



© G.M.B. Akash/Panos

Women in Bangladesh attend a literacy class given at a BRAC support centre





Youth skills: pathways to a better future....299

1. Provide second-chance education for those with low or no foundation skills.. 299
 2. Tackle the barriers that limit access to lower secondary school..... 300
 3. Make upper secondary education more accessible to the disadvantaged and improve its relevance to work 300
 4. Give poor urban youth access to skills training for better jobs 301
 5. Aim policies and programmes at youth in deprived rural areas..... 301
 6. Link skills training with social protection for the poorest youth..... 301
 7. Make the training needs of disadvantaged young women a high priority 302
 8. Harness the potential of technology to enhance opportunities for young people 302
 9. Improve planning by strengthening data collection and coordination of skills programmes 302
 10. Mobilize additional funding from diverse sources to meet the training needs of disadvantaged youth 303
- Conclusion..... 303

Young people need a pathway along which they can acquire the skills they need to benefit from a fulfilled life. This section identifies the ten most important steps that can improve young people's job prospects by developing their skills. They should influence national policies as well as donor and private sector financing strategies. As part of broader development efforts, they can help lift disadvantaged youth out of poverty.

Youth skills: pathways to a better future

Around one in six of the world's population are aged between 15 and 24. These young people are disproportionately concentrated in some of the poorest countries, where their numbers are still rising. Sub-Saharan Africa alone will have over three and half times more young people in 2030 than it had in 1980. Large numbers of young people equipped with appropriate skills have the potential to boost their country's prosperity. Ignoring the skills needs of disadvantaged young people not only limits their chances of achieving their potential, but also threatens to slow growth and poverty reduction.

Disadvantaged youth are often below the radar of youth employment policies and programmes, or approaches aimed at creating jobs in the private sector. Many have not been able to progress to lower secondary school and urgently need support to develop foundation skills. To give them a better chance of obtaining good jobs, they must be able to build on these foundations by acquiring the transferable skills and technical and vocational skills that are required in today's ever-changing labour market.

This Report describes policies and programmes that have been successful in meeting the skills needs of disadvantaged young people – whether engaged in the formal or informal sector in urban areas, or as smallholder farmers or rural entrepreneurs. By closing the gap between rich and poor and males and females, investment in skills development can help make societies more equitable.

Several lessons from this Report should form the backbone of national policies, as well as donor and private sector investment strategies, that can improve young people's job prospects. As part of broader development efforts, they can help lift disadvantaged youth out of poverty.

One of the most important messages is that all young people need a pathway along which they

can acquire strong foundation skills, starting from early childhood right through to lower secondary school and beyond. To help give all young people an equal chance in life, it is vital to ensure that they do not face discrimination in educational access, quality or relevance because of where they live or what their gender is. Those who have missed out on foundation skills need a second chance to acquire them. Otherwise they will be consigned to low paid, insecure work, and will not be able to benefit from the further training that can lead to better jobs.

The need to take action in support of skills development for young people has become urgent. This Report identifies the ten most important steps that should be taken. These can be tailored to fit country-specific circumstances and needs.

1 Provide second-chance education for those with low or no foundation skills

There are around 200 million 15- to 24-year-olds in low and middle income countries who have missed out on completing primary school. Governments need to offer them second-chance education to provide at least the basic literacy and numeracy skills they need to get back on track and escape the cycle of low paid or unpaid work that can trap them in poverty.

As well as helping young people acquire foundation skills needed for work, second-chance programmes that also include practical skills for particular trades can boost their self-confidence. Having such skills gives them more control over work and livelihood choices.

Providing second-chance education to the large number of young people who need it requires well-coordinated and adequately funded programmes on a much greater scale. With the support of donor organizations, governments should make this a policy priority, including it in education sector strategic plans

Recommendations

that sets targets to reduce significantly the large number of young people without foundation skills. Budgetary allocations based on the number of disadvantaged youth requiring a second-chance education should be identified and included in the national budget forecast.

2 Tackle the barriers that limit access to lower secondary school

It is vital that young people get the chance to attend lower secondary school to consolidate their foundation skills. Alarming, around one in three of youth in low and middle income countries do not get to this level. Most of those not in lower secondary school live in rural areas or poor urban informal settlements, and a disproportionate number are young women. Large numbers do not even make it through primary school. Those who do stay in school often receive education of poor quality and relevance. Without the foundation skills that primary and lower secondary school should offer, their chances of finding secure and decently paid work are severely limited.

A global target should be set to ensure all young people benefit from lower secondary school, with the aim of achieving universal lower secondary education of acceptable quality by 2030. Long-term education plans should identify strategies and financial resources required to meet this goal.

Countries with large numbers of young people who lack access to lower secondary school need to start by tackling the barriers that exclude many disadvantaged children and adolescents from participating and progressing in education. Key measures that can improve access to lower secondary school include abolishing school fees and providing targeted financial support, linking lower secondary to primary schools, ensuring that there are enough government school places and assuring accessibility in rural areas. In addition, strategies are needed that address the cultural barriers that young women often face.

Even in countries where access is not a major problem, providing a common core curriculum is a vital way of equipping all young people with foundation skills.

3 Make upper secondary education more accessible to the disadvantaged and improve its relevance to work

Upper secondary education offers young people opportunities to develop skills that will put them in a strong position to obtain good jobs. In the developing world, however, making the transition to upper secondary school remains difficult, while some rich countries are still struggling to make upper secondary near universal. To address these shortcomings, action is urgent in three key areas.

First, upper secondary education has to strike a balance between technical and vocational and general subjects by providing flexibility in subject choices and links with the workplace. Offering students short work placements as part of the curriculum and enhancing the relevance of what they learn in school in relation to the world of work can make them better candidates for good jobs. It is important for all students, irrespective of their gender or where they live, to have this opportunity. All students should also receive career guidance that emphasizes the skills requirements of a wide range of jobs in the formal and informal sectors, helping them choose school subjects that are relevant to these jobs.

Second, secondary school curriculum reforms should focus much more on developing in learners the capacity to solve problems and to apply knowledge creatively in ways that are relevant to many different job contexts. In addition, curriculum innovations are needed to tap into the potential of information and communication technology (ICT) to help learners develop the skills required in a labour market that is increasingly dependent on technology. More emphasis should be placed on its practical use in the workplace.

Third, flexible opportunities should be offered to students who are at risk of dropping out of secondary education. Distance education centres can be set up to cater for the learning needs of disadvantaged youth. Appropriate recognition should be given to skills gained through such alternative learning pathways.

4 Give poor urban youth access to skills training for better jobs

National policies and development strategies need to provide a clearer indication of how the skills needs of young people living in urban poverty will be met and funded. Many of these young people lack foundation skills, are thus trapped in low paid and insecure informal sector work, and are often invisible in national strategies. By supporting skills development in this sector, governments can harness the potential of the part of the economy that is most likely to absorb the large numbers of young people in developing countries.

Traditional apprenticeships are an important way of acquiring transferable and job-specific skills. Attention must be paid to how they are delivered in order to avoid exploitation and improve accessibility, especially for young women. Public interventions building on traditional apprenticeship systems should strengthen training by master craftspeople, improve working conditions of apprentices and ensure that skills can be certified through national qualification frameworks. As well as enhancing the legitimacy of traditional apprenticeships, such measures will ensure that they meet business and industry standards, and improve apprentices' access to a wider range of better-paid jobs.

Governments should improve national data collection on the informal sector, and work with associations and cooperatives in the sector to target urban youth as one way of improving their access to training and jobs. Micro- and small enterprises and their umbrella organizations will require considerable outside support and guidance to help them provide training. But producing labour market information about jobs is only half the challenge – it must also be distributed through youth-friendly community associations. Such services should provide information about where good jobs can be found, the skills needed to obtain them, and the likely earnings.

Policies and strategies should provide skills training, but must not stop there. They should also include job placement or careers advice services, in close association with local employers, to ease the search for gainful employment or

entrepreneurial opportunities. Providing young people with access to funds to start up businesses, as well as other forms of support in the early stages, can help them use their skills successfully.

5 Aim policies and programmes at youth in deprived rural areas

Around 70% of the world's 1.4 billion people living in extreme poverty are in rural areas, many of them involved in smallholder farming. Greater attention should be given to their skills needs. Once young people in this situation have been given a second chance to acquire foundation skills, training in agricultural techniques can help enhance their productivity. Farmer field schools and training via cooperatives, which are attuned to the local needs of farmers, are particularly successful. Since many rural youth also work off the farm, training in entrepreneurship and financial management can widen their opportunities, especially where farmland is becoming scarce.

Enhancing smallholders' access to inputs and technology for more productive and sustainable agricultural practices must be accompanied by training in how to adapt to new practices. If young people already have foundation skills, such training can not only improve farm output but also make work in rural areas more attractive, and so help curtail the flow of young people to urban areas. Youth living in rural areas, who are particularly disadvantaged by a lack of access to land, financial assets and educational opportunities, need an integrated package of support that includes training in entrepreneurial and business skills to enable them to expand their livelihood options through non-farm work.

6 Link skills training with social protection for the poorest youth

Skills training alone is unlikely to be sufficient for the most disadvantaged of the urban and rural poor, including those involved in subsistence activities, such as street vendors, waste-pickers, smallholders and home-based workers. Some need legal protection from harassment and entitlement to skills training to enhance the profitability of their small businesses.

Recommendations

Many low and lower middle income countries offer support to the most vulnerable via microfinance or social protection programmes that provide access to productive and financial assets. Combining such assets with training in basic literacy and numeracy as well as livelihood skills can help counter the multiple forms of disadvantage that lock youth into poverty. By providing the skills needed to use the assets effectively, the programmes can help boost productivity and income, ensuring that the impact of the programmes is long-term and transformative.

7 Make the training needs of disadvantaged young women a high priority

The training needs of young women are particularly neglected. In many regions of the world, young women work for long hours in household and informal labour that is seldom visible to policy-makers. Women carry a heavy workload and face discrimination in education and labour markets, especially in rural areas, where their mobility is often highly restricted. More should be done to help young women make productive use of their skills by giving them access to credit and assets.

Targeted programmes that address the multiple causes of this disadvantage have proved effective. Providing young women with microfinance and livelihood assets, together with the skills needed to make the most out of these assets, gives them greater control over their own resources in ways that benefit them and their families. Successful programmes take into account the restrictions that young women can face in particular settings.

8 Harness the potential of technology to enhance opportunities for young people

Young people need to develop ICT skills to ensure that they can participate fully in an increasingly knowledge-based economy. ICTs can also be used to bring skills training to a larger number of youth. Even basic technology such as radio can play an important role in skills training, particularly for those in remote rural areas. Such methods should be exploited further to enhance training opportunities for young people.

The spread of mobile phones has huge potential for improving livelihood opportunities for young people. Skills programmes, especially in rural contexts, should include training in how mobile phone and similar technologies can be used to access information and financial services that can increase productivity and earnings. This will enhance opportunities for small businesses, especially in rural areas, to grow and reach larger markets.

9 Improve planning by strengthening data collection and coordination of skills programmes

Many training programmes are not sufficiently integrated with national development strategies. Government leadership is important in coordinating the diverse range of skills training and associated programmes to ensure that they reflect national priorities targeting the most disadvantaged youth. Doing so will reduce fragmentation and duplication of effort, and assure equitable access.

More and better quality data are needed to enable national governments and the international community to monitor access to skills development programmes, and so plan more effectively. For reporting to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, better information on lower and upper secondary education is needed. This should include more data on dropout and completion and on subjects taken, such as details on academic as well as technical and vocational areas, enabling analysis of choice of subject by gender.

Better data are also needed on skills development programmes beyond the formal school system, including second-chance programmes and traditional apprenticeships, for example, linking this with labour market information. Given its expertise in this area, the International Labour Organization could take on responsibility for gathering and disseminating such data from national governments. The international community should also build on recent developments to measure a range of youth and adult skills more systematically.

Involving young people in planning, especially those facing disadvantages, can help to

identify constraints and appropriate solutions. Governments also need to collaborate more closely with businesses and trade unions so that skills training efforts are more relevant to the workplace, including through the development of national qualifications frameworks. At the same time, businesses should support skills development by expanding access to enterprise-based training, which can improve productivity by increasing their pool of skilled labour.

10 Mobilize additional funding from diverse sources to meet the training needs of disadvantaged youth

There is an urgent need for more resources to ensure that all young people have a good foundation in education, extending at least until lower secondary school. Additional funds are needed to support second-chance opportunities on a much larger scale for those who have missed out. In poor countries, where government budgets are already overstretched, many young people will simply not be reached without additional funding dedicated to ensuring that they have foundation skills. It is therefore essential to mobilize additional funding for this purpose, not only from aid donors but also from the private sector, which ultimately is the main beneficiary of a better-trained workforce.

Ensuring that all youth are enrolled in lower secondary school would cost US\$8 billion, over and above the US\$16 billion needed to attain universal basic education by 2015. Extending second-chance opportunities to the one in five 15- to 24-year-olds in low and middle income countries who have not completed primary school would raise this figure considerably. Resources are finite and some aid donors are already providing significant support to disadvantaged young people. But donors could do far more. The same donors that champion skills development are often those that spend large amounts of their aid to pay for students from developing countries to study in the donor countries. Reallocating some of these funds could support skills development programmes for disadvantaged young people living in developing countries.

If invested directly in developing countries' education systems, the US\$3.1 billion of aid spent on scholarships and imputed student

costs in donor countries could contribute significantly to the US\$8 billion needed for lower secondary schooling and to providing second-chance opportunities for around 200 million young people who lack even the most basic skills.

Aid donors offering skills development programmes also need to work more closely with governments and the private sector, coordinating their funds to ensure that the training offered has direct links to the labour market. Training funds are one approach that has been used with some success in reaching disadvantaged youth, including those in the informal sector. They offer the potential both of raising additional funds from diverse sources, including through payroll taxes and levies, and of improving coordination among governments, enterprises, donors and other interested parties. To be successful, however, they need effective management and broad representation from the business sector, youth, and other groups to ensure that funds are allocated according to demand and delivered on schedule.

The private sector could also extend its support to skills development programmes for disadvantaged young people through its foundations. Some have already shown innovation in this area, but their funding needs to be available on a much larger scale, and more closely coordinated with national priorities.

Conclusion

All countries, regardless of income level, need to pay greater attention to the needs of young people who face disadvantage in education and skills development by virtue of their poverty, gender or other characteristics. The precise nature and extent of these needs vary according to where young people live, but the response should address a common set of issues. The ten steps outlined here, based on evidence of policies, programmes and strategies that have been successful in many countries, can inform the choices that governments, donors and the private sector make in addressing the skills needs of disadvantaged youth.