

# EMPLOYMENT GENERATION IN AFRICA

— Learning From Good Practices



Ghana



Benin



Rwanda



Ethiopia



Madagascar



South Africa

## OVERVIEW PAPER

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**EMPLOYMENT GENERATION IN AFRICA - LEARNING FROM GOOD PRACTICES**

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## FOREWORD

Sub-Saharan Africa has a large, mainly youth population estimated to reach 2.2 billion people by 2050. A key challenge is how to create enough, and at the same time, decent jobs for a young and growing population. Lasting employment generation is the prerequisite for a peaceful, sustainable and future-oriented transformation of economies and societies and a key strategy to fight poverty.

African governments are still grappling with the right policy mix to resolve this developmental challenge. Many governments have churned out policies to create the employment needed for sustainable growth in Africa. However, they often meet structural problems and institutional challenges, are blind to the gender dimension of employment and do not seem to fit into the industrialization agenda on the continent. Taking stock of these policies across six African countries, the project on "Employment Generation in Africa – Learning from Good Practices" (coordinated by the Economic Policy Competence Centre of Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Ghana Office) has revealed a complicated mix of reasons why some policies are not contributing to employment creation and how alternative approaches could look like. There is also a call to tailor Africa's economic transformation to challenges such as the climate crisis.

This publication is an overview of the six-country studies (Ghana, Rwanda, Benin, South Africa, Ethiopia and Madagascar). It exposes readers to the drivers of employment, the challenges to the employment generation prospects, the role of governments in this endeavour, recommendations and progressive approaches to employment creation in Africa. The publication should contribute to the conversation on how to create enough and at the same time decent jobs in Africa.

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## ABSTRACT

The economic growth record of sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) in the past two decades has been generally impressive but it is accompanied with jobless growth as unemployment and underemployment remain key challenges. As a result, employment creation policies, interventions, and strategies have been developed in the last decade to create sustainable and quality jobs. The outcomes of such policies and interventions have been mixed thereby providing the basis to take stock of the policy landscape to document key challenges, good practices, and recommendations for employment creation. This paper takes a qualitative methodological approach by reviewing country studies commissioned by the Economic Policy Competence Centre of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Ghana Office to summarise the key points. The paper reveals that employment policies in SSA face key challenges such as weak institutional framework; inadequate skill set; absence of robust data management and monitoring and evaluation systems; and inadequate fiscal space for industrial and employment policies thus preventing such policies from making impactful gains. Good practices for employment generation are identified as presence of well-planned exit strategy for policy interventions; stakeholder engagement in policy formulation or social dialogues with strong involvement of trade unions; legal backing for decent employment policies and interventions; and the establishment of a central coordinating body for employment creation, among others. The paper makes recommendations for employment creation in SSA including reform of education and training; reform of macroeconomic policies to enhance job-inducing growth including boosting aggregate demand, and employment subsidies and/or employment tax cuts; enhancing the competitiveness and productivity of the private and informal sectors; effective targeted actions for vulnerable groups; and structural transformation. Finally, the paper identifies key elements for progressive approach to employment generation in SSA as governments supervising the market while supporting and providing a conducive environment for private sector to thrive and drive the employment agenda; governments emphasising and carefully planning transition to green jobs; governments striving to strike effective employment dialogue, stakeholder participation and inclusiveness from the creation of policies to monitoring and evaluation; political transformation to drive transformational agenda; recognising the urgent need for targeting in employment policy design and implementation; and embracing a regional approach to the employment problem solving.

## 1.0 OVERVIEW OF EMPLOYMENT SITUATION IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

### 1.1 Context and Questions

The economic growth record of sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) in the past two decades has been generally impressive, even though the economies begun to falter by 2014 principally due to global economic slowdown and the commodities' price slump between 2014 and 2017 and further exacerbated by rising debts to the point of risk of default from 2020 due partly to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>1</sup> Following the development history of other regions of the world, the impressive growth record was supposed to lead the process of eradicating key development challenges. However, that has not been the case. Despite significant reduction in poverty and inequality, at least up to 2014, employment across the sub-region has failed to keep up, as unemployment and underemployment still ravage significant number of people, especially sub-groups such as women, youth, and other vulnerable groups. Indeed, this situation is now made worst by the current debt crises in developing countries as already noted.

An introspection of the employment challenge across SSA reveals a two-fold challenge: creating enough job opportunities (i.e., supply of jobs) to match up with the number of people seeking jobs (i.e., demand for jobs), and deliberately ensuring that new job opportunities and existing ones meet the standards of decent jobs. As simple as this twin challenge may sound, it has been the bane of employment creation in SSA. Governments have realised that creating sufficient and decent employment opportunities for people to enter the labour market is the way out of the challenge. Therefore, governments across the region have developed employment creation policies, interventions, and strategies in the last decade to create sustainable and quality jobs. But these policies have not yielded the needed results.

The employment policy landscape in SSA basically reflects several realities including: (i) ambitious policies lacking in implementation; and (ii) policies that have been implemented but with only modest impact on employment. The mixed outcomes of these policies provide the basis to take stock of the policy landscape to document what has worked and why, and those that have not worked and the reasons for their failure. This examination is key if the interest and fight against unemployment and underemployment are to be sustained. In addition, this kind of examination provides insights to retool policies that can provide the desired outcomes, as well as equip stakeholders and lobbyist to engage policymakers. Specifically, this paper takes stock of the key problems associated with employment generation in SSA; the good practices that promote employment generation in Africa; the recommendations for employment generation in Africa; and a progressive approach towards employment generation in Africa.

The paper takes a qualitative methodological approach by reviewing country studies commissioned by the Economic

Policy Competence Centre of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Ghana Office to summarise the key points. The paper is structured into four other sections immediately following the overview section. The next major section presents the key employment generation challenges; it is followed by the section that distils the good practices for employment generation; the penultimate section provides broad-based recommendations to boost employment generation; and the final section presents the key progressive issues for employment generation.

### 1.2 Current Employment Situation in Sub-Saharan Africa

Generally, the employment landscape in SSA shows that employment has been increasing in the last decade (from 321,662,928 people in 2012 to 402,804,490 people in 2021). Thus, the number of people finding jobs in the last decade is much more relative to previous decades. Despite the steady increase in employment, unemployment has also been increasing in the last decade, reaching an average of 6.1% and a current rate of 7.3% in 2021 (i.e., 1.8 percentage point increase from the 2012 rate of 5.5%). One explanation for this paradox is found in the employment-to-labour force ratio, which has been consistently falling in the last decade (reaching 92.7% in 2021 from 94.5% in 2012). Present reported unemployment rates in Benin, Ethiopia, Ghana, Madagascar, and South Africa are respectively 2.5%, 8.0%, 4.5%, 4.2%, and 34.4%. Apart from the unemployment rate in South Africa that is in double figures, the rates in the other countries and the SSA average paint a picture that unemployment is within manageable range, and thus not a serious challenge that should warrant so much attention. A conclusion of this sort is hasty and flippant in the light of two key issues.

First, the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) earlier definition of unemployment based on which these statistics are computed remains a challenge and unable to appropriately measure the practical situation in SSA. Indeed, Baah-Boateng (2013) questioned the assessment of unemployment using the then ILO's definition. The ILO defined the unemployed population to consist of all persons (15 years and older) who are available for work and actively seeking for a job during a reference period.<sup>2</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that Aryeetey et al. (2021) observed that unemployment statistics downplay the enormity of the problem. This implies that if the requirement of "available and actively looking for work" is relaxed, these unemployment rates would increase, because, in many developing economies, work opportunities are limited, and potential workers may well give up after unsuccessful periods of looking for work. While the definition and measurement of unemployment remains a challenge and hides the real situation in SSA, getting the measurement right does not still solve the problem because of the second key issue.

Second, the decency<sup>3</sup> of work is unaccounted for in the measurement of unemployment in SSA. When the unemployment discourse shifts from just working to working in decent jobs, the entire narrative changes. For example, while Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) reports unemployment rate of

<sup>1</sup> <https://adamtooze.substack.com/p/finance-and-the-polycrisis-6-africas> (posted on December 19, 2022).

<sup>2</sup>We note that the ILO has since updated the definition of an unemployed person as a person aged 15 or over without a job during a given week, available to start a job within the next two weeks, and actively having sought employment at some time during the last four weeks or having already found a job that starts within the next three months. However, this still does not completely resolve the two difficulties discussed subsequently.

<sup>3</sup>The ILO defines decent work as "productive work for women and men in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity". The main components of decent work are thus secure employment, fair wages/incomes, safe working conditions, social protection for workers and their families, social dialogue, labour rights, standards, and prospects for personal development and equal opportunities and treatment for all.

8.4%, time-related underemployment is reported at 21.4%. Indeed, a combined rate of time-related underemployment and unemployment is higher, at 24.2%. Benin's 2.5% unemployment rate quickly accelerates to an underemployment rate of 17.6%. In Madagascar, the time-related underemployment rate is reported at 9.8%, while job mismatch underemployment is 82.4%. These statistics imply that relative to the labour force, more people are working but among those working, more are working in indecent jobs. For the whole of SSA, time-related underemployment has been rising steadily in the last decade, reaching 17.0% in 2019. Therefore, the low unemployment statistics across SSA focus on the quantity of employment rather than its quality. Other indicators of decent jobs also paint a grim picture. Only 14.8% of employed people were covered in the event of work injury and only 19.8% people above retirement age were receiving a pension in 2020. Trade union density rate is low, with rates of 9.4%, 16.8%, 7.2% and 29.1% respectively in Ethiopia, Ghana, Madagascar, and South Africa in 2019. ILO data further indicates declining but high levels of vulnerable employment (at 67.6% in 2019) and working poverty (at 33.1% in 2021), as well as low levels of compliance with labour rights. Collective bargaining coverage rate is also low.

Another major trend in employment discourse is structural disparities in employment and unemployment statistics. Employment, unemployment, underemployment, employment-to-population ratio, and labour force participation rate, among others, across gender and age suggest prevailing structural inequalities in SSA. Data on these employment statistics show that women are consistently behind their male counterparts (e.g., unemployment rate of 7.6% for women versus 7.1% for men in 2021; time-related underemployment rate of 17.6% for women versus 15.6% for men in 2019). In fact, the statistics where women have higher rates are those where the ideal situation is to have lower rates. For example, females have an average vulnerable employment rate of 75.7% relative to 62.9% for males across SSA in the last decade. These inequalities across the various employment statistics also exist between the young and the old. For example, the case of youth unemployment rate in Ghana has been consistently about twice that of the older population over the years.

Informality in employment is the key trend. Most people in SSA are employed in the informal sector. This is one of the main reasons indecent jobs remain a serious challenge. With the literature attributing most indecent jobs to the informal sector, SSA still has majority of workers in that sector (e.g., 96.9% in Benin in 2018, 40.4% in South Africa in 2018, 78.1% in Ghana in 2015 and 95.2% in Madagascar in 2015). Further, low level employability is a common issue in employment in SSA. Thus, while many people complete various training programmes and are expected to find decent jobs, the job market is unable to absorb a chunk because most are regarded as unemployable.

## 2.0 KEY CHALLENGES FOR EMPLOYMENT GENERATION IN AFRICA

The policy environment for employment creation in Africa broadly shows that there are good policies and interventions for employment creation. However, unemployment is still a

menace because of key challenges that permeate the policy and economic spaces of African countries. Inasmuch as there are country-specific challenges, the evidence on key common challenges is overwhelming. These common challenges that constrain efforts at making massive gains at employment generation are outlined below.

### Weak institutional framework for employment creation

Sub-Saharan African countries have institutions and systems that oversee employment issues. These institutions are tasked with the primary mandate of employment policy creation, implementation, and coordination of employment interventions/programmes across sectoral institutions and agencies. These institutions are weak in their functions, generally manifesting in the following ways:

- **Misdiagnosis of employment issues:** In SSA countries, market-driven and supply-side employment interventions have been heavily implemented, imposing a problematic belief that the core problem lies with the job seeker. The fact that these interventions have not yielded the desired impacts points to misdiagnosis of the question of employment. In South Africa, for example, supply-side interventions (including tackling unemployment through microeconomic intervention, increasing skills, and lowering wage costs), have been proven to be ineffective, as they fail to lead to job creation and ultimately reduce unemployment.
- **Internal inconsistencies:** Various policy actions run inconsistent with others within the same policy framework. For example, in identifying challenges that hamper effective service delivery in Ghana, the National Employment Policy (NEP) comes up with a list including unsustainable public sector wage bill, and relatively low public sector wages and salaries. These two factors run counter and could not be present at the same time. Even worse still, the same NEP then aims at, among other things, increasing employment including those in the public sector. Not only are inconsistencies found in policies, but also in employment interventions/programmes. Employment challenges are not only ubiquitous but also crosscutting. In attempts to size up to this specific character of the challenges, varying and dispersed interventions are created by employment institutions. Evidence from Benin indicates that the multiplicity of employment structures is hardly an asset for promoting employment, as it is characterised by a dispersion of interventions and a lack of consistency in actions.
- **Inefficiency in institutional operations:** Lags between the launch of employment policies and the preparation of policy implementation documents is a key challenge. In Madagascar, for example, the National Statistics Council – an institution key in monitoring employment statistics – has been cited to have been delayed due to the absence of a decree specifying its organisational and operational rules.
- **Fragmented policies/interventions:** There are fragmented policies on employment being administered across sectors in the economy without any efforts at harmonising and coordinating these policies. In Ghana, an attempt at resolving this was the proposal for the formation of the National Employment Coordinating Council (NECC) as part of the NEP. However, this part of the policy is yet to be functional after nearly six years of implementation.

## Skill set challenges

Training that provides people with the requisite skills to engage in the labour market is a key challenge in Africa. Training-related ineffectiveness and inefficiencies that continue to hamper employment generation include the following:

- **Mismatch between educational training and industrial requirements:** Training of people in higher educational institutions who can seamlessly fit into industry is a mirage in Africa in recent times. While academic training equips people with degrees and qualifications, these are generally unusable by industry. This mismatch is primarily caused by the differences in the pace between industrial demands and academic innovation. While industry is extremely dynamic, academic institutions are conservative in altering programmes that keep pace with industrial needs. Evidence from Benin indicates that university training offers are not defined in a consensual framework with entrepreneurs while considering the dynamics of the labour market. It is also noted in Ethiopia of a poor education-industry linkage prompting a weak response by the education system to skill demand and the weakness of apprenticeship and internship systems.

- **Lack of comprehensive training programmes:** Evidence shows that training programmes are not all-rounded to deliver the desired level of impact. For example, training programmes in Ghana are skewed towards skills development, apprenticeship, and entrepreneurship, to the neglect of other equally important areas such as marketing and value chain management.

- **Limited practicality in technical and vocational training programmes:** Inadequate practical exposure of technical and vocational training programmes makes these programmes ineffective, and they coalesce to more theoretical academic programmes. In Ethiopia, it is observed that TVET trainees spend limited time to grasp fundamental practical content in enterprises, coupled with limited exposure to mentoring and coaching. Also, in South Africa, training programmes have been found to be too simplistic and inadequate for trainees to start their own businesses.

## Lack of robust data management, and monitoring and evaluation systems

Employment policies and respective interventions/programmes are well documented across SSA. However, proceeding from these policies and interventions to how much impact they have made in employment generation has always been masked in controversy. The twin problem of data, and monitoring and evaluation systems are outlined below:

- **Inadequate data:** Existence of detailed and comprehensive labour market data has always been a challenge in SSA. Indeed, the lack of readily available data on jobs created is as troubling as the challenge of unemployment itself. Employment has not been valued in similar fashion as other macroeconomic indicators (e.g., inflation, GDP, and exchange rate). While unemployment is equally as important – if not more important – as other macroeconomic indicators, the

attention it receives begs the question whether it is really a problem. For example, inflation data are collected and published periodically, so are economic growth and exchange rate. However, employment and unemployment data are not so periodic, giving rise to estimates.<sup>4</sup>

For instance, the labour force survey is not conducted annually. How do we solve a problem we do not have adequate and timely data on? Without adequate data, how can countries monitor progress on the implementation of employment policies? How many jobs have been created through the implementation of various employment policies? What is the specific nature of the jobs created and what are the socioeconomic and gender dynamics of the jobs created? Evidence from Benin shows that despite the statistical progress of the last decade, the lack of appropriate data hinders the analysis of the important problems affecting employment and the monitoring of the implementation of policies.

- **Inadequate monitoring and evaluation systems:** Most employment interventions do not have robust monitoring and evaluation systems. Evidence in Ghana shows that out of 15 different youth employment programmes evaluated, only two had conducted tracer studies (Dadzie & Fumey, 2020). In Ethiopia, tracer studies conducted at the college/university level are not only weak but also do not lead to curriculum or programme changes. Further, labour market information system lacks the capacity to inform policy. Moreover, there is lack of clear indicators to provide the basis for impact evaluation of interventions as emphasised by Dadzie et al. (2020).

- **Lack of well-structured exit strategy:** Either most intervention programmes lack structured exit strategies or where they exist, they are not well implemented (Dadzie & Fumey, 2020). As a result, aftercare support services are either lacking or weak. In such cases, post-training engagements tend not to be very beneficial to consolidating or advancing the skills learnt while in training.

## Inadequate funding, infrastructural, and technical requirements

An impactful implementation of policies and interventions require adequate resources. However, this requirement is often elusive in the implementation of policies in SSA. At the macro-level, employment policies and interventions are formulated and rolled out without due regard to funding, infrastructural, and technical requirements.<sup>5</sup> Implementation commences and soon serious challenges come up leading to abandonment or sloppy implementation. In most cases, the financing of policies and programmes is not subject to a law and remains dependent on the vagaries of national budget allocation. In Madagascar, it is reported that lack of funding or delay in disbursement has led to the failures or faltering in sound employment policies. A host of other policy actions could not even kickstart due to financing problems. At the micro-level, the evidence points to the fact that beneficiaries of employment interventions/programmes aimed at entrepreneurship are usually starved of funds to help kickstart their own establishments. Evidence from Benin indicates a nepotistic distribution of start-up funds for entrepreneurs.

<sup>4</sup> Due also to the nature of African labour markets with many activities in the informalsector making it difficult to obtain accurate data.

<sup>5</sup> This is partly explained by the fact that in most cases politicians make campaign promises at election times that they struggle to implement when they win power due to the financial commitment involved.



## Changes in political preferences

Changes in political preferences tend to interfere with targeting and goals of programmes (Dadzie & Fumey, 2020). In Ghana, for example, the National Youth Employment Programme (NYEP) was converted to Ghana Youth Employment and Entrepreneurial Development Agency (GYEEDA) when there was a change of government with slightly different focus and then again to Youth Employment Agency (YEA), also with a change in political leadership. Frequent changes of officials or organisation at the level of ministerial departments have also been observed in Madagascar.

## Poor performance in creating a competitive private sector

Despite much rhetoric of positioning the private sector as the engine of growth in SSA, it is still struggling to achieve this or making the private sector to be the biggest employer. The level of engagement of the private sector in policy creation processes and implementation is limited. Private sector enterprises across SSA are generally plagued with poor support systems, financial constraints, poor interfirm linkages, among other crippling constraints.

## Proliferation of indecent and low wage employment

Even though employment policies in SSA aim at promoting the creation of decent and sustainable jobs, many jobs created by these policies and interventions are indecent in various respects. In South Africa, evidence points to the fact that employment opportunities created tend to require low-skilled labour, failing to transition employment away from “second economy” (marked by casual, informal employment) to a “first economy” (marked by higher skill-requiring, formal employment). In Ethiopia, it is noted that the creation of decent employment has received less attention. It appears governments have been forced to create more jobs than sustainable and quality jobs. Undoubtedly, the creation of indecent jobs manifests in low wages, and low employment security and stability.

## Insufficient mechanisms to support the vulnerable

SSA is still struggling to implement policies that will transform the employment landscape of those described as vulnerable. Women, people with poor educational qualifications and differently abled people are still disproportionately into vulnerable employment. Despite the presence of policies and regulations that help increase women’s equitable participation and safeguard occupational safety, their practical implementation and enforcement is still limited due to challenges such as limited gender support structures and institutionalisation.

## Jobless growth

SSA is undoubtedly growing but with that growth contributing marginally to employment creation. This is what is popularly termed ‘jobless growth’. Indeed, the evidence of jobless growth is profound. The literature shows that the growth trajectory led by the services (characterised by low productivity, informal and precarious jobs, and limited orientation for exports) and exploitation of natural resources (oil and other minerals) account for this problem.

## 3.0 GOOD PRACTICES FOR EMPLOYMENT CREATION IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Good practices for employment generation are generally workable and impactful approaches that lead to the sustainable creation of decent jobs that meet the needs of people on one hand, while significantly reducing the menace of unemployment. It is acknowledged that while no single policy or intervention can completely eradicate unemployment, there need to be those that can be celebrated because of their utmost impact in bending the unemployment curve. Thus, an employment creation initiative can be described as successful if it provides decent jobs to a significant number of unemployed people.

### Well-planned exit strategy for policy interventions

Employment creation policies or interventions cannot be implemented in perpetuity. There would always be an inception period and a disengagement period. The most important question in the light of this is, what happens to the beneficiaries of the policy interventions after these interventions run their full course? Impactful policy interventions embody well-planned exit strategy at the onset, that clearly outlines sustainable transition from lower states of employment to higher ones. Business-as-usual interventions where beneficiaries coil back to their previous jobless states waiting for the implementation of another intervention has exerted incalculable cost in SSA in its quest to create employment. In Ghana, the ‘Community Teacher Assistants’ and the ‘Youth in Health Extension’ modules of the National Youth Employment Programme (NYEP) provided exit platforms where some beneficiaries, especially those on paid internships, respectively transitioned into the mainstream teaching and health assistants’ professions after a minimum of two years on those modules. Even that, those who successfully transitioned into sustainable careers constituted just about 10 percent of the first batch of 92,075 beneficiaries who enrolled on the programme (Coulombe et al., 2012; Gyampo, 2012), indicating the issue of functional and workable exit strategy must be given serious attention in SSA.

### Stakeholder engagement

The identification and engagement of all stakeholders at all levels of employment policy formulation, implementation and evaluation is an asset. Policies crafted through a wide consultative process ensures that the views and interests of all the stakeholders are adequately captured. Differing interests promote dialogues and provide opportunities to build consensus and synchronise these views into common themes that each stakeholder would be satisfied with. Thus, dialogues promote ownership of a defined programme of action, an important characteristic that stimulates policy buy-in by all stakeholders. Also, dialogue promotes representation and democratisation of employment issues. Stakeholder engagement has been a key factor in the development of employment policies in SSA. For example, in Benin, the development of the Holistic Social Protection Policy (PHPS) benefited from consultations of all stakeholders. Also, the National Employment Commission (CNE) is composed of all stakeholders. In Madagascar, stakeholder engagement in the development of the National Employment and Vocational

Training Policy (PNEFP) was touted as an ‘undeniable asset’ to the extent that the policy has been regarded as the best developed policy of the last decade. Further, in Ghana the development of the National Employment Policy (NEP) benefitted from consultative engagements with all relevant stakeholders. Trade unions are an important stakeholder in employment issues, and they have an important role to play in employment generation. Their inputs in the policy cycle (ILO, 2015a) are relevant, especially in promoting the interests of workers and ensuring industrial harmony. The labour market in SSA still shows semblances of employers and governments wielding so much power over workers. Active and efficient trade unions can provide a solution to this through stimulating the concept of solidarity among workers, that provides them with the freedom to exploit their social and economic rights. A good practice thus is to ensure that governments’ actions are geared toward providing an enabling environment for the effective organisation and operation of democratic and independent trade unions in all spheres of work.

### Legal backing for impactful employment policies and interventions

Necessary legal backing for impactful employment interventions is an essential good practice for employment creation. Such interventions not only become difficult, if not impossible, to discontinue after a change in government, but they also make it incumbent for governments to provide appropriate budgetary allocation (Ampadu-Ameyaw et al., 2020). For example, in South Africa, the parental leave law came into force in 2020, which allow all parents to take ten days of leave when their children are born. There are also recent and ongoing revisions of legal frameworks for employment generation across SSA. For example, Madagascar’s National Employment Support Program (PNSE) has a special focus on improving the legal and institutional framework for employment.

### Wide coverage with diverse modules

A policy intervention has good practice if it has wide coverage and has diverse training modules. Employment challenges in SSA are deep (i.e., in terms of the population affected) and wide (i.e., in terms of its multi-sectoral nature). An intervention that covers few people and tackles only parts of the problem may figuratively depict ‘a drop in an ocean’. Thus, interventions should be national in coverage with diverse modules in the long run following piloting in some parts of the country or after the regions that are in dire need of the intervention are served. The practice of diverse modules aided the Rural Enterprises Project (REP) in Ghana to contribute to the creation of over 62,000 new jobs, assisted in setting up nearly 52,000 new businesses, and strengthening nearly 21,000 existing medium and small-scale enterprises as of 2019.

### Institutionalisation of information management, monitoring, and evaluation systems

Adequate data is the engine for successful decision making. Employment policies and interventions should imbibe information management systems that generate robust and timely pertinent labour market data to inform implementation process. The generation of the data should also spur efficient

monitoring of implementation for corrective measures to be undertaken. Internal and external evaluation of policies and interventions help in determining impacts. For example, the National Entrepreneurial and Innovation Programme (NEIP) has largely been successful in Ghana due to the incorporation of external monitoring as a major feature in progress review and funds utilisation by beneficiaries (Boadu & Fatunbi, 2020).

### Establishment of a central coordinating body for employment creation

Because the question of employment is crosscutting, it is easy to lose track of multiplicity of interventions across different sectors and agencies. Creating space within existing structures of employment ministries (or institutions with the oversight responsibility for employment) for a central body with the mandate of coordinating all employment interventions and their implementation is a good practice. The relevance of this body cannot be overemphasised. It is imperative that sector- or institution-specific interventions rolled out are coordinated. Coordination prevents duplication of efforts from institutions and departments. Also, coordination provides the opportunity to monitor the roll out of interventions and generate important data useful for feedback into policy revision. It is imperative to ensure that political preferences do not interfere with targeting and goals of programmes of the institution coordinating employment policies and implementation.

### Enhancing the value of training certification

Certification for participation in employable training programmes does not receive much recognition beyond ‘certificate of participation’. This tag does not communicate confidence and evidence of ability to employers. Enhancing the value of training certificates is a good practice. Thus, quality assurance standards should be applied to all training institutions through close and permanent collaboration between employers’ organisations, training institutions and structures in charge of making certifications.

## 4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EMPLOYMENT GENERATION IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

An employment policy that can significantly bend the curve of unemployment is one which is comprehensive, tackling both supply-side and demand-side challenges, one which is multi-sectoral cutting across macroeconomic policy, agriculture policy, industrial policy, labour policy, institutional policy, educational policy, trade policy, and social protection policy. The following are key recommendations for tackling the challenge of employment in SSA.

### Reform macroeconomic policies to enhance job-inducing growth

SSA needs to find ways to ensure that economic growth enhances employment creation. Employment should be at the centre stage of macroeconomic policy and not treated as a residual outcome of growth, education, and economic policies. Macroeconomic policy should inure to the benefit of sectors that simultaneously boost growth and job creation. Proactive ways include:

- Investments that, on the one hand, eliminate or reduce

growth constraints and sectoral bottlenecks (e.g., credit, energy, market, export promotion and economic structures) of pro-growth and pro-job industries, and on the other hand, can immediately employ the large pool of workers with low level of employability. Key job and growth inducing industries include agro-processing and agribusiness, hospitality and tourism, textiles, and information and communication, as these are identified as emerging “industries without smokestacks” that have huge employment creation potentials suitable for low and moderate skilled people. Projections from Madagascar show that attracting a million tourists over a year would create about 74,260 direct formal jobs aside indirect ones.

- Investments that promote productivity in the low productive agriculture sector and rural nonfarm enterprises through substantial improvement in rural infrastructure, mechanisation, strengthening farmer organisations and cooperatives, and rural development. Promoting vibrant and efficient cooperatives is particularly emphasised because its job creation potential is massive, contributing around 10% of the employed population globally. It also has the potential to provide a partial formalisation of informal sector employment, as participants in certain types of cooperatives gain access to some formal and semi-formal services, benefit from social protection through group solidarity and build bargaining power through unionisation.<sup>6</sup> While cooperativism is recommended for every sector, vibrant agricultural cooperatives would be much more beneficial for employment given the agrarian nature of SSA economies. Indeed, evidence already shows that majority of employment created through cooperatives is in the agricultural sector.

- Strengthen the competitive advantage of domestic industries through boosting the business environment, value addition and better integration in regional and global value chains.

- Creating economic foundations that are resilient to shocks. Shocks of various kinds cannot be prevented, however, building economies that recover quickly to counter the repercussions of shocks is key. Investments in value addition to primary products for export is one pathway.

- Refocusing foreign direct investment (FDI) away from capital intensive but low employment potential sectors to high employment potential ones and closing tax loopholes. High and rising public debt across SSA has negative impacts on macroeconomic environment and employment generation. With low tax to GDP ratio, SSA countries must pay special attention to domestic revenue generation through taxation. Finding efficient measures of directly taxing the informal economy can raise substantial revenue to fund employment policies. Tax policies that offer incentives to old multinational companies that reform into new ones should be reviewed.

- Governments can pursue demand-side policies such as boosting aggregate demand through increasing government spending (known as fiscal stimulus) on projects which in turn increases output and employment. Another approach to introducing fiscal stimulus is through lowering taxes to increase disposable incomes. However, developing countries’ governments, including those in SSA, have been noted to have very limited fiscal space (Parisotto & Ray, 2017), thereby

making it very difficult for SSA governments to apply fiscal stimuli.

- Another demand-side policy that can be deployed by governments is the use of employment subsidies and/or employment tax cuts. While some developed countries have successfully employed granting of subsidies in the form of cash payments to corporations and companies that employ the youth immediately after training, others and some developing countries have found it more effective to lower taxes on businesses that employ more workers.<sup>7</sup>

- The role of SSA central banks in the reform of macroeconomic policy that are employment driven is key. In most cases, emphasis is placed on governments’ fiscal policies to the neglect of monetary policies. The inability to achieve monetary policy targets such as price stability, financial stability, stable exchange rate and favourable policy rates, derail efforts at employment creation. For example, unfavourable interest rates, as presently prevailing in SSA, constrain business start-ups and expansion in ways that would have stimulated employment creation. Similarly, currency depreciation increases the cost of business leading to layoffs in milder consequences and collapse of businesses in severe consequences. The repercussion of rising inflation on business and employment is significant. Parisotto & Ray (2017) advocate developmental central banking with elements such as adopting a dual mandate of price stability and full employment; enhanced regulatory and supervisory functions for effective financial intermediation with the aim of increasing credit supply to small firms and start-ups; and adoption of transparent criteria to facilitate credit availability to priority sectors for increased job creation.

### Structural transformation

Evidence indicates that structural rigidity is the real cause of unemployment. Therefore, for policies and programmes to shift unemployment significantly, it is critical that interventions focus on addressing the structural challenges that constrain the transition from informal, low-paid, and unproductive jobs to formal and productive jobs. For example:

- Macroeconomic policy should be transformative instead of market centric. Transformative macroeconomic policy ties macroeconomic, labour market, and sectoral policies in a synergistic framework for development. This approach has people’s wellbeing as the goal.

- Investments should be made to identify, understand, and address the structural issues that constrain the creation of decent job opportunities. For example, actions should ensure that rural communities are upskilled in technological and ecologically sustainable sectors, create jobs meeting decent work standards, among others.

- Improving the operations of the informal sector is key for the creation of decent jobs. For example, partial formalisation strategies, including provision of job contracts and social protection schemes by employers, and strict adherence to minimum wage conditions, are imperative. Strategies that enhance improved monitoring of informal sector operations

<sup>6</sup> See the report “Eum, H. (2017). Cooperatives and Employment: Second Global Report. International Organization of Industrial, Artisanal and Service Producer Cooperatives (CICOPA).

<sup>7</sup><https://www.tutor2u.net/economics/reference/unemployment-policies-to-reduce-unemployment>.



and promote flexible and less expensive administrative procedures are also important. Trade unions also have an important role to play here. Effective trade union activism will help improve the situation of the informal sector workers by advocating for them; it also helps the state in easily identifying the various groups within the sector.

### Resilient structures to contain shocks and megatrends

SSA needs to evolve strategies to combat the negative consequences of shocks and underlying megatrends for employment creation, while taking advantage of the positive sides.

- There is the need to pay particular attention to the current model of urbanisation to shift it away from 'consumption' to 'production' cities through planning and skills development.
- Investments should be made to promote the practical teaching of ICT from the basic level as a means of equipping people with the skills to function in an economy that is witnessing an increase in digitalisation. Capacities should also be built in the fields of cybersecurity, cloud, internet of things, and big data and artificial intelligence.
- Develop a new energy system that is not reliant on fossil fuels. In order words, governments should embrace and encourage just transitions. Just transitions (or green jobs) preserve the current environment and work to reverse past environmental damage. They enhance reduction of pollution and promote sustainable management of natural resources that stimulate innovation, resilience, and savings, to drive new investment and employment (ILO, 2015b)
- Modernise agriculture to adapt to climate change impacts through climate smart agricultural practices and innovative sustainable production models or more generally through just transitions.
- Learn to anticipate megatrends and how to adapt policy to negotiate their negative consequences while exploiting the potentials.

### Prioritisation of employment

Employment should be valued in similar fashion as other macroeconomic indicators (e.g., inflation, GDP, and exchange rate). This can be done through:

- Institutionalisation of robust, and quality data collection and management systems that can track employment and related data timeously. Employment related institutions should build data management systems that are frequent and deep in terms of information collected for all employment interventions across various sectors.
- Tracer studies should be instituted for all employment interventions that train and discharge beneficiaries. In addition, all training institutions, including tertiary education institutions, and technical and vocational training units should institute tracer and labour market assessment studies for their alumni.
- Setting up efficient and functional public job market information system for job seekers.

- Providing a niche in the ever competitive and tight fiscal space for investment in employment creation policies. In the face of budgetary constraints and rising debt in SSA, governments need to prioritise investments in long-run impactful policies. Returns on investment in employment creation policies that deliver decent jobs may be unmatched among the list of priority investments. Employment creation investment, just like other investments, is costly but it has the potential to pay for itself over the long term through its impact on growth, poverty, and inequality reduction. Thus, borrowing or shifting resources away from low priority expenditures or increasing revenue mobilisation to specifically invest in decent job creation is a bankable enterprise.

### Building administrative and technical capacity of employment institutions

Policy implementation can be effective and efficient if the administrative, technical, and logistical capacities of all relevant institutions in policy implementation are thoroughly assessed and augmented in readiness for policy roll out. It is mostly erroneously assumed that once all relevant stakeholders are consulted in the design of employment policy, then all implementation institutions are adequately ready to roll out the policy. This usually harms and exacerbates challenges of employment creation. Governments must strive for better governance, coordination, and resources for institutions in charge of steering employment policies.

Given the multiplicity of interests and actors, the government must act wisely in decision-taking and must also ensure the coordination of initiatives within the framework of employment policies. The ministry in charge of employment must assert its leadership, on the one hand, at the level of discussions with partners and other line ministries. And, on the other hand, it must be the focal point at regional and local levels regarding the implementation of actions in favour of job creation. To fully play this role, the resources available must be adequate. Decentralised technical services are faced with a lack of both financial and human resources. Above all, it is necessary to increase the proportion of the government budget earmarked for employment each year so that it covers at least the planned government contribution in the implementation of training and employment policies.

### Reform of education and training

SSA needs to reform education and training through the following specific actions:

- Adopt educational and training models where policies, curricula and programmes are developed jointly by the business/corporate sector and the academic sector. This proposal ensures adapting of the content of study programmes to the needs of the labour market. At present, the private sector generally bemoans the lack of match between skills required and what graduates possess.
- Eliminating marked disparities between infrastructure and other endowments between high or "grammar" type schools, and technical and vocational institutes by undertaking the needed investments in the technical and vocational institutions. Vocational and technical training is less prioritised, meanwhile, they possess more potential for the creation of

self-employed jobs relative to those from high schools. Streamlining public education spending that ensures equitable distribution would change the tide.

- Regardless of technical or vocational institution, equal quality standards adapted to the needs of people should be promoted. For example, professional standards, curricula, and teaching methods must be harmonised in all vocational training institutions, as well as certification of programmes.
- Develop training modules that train people in advanced and the so-called skills for jobs of the future such as artificial intelligence and machine learning, coding and cloud computing, digital literacy and marketing, project management, critical and creative thinking, and leadership. Shortages of locally trained personnel in most advanced skills present the situation where these advanced positions are entrusted to expatriates. Indeed, resorting to expatriates only is costly and undermines competitiveness on the international market.

### Enhancing the competitiveness and productivity of the private and informal sectors

Supply-side interventions, such as skills development training programmes, that aim to equip job seekers with the requisite skills and capacity to find formal wage jobs are ineffective. The workable option is training programmes that aim to reorient trainees to seek self-employment. Sub-Saharan African governments should focus on packages that provide the capacity and resources for trainees of training programmes to become entrepreneurs. Indeed, the informal sector should be considered an ally. Thus, priority actions will be those aimed at improving worker productivity through capacity building and training. The informal sector should be integrated into all existing structures for consultation and dialogue.

### Effective targeted actions for vulnerable groups in employment

There is a mismatch between repeated acknowledgements of vulnerable groups with disproportionate employment challenges and making effective commitments to salvaging the situation. Thus, employment related policies tend not to consider and integrate systemic and structural issues related to vulnerable groups (e.g., women, youth, differently abled, and racial and ethnic minorities) across SSA. To curtail this bias, there is the need for effective targeted employment interventions that address barriers to participation in the labour market by these vulnerable groups and curtail the thriving replication and reinforcement of structural inequities. Specific actions include:

- Curb resource and institutional constraints that persistently promote structural inequalities. All employment related institutions and services should be strengthened. Institute targeted training of vulnerable groups and improve their networking capacities.
- Despite the existence of numerous policies and regulations to support labour market participation of vulnerable groups, the practical implementation of these policies leaves much to be desired. There are limitations to effective enforcement due to limited support structures for vulnerable groups and institutionalisation. Enforcing existing policies and interventions that promote equal participation of vulnerable

groups is imperative to change the narrative.

### Complementarity of social protection and employment creation

Employment policies and initiatives should prioritise social protection because social protection has growth-enhancing and employment creation potentials. Evidence shows that investment in social protection raises employment, reduces gender inequalities in employment and helps people overcome adverse shocks through consumption smoothing. Therefore, governments should demonstrate the importance of social protection in employment by introducing key social protection components such as pensions in public programmes and interventions. In the private and generally informal sector, where social protection is less emphasised, governments could spur the creation of social protection schemes for employees through the provision of tax incentives for employers who institute such schemes.

## 5.0 KEY ELEMENTS FOR PROGRESSIVE APPROACH TO EMPLOYMENT GENERATION IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Having reviewed the challenges, good practices, and recommendations for employment generation in SSA, this section presents key elements on how to sum all these together for the purpose of making progress in generating employment.

Governments should emphasise the proactive supervision of the labour market. Markets alone are never enough to create sufficient jobs. The private sector is a key partner in answering the unemployment question. Governments should prioritise providing incentives to the private sector, especially those that have huge potentials for job opportunities such as coding and cloud computing, artificial intelligence, agro-processing, agribusiness, hospitality and tourism, and textiles.

The question of employment can be best answered within a multi-stakeholder environment because employment itself is crosscutting. Therefore, to make significant progress in generating sufficient employment, governments should strive to strike effective employment dialogue, stakeholder participation and inclusiveness from the creation of policies to monitoring and evaluation. An approach of 'disagreeing to agree' is essential for impactful employment policies and implementation. Governments should develop and maintain political will to play the lead role in organising and sustaining stakeholder engagement and inclusion.

The role of trade unions in employment cannot be overemphasised. Their inputs in policy processes, implementation, monitoring and evaluation are relevant, especially in promoting the interests of workers and ensuring industrial harmony. The labour market in SSA still shows semblances of employers and governments wielding so much power over workers. Active and efficient trade unions can provide the cure to this through stimulating the concept of solidarity among workers, that provides them with the freedom to exploit their social and economic rights. Trade unions and strong worker representation can aid even low-profile workers to demand for their rights to better conditions of work and providing the space for collective

bargaining that enhance decent employment. In addition, trade unions have the potential to raise productivity in the workplace by participating, with management, in the search for better ways of organising production. High productivity, as one possible factor that can drive jobs creation, cannot be achieved and maintained in the long term under poor labour standards. Government actions should be to provide an enabling environment for the effective organisation and operation of democratic and independent trade unions in all spheres of work, by enforcing regulations that safeguard their rights and stimulating balanced dialogue between governments and trade unions.

Political transformation is an important progressive approach, as it has the capacity to deliver a transformational employment generation agenda. An impactful employment generation agenda cannot be initiated without SSA governments embracing aspects of democratic leadership and governance. Governments need to stimulate stakeholder participation in an atmosphere of freedom to express opinions and suggestions on employment, as well as recognise workers' rights and freedom to negotiate better conditions. In addition, political leadership should be opened to addressing structural employment disparities, inequalities, discrimination, and dealing with partisanship and nepotistic tendencies in employment opportunities in very sincere and transparent manner. Thus, job opportunities should be neutral to gender, origin, religion, health, and economic status. Governance should also emphasise deliberate expansive and well-functioning welfare systems for all categories of workers. These deliberate welfare systems should aim at supporting workers when they lose their jobs, far beyond one-time severance packages, a situation common in SSA. It should support the unemployed with some unemployment benefits. This latter measure can be achieved through the deployment of fiscal policies (referred to as automatic stabilisers) that embody existing tax collection, social security contributions or social transfers regimes as effective and immediate responders to shocks (Parisotto & Ray, 2017). Because of restricted fiscal space in developing countries, such automatic stabilisers usually come in the form of large social or cash transfer programmes.

Another progressive approach to employment generation is to recognise the urgent need for targeting in employment policy design and implementation. The evidence on structural inequalities in employment is overwhelming. For example, women and youth face more of the brunt of unemployment. In South Africa, racial inequality persists in employment. Given this background, the 'business-as-usual' approach to employment generation would not suffice. Right from policy design, governments should account for structural disparities through appropriate gender, age, locality, and inter-cultural analyses, and how to deal with these systemic issues in implementation. The narrative should shift from crafting legislations and regulations for the inclusion of vulnerable groups to operationalising and fully implementing them. It is identified that investments in social infrastructure in general and the care economy specifically has the potential to not only create decent jobs but reduce gender inequalities and promote gender justice in employment. The argument is not

about a complete shift from investment in physical infrastructure – an investment that is still relevant in boosting employment and cannot be ignored – but a reorientation of priorities that makes room for investments in social infrastructure because such investments are far more proactive in reducing gender inequalities in employment than the status quo. Thus, for a progressive approach to solving gender bias in employment, especially through targeting, balanced investments in physical and social infrastructure (i.e., social and solidarity economy) are needed.

Sub-Saharan Africa cannot ignore megatrends if it must make progress in employment generation. Urbanisation, digitalisation, and climate change exert impacts in the labour market and the world of work in general. Therefore, these megatrends should be thoroughly dissected in terms of their threats and opportunities for employment generation. The right investments need to be made in the areas of climate resilient infrastructure, climate smart agriculture, infrastructure to support digitalisation, and training to develop linguistic and information technology proficiency.

Sub-Saharan Africa needs to carefully plan transition to green jobs as a progressive approach to employment generation. Basically, green jobs are jobs that contribute to the preservation or restoration of the environment through reduction in carbon emissions and making environmental improvements. UNEP et al. (2008) define green jobs as "work in agricultural, manufacturing, research and development (R&D), administrative, and service activities that contribute substantially to preserving or restoring environmental quality". Thus, green jobs do not only preserve the current environment but also work to reverse past environmental damage. Green jobs provide the knowledge and resources to negotiate the current climate change crisis and promise a sustainable future for the younger generation. While there are concerns about job losses and displacements in the consideration of transition to green jobs, there are potentials and opportunities for net gains in total employment through investments that promote environmentally sustainable production and consumption and management of natural resources. Green jobs enhance reduction of pollution and promote sustainable management of natural resources that stimulate innovation, resilience, and savings, which drive new investment and employment (ILO, 2015b). Since innovation is an important bedrock of entrepreneurship, it is expected that in the long run the promotion of green jobs should create more sustainable jobs for people. For example, it is found that the wind power industry alone has the potential of opening opportunities for variety of skills including meteorologists, surveyors, people trained in anemometry, structural engineers, electrical engineers, mechanical engineers, quality-control personnel, workers for advanced composite and metal parts, computer operators, software specialists, mechanics, and technicians. Green jobs also have the potential to enhance job quality, job upgrading and incomes on a large scale from more productive processes, as well as greener products and services in sectors like agriculture, construction, recycling, and tourism (ILO, 2015b). However, it is important to note that the right approach and investments are needed in the areas of skills development, and the right mix of macroeconomic and labour policies.

<sup>8</sup>A report by Siemens Stiftung for example estimates that by 2030, 1 million additional jobs will be created that further leads to the overall creation of 5.5 million direct jobs in social enterprises. Also see a report by De Henau et al. (2017) on "investing in the care economy: simulating employment effects by gender in countries in emerging economies".

Though the employment challenge is enormous and involving a lot of people, it is important governments do not panic by introducing very ambitious interventions that target numerous people but lacking in creating quality and decent jobs. Indeed, small-scale, high-quality employment interventions and programmes are more desirable than the large-scale, low-quality ones.

Sub-Saharan Africa can benefit more by embracing a regional approach to the employment problem solving. 'Thinking locally but acting regionally or globally' has potential to absorb masses of the unemployed, especially in areas of comparative advantage in the training of skills. With a regional approach, the oversupply of a specific skill in one country may find space where there are shortages in another country. There are country-specific strengths and weaknesses in skills development and qualifications. Thus, a regional approach becomes handy in solving these country imbalances. This approach is even more relevant in the face of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). However, this requires policies that enhance the mobility of labour and protection of domestic workers. In terms of trade, SSA should utilise the AfCFTA as a springboard to invest and develop its production of goods and services for which it has comparative advantage relative to the rest of the world. Building country-level or sub-regional level comparative advantage is a necessary condition for maximising gains in international trade.

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## **ABOUT THE PROJECT**

Unemployment and underemployment remain key challenges in Africa. As a result, employment creation policies, interventions, and strategies have been developed in the last decade to create sustainable and quality jobs. The outcomes of such policies and interventions have been mixed thereby providing the basis to take stock of the policy landscape to document key challenges, good practices, and recommendations for employment creation.

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