

African youth are capable entrepreneurs and we should invest in them now

Africa has the largest workforce in the world. A recent report by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) titled [2020 Policy Note on Africa: The Future of Production](#) indicated that the continent will, by 2030, be home to a capable labour force of over 1.6 billion, larger than Asia and South America.



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Yet, the continent creates very few employment opportunities: only 16 million new jobs were created between 2008 and 2016 for the continent's youth -people aged between 15-24 years, a minuscule number considering the size of the youth cohort on the continent. This means that those of the population who should be working - the majority of which are youth - is growing faster than the regional economy is able to accommodate them.

It is a well-known reality now that since the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic, [the region shed millions of jobs](#). It is against this backdrop that the recently released report by Africa's premier entrepreneurship initiative, the Anzisha Prize, labelled *Unlocking Africa's Job creators*, highlights eleven lessons recommended as pivotal to helping African youth become job creators instead of seekers. The initiative sees entrepreneurship as the key to job creation and resolving the continent's economic woes.

It highlights that entrepreneurship, supported by a policy framework designed to respond to challenges including cultural aversion - an entrenched system that favours one culture over the other based on race, weak education systems and bureaucracy, can help the continent's youth create over a million jobs by 2030. These would be jobs created by the very youngest segment of the population, contributing to overall job creation numbers.

The data contained in *Unlocking Africa's Job Creators* were collected over a 10-year period (2010 to 2020) from the time the Anzisha Prize started its work on the continent. And one important discovery made in the process of collecting this data was that young people create jobs for other young people. This is the very first lesson highlighted in the report.

Young people can start businesses from just about anywhere in Africa

According to Nhlawulo Shikwambane, programme coordinator: Very Young Entrepreneurs at the Anzisha Prize, young people from the ages of 17 are more than capable of building businesses: “We have seen many of them joining the initiative as Fellows of the Anzisha Prize between the ages of 17 and 22, building their businesses from scratch and quickly building teams of age-mates who then grow together with them.”

“Take Vanessa Ishimwe, for example. A 23-years old founder of Youth Initiative for Development in Africa (YIDA) - an organisation that trains young people in education, entrepreneurship and leadership skills - and is based in a refugee camp in Uganda. YIDA has enrolled over 800 children in early-childhood development schooling and employs 31 people, 15 of whom are youth under the age of 25”, says Nhlawulo.

She adds that this also proved that young people can start businesses from just about anywhere on the continent: “They do this from anywhere and under any circumstances. In deep rural Africa and in the cities. And having watched over 122 Fellows in our Very Young Entrepreneurs programme and learning from the additional 20 that joined in 2020, I know many of them are pioneers in their industries, relying on their own resources to propel their own growth. Imagine what would happen if everyone - policymakers, government, big business, civil organisations, investors, teachers and parents - all took united and deliberate action to support these young people.”

Young people’s inexperience is perhaps their greatest asset, the report has found. This, it posits, is because they are less likely to be discouraged from trying new solutions for fear that they will not work, and are perhaps more likely to enter an industry asking questions where others have previously relied on uninterrogated assumptions. It helps to face these challenges alongside friends, with teams quickly forming, learning and growing together.

“Young people are more permeable to new knowledge. They have not yet formed rigid ways of thinking, which makes them highly innovative and agile - very important ingredients for business success and sustainability today”, she concludes.

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