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**AFRICA'S
UNTAPPED
RESOURCE:
ANALYSING
YOUTH IN THE
APRM**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Africa has the fastest-growing and most youthful population in the world. Over 40% of the continent's people are under the age of 15 and 20% are between the ages of 15 and 24. Africa in 2015 exists in a context in which global economic growth rates have slowed, as have global population growth rates. By contrast, sub-Saharan Africa is experiencing an average 6% annual economic growth rate. This environment offers the potential for an increasing youth population to drive economic growth on the continent. The question is, however, are the youth being equipped for the task at hand?

Issues around education and employment emerge as the two overarching, and indeed interlinked, youth-related challenges raised in the APRM Country Review Reports (CRRs). The consequence of insufficient or inappropriate education, skills development and integration is a youth population which is ill equipped to meet the criteria necessary for employment in the formal economy. Several APRM reports revealed concerns over high, and escalating, levels of youth unemployment and underemployment on the continent. The conversation in the reports regarding both challenges reveals shared concerns of potential political and social instability as well as a failure to achieve sustainable economic development.

The APRM reports include unique accounts of country experiences with regard to overcoming youth education and employment challenges, describing various degrees of success and failure. This provides an opportunity for sharing best (and worst) practices and peer learning.

An overview of all the APRM CRRs reveals one general shortfall in the youth conversation. Despite youth education and employment being interrelated, there is no holistic approach to the questions raised in the APRM questionnaire (used to guide the report writing) and the subsequent conversations in the thematic chapters of the CRRs, thereby undermining the prospect of sustainable solutions.

inability of this group to contribute meaningfully to sustainable economic development. The relatively large informal sectors found across the continent offer some reprieve from poverty and do contribute to the overall GDP of counties, but in their current form do not offer long-term sustainable growth. As noted in the Burkina Faso report the ‘sector is characterised by modest (and often archaic) means of production, by the use of intensive workforce techniques, by low productivity, by the itemised transmission of know-how (through learning) on the job, and by low accessibility barriers and thus a variety of economic operators.’

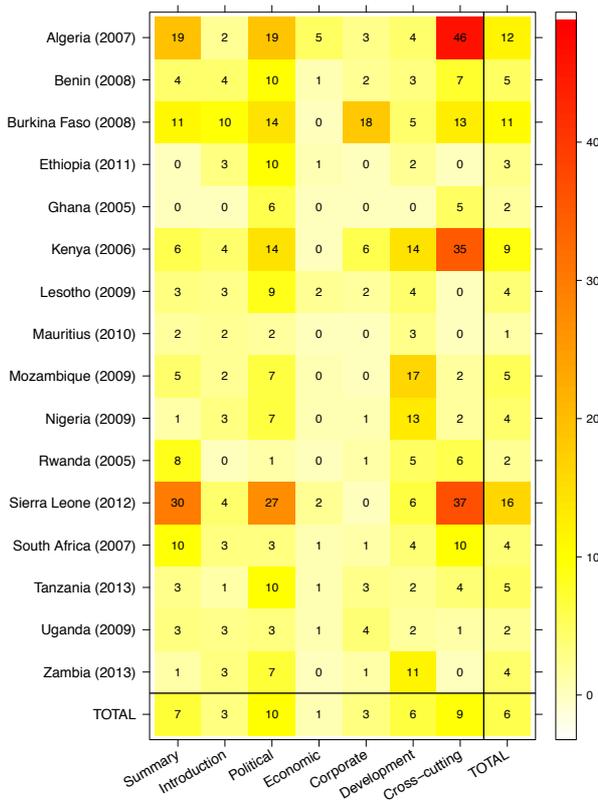
chapters. Similarly, education was discussed more in the ‘Development’ chapter, and employment in the ‘Development’ and ‘Corporate’ chapters. Given the level of interconnectivity of youth issues, there should be a more balanced conversation throughout the report.

While remaining cognisant of the very real susceptibility to instability that some countries are facing, it is important not to fall into the trap of branding youth as a challenge rather than an opportunity. The CRRs reveal that various success stories with regards to youth education and employment issues.

The APRM reports reveal that countries have enjoyed degrees of success in improving education by: raising public awareness of the advantages of sending children to secondary school; considering context specific barriers to education; improving assessments and certification at vocational and technical training; creating a coordinating body within government; and increasing the participation of youth in the decision-making processes.

Similarly, several key steps towards reducing youth unemployment rates emerge from the various APRM reports including: recognising that education and skills development are the first steps to a solution; the creation of a youth database; holding annual meetings between government, business and youth to increase cooperation; coordination of government policies through a focal point or commission; and creating effective internship and apprenticeship programmes.

‘Youth’
(occurrences per ten thousand words)



CRITIQUE OF THE CONVERSATION

There appears to be an inconsistency in the reports in that the ‘Cross-cutting Issues’ chapter highlights youth employment as an overwhelming concern, yet the issue is not raised clearly within the four thematic chapters of the reports. The majority of the references made to youth were in the ‘Political’ chapter, far exceeding mentions in the other

RECOMMENDATIONS

Adopt a holistic approach: Proposed solutions to youth-related challenges will need to recognise the interlinked nature of issues and the multiple stakeholders involved. While the revised APRM questionnaire does include more questions on youth, these questions should be integrated across the thematic areas. Special attention should be paid to the level of coordination that exists between public and private sector organisations dealing with education and employment, ensuring that political,

social, corporate and economic policies are aligned in order to facilitate the integration from youth education to employment. The private sector is able to provide valuable insight into gaps in the youth skills sets entering the market, as well as to forecast future skills demands. This advice would be useful in creating coordinated government policies regarding youth. It would be useful to monitor the space for conversation between government and business through the APRM reports.

Understand barriers and make targeted policy recommendations: The barriers to youth attaining a secondary or tertiary level of education, for example, might include: finances, age, poor primary school performance and early sexual activity or marriage. Youth employment may be affected by factors related to the quality and relevance of the education or skills the youth have (or have not) received, or the relative size of the economy they are entering. In developing solutions it is essential to start from a clear understanding of the context specific obstacles that face this demographic, and from this point develop targeted responses.

Bridging the gaps: There is an opportunity for cooperation between public and private organisations to bridge the gaps between education and employment and allow youth to integrate successfully into the economy. To this end, it would be useful for the APRM reports to highlight the

extent to which opportunities such as internships, apprenticeships and other skills development tools are available to youth; how well these programmes are regulated and how useful the programmes are in terms of leading to full-time employment for youth in the formal sector.

Creating a space for participation: In several reports there is mention of large numbers of marginalised youth posing a threat to political and social stability. The scale of the challenges faced by youth on the continent is unprecedented in the continent's history and it is imperative to include their voices in the political decision-making processes in order to ensure the creation of appropriate policies to deal with these challenges. It should be noted that the revised APRM questionnaire does pose questions relating to the rights of the youth and the facilitation of youth participation in legislative processes. Including the youth in decision-making processes would allow for two-way communication and a space in which to inform them of the opportunities available to them.

REFERENCES

This policy brief was compiled by Melanie Meirotti, drawn from the full report, "Africa's Untapped Resource: Analysing Youth in the APRM," by Melanie Meirotti, which can be found at (www.eisa.org.za).



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An African continent where democratic governance, human rights and citizen participation are upheld in a peaceful environment.

Mission statement

EISA strives for excellence in the promotion of credible elections, citizen participation, and the strengthening of political institutions for sustainable democracy in Africa.