

# GATHERING EVIDENCE :

HOW CAN  
SOFT SKILLS  
DEVELOPMENT  
AND WORK-BASED  
LEARNING IMPROVE  
**JOB OPPORTUNITIES**  
FOR **YOUNG PEOPLE?**

**BOOSTING  
DECENT  
EMPLOYMENT  
FOR AFRICA'S  
YOUTH**



A research initiative under the  
guidance of Decent Jobs for Youth

 **DECENT JOBS  
FOR YOUTH**





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**Over the next decade  
in Africa, an estimated  
**122 million**  
young people  
will join the labour force.**

That's nearly three times as many young workers as there will be stable, wage-paying jobs. Millions of young people in Africa already work in insecure, low-income and often unsafe jobs or on family farms with little or no pay<sup>1</sup>. If greater numbers of better jobs are not created, this situation will continue and possibly worsen.

Harnessing the potential of Africa's youth continues to be a priority for governments and donors. Yet while the topic has galvanized political commitment and resources across the region, progress has been fragmented and slow. A number of pressing questions remain:

**What are the most effective ways to boost productive employment for youth in rural and urban settings? How can we move from small-scale pilot projects to large-scale interventions?**

A key barrier to solving the continent's employment challenge is a lack of research to guide policies and interventions. Further studies can help address this critical knowledge gap.

1. Fox, Louise; Senbet, Lemma; Simbanegavi, Witness (2016). Youth Employment in Sub-Saharan Africa: Challenges, Constraints and Opportunities. Journal of African Economies, Volume 25, Issue suppl\_1, 1 March 2016, Pages i3–i15.

**Key themes:**



Soft and digital skills



Fostering work-based learning programs and mentorship for youth

**Cross-cutting themes:**



Gender equality



Youth engagement



Grounded in specific contexts

# A MULTI-DONOR RESEARCH INITIATIVE



*Boosting Decent Employment for Africa's Youth* is a three-year partnership by Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the Dutch Knowledge Platform on Inclusive Development Policies (INCLUDE), and the International Labour Organization (ILO) under the guidance of the [Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth](#). It's a research initiative built on a vision of a world where young women and men everywhere have greater access to decent jobs.



This initiative aims to:

8

Research projects

5

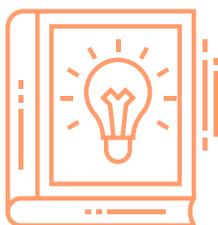
Evidence syntheses

65+

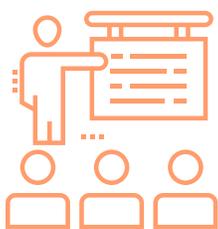
Multidisciplinary researchers

18+

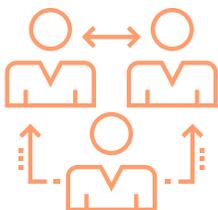
Research institutions



Generate new, rigorous evidence on how soft skills development and work-based learning may boost economic opportunities for youth.



Synthesize and share evidence about why and how best to support youth employment.



Develop a community of practice and engage youth to foster learning and policy outreach through multi-stakeholder dialogue within and between countries.

Led by IDRC, a first cohort of eight research projects is underway now in a number of sub-Saharan African countries (Benin, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda). The aim is to study the impact of various innovative approaches in order to:

- ♦ **help youth develop soft skills, and be better equipped for digital jobs, and**
- ♦ **support work-based learning programs and mentorship opportunities.**

Chosen from among 375 applications, these cutting-edge research projects have the potential to inform decisions at the national level and beyond. Their work is grounded in specific contexts that include fragile and conflict-affected states and situations, and all of them address the gender constraints that prevent young women from accessing decent work. Their results are expected to be widely relevant and to feed into discussions of youth employment across Africa.

This in-depth research will be complemented by evidence synthesis —bringing together and analysing information from a range of sources and disciplines. The synthesis will use existing knowledge about what works and what doesn't on the job market for youth in different contexts, including low-income countries outside of sub-Saharan Africa. Led by INCLUDE, the first call for evidence reviews will identify

practices and strategies (from ongoing or completed initiatives) on five topics:

1. **work-based learning schemes,**
2. **sustainable job creation,**
3. **gender barriers and constraints in the labour market,**
4. **job creation in fragile contexts, and**
5. **political economy and social networks.**

Ultimately, together with the in-depth studies, this research will provide key insights, practical guidance, and tools that policy-makers and practitioners can use to help improve employment outcomes for young men and women.

A key component of the initiative is knowledge sharing to foster cross-country learning and dialogue. Through the Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth, a group of committed partners will work together for more and better jobs for youth under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The initiative will also provide a platform to make it easy to share findings from research projects. The aim is to use partners' experiences to connect, capture and share best practices, highlight innovative approaches, and create opportunities to learn how to boost decent employment for Africa's youth.

Two  
themes

Eight  
projects

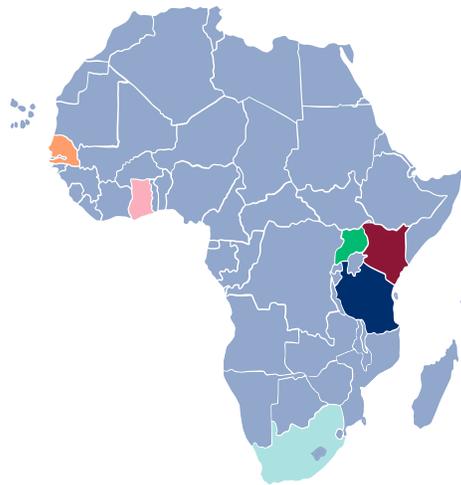
Nine  
countries



The eight innovative research projects that began in early 2019 will generate new insights into the most effective ways to help youth develop soft skills and use work-based learning to find better employment. This new body of evidence will be complemented by evidence synthesis to contribute to a wider discussion of youth employment. This will likely be the starting point for further research and outreach activities conducted with like-minded partners. This growing community of research and practice will strengthen the evidence base to inform policies and interventions that have the potential to make a real difference in young people's lives.

## Theme I

# SOFT AND DIGITAL SKILLS FOR YOUTH



Ghana



## Soft skills for sub-Saharan Africa youth: the Ghanaian context

Soft skills are critical to help youth find work and to move from poor-quality jobs to decent jobs. To guide public policy on youth employment, we need more evidence about the effectiveness of different initiatives and approaches to promoting youth employment. This project will shed light on the types of soft skills Ghanaian employers are looking for as well as on effective ways of providing them to youth nationally. It will also address underlying systemic barriers that affect program effectiveness. This evidence will play a key role in helping Ghana achieve its national goal to reduce unemployment among university graduates.

**Institution:** University of Ghana

Tanzania



## Empowering adolescent girls with improved life skills in Tanzania

BRAC’s Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents (ELA) program in Africa provides safe spaces where adolescent girls can meet and socialize close to their homes. In collaboration with experts in social and emotional learning, as well as researchers from the Gender Innovation Lab at the World Bank, this project will build on recent advances in psychology to improve ELA’s life skills modules. Working in Tanzania, the research team will test multiple versions of an expanded life skills curriculum, with each version emphasizing specific skill sets. This project seeks to gather evidence about the optimal set of soft skills to foster youth employment in Africa by experimentally modifying ELA’s program, which is already reaching 50,000 girls in four countries.

**Institutions:** BRAC, in partnership with the Gender Innovation Lab

Uganda



## Soft vs. hard skills: two long-term evaluations of youth entrepreneurship training programs in Uganda

There are strong indications that Uganda’s education systems face challenges in meeting young peoples’ needs. Youth skill development and entrepreneurship interventions led by non-governmental organizations have mushroomed throughout the country in the past decade to fill this gap, but little is known about what works and what is scalable. Drawing insights from two innovative ongoing interventions that started six years ago—Educate! and SEED (Skills for Effective Entrepreneurship Development)—this research will examine the long-term impacts of youth skills development and entrepreneurship interventions in Uganda. It will provide evidence about the best combination of soft and hard skills that should be considered to improve youth employment prospects in Uganda.

**Institutions:** Innovations for Poverty Action-Uganda, University of California, Berkeley, Educate!

Uganda



Kenya



South Africa



Senegal



## Addressing youth unemployment in Africa through skills for industries without smokestacks

Industries without smokestacks—that is, horticulture, agribusiness, tourism and some information and communication technology (ICT)-based services—have higher productivity than agriculture and can absorb larger numbers of moderately skilled workers, including those transitioning out of agriculture. If properly stewarded, these industries could provide work for many youths in Africa. This project will document the soft skills, digital skills and formal education that are needed to support the development of these industries in Kenya, South Africa, Senegal and Uganda. In each of these countries, the project will map labour force needs and suggest interventions to fill skills gaps. By ensuring that young people have the skills they need to be fully employable, the project will make a novel contribution to solving the youth employment challenge in Africa.

**Institutions:** Brookings Institution, Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis, University of Cape Town, Laboratoire d’Analyse des Politiques de Développement and Economic Policy Research Centre

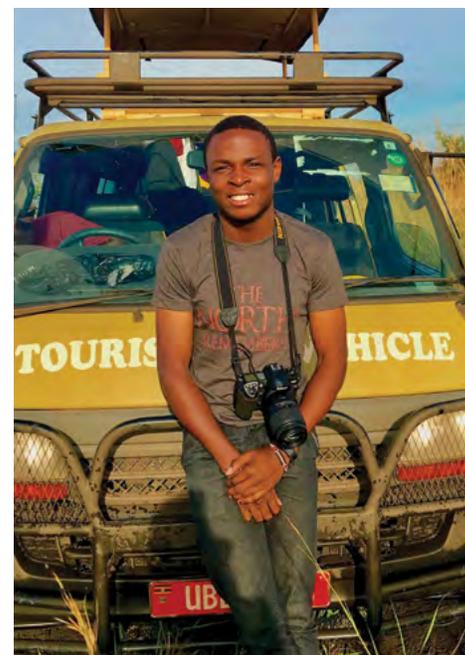
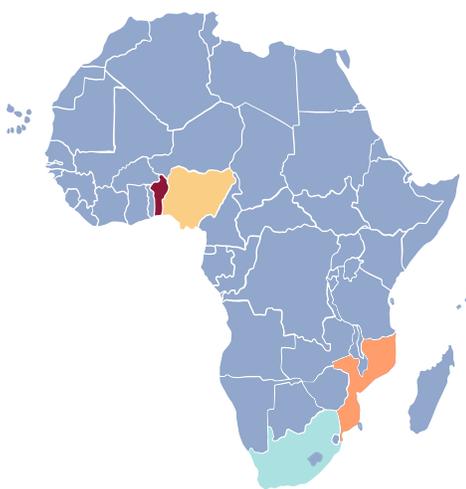


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## Theme 2

# FOSTERING WORK-BASED LEARNING PROGRAMS AND MENTORSHIP



### Nigeria



## The impact of a national apprenticeship-based entrepreneurship strategy in Nigeria

In Nigeria, every graduate under the age of 30 must complete a mandatory national service term lasting one year. This includes the Skill Acquisition & Entrepreneurship Development (SAED) program, with two training modules: a three-week compulsory entrepreneurship course and a voluntary apprenticeship that runs for the rest of the year. This apprenticeship-based initiative has the potential to close the observed gap between youth who are interested in entrepreneurship and those who actually pursue it, and to increase the supply of highly educated entrepreneurs. The main objective of this project is to evaluate the impact of the SAED intervention on entrepreneurship rates and generate evidence regarding whether the apprenticeship-based approach is leading Nigeria's youth to create more businesses.

**Institution:** Obafemi Awolowo University, National Centre for Technology Management

### Mozambique



## Connecting young, vulnerable women in Mozambique with paid work

The Mozambican economy is characterized by high levels of informality and unemployment. It is often assumed that the explosion of digital technologies has the potential to be an economic equalizer. But statistics show that young women have restricted access to digital opportunities. There are strong indications that sociocultural, political and economic barriers still prevent women from accessing technology and digital skills. Before policy recommendations can be made, we need more evidence to support actions that can bridge the gap between job seekers and market demands. This project aims to provide evidence on ways to build digital skills, soft skills and work-based learning to foster the economic inclusion of urban and young women.

**Institutions:** Associação Académica de Nutrição e Segurança Alimentar, Oxford Policy Management

### Benin



## Mentoring young agricultural graduates for decent jobs in the Benin labour market

Most of the young graduates from agricultural training institutions who enter the workforce in Benin do not find formal, decent employment. One reason for this is scarce job-related advice and guidance for youth. Mentoring can help overcome this challenge, but there is still much that we don't know about how and in what conditions mentoring can sustainably help youth transition from school to work. This project aims to assess the match between young graduates' skills and employers' needs, and learn how mentoring can help youth access decent jobs in Benin.

**Institutions:** Université d'Abomey-Calavi, DagriVest



## Tackling youth unemployment through work-based learning: experimental evidence from South Africa

The recent entrance of the Youth Employment Service (YES) into the South African employment landscape provides a unique opportunity to shed light on the impact of work-based learning interventions on employment outcomes for young participants. YES, a large-scale, public-private job creation partnership, helps first-time workers enter the labour market by providing them with 12-month internships, training and mentorship. This research team will explore different dimensions of YES' impact on the young participants, from the accumulation of skills and confidence to post-program employment and income. Researchers aim to inform YES' program design and suggest improvements to make it as effective as possible. They also hope it will yield lessons for other initiatives.

**Institutions:** University of Cape Town, I-PAL Africa



Photo by IDRC / Bartay

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# THE RESEARCH AGENDA MOVING FORWARD



Opportunities for youth will continue to evolve over the next decade as the world of work undergoes major structural changes driven by technology, climate change, globalization and demographic shifts. The future of work for youth will be closely linked to digital applications and less tied to specific locations, allowing for greater job mobility and flexibility.

But these new jobs will also require new skills sets—and whether or not youth can take advantage of the coming opportunities will depend on whether they have access to adequate training and preparation, as well as on making sure the new jobs meet their aspirations. In response, further research on how the future of work will affect youth employment will be a priority for the research initiative moving forward.

IDRC, INCLUDE and ILO will continue to invest in the tools and evidence that will allow a new generation of young people to secure meaningful and decent work, ultimately contributing to more inclusive communities for all. The research initiative focuses on generating new evidence, sharing knowledge and advocating for evidence-informed policy-making and programming.

We invite interested donors to join hands with us in those efforts. Together, we can deepen the evidence base and provide a space for meaningful dialogue and knowledge exchange. Everyone interested and involved in this topic—including youth, civil society, the media and the private sector—is invited to help develop and pilot potential solutions to the youth employment challenge in sub-Saharan Africa.



International Development Research Centre  
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