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One third of young people in Sub-Saharan Africa fail to complete primary school and lack skills for work

The tenth Education for All Global Monitoring Report, *Putting Education to Work*, reveals the urgent need to invest in skills for youth. In Sub-Saharan Africa, over 56 million people aged 15 to 24 have not even completed primary school and need alternative pathways to acquire basic skills for employment and prosperity. This is equivalent to one in three of the region's youth population. Around two-thirds of the population in Africa are under 25-years-old. In the world, an eighth of young people is unemployed; a quarter are trapped in jobs that keep them on or below the poverty line. As the effects of the global economic crisis continue to be felt, the severe lack of youth skills is more damaging than ever.

Despite significant progress in enrolling children in school in countries like Ethiopia, the Report shows that few are on track to meet the six Education for All goals set in 2000, and some are a long way behind. Over 10 million are still out of school in Nigeria. Along with the Arab States, sub-Saharan Africa has the worst rate of girls to boys in school of any region in the world.

The Report looks in depth at one of the least analysed education goals on youth skills. It shows that young people need the skills taught at primary and lower secondary school to find decent jobs.. In sub-Saharan Africa, about 30 million children are still missing out on primary school and 22 million teenagers are out of secondary school, missing out on vital skills for future employment. The number of young people out of school in the region has even increased over the past year.

There is also a learning crisis: worldwide, 250 million children of primary school age cannot read or write, whether they are in school or not. In Ghana in 2008, around one-half of young women and one-third of young men could not read a sentence even though they had spent six years in school.

“We are witnessing a young generation frustrated by the chronic mismatch between skills and work. The best answer to the economic downturn and youth unemployment is to ensure that young people acquire the basic skills and relevant training they need to enter the world of work with confidence,” said Irina Bokova, the Director General of UNESCO “Many youth, and women in particular, need to be offered alternative pathways to education, so that they gain the skills to earn a living, live in dignity and contribute to their communities and societies.”

In richer countries, a lack of investment in young people's skills has contributed to spiralling unemployment statistics, often far worse for youth than adults. In 2010 in South Africa, almost nine out of ten young people were unemployed, with worse rates for those with less than a secondary education. In poorer countries, meanwhile, those lucky enough to get work end up trapped in jobs earning poverty line wages.

Poor young populations, urban and rural, are the most in need of skills training. In urban areas, the youth population is larger than it has ever been and growing. Today, two thirds of Africa's urban population live in slums where a lack of skills can confine young people to a life of subsistence work. However, the majority of the poor and least educated live in rural areas. In Cameroon, young people living in rural areas with no schooling are two and half times more likely to be earning \$1.25 per day or less than those who have completed secondary education

Young poor African farmers struggle to make a living. The average size of 80% of African farms is less than 2 hectares. Vulnerable to climate change, many are in desperate need of even the most basic skills to protect their livelihoods. Those not in farmwork urgently need training in business and marketing to find new opportunities and reduce the obligation of migrating to cities in search of a job.

Women are the most in need of all. In eight African countries, over nine out of ten young women in rural areas have not completed lower secondary school. Without these skills, these women will have their life chances affected forever.

Investing in young peoples' skills is a smart move for countries seeking to boost their economic growth. The Report estimates that every \$1 spent on a person's education, yields US\$10-US\$15 in economic growth over that person's working lifetime. Over much of the last decade almost three-quarters of Africa's export growth came from oils and minerals, leaving countries extremely vulnerable to price changes. Diversifying its economies would help assure continued growth. To do this, Africa will need to ensure its young people have the skills that enable them to adapt flexibly to new areas of work.

In some countries in sub-Saharan Africa, traditional apprenticeships are the main type of skills training for those not formally employed. In Senegal, young people were more than 40 times more likely to be trained through this route than in formal technical and vocational schooling. These apprenticeships need to be open to all: in Ghana, the poorest and least educated have a much slimmer chance of getting an apprenticeship while in Tanzania apprenticeships are dominated by men.

Pauline Rose, director of EFA Global Monitoring Report, said: *“Education and skills for young people are the key to Africa's future development. Yet millions of young people in the region have not completed primary education, and millions more have never been to lower secondary school. These young people, especially women and the rural and urban poor, are not equipped to join the ambitions of many African countries to achieve middle income status in the coming years. First and foremost, these young people must be given another chance to learn basic skills such as reading, and skills in relevant trades. Only then can young people fulfil their potential and achieve their aspirations.”*

There is a dire need to increase funding to fix this skills deficit and find funds to dramatically scale up alternative pathways for training. This year's *Education for All Global Monitoring Report* calculates that, on top of the US\$16 billion needed annually to attain universal primary education by 2015, it would cost US\$8 billion to achieve universal lower education. Reallocating aid could help fill the funding gap. US\$3.1 billion of aid to post-secondary education never reaches the educational systems of developing countries as it is used to fund foreign students in donor countries. For the amount it costs for one Ghanaian student to study on scholarship in Japan, 72 young people could have accessed secondary education in Ghana. These funds could be better spent addressing the skills deficit for disadvantaged youth in poor countries.

Recommendations: It is time to take action to support skills development for young people.

1. 200 million young people need to be given alternative pathways to learn foundation skills.
2. All young people need quality training in relevant foundation skills at lower secondary school.
3. Upper secondary curricula should provide a balance between vocational and technical skills, including IT, and transferable skills such as confidence and communication which are indispensable for the work place.
4. Skills strategies must target the disadvantaged: particularly young women and urban and rural poor.

5. \$US8 billion is needed to ensure all young people attend lower secondary education. Governments as well as donors and the private sector must help fill the funding gap.

The 2012 edition of the Report follows the launch on 26 September of “Education First”, an initiative driven by U.N Secretary General Ban Ki-moon who stressed the importance of rallying all stakeholders to overcome the obstacles to achieving “quality, relevant and transformative education.”

“Our shared goals are simple,” said the Secretary-General on that occasion. “We want all children to attend primary school and to progress to secondary school and relevant higher education that will help them to succeed in life and live as engaged and productive global citizens.”

-ENDS-

For interviews, photos, case studies, videos, b-roll, quotes taken from focus groups with young people around the world, or to find out more about the report, please contact:

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To download the report and other relevant materials: <http://www.efareport.unesco.org>
Twitter: **#YouthSkillsWork**. A tweetchat will be taking place on October 16 to discuss the findings of the report.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

The EFA Global Monitoring Report is developed annually by an independent team and published by UNESCO.