-up approach, partnering with the government to change policy to support more relevant teaching methods in classrooms, and supporting the implementation of this policy with schools and teachers. “Policy, and the resulting systems change, drives the incentives for everything, and you cannot begin to effect meaningful behavior change in the classroom without it,” says Boris Bulayev, cofounder and executive director.

Around the world, governments are striving to strengthen national institutions, curricula, data analysis, and policy alignment, while the private sector works to engage with the workforce, and act as an important supplier of data and provider of opportunities. Still, as Andrew Baird, RTI International, has commented, “It has been very difficult to define what the workforce development system is . . . and all of the different players that are in it . . . and the difficulty that then poses for designing specific interventions to try to develop a workforce ecosystem.” As a response to the challenge, RTI is piloting a diagnostic tool to rapidly map and assess workforce systems. Importantly, the tool emphasizes the voices of actors within the system, and is institution agnostic, recognizing that such workforce development efforts are being carried out by a wide range of actors across public, private, and civil society sectors.

How Is Stigma a Factor?

In addition to educational and skills attainment, stigma and social norms influence youths’ employment choices, a difficult challenge to overcome. Youth may choose to go to university or remain unemployed altogether, over taking certain jobs. In hospitality, for example, barriers to employment may be exacerbated by a lack of information, particularly in societies where youth are bound to their parents’ beliefs about appropriate work. In the Middle East, for instance, “the culture of shame discourages young people from working in the hospitality industry and limits the

number of socially acceptable careers for women.”²¹ Social status, particularly among peers, attached with more “traditional” sectors, such as agriculture, is becoming problematic, as will be discussed more fully in the following section.

The psychosocial component of employment is increasingly recognized as an important consideration in workforce development. Countries and the private sector are engaged in efforts to dispel stigma associated with particular jobs, such as those in hospitality and agriculture, through greater information access and training programs. One method for countering such perceptions, in the agriculture sector for example, is to ensure agricultural education and training responds to the changes being seen in rural areas, integrate technology, utilizing innovation to create higher-value crops, and adapt to climate change.

Further, some employment opportunities are seen as a temporary stop by youth, and for these reasons, ensuring the existence of career pathways is important. For example, in agriculture, youth need to be introduced to income-generating opportunities and value chains associated with the sector outside of direct farm labor.²² This stands true for other sectors too, such as hospitality and retail. If youth understand the growth opportunities many sectors present, they may be more willing to enter more stigmatized jobs and reduce turnover.

What Should We Consider for the Agriculture Sector?

Agriculture remains the cornerstone of many emerging nations’ economies, and represents 32 percent of global employment.²³ It is one of the world’s most vital sectors in terms of livelihoods, and a substantial number of youth will need to enter the agriculture sector to continue current and increase future production levels.

Yet constraints in the global agricultural sector, such as limited access to land, investment capital, water, and energy, poor resource conditions, low wages, unsafe working conditions, politics and complex policies, and a growing social stigma attached to more traditional sectors of employment are deterring youth from entering the sector amid increased urban migration rates. Due to fewer youth entering the sector, many employers are faced with a smaller pool of potential employees needed for advanced agriculture and agribusiness. This gap is largely due to the lack of

²¹ International Youth Foundation (IYF), *Creating Opportunities for Youth in Hospitality* (Baltimore, MD: IYF, January 2013), 4, <http://www.iyfnet.org/sites/default/files/Creating-Opportunities-for-Youth-in-Hospitality.pdf>.

²² David Acker and Lavinia Gasperini, *Education for Rural People: The Role of Education, Training and Capacity Development in Poverty Reduction and Food Security* (Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2009), <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i0760e.pdf>.

²³ Matthieu Cognac, “Agriculture and Youth Employment: The Missing Link,” International Labor Organization, February 14, 2014, http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/features/WCMS_235524/lang-ja/index.htm.

technical skills such as management, risk assessment, planning, processing, and quality assurance.²⁴

Over the past three decades, Nigeria, for example, has made efforts to attract youth to the agricultural sector by implementing youth vocational education programs and microcredit and lending programs. Even still, “despite these incentives and the expanding markets for primary and secondary agricultural commodities, the involvement of the youth in agricultural activities has steadily declined in recent years . . . in spite of the high current youth unemployment rate, and abundance of agricultural jobs available.”²⁵

Similar trends are being seen in Ghana’s cocoa and tomato growing communities, where young workers view their employment in the sector as a “stepping stone” to future opportunities.²⁶ Increasing value chain opportunities, access to capital, land, and wages could attract youth to the sector and help to overcome these challenges. As earnings become more equal to wage-sector earnings, and with improved infrastructure, technological advancement and innovations, youth may demonstrate a greater willingness to engage in this crucial sector. Doing so could help to promote greater well-being among rural populations and increase overall economic growth and food security.

Access to education on agricultural processes and supply chains could also help attract youth to the sector. However, globally, formal and vocational education systems often do not incorporate agricultural curriculum.²⁷ In the United States, Cornell University and the New York State Legislative Commission on Rural Resources have examined agricultural education and workforce development as part of its Rural Vision Project. The Project identified agriculture as an important component in overall economic development, and acknowledges that youth are increasingly drawn away from more rural areas.²⁸ Starting young can also influence the industry by incorporating agriculture in science and business curricula. Further, by showing the linkage of agriculture to health and nutrition, students learn that the sector is not limited to farming.²⁹ Youth agricultural programs with access to information could help to address this phenomenon. Further, investments in technology could improve production outcomes and encourage youth participation in the sector.

²⁴ Gabor Konig, Carlos A. da Silva, and Nomathemba Mhlanga, *Enabling Environments for Agribusiness and Agro-Industries Development: Regional and Country Perspectives* (Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2013), <http://www.fao.org/docrep/017/i3121e/i3121e00.pdf>.

²⁵ Dominic P. Okon and I. E. Nwosu, “Understanding Young Adults Aptitude in Poultry Enterprise,” *International Journal of Poultry Science* 11, no. 10 (2012): 659.

²⁶ Jennifer Leavy and Naomi Hossain, *Who Wants to Farm? Youth Aspirations, Opportunities, and Rising Food Prices*, IDS Working Paper 439 (Brighton, England: Institute of Development Studies, March 2014), 12.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 29–30.

²⁸ Cornell University, “Land Grant: Agriculture and Food Systems,” <http://cardi.cals.cornell.edu/focal-areas/>.

²⁹ Acker and Gasperini, *Education for Rural People*.

How Is Technology Changing the Landscape?

Technology is an increasingly essential tool in education and training, and fluency in information and communications technology (ICT) is an increasingly demanded competency among employers. Technology is, in many places, changing how teaching happens and content is delivered in the classroom, though teachers must be trained to use tech as a tool. Given high rates of mobile penetration, 128 percent in developed countries and 89 percent in developing countries,³⁰ mobile learning and education is surging. With mobiles being more easily accessible, many are taking the opportunity to use mobiles as a bridge between youth and access to education and opportunities for employment. Nokia Life, launched in 2009 by Nokia, has brought educational opportunities to over 90 million people in India, China, Indonesia, and Nigeria, with beta testing in multiple other countries. This program allows users to select curricula from myriad options such as health, agriculture, and entrepreneurship. Based on the selection, the user receives relevant information on the topic. This tool, for example, has been used by students preparing for exams, by farmers negotiating the best price, and by mothers to gain knowledge on prenatal care.³¹ Mobiles are also critical in areas affected by disasters or conflict, where students are displaced or access to school is disrupted by destroyed roads and buildings or safety concerns. In these circumstances mobile infrastructure is likely to be more easily repaired and young people can continue learning via mobile.

Mobiles are also increasingly useful for job-placement services where otherwise it may be difficult for youth to connect with opportunities outside of city centers. For example, Souktel, a nongovernment organization, partners with the development community to connect job seekers with potential opportunities in 22 countries via a SMS-platform. A recent landscape review on mobile learning found that “mobile job matching can be successful at placing youth in jobs when it is combined with skills training and where there is a labor market for youth.”³² Mobiles can play a key role in helping youth save time and money to connect to potential jobs, apprenticeships, and volunteer opportunities.

At the same time, e-learning such as massive open online courses (MOOCs), and online universities like University of the People, are providing students in developed and emerging economies with access to collaborative, and in many cases free, general education and technical courses that may also lead to a degree or other marketable certification. Currently, the number of students from developing countries enrolled in

³⁰ International Telecommunication Union (ITU), “The World in 2013: ICT Facts and Figures,” February 2013, <http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/facts/ICTFactsFigures2013-e.pdf>.

³¹ Nokia, “Nokia People Planet Report, 2012,” <http://company.nokia.com/sites/default/files/download/nokia-people-planet-report-2012-pdf.pdf>.

³² Linda Raftree, “Surveying the Landscape: Mobiles and Youth Workforce Development,” *Wait... What?* (blog), September 16, 2013, <http://lindaraftree.com/2013/09/16/surveying-the-landscape-mobiles-and-youth-workforce-development/>.

MOOCs remains relatively low at about 20,000. Additionally, data suggests that those enrolled in MOOC courses come from higher levels of education, while the biggest cohort of users are males over 26 years of age. Better access to tools such as MOOCs among younger populations and girls could prove important in spurring greater demographic representation in global workforce readiness.

Though the benefits of technology are great, there are multiple considerations to take into account such as cost implications, disparities in access such as gender and disabilities, local adaptability both cultural and language, and quality of content and applications. Similar to face-to-face education, the quality of training is far more important than the type of device being used.³³ Mobiles have the opportunity to supplement education and training programs and help fill the information gap among young people in terms of what opportunities are available.

Advances in technology may also inspire greater interest in more traditional sectors of employment, such as agriculture. With higher productivity yields and capacity for innovation, work in such sectors may become more appealing and further address the social stigma attached to employment opportunities that are considered less attractive. However, there often remains a lack of vital age-disaggregated data on information and communications technology and infrastructure in existing datasets, thereby making it difficult to highlight particular areas for investment.

Concluding Themes and Other Emerging Considerations

Supply and Demand

Workforce development is a large and complex challenge, meriting global collective action and investment. Attention must be given to both supply and demand constraints, particularly as we consider how technology is affecting the landscape of education, training, and opportunity. By integrating training and education with supply chain work, labor demands will increase and provide greater opportunities for youth. Undoubtedly, education is a cornerstone to economic opportunity, and formal and vocational education offer youth the vital technical skills necessary to succeed in employment. However, education is only one piece of the workforce development challenge; youth must also possess more intangible life skills to be active contributors in the global economy.

Partner to Promote Ecosystems and Leverage Resources

Collaboration between the public and private sectors is paramount in promoting more inclusive workforce development programs and policies. The private sector offers important insight into existing skills gaps and employer preferences, which may

³³ Ibid.

provide a useful foundation for public efforts in shaping and directing education policy. Additionally, incentivized by the prospect of future returns on their investments, the private sector is better able to provide necessary financial resources to enact and support sustainable workforce development programs. This is not an easy task, as “we know we’re looking at a structural change in the economy. All of us in the donor community, the national governments, the private sector, we’re all trying to figure out how we can provide pathways for these young people to engage in a productive life. This is the time when partnerships are crucial,” says Aaron Williams, executive vice president for international programs at Research Triangle International and former director, U.S. Peace Corps; and RTI is taking important steps toward such coordination backing a new Global Center for Youth Employment.³⁴

At a systems level, institutions must implement policies and provide incentives that facilitate an enabling environment conducive to youths’ entry in the workforce. The systems implemented by Germany and India serve as examples of successful public- and private-sector collaboration through the localized application of national level policies and guidelines with a recognition that the success and growth of the economy depends on the skills development and training of youth today. Similarly, Sweden represents an interesting and promising model. The central government offers grants to support partnerships between employers and training providers, funding existing programs of study with a built-in element of work-based learning. Simon Field, lead author to the OECD *Skilling Beyond School* report, has noted “the key thing about this model is that it changes the incentives, because instead of saying, well, we’ll fund people to provide training places, and they’re going to try very hard to work with employers who will then provide some element of work-based learning, but often they fail. Instead, it’s very simple: unless you actually have the employer from the outset working in conjunction with the training provider, then the programme is not funded. That changes the incentives radically.”³⁵

Need to Know More

An emerging set of best practices and project-level learnings with regard to workforce development is becoming available thanks to an increased commitment to evaluation and meta-evaluations like *EQUIP3 Lessons Learned* and survey-based research, such as the ILO’s School To Work Transition Surveys sponsored by the Mastercard Foundation. Yet, increased and more rigorous monitoring and evaluation of workforce development systems could shed light on existing gaps, or, conversely, programs and policies that are successfully addressing the youth unemployment crisis. At the same time, better baseline and monitoring data can highlight where inequality or poor status remains and motivate governments to incorporate broader

³⁴ For more information, see RTI International, “Global Center on Youth Employment,” http://www.rti.org/page.cfm/Youth_Employment.

³⁵ Ken Manson, “Lessons for the UK,” EducationToday (blog), November 6, 2014, <http://oecdeducationtoday.blogspot.com/2014/11/lessons-for-uk.html>.

skill-building curricula into the formal education system and vocational programs. In addition, employer and youth surveys are an invaluable tool, revealing the relationships between business environments, economic growth, and perceptions.

Start Young

In addition to a demographic rationale based on sizable early adolescent and teenage cohorts, enrollment trends and the promising results of programs like ConnectEd, Educate!, and Supérate underscore the importance of “beginning” workforce development earlier in one’s learning and transitions. Infusing secondary school curricula and pedagogy with “real world” content and skills is likely to enhance retention, and make young people more successful in onward training, education, or initial employment. Similarly, engaging younger youth in service or sports, for example, can help create a foundation of life and social skills.

Accreditation

As the nature of education, training, and skills development shift, so too is the nature of work. Task or micro-project-based work is on the rise as companies are unable or unwilling to hire full-time employees, and as individuals, especially enterprising, tech-savvy young people seek out income and experience-earning activities. As delivery and work become more modular, students, educators, regulators, and employers alike are asking important new questions about recognition, accreditation, and certification.

Engage and Involve Youth and Students

The youth voice is also a component in the workforce development discussions; few know better than youth themselves the opportunities and challenges they face in entering and succeeding in the workforce. Surveys show that young people feel underserved and underprepared by most public and some private education and training systems. By involving young people and seeking their opinion and input in crafting policies and programs, the end products are likely to be more responsive to their needs and interests, and better address what and how they want to learn. Engaging and consulting with students is also crucial, as it allows them to contribute to their own formal learning experience and keeps them more engaged and interested. Students can perhaps be consulted on curriculum (while adhering to core standards), reading lists and materials, projects, class format, and room setup.

Personal Financing

In addition to considerations for content and delivery, increasing attention is being placed on financing education training, especially among young people and households themselves. Thus, promoting youth financial inclusion is an emerging

issue in workforce development. Ensuring youth have access to capital to obtain higher levels of education is particularly important. In Kyrgyzstan, USAID launched an Education Loan Program with Kyrgyz Investment and Credit Bank's (KICB) in 2009, which provides loans at preferential rates to students or their families wishing to attend colleges or vocational schools, while working with recent graduates to increase employment opportunities. Another interesting and emerging trend is using remittances to help finance youths' secondary and higher-education opportunities in emerging economies. Recent studies have found that households that receive remittances increase their expenditure on education, thereby increasing human capital and overall workforce development and readiness. Recognizing this, organizations have begun to implement tools to target remittances toward educational investment. In El Salvador, a new financial tool called EduRemesa allows migrants to "direct remittances meant for education to high school and college students of their choosing" through a local educational foundation, FEPADE (Fundación Empresarial para el Desarrollo Educativo), which issues an ATM card to the beneficiary student directly in monthly installments. In this way, remittances are becoming an important source of financing in education, which can further promote workforce readiness.

Jobless young people experience vulnerability to future or long-term unemployment, wage scarring, and skills stagnation. In lower-income countries, and those with less developed safety nets, young people are often underemployed or end up in the informal or shadow economy where work may be irregular and insecure, low wage, hazardous, or illicit. Therefore, any approach to address the youth unemployment crisis must be long term and sustainable. Additionally, heavy consideration should be given to programs currently employing successful means to address any of the key issues discussed previously. Outcomes should be contextually appropriate, scalable, and collaborative with a focus on creating a healthy, engaged population. Increased cooperation between the private and public sector will facilitate a workforce ecosystem in which all parties are able to promote their interests while working toward a future of greater prosperity for all. Our shared security and growth depend on the success and productivity of today's and tomorrow's workers.

About the Author

Nicole Goldin was the first director of the Youth, Prosperity, and Security Initiative at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), in partnership with the International Youth Foundation (IYF). She currently leads NRG Advisory, is a senior associate of CSIS, and is professorial lecturer at George Washington University's Elliott School of International Affairs. On global youth affairs, she is a policy entrepreneur having led the creation of Youth in Development Policy at the U.S. Agency for International Development as senior adviser for policy until December 2012. Previously, as senior adviser to the undersecretary for citizen security, democracy, and human rights for policy on global youth, urbanization, Africa, and international organizations, Dr. Goldin helped launch a task force at the Department of State that drafted its youth framework. She has received multiple awards for her leadership in this area. She sat on the Boards of Directors of the Society for International Development–Washington Chapter and is an adviser to She's the First, a nonprofit organization that mobilizes and supports millennial leadership and girls' education.

Prior to her service in the Obama administration, Dr. Goldin worked with Peace Dividend Trust as managing economist, leading research projects related to economic recovery and stabilization. She has worked in and with public, corporate, finance, and nonprofit organizations on economic growth, education, democracy and governance, youth, urbanization, gender, stabilization, and social innovation policy and programs. Other experience includes 10 years working and consulting in the development and finance sectors with organizations such as the Clinton Global Initiative, Gerson Lehrman Group, Chemonics International, and International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES). She holds a Ph.D. in economics from the School of Oriental and African Studies, an M.Sc. in development from the London School of Economics, an M.A. in international political economy from American University, and a B.A. in East Asian studies from Union College. Dr. Goldin has lived, worked, and traveled in over 60 countries across all 7 continents. She is on Twitter @nicolegoldin.

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