

# IDS

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### Failing Young People? Addressing the Supply-side Bias and Individualisation in Youth Employment Programming

Justin Flynn, Philip Mader and Marjoke Oosterom with Santiago Ripoll

January 2017

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# Abstract

International development actors increasingly focus on youth employment as a key development challenge. The recognition of high rates of unemployment, underemployment and job insecurity among young people around the world has led to a plethora of youth employment interventions, as well as often problematic discourses about youth 'dividends' and 'bulges', which instrumentalise young people and paint them as security threats. This report problematises and critiques some of the currently predominant models for getting young people into work. Examining the current state of play of donor policies, the report critiques the supply-side bias built into the majority of approaches, and aims to advance an understanding of the demand-side and structural constraints. If supply-side approaches are not matched by measures to address these constraints, it argues, interventions risk adversely incorporating young people into the economy. The report also develops a critique of the overall narrow economic and individualistic approach currently adopted, building on the concept of social navigation to understand how young people's decisions and trajectories regarding work are shaped in reality. Young people are socially embedded: their agency and aspirations are shaped by social values, positions and expectations, as well as by their social relationships and immediate political contexts. Consequently, the report argues that policies need to be de-individualised, both conceptually and practically, to better reflect the real constraints, opportunities and forces that will shape young people's engagement with work.

# Acknowledgements

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# Abbreviations

AfDB	African Development Bank
DFID	Department for International Development
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GEM	Global Entrepreneurship Monitor
ICT	information and communication technologies
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
ILO	International Labour Organization
KAB	Know about Business
KYBT	Kenya Youth Business Trust
M4P	Making Markets Work for the Poor
NEET	not in education, employment or training
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
S4YE	Solution for Youth Employment Coalition
SSA	sub-Saharan Africa
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UN-HABITAT	United Nations Human Settlements Programme

# 1 Introduction

Young people<sup>1</sup> are having a very tough time finding work, particularly decent work. Around the world, about 500 million young people aged 15–29 are unemployed, underemployed or working in insecure jobs, which translates to almost 43 per cent of the global youth labour workforce either being unemployed or working but still living in poverty (Goldin *et al.* 2015; ILO 2015b). This issue, exacerbated by the 2007–08 global financial crisis, has garnered considerable attention among policy actors in recent years (e.g. Goldin *et al.* 2015; ILO 2012; OECD 2013).

Much of the focus in the policies we see is on including young people in markets through skills development, enhanced education and entrepreneurship promotion – all valid approaches in their own right. However, problematically, such programmes focus on the supply side of what young people bring to the labour market rather than the demand side, i.e. what the market offers them. A further problem is that the liberal underpinnings of current approaches to youth employment ignore the social and political relationships in which young people are embedded, and which shape their actual pathways to finding work.

In this report, we present a substantive critique of some of the current dominant narratives and discourses around youth, and the related policy approaches to youth employment, and we propose a broader view on young people’s engagement with work. A firm recognition of young people as actors that are embedded in wider social, political and economic structures prompts a rethinking of individualistic approaches. It also draws attention to the diversity within the social category of ‘youth’, with which many policy approaches continue to struggle.

## 1.1 Aims of the report

In this report, we problematise and critique the individualising and supply-driven approaches of current predominant models for getting young people into work, which often treat them as a homogeneous group and as rational agents outside of economic, social, cultural and political structures. Specifically, we argue that the economic, supply-driven approach of many programmes does not work because it is mainly structural problems, rather than individual shortcomings, that prevent young people from finding jobs. Moreover, given how young people are embedded in networks, social relations, political systems and cultural settings, there are many more considerations than individual income alone that factor into young people’s decisions and motivations for engaging in different types of work. As such, we argue that the broader meanings that work represents for young people, and the different work and employment configurations young people (already) engage in, need to be better recognised and integrated into conceptualisations of youth employment and related policy prescriptions. With this in mind, the report examines the current state of play in donor policies relating to youth employment in developing countries (in the context of wider narratives) and aims to make two substantive contributions:

1. To critique the supply-side bias built into the majority of current policies, and advance an understanding of the demand-side and structural constraints on young people finding work.
2. To critique the overall narrow economic and individualistic approach, and emphasise how young people’s decisions and trajectories regarding work are shaped by their social relationships and political contexts, and how they actively negotiate these relationships.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this report, the 15–35 age range covers the vast majority of references made to the term ‘young people’ or ‘youth’ (we consider these two terms equivalent and use them interchangeably) in different sources, although most references to youth specifically refer to the ages of 15 and 24 (inclusive). A discussion of different definitions can be found in Section 2.



### **1.1.1 Objective one: tackling the supply-side bias**

Many youth work programmes appear to ignore deeper-rooted structural issues underpinning youth unemployment and underemployment. Macroeconomic structures, including the nature of markets, state interventions and national and global economic circumstances, affect and constrain young people's chances. At the same time, we find that youth-oriented programmes often even count on young people's ability to address these structural issues, such as overcoming economic stagnation through innovation, even though they are not responsible for them. This may be both unfair to young people and at risk of failure.

One particularly salient structural problem is a lack of aggregate demand, which leads to a lack of jobs. While donors and governments often recognise the problem of insufficient labour demand, the majority of the policies and programmes put into practice nonetheless primarily focus on the supply side. General education, specific skills training, behavioural change for activation, and entrepreneurship training and promotion are all supply-oriented with their focus on enhancing what young people bring to labour markets, rather than what labour markets offer them. However, it is increasingly clear that in many cases the structural problems of their environments, and not young people's attributes, are the key constraints to their finding work.

We do not allege that donors and governments are blind to demand issues and structural problems, but that *in practice* very many programmes fail to address them. The demand side is more difficult to address and requires more systemic, longer-term approaches, while interventions on the supply side, particularly entrepreneurship and skills training, may appear to promise quicker results on smaller budgets. Particular critical attention, we argue, needs to be paid to entrepreneurship-oriented approaches, which garner much enthusiasm among donors and policymakers, but only falsely appear to overcome the demand-side constraint, and often confuse or conflate growth-oriented entrepreneurship with entrepreneurial survival activities.

This critique should not be seen as suggesting that education, skills training, behavioural change or enterprise facilitation cannot be useful, especially in individual cases where a specific need (for more education, better training, right attitudes or more enterprises) is identified. But if applied widely, and not matched with at least equivalent – or more substantial – measures on the demand side, such approaches risk wasting donor resources *and* frustrating the efforts of the intended beneficiaries.

### **1.1.2 Objective two: de-individualising young people**

We also need to challenge the framing of youth as purely individualistic agents, which reflects broader liberal and neoliberal paradigms. There is a growing understanding that young people are embedded in social relationships and that this greatly influences their choices and opportunities in, for instance, venturing into informal businesses and deciding how to run them, figuring out whether and how to migrate to urban settings, or how they engage with savings and loans.

To de-individualise youth by socially embedding them involves looking at the influence of parents, carers and extended families on both young people's aspirations and their agency, while recognising that young people are not simply pushed around but actively negotiate these relationships. A focus on social embeddedness also involves looking at the role of peers and other young people in and outside the workplace, and how work contributes to constructing their identities. It also requires us to look at society at large: how social and cultural norms define what types of work are considered appropriate for young men and women, as well as shape opportunities and decisions such as starting a business or migrating. Such norms influence the aspirations young men and women might have and are often strongly gendered and internalised (Pettit 2016).

Another aspect of a more relational approach to young people and work is to consider the meaning of work in young people's lives. Where many youth employment interventions see paid work as fulfilling primarily an income-generating role, this may underestimate the value of intangible benefits such as status, independence and youth identity, closely connected to the question of aspirations and ambitions. Considering paid work as *the* form of work that young people necessarily aspire to overlooks other forms of work that young people are also expected (and may want) to do, such as unpaid care work, domestic work and reproductive work. The latter three in particular receive little attention in policies for young people's work.

We furthermore problematise how interventions pay little if any attention to the political dimensions of work. It should be better recognised how politics pervade local economies (Hansen 2010; Oosterom 2016): political actors mediate access to certain jobs and can dominate and create hierarchies in certain sectors, shaping the opportunities for young people. These insights, however, have often not been incorporated into policies and programmes.

## **1.2 Overview of the report**

The report begins in Section 2 with an examination of the definitions, policy rationales and understandings of work currently applied in approaches to youth employment. In Section 3, we examine the supply-side bias ingrained in current dominant approaches to getting young people into work and formulate a critique in light of the apparent demand-side constraints. We suggest that approaches to include young people in markets by enhancing what they offer in terms of skills, education, positive attitudes or entrepreneurialism risk adversely incorporating young people if the approaches are not matched by measures to address the structural demand-side constraints of those markets. Section 4 utilises the concept of social navigation (Vigh 2006, 2009) to build an argument that social positionality and sociocultural and political relationships matter strongly for young people's aspirations as well as for their agency in finding work. This helps us to critique the rather narrow focus of current youth employment interventions that tend to emphasise young people as individual, rational agents who craft their life trajectories in isolation, rather than social beings whose agency reflects larger structures.

## 2 Policy review: unemployment and underemployment among youth

This section critically reviews recent policy documents of major international organisations, including various UN bodies (e.g. Food and Agriculture Organization – FAO, International Labour Organization – ILO, United Nations Development Programme – UNDP), development banks and funders (e.g. African Development Bank – AfDB, International Fund for Agricultural Development – IFAD, World Bank), donor organisations (e.g. Department for International Development – DFID, United States Agency for International Development – USAID, International Development Research Centre – IDRC), and other development organisations (e.g. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development – OECD). The organisations were selected because of their policy influence, enabling the study of core policy discourses through an analysis of influential actors' most recent publications on youth, or youth and employment specifically. We first set the scene by providing an overview of the youth employment situation around the world and investigating the urgency of policy actors to tackle the issue of youth unemployment. We then proceed by presenting and problematising some of the main concepts that are prevalent in the debates that our report engages with, namely 'youth', 'unemployment' and 'underemployment'.

### 2.1 Young people everywhere seeking work

Recognising the 'unprecedented' and rising number of young people who were unemployed or discouraged from looking for work following the 2008 financial crisis, along with the vast numbers of young people working in low-productive and precarious jobs, the ILO in 2012 issued a 'call for action' to address the 'youth employment crisis' (ILO 2012). The situation has been reported as dire in many countries, both rich and poor, with youth unemployment rates two to four times higher than for adults in most countries around the world (UNDP 2014a). More specifically, among wealthier countries, the OECD (2013) reported that at the end of 2012 half of the youth labour force was out of work in Greece and Spain, but also in South Africa, while the unemployment rate exceeded 20 per cent in ten other OECD countries. Globally, youth unemployment rates are highest in North Africa and the Middle East (30.5 per cent and 28.2 per cent respectively), and lowest in East and South Asia (10.6 per cent and 9.9 per cent respectively) (ILO 2015a) (see Figure 2.1).

In poorer regions of the world, however, the problem is not so much youth unemployment as it is underemployment. This is the case for sub-Saharan Africa, for example, where 'many young Africans find themselves unemployed, or, more frequently, underemployed in informal jobs with low productivity and pay', as AfDB, OECD, UNDP and UNECA (2012: 99) report. Indeed, while unemployment rates in sub-Saharan Africa are relatively lower than in other regions of the world, averaging 11.6 per cent across the region, underemployment rates, by some accounts, are staggeringly high, 'peak[ing] at just over half of youth, excluding students, in low income countries'<sup>2</sup> (AfDB 2016a: 4).

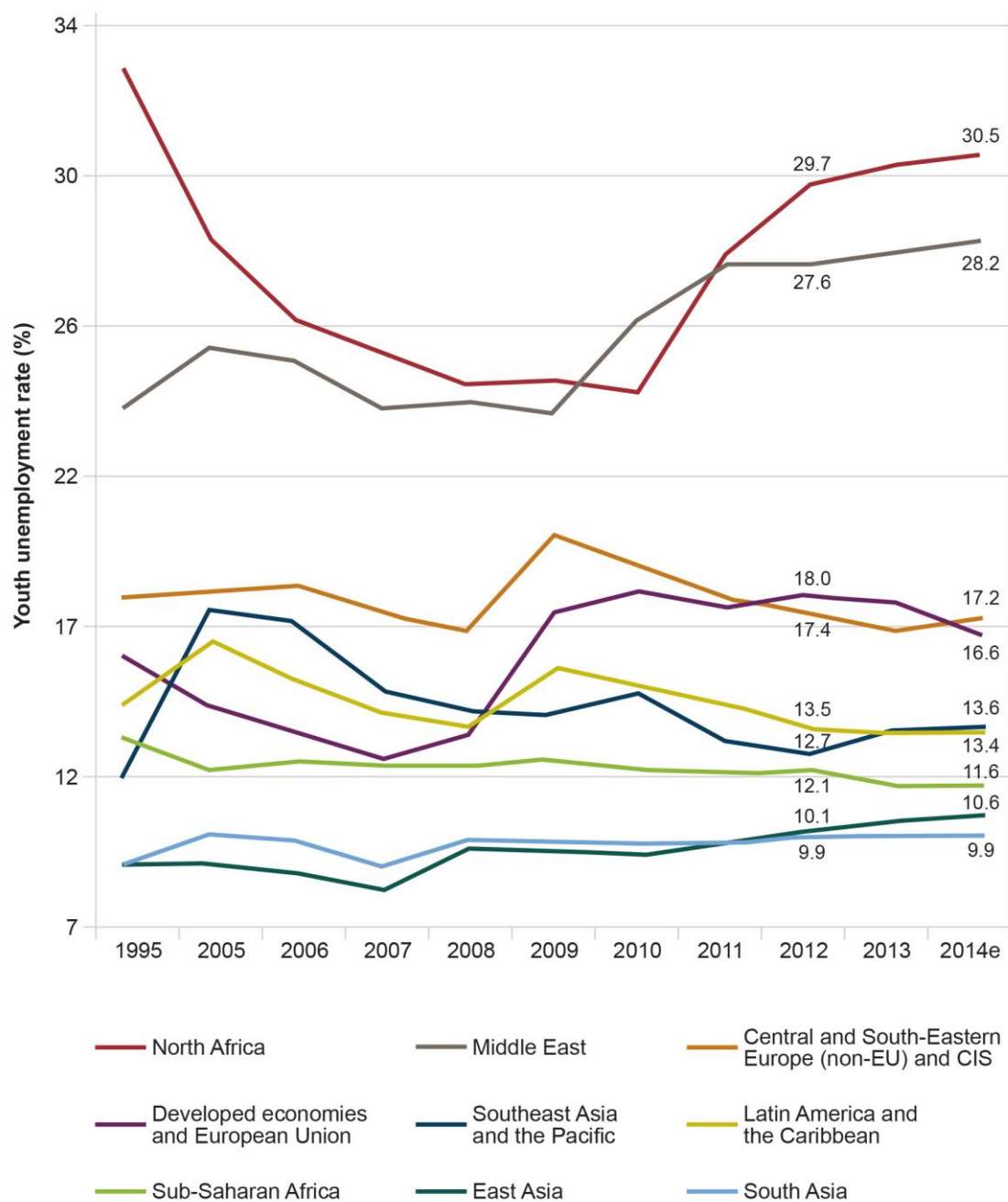
Overall, the situation has worsened recently, and the outlook looks grim, particularly in poorer parts of the world. The Solution for Youth Employment Coalition (S4YE)<sup>3</sup> portrays the current youth employment situation in its baseline report on youth employment as follows: 'Since the 2007–2008 financial crisis, youth unemployment and underemployment has reached an apex, and projections indicate the situation is likely to worsen in many low-income countries' (Goldin *et al.* 2015: 11).

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<sup>2</sup> The AfDB (2016a) uses the definition of underemployment here as 'vulnerable employment'; see Section 2.4.1 on the definition of underemployment.

<sup>3</sup> S4YE is a coalition of partners initiated by the following organisations: World Bank, Plan International, the International Youth Foundation, Youth Business International, RAND, Accenture and the International Labour Organization (Goldin *et al.* 2015).

**Figure 2.1 Youth unemployment rates by region**



Note: e = estimate.  
 Source: Adapted from ILO (2015a: 18).

## 2.2 Understanding the focus on young people

Despite the extent of the ‘youth employment crisis’ it is not immediately clear why the issue of youth, who are often marginalised in society and policy processes (see, for example, te Lintelo 2012), has continued to attract such attention from various policy actors. One indication is the emphasis that policy actors have placed on addressing the ‘youth bulge’ (e.g. DFID 2016; IDRC 2015a; World Bank 2012), a term referring to demographics with a significantly large youth population living in an area or region. In places identified as having a ‘youth bulge’, including South Asia and especially Africa<sup>4</sup> (mainly sub-Saharan Africa), the youth employment issue is often seen as even more pressing. The notion of ‘youth bulges’ underpins two major narratives in the policy discourse that underlie arguments for taking urgent action on the question of youth employment.

The first is that if young people’s work abilities are ‘harnessed properly’, they can contribute significantly to their countries’ development and the world economy (UNDP 2014b; UNFPA 2014). This is what is referred to by many actors as the ‘demographic dividend’ (AfDB 2014, 2016a; African Union Commission and UNECA 2013; DFID 2016; FAO 2014; Goldin *et al.* 2015; ILO 2015a; UNDP 2014b; UNFPA 2014; Vargas-Lundius and Suttie 2014). To illustrate the potential payoff, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) estimates that, for example, if countries in sub-Saharan Africa,

make the right human capital investments and adopt policies that expand opportunities for young people, their combined demographic dividends could be enormous: at least US\$500 billion a year, equal to about one third of the region’s current GDP, for as many as 30 years.  
(UNFPA 2014)

It is thus essential, according to these policy actors, to ensure young people do not remain ‘underutilised’, as 75 per cent of them are currently reported to be in developing countries (DFID 2016; UNDP 2014a). But in addition to missed opportunities, youth outside the labour market and education are also seen as a burden on the economy, as the baseline report from S4YE suggests: ‘[w]hen young people are not fully participating in the labor force or are NEETs [not in education, employment or training], governments forgo tax revenue and *incur the cost of social safety nets, unemployment benefits and insurances*, and lost productivity’ (Goldin *et al.* 2015: 2–3, emphasis added). In the context of Africa, the AfDB (2016b) summarises the main reasons for the focus of policy actors on youth unemployment, with economic motivations to tackle youth unemployment and underemployment coming first:

The consequences of youth unemployment in Africa are pervasive and severe: unemployment translates to poorer living conditions, fuels migration out of Africa, and contributes to conflict on the continent itself. *Above all*, youth unemployment constitutes a failure to capitalize on one of the continent’s greatest assets for growth: its large and growing population of talented young people.  
(AfDB 2016b: 1, emphasis added)

Mirroring this economic story of hope and missed opportunity is the narrative that seeks to ‘securitise’ – i.e. pacify – idle young people, particularly young men, who are seen as a political threat. Many actors emphasise this second alarming consequence: if policies do not provide expanded economic opportunities for young people, they may become violent or volatile and threaten political stability. For example, the UNDP (2014b: 22) states that:

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<sup>4</sup> In fact, although Africa is already home to the world’s youngest population, its youth population is expected to double by 2045 (AfDB *et al.* 2012). As a result, the AfDB (2016b) finds that 12 million new people enter the labour market every year, competing for only 3 million new jobs.

Marginalized youth who lack economic livelihoods and employment opportunities may be prone to become attracted to illicit sectors, organized crime and gang associations or piracy. The growing dissatisfaction with political leadership and livelihood opportunities is also attracting increasing numbers of youth towards ideologically-driven groups associated with radicalization, violence and extremism.

The AfDB (2016a: 3) also makes an argument along these lines, stating that ‘40% of people who join rebel movements are motivated by a lack of jobs’. AfDB *et al.* (2012) highlight that high unemployment among Africa’s youth could threaten political stability and social cohesion, and IDRC (2015a) and the World Bank (2012) remind us that the highest unemployment rates in the world, found in North Africa and the Middle East, as mentioned earlier, fuelled the uprisings that swept the region in 2011. Indeed, the S4YE Coalition perhaps most strikingly and concisely presents the argument made in favour of treating young people’s work situation as a security threat. It cites a senior official in the Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development of Uganda, who stated that ‘The Arab Spring taught us the importance of investing in youth to avoid instability. Youth employment should be addressed for political purposes’ (Goldin *et al.* 2015: 121).

The ILO (2015a) paints a slightly more nuanced picture, citing evidence that at least dampens, or questions, the links between unemployment and young people’s participation in political violence. According to one report it cites, it is rather the sense of hopelessness, frustration and anger that is derived from perceived injustice, and more so by bad governance than unemployment alone, which drives civic unrest (MercyCorp 2015, cited in ILO 2015a). This echoes other research, which finds inconsistent, mixed and sometimes contradictory evidence on the relationship between youth unemployment, violence and conflict (Cramer 2010; Filmer *et al.* 2014).

As seen in such citations by various actors and overall, the discourse emerging from multilateral and donor organisations on the one hand has a tendency to instrumentalise young people as actors whose greatest potential lies in better servicing the economy. On the other hand, there is a tendency to essentialise and attempt to securitise young people who are seen as threats – potential criminals or insurgents – to political and economic stability.

Before moving further with our analysis, we need to define core concepts to our report, namely ‘youth’, ‘unemployment’ and ‘underemployment’.

## **2.3 Tricky definitions and delineations**

### **2.3.1 Who are ‘youth’?**

International organisations such as the UN, the OECD and others, as well as national governments, use varying definitions of ‘youth’ or ‘young people’. Most UN bodies (including the ILO and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization – UNESCO) define youth and young people as anyone between the ages of 15 and 24; this is also the definition used for official UN statistics. However, some bodies use other age ranges, for example, UNFPA distinguishes ‘youth’ (15–24) from ‘young people’ 10–24 (UNDESA n.d.). Somewhat distinctively, though relevantly, the UNDP Youth Strategy focuses mainly on youth aged 15–24, though it extends its strategy to groups aged up to 25, 30 and sometimes even up to 35 years of age in exceptional circumstances. It states that it uses a ‘more flexible definition of youth to allow programming to be aligned to national and local realities’ (UNDP 2014b: 9).

Regarding other international organisations, similarly to the UN, the OECD refers to youth as 15/16 to 24-year-olds<sup>5</sup> (OECD 2013). DFID states it mostly uses the 10–24 age range to refer to youth (or also ‘young people’), basing its definition on the notion that youth of that age have started transitioning to adulthood (the ‘life cycle approach’, which we discuss below), but still acknowledges that people outside this age range may also be transitioning to adulthood (DFID 2016). At this point, we want to highlight that while some definitions of ‘youth’ extend into the age range at which work is counted as child labour, the definitions constitute a separate matter from the youth employment strategies with which we deal in this report. Some definitions include people below 15 years of age among ‘youth’ (for instance, DFID’s definition as between the ages of 10 and 24 seen directly above), but this is not *per se* problematic as long as employment policies or interventions only apply to older groups.

Further, some definitions are much wider. For example, Nigeria uses the 18–35 age range to define youth, while both the African Youth Charter and the AfDB define youth as between 15 and 35 (AfDB 2016a; African Union Commission 2006). However, not all African governments use these wider age ranges, with both Tanzania and Zambia, for example, following the 15–24 age range (te Lintelo 2012).

Regarding the variation in definitions, the UNDP (2014b) finds that while most countries and institutions use an age-based definition, others adopt a more sociological ‘life cycle’ approach. This approach sheds light on the problems with a definition of youth based on a narrow age range, such as 15–24, since the relevant transitions can also occur outside this age range, as DFID suggests. In fact, although the ILO formally uses the 15–24 definition, it states in its most recent report on *Global Employment Trends for Youth* (2015) that there is growing pressure to increase the age range of ‘youth’ to 15–29, precisely because not all youth have finished education or entered work by the age of 25. This is the reason the ILO school-to-work transition surveys use this extended age range (ILO 2015a).

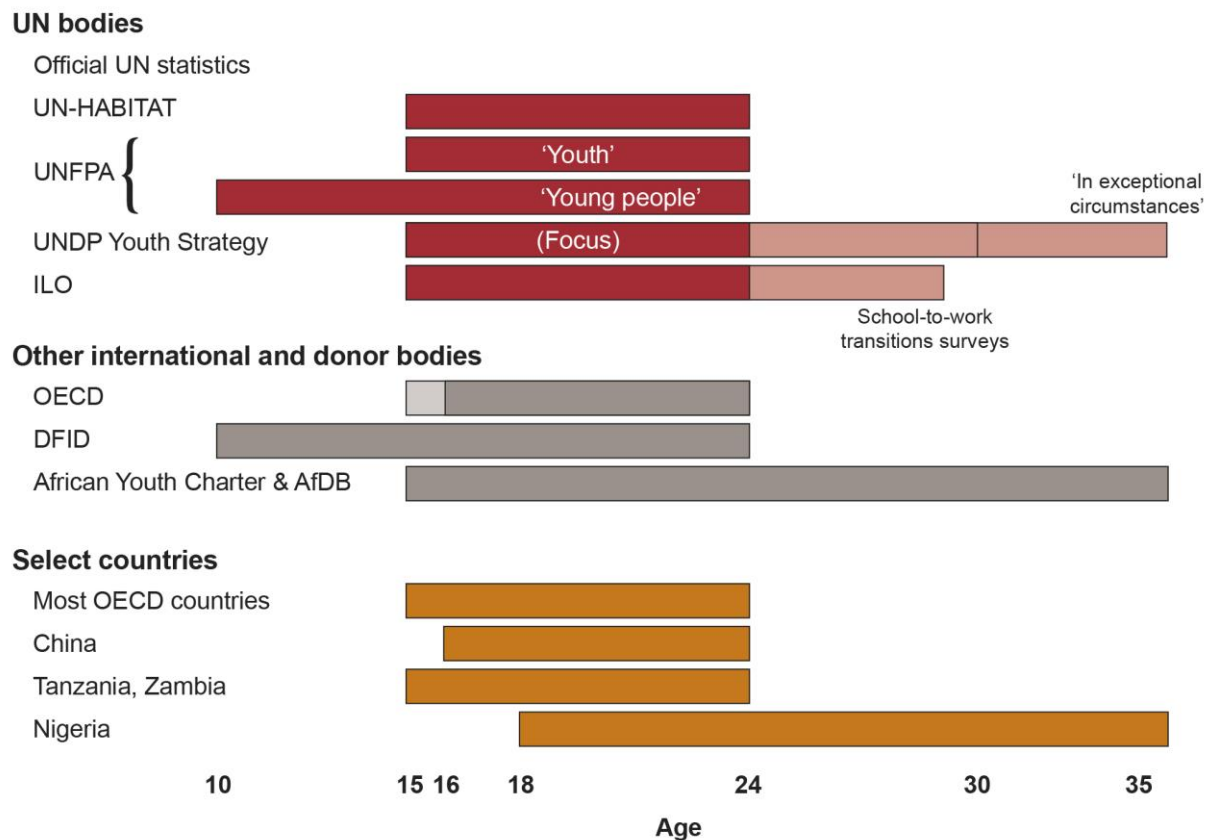
A final alternative perspective comes from the UNDP Youth Strategy (2014b), which suggests a reflexive, policy-based distinction between ‘young people’ and ‘young adults’, but which also showcases an instrumentalising discourse by policymakers as discussed further above, in this case, to keep young people out of trouble:

young people tend to be those whom policy wants to keep ‘in good shape’ (in learning, away from drugs and crime, doing constructive things in leisure) while young adults are more engaged in independent living, perhaps studying but closer to, or already in the labour market (though they may not have a job). The policy issue here is supporting ‘life management’: capacity, resilience in relation to family formation, housing, and employment.  
(UNDP 2014b: 47)

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<sup>5</sup> The reason the OECD refers to 15/16 as the lower range of the youth age bracket is because while most OECD countries use the 15–24 definition, the USA, Spain and other countries that are not in the OECD but are still included in OECD reports, such as China, use the 16–24 definition (OECD 2013).

**Figure 2.2 Age ranges commonly identified with ‘youth’ in the policy literature**



As we can see, with regard to the age ranges commonly used by policymakers, definitions of ‘youth’ differ considerably. Figure 2.2 illustrates this. Clearly, for statistical and targeting purposes clear definitions may be necessary. At the same time, however, the considerably different scales of who is considered ‘youth’ or a ‘young person’ and the different cut-off points illustrate the difficulty of such delineations. Not only is the issue of delineations tricky, if not problematic, but some scholars have even critiqued the ‘life cycle’ approach, calling into question the linearity and the presumed definitiveness of transitioning from one stage to another. We come back to this briefly in the next sub-section.

### 2.3.2 Transitioning to adulthood

As mentioned, much of the discourse around youth employment implicitly or explicitly follows a ‘life cycle’ approach, where young people are seen to traverse life on a winding but ultimately uni-directional path. A major transition that is assumed to occur in young people’s lives is the school-to-work transition, mentioned in several policy documents (DFID 2016; IDRC 2015a; OECD 2013; UNDP 2014b; UNESCO 2014; USAID 2012; World Bank 2006). The 2007 World Development Report includes this transition as part of the five stages (continuing to learn, starting to work, developing a healthful lifestyle, beginning a family and exercising citizenship) through which young people are expected to transition on their path to adulthood (World Bank 2006). These same five stages of life transition are also referred to in USAID’s youth policy (USAID 2012). Finally, the OECD (2013: 4) also draws attention to this life stage, highlighting the urgency with which young people must complete this life stage, stating that ‘[y]outh have long faced challenges in the transition from education to work but now need urgent attention’. It adds that if young people end up not in education, employment or training (as NEETs), they ‘risk becoming marginalised from the labour market



and may turn to anti-social behaviour' (*ibid.*: 4), emphasising especially the negative aspects of *failure* to transition from school to work.

Thus, the policy discourse broadly assumes that young people should necessarily transition through life stages that bring them, in a somewhat linear fashion, from education into remunerated work, and that if not, they – and most likely society also – will suffer. However, like many other scholars we have raised problems with this notion of linearity, not only because many young people may assume adult roles at earlier stages (e.g. be financially independent or breadwinners already during childhood), but also because they may also revert back to assuming 'younger' roles within society (Waage 2006). Young people may also seem to assume both youthful and adult roles at the same time (Durham 2000, cited in Hardgrove *et al.* 2014). Many adolescents and children move back and forth on a continuum of education and work, very often combining the two,<sup>6</sup> and seeking 'becoming' rather than attainment of an ideal-typical final state of adulthood (Crivello 2011). Rather, transitioning to work, what Morrow (2013) refers to as 'vital conjunctures'<sup>7</sup> can send young people off into many different directions, including 'back' into education or into unplanned employment or into marriage and household work. Thorsen (2013) evocatively paints young rural men as 'weaving' in and out of employment and self-employment, not towards any particular goal but out of necessity.

### 2.3.3 Heterogeneities

Beyond the critique of numerical cut-off points and the linear life cycle approach more generally, there is the problem of what lies within. A depiction of certain groups simply as 'youth' or 'young people' obscures important differences and heterogeneities within the group; 'youth' may simply not be much of a relevant unifier.

The ideal of an education-to-work transition is particularly biased towards the traditional 'male breadwinner' model. The linearity in the life course transition model thus is even more at odds with the reality of many young women particularly, more so than men. This is because young women often find themselves in and out of school while working for income or subsistence as well as performing caring tasks that are seen as 'adult' (Morrow 2013). In Africa, 25 per cent of the women aged 15–19 have already had their first child or are pregnant, while men become parents at a later age. This affects women's decisions about whether to continue education and find work much earlier, and consider the trade-offs childcare represents in relation to education and work (Fox, Senbet and Simbanegavi 2016).

Overall, we find the label, and the policies to tackle 'youth' employment in particular, often apparently implies young men. While most policies and programmes do differentiate to some extent, referring to 'youth' often suggests a different gender than 'young women and men' would do. This issue also connects with the idea of intersectionality: it is often much more than just their being young that oppresses or holds back many of the people seen as facing a youth work problem. The 'youth' category might falsely suggest homogeneity and distract from more meaningful identity markers and relative positionalities, perhaps most acutely gender, place, ethnic privilege and economic class.

## 2.4 Concepts and types of work young people engage in

This section provides various definitions of what constitutes 'work', 'employment' and 'productive' work according to policy actors, and investigates the implications of policy

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<sup>6</sup> While children and adolescents may sometimes combine school and work, we are not necessarily assessing the morality of this phenomenon here, particularly since in some cases it is legal for children to work (see ILO Convention 138 on minimum working age). Rather, our point here is that delineating childhood and youth/adulthood as times of education and work respectively is not a matter for which there is necessarily a clear-cut distinction.

<sup>7</sup> This concept was originally used by Johnson-Hanks (2002).

discourses that are derived from these definitions. The section then broadens the discussion of youth employment by looking at the different types of work young people engage in. It tries to do so by highlighting the social and family norms, responsibilities and commitments that might be embedded in various types of work young people do.

### **2.4.1 Definitions of ‘work’ and ‘employment’ and assumptions about ‘productive’ work**

We start with the definition of ‘work’. The ILO considers that ‘work’

comprises all inputs of labour for:

- Production of goods and services for payment, profit or family gain;
- Unpaid production of goods and services for consumption by others, ex. as a volunteer or part of a programme of education and training; [...]
- Unpaid production of goods and services for own consumption or by members of own household (ex. subsistence production and household cleaning or child care)

(Lawrence 2012: 7)

According to the 2013 World Development Report on ‘Jobs’, this definition of work also refers to the notion of a ‘job’, or ‘employment’. Indeed, the Report states that:

For statisticians, a job is ‘a set of tasks and duties performed, or meant to be performed, by one person, including for an employer or in self-employment.’ Jobs are performed by the employed. These are defined as people who produce goods and services for the market or for their own use.

(World Bank 2012: 5)

Further, this definition of ‘work’, ‘job’ or ‘employment’ is recognised by the UN as being ‘productive in an economic sense’, and thus work is the same as ‘production’ (UN 2009: 6). However, while recognising the nature of what constitutes ‘productive work’, the UN also intentionally leaves some types of work out of its system formally accounting for ‘productive work’ or ‘production’, or ‘employment’:

The system of national accounts (SNA) includes ‘all production actually destined for the market, whether for sale or barter,’ as well as the production of goods for one’s own use, but ‘excludes all production of services for own final consumption within households.’ This definition thus leaves out of official statistics activities such as child-rearing, care of the elderly, or home cooking, as well as traveling to work.’

(UN 2009: 6–7, cited in World Bank 2012: 63)

The UN explains that the ‘production’ boundary is a definitional compromise, and a deliberate one, which takes into account the needs of most of its users, while not being tautological. It argues that including all people involved in personal and domestic services for own final consumption would essentially render everyone employed, making defining unemployment virtually impossible (UN 2009: 7).

While this is an understandable justification for leaving some types of production out of labour force statistics, this interpretation is also liable to influence the discourse of policy actors on what is to be considered ‘productive’. This appears to be the case for the ILO (2015a), which states that in lower-income countries it is often the case that, for individuals, ‘adulthood and family formation arrive without having attained the stage of productive employment’ (2015a: 51). Those who aren’t able to get a decent job (i.e. which provides a fair income) following the end of schooling are therefore ‘effectively blocked in their ability to fully adopt their role as productive members of society, which in turn jeopardizes the country’s capacity to grow’ (ILO 2015a: 3–4). Thus, here what the ILO considers productive

jobs are not just those jobs that 'produce' goods or services, but rather those that are higher skilled, better paid and making a greater contribution to the economy. In other words, those who work but without obtaining a decent job (and income) (e.g. doing paid or unpaid childcare), are considered to be less productive members of society.

Although this conception of 'productivity' is not new or unknown within the economic and development community, some scholarship has critiqued this view by encouraging a perspective that pays greater attention towards the non-economic value of activities carried out by (young) people (Ferguson 2015; Wignall 2016). For example, Wignall (2016) expands on Ferguson's idea that the 'jobless' are creating 'so far unquantifiable social value' (Ferguson 2015, cited in Wignall 2016) through examples of non-paid community work in both the global North and the global South (such as coaching local youth in sports or acting as voluntary security guards). Among other things, this work is valuable not only to the community, but also to those who perform it because they garner respect from community members and thus accrue social capital.

Much of the work performed by young people thus does not fit standard notions of salaried employment. We therefore need to cast an eye on the other types of work and their meanings in young people's lives.

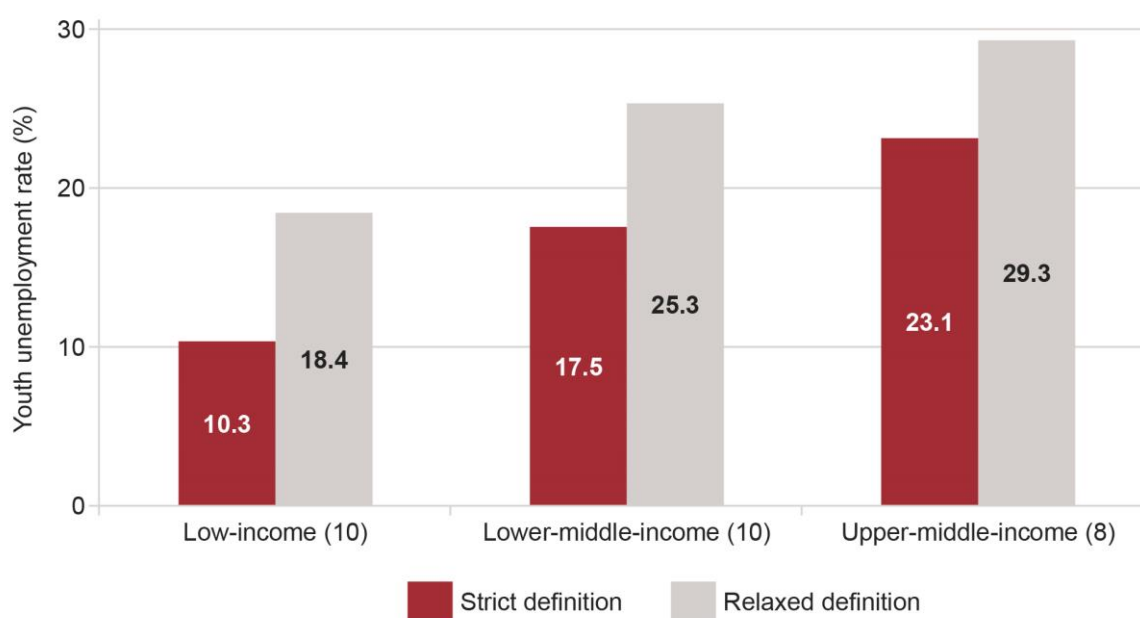
## Box 2.1 Who is unemployed, who is underemployed?

The ILO (2015a: 31) considers someone as unemployed if they satisfy three criteria: they,

- (a) did not work in the reference period; (b) were available to take up a job had one been offered in the week prior to the reference period; and (c) actively sought work within the past 30 days (for example, by registering at an employment centre or answering a job advertisement).

The ILO further recognises two distinctions within this definition: a 'strict' definition of unemployment, and a 'relaxed' (or 'broad') definition. The distinction is made regarding the 'seeking work' criterion (c), where the definition can be considered 'relaxed' if a person did not work in the reference week but was available to work (thus the difference is whether someone was simply available for work rather than seeking work, though with a shortened reference period). The 'relaxed' definition may be used for contexts where, for example, the conventional means of seeking work are of limited relevance or where the labour force is largely self-employed.

**Figure 2.3 Youth unemployment rates by different definitions**



Notes: The age group is 15–29. Number of countries covered is shown in parentheses.  
Source: Adapted from ILO (2015a: 31).

Figure 2.3 shows the difference in youth unemployment rates in various contexts according to the definitions used. Notably, both the strict and relaxed definitions show lower rates in poorer countries, reflecting the fact that few people in low-income countries can afford to remain idle, including while they are looking for (better) employment prospects. Also, we can see that the relative difference between adopting a strict and relaxed definition grows as we move down the income categories, which does indeed suggest higher rates of self-employment, and the lower relevance of 'conventional' means of seeking work in poorer countries.

The AfDB *et al.* (2012) use a number of measures defined differently to assess unemployment rates. They recognise the ILO's definition of unemployment, but designate the 'relaxed', or 'broad', part of its definition as the 'discouraged worker rate' (i.e. those who are not actively seeking employment but who are available, and who would not normally be counted in un/employment measures as they are typically considered out of the labour force). However, the document in fact finds that the 'relaxed' definition does not go far enough – as it does not take into account those who are ill, or who, perhaps out of lack of prospects, take up family commitments and are thus unavailable to work – and instead suggests to use the NEET rate of youth, which is the rate of youth 'not in employment, education or training'.

One definition of underemployment refers to being in involuntary part-time work, i.e. having part-time work but not being employed full-time despite wanting to be (AfDB *et al.* 2012). This definition

is referred to as 'time-related' underemployment and is also used by the UN (1998). However, AfDB (2016a) also describes underemployment with reference to the term 'vulnerable employment', which fundamentally denotes 'workers in unprotected forms of employment, with low productivity and high risk of poverty' (AfDB *et al.* 2012: 105).

This conceptualisation of underemployment closely links to a definition proposed by the scholars Ranis and Gollin (2014). Indeed, because working full-time, particularly in lower-income countries, may not be enough to satisfy one's basic needs, they propose a definition of underemployment based on the proportion of those in the workforce working full-time but who are earning less than minimum wage. This is what they call 'invisible underemployment'. They do state that this definition is likely to significantly increase the number of those considered to be underemployed (*ibid.*: 28).

## 2.4.2 Formal/informal employed youth

Three-quarters of young people aged 15–29 are currently engaged in informal employment<sup>8</sup> according to surveys conducted by the ILO across 20 developing countries around the world (Shehu and Nilsson 2014). In Africa, the proportion of people working in the informal sector is up to 90 per cent in the poorest countries (AfDB *et al.* 2012), with the proportion of young people in the informal sector being 'significantly higher' than the share of adults (2012: 100). In terms of informal activities, this mainly involves self-employment or (paid or unpaid) family work in the agricultural sector, and to a lesser extent in non-farm activities, mainly in trading and services (AfDB *et al.* 2012; FAO 2012; Filmer *et al.* 2014). While exact figures are not necessarily known, contributions and commitment to family labour, both in farming and in household enterprises, constitute an important part of employment for youth.

## 2.4.3 Self-employment/youth entrepreneurship

As mentioned above, informal self-employment is an important type of employment for many young people. It involves to a large extent agriculture, but can also include a vast array of other activities, such as food preparation, brickmaking, hairdressing, driving a motorcycle taxi, street trading, or hawking. This is what a number of authors would consider 'entrepreneurship' (e.g. Gough and Langevang 2016; IRIN In-Depth 2007; Ismail 2016; Mabala 2011). Indeed, the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) describes entrepreneurship as 'any attempt at new business or new venture creation, such as self-employment, a new business organization, or the expansion of an existing business, by an individual, a team of individuals, or an established business' (Bosma, Wennekers and Amorós 2012: 9).

Regarding self-employment specifically, a survey conducted in five sub-Saharan African countries found that the vast majority of people are self-employed in Kenya, Ghana, Mali and Madagascar (ranging from 64.8 per cent to 83.3 per cent), with the most common activity being agriculture (around 50 per cent of informal self-employment) (Heintz and Valodia 2008: 9). South Africa, however, is an outlier in terms of self-employment rates, with a rate of only 19 per cent (*ibid.*: 9).

Yet wage employment is often the preferred option, and many people in developing countries undertake self-employment because they have no other choice (AfDB *et al.* 2012; Fields 2013; UNDP 2014b). This is referred to by some as 'necessity' (or 'survival') entrepreneurship (Naudé 2011; Vivarelli 2013). A recent review of programmes to promote

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<sup>8</sup> Regarding a definition, there is surprisingly little agreement on what constitutes 'informality' (Kanbur 2009). This is partly because of the interchanging use of terms such as 'the informal sector', 'the informal economy' and 'informal employment' (Cassim *et al.* 2016), but also because of the distinction between working in informal firms (informal sector) and informal employment in formal firms (formal sector). Although there is still debate on the definition of informality (Ismail 2016; World Bank 2012), the ILO reconciles the latter distinction and considers as informally employed: '(a) everyone who works in an unincorporated enterprise that is unregistered or small (less than five people), including subsistence farming and non-farm self-employment and (b) anyone in any kind of wage labour not covered by social protection through their work, domestic workers, such a [sic] regular, temporary, or casual day labourers, and non-wage contributing family workers' (cited in Fox, Senbet and Simbanegavi 2016: i9).

youth self-employment published by the ILO found that while self-employment may be a way for young people and their families to cope in situations where few or no other economic opportunities exist, interventions to support self-employment are unlikely to create more than low-paid jobs with limited sustainability (Burchell *et al.* 2015: 35, 40). However, while such economic factors are important, many reasons for engaging in this type of work can also come from social motivations (as explored further in sub-section 4.2 on situated aspirations).

#### **2.4.4 Household reproduction and domestic work**

Household reproduction essentially refers to the ability of a household to sustain itself and continue into next generation. This entails not only childbearing, but also ‘daily practices of mutual support, including income-pooling and labor-sharing’ (Douglass 2015: 2). Activities associated with household reproduction thus include marriage, educating and raising children, household maintenance, migrant remittances and care of the elderly (Douglass 2015: 1) – all activities that have a strong social or relational component. These in turn play a role in the process of inculcating values and cultural norms, creating citizens and protecting individuals against the outside world (*ibid.*). Households, notably, extend beyond families, to allow for various configurations of household arrangements, and can thus include domestic workers, both those who are fictive (or foster) kin, and those who become intimately tied to the family (*ibid.*).

Regarding participation in household reproduction activities, many individuals are reported to begin both paid and unpaid work in and outside of the domestic sphere at an early age (Hardgrove *et al.* 2014; Morrow 2013). For example, Morrow (2013) describes how some of the household activities of children aged 12–17 are common among both sexes, such as agricultural work, while others are segregated according to strong social norms. For example, in India, boys are expected to provide for their parents in old age and for their sisters’ dowries, while girls are expected to master household chores, such as making *rangoli*,<sup>9</sup> in order to please future in-laws (*ibid.*). Overall, however, women are disproportionately more involved in domestic household reproductive and thus unpaid (and considered ‘unproductive’) work. Around the world, women are involved in unpaid care work two to ten times more than men are (Ferrant, Pesando and Nowacka 2014), largely contributing to the fact that they have been found to work overall 1.4 times more hours (all types of work combined) than men in places such as Nepal and Kenya (Budlender and Moussié 2013). This disproportionate burden of unpaid domestic work and overall working hours placed on women can severely limit their ability to gain higher incomes (Chopra 2015; Ferrant *et al.* 2014).

In addition to unpaid domestic work, such as reproductive and care work, paid domestic work mainly occurs in the informal sector (ILO 2013b). These tasks can include working as a housemaid/servant, cook, gardener, watchman, chauffeur, etc. (ILO 2013b), and the workforce mainly consists of females (83 per cent among domestic workers aged 15 and older, and 61 per cent among those aged under 15) (ILO 2013a: 3, 2013b: 19). Women are predominant in the low-wage and low-status job that is domestic work – often considered ‘women’s work’ (Piper and Lee 2013). Domestic work is often considered ‘invisible’ work since it is carried out behind closed doors in private households – an unconventional worksite – and this notion of invisibility is also reflected in national labour legislation (Tomei 2009, cited in Tsikata 2009). Paid domestic workers are often excluded from the purview of national employment laws either partially (51 per cent) or fully (30 per cent), in wealthy as well as developing countries (ILO 2013b). They are not covered by minimum wage rates in places such as Finland (ILO 2010), and their exclusion from national labour laws can reinforce society’s perception of domestic work as not worthy of legalisation or monetisation.

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<sup>9</sup> *Rangoli* refer to patterns made of powder every morning in front of the house and are an assessment of a girl’s ability to undertake housework (Morrow 2013).

Everywhere in the world, remunerated domestic workers are reported to be subjected to low pay, unstable hours, few employment benefits and no career path (Tomei 2009, cited in Tsikata 2009), and many of them are in vulnerable positions (ILO 2013b).

A UN Women report suggests that domestic work is a major contributor to both internal and international migration, which sees many women leaving home, leaving many children and family members who stay back facing a 'care crisis' (Piper and Lee 2013). However, the report also suggests many women may gain empowerment and independence through domestic work, potentially allowing them to gain access to land markets, credit and other resources upon their return home. Their families are also reported to gain from women's domestic work, as reports show that women are more likely to invest in schools, wells and local development for their families, through their networks (*ibid.*).

Domestic work can thus also be seen as livelihood strategy, where mostly women need to navigate the opportunities that are afforded to them through such work, and square them against the potential obligations they have towards their home communities and family members (sometimes including in-laws).

## **2.5 Conclusion**

This concludes our critical review of policy framings and definitions around youth unemployment and underemployment. We began by examining the statistical evidence on young people's employment and highlighting the economic ('demographic dividend') and securitising (young people as threats) rationales underlying some of the present focus on young people. It showed that there are tricky definitional issues around the label 'youth', not only with numerical cut-off points, but also with more sociological approaches that focus on a supposedly linear and natural transition from school to work. Labelling people collectively as 'youth' can also hide important heterogeneities between young people. Finally, we discussed different perspectives on what counts as 'work', which do not necessarily fit well with many current policy approaches.

The following section will delve deeper into a specific set of policy approaches, namely those that focus on getting young people into paid employed or self-employed work via enhancing what young people bring to the labour market. As we have seen, paid (formal and informal) labour is just a subset of the work that young people do, but it is the type of work that many interventions focus on, which reflects a broader emphasis on market inclusion. The current focus on enhancing the supply of young people's labour, rather than improving what opportunities they find in labour markets, creates problems for the success of the approaches we focus on, namely: education, skills training, behavioural change and entrepreneurship.

### 3 Supply-side policies for youth work, and their problems

The first main objective of this report is to tackle the supply-side bias found in currently dominant approaches to young people and work, which is particularly striking in light of major demand-side structural constraints. As we clarify here, the dominant approaches generally focus on including young people in markets by enhancing what they can supply to those markets; but without addressing structural constraints, these measures risk leading to an adverse form of incorporation into markets.

Table 3.1 provides a list of the most common intervention or programme components from programme evaluations between 2001 and 2012, as reported in a USAID study. As can be seen, most of the programme components focus on developing the supply of labour (especially through skills and entrepreneurship development).

**Table 3.1 Most common intervention or programme components**

	<b>Common programme components</b>
Workforce development	Apprenticeship or on-the-job training (27 interventions) Classroom vocational skills training (26 interventions) Vouchers (13 interventions) Job match or mediation (9 interventions) Life skills (6 interventions)
Entrepreneurship	General training on entrepreneurship (31 interventions) Access to youth-tailored loans and stock (10 interventions) Business plan development (6 interventions) Mentoring (6 interventions) Life skills (4 interventions)

Source: Olenik, Fawcett and Boyson (2013: 5).

Youth work policy documents usually focus on skills and education and emphasise the ‘skills mismatch’, i.e. inadequacy or inappropriateness of skills with which young people are equipped when attempting to enter the labour market (AfDB 2016a; ILO 2015a; OECD 2013; UNDP 2014b). An overall lack of basic education, and thus underskilling, is often identified as an important challenge for young people (UNDP 2014b; Vargas-Lundius and Suttie 2014; World Bank 2012), with inability to read and write<sup>10</sup> considered particularly harmful to accessing paid jobs (World Bank 2012). Schools and vocational training are moreover seen as equipping young people with the wrong or inadequate skills and knowledge (UNDP 2014b). As the UNDP (2014b: 16) reports, an example of the skills mismatch is that when interviewed, ‘young people said that formal education curricula are often overly theoretical, leaving students feeling ill-prepared and lacking the necessary practical skills for the labour force’. Young people are also often portrayed as having the wrong attitudes, particularly being insufficiently entrepreneurial (ILO 2014; UN 2013). Collectively, these perspectives suggest that what young people bring to the labour market is inadequate, and they seek to redress what young people have to offer, rather than what the labour market offers them.

<sup>10</sup> The World Bank (2012) reports that one-tenth of all 15–24-year-olds worldwide are functionally illiterate, while in developing countries, the UNDP (2014b) reports that 200 million people in this age bracket have not completed primary school, and one-quarter cannot read.



Some observers in the policy space have also taken note that most actual policies for youth unemployment focus on promoting skills and contrasted this with demand-side constraints (AfDB *et al.* 2012; Goldin *et al.* 2015; ILO 2015a). Indeed, the baseline report from S4YE finds that:

An initial review of spending shows that much of the money is being spent strategically... investments in youth employment initiatives have been dominated by supply-side interventions, especially those to build skills. Investments in supply-side projects make up 52 percent of the total portfolio, compared with 29 percent on the demand side.

(Goldin *et al.* 2015: 14)

However, while it is recognised that most interventions are geared towards increasing labour supply, the assertion that the money has been spent 'strategically' contrasts with the ILO's assessment of current policy frameworks that there has been 'a general underutilization of policy interventions that aim to increase labour demand' (ILO 2013c: 62).

### **3.1 Supply-side bias of four common interventions**

Many policies therefore focus on, or combine, one or more of four approaches: general education, specific skills training, behavioural change for activation, and entrepreneurship training and promotion.<sup>11</sup> How do these approaches seek to help them, and where are their limitations?

#### **3.1.1 Education**

The benefits of education are diverse. Viewed purely as a labour-market intervention, however, general education (primary, secondary and tertiary) primarily seeks to ensure that young people are better-equipped to engage in a variety of work, thanks to possessing literacy, numeracy and more advanced transferable skills. The provision of education can also come in the form of programmatic interventions, where certain types of modules are integrated into school curricula and carried out in classrooms. For example, the Know about Business (KAB) programme promoted by the ILO is a 120-hour course meant to be taught by teachers in high schools and higher education institutions (ILO 2014).

South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa have made massive improvements in primary education in recent decades,<sup>12</sup> but secondary education has lagged in these places.<sup>13</sup> Viewed through an economic lens, which many programmes at least partly adopt (see, for example, AfDB 2014; ILO 2014), education is a means to build 'human capital'. It equips young people with the (non-specific) skills, knowledge and abilities that render their labour more saleable; it enhances the quality of the 'good' that they bring to the labour market as seekers of work. Many parents and adolescents recognise education as a key to social rise and economic success (Crivello 2011; Morrow 2013).

There is no doubt that education plays an important role in economic development, as it allows countries, firms and people to move into higher-skill economic activities. But it is not evident that a lack of general education is generally the critical issue behind young people's difficulty at finding work in many cases. As Fox *et al.* (2016: i3) note: 'The large cohort of

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<sup>11</sup> The Youth Employment Inventory ([www.youth-employment-inventory.org/](http://www.youth-employment-inventory.org/)) keeps a database of hundreds of relatively recent or ongoing interventions geared to fostering youth employment in all parts of the world. These include interventions funded by donors, governments, development banks, the private and non-government sectors, and relate to the four types of interventions we analyse here, namely education, behavioural change, skills training and entrepreneurship promotion.

<sup>12</sup> Net primary enrolment in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) rose from 60.5 per cent in 1990 to 77.4 per cent in 2013, and in South Asia from 76.3 per cent to 89.5 per cent (World DataBank, 7 September 2016).

<sup>13</sup> Net secondary enrolment in SSA rose from 20.8 per cent in 1990 to 33.7 per cent in 2013, and in South Asia from 39.6 per cent to 51.4 per cent (2008) (World DataBank, 7 September 2016). Latin America has shown consistently higher enrolment rates.

youth entering Africa's labour force is the best educated one the continent has seen, and Africa is witnessing its best growth performance in decades; yet jobs remain elusive in the formal wage sector'.

In fact, young people in Asia and Africa often find it difficult to get work *despite* being educated to a secondary or tertiary level (Betcherman and Khan 2015; IDRC 2015b; ILO 2015a), with young people (15–24) with higher education in sub-Saharan Africa being twice as likely to be unemployed as those with basic education, for example (IDRC 2015b). This is because people with higher education tend to be in the wage sector or are willing to wait in line for a job in that sector, while lower-educated youth tend to be poorer and thus cannot afford to be idle. In the words of van der Geest (2010), '[i]n the poorest countries, to be unemployed is somehow a "luxury" that few can afford'.

If education in many cases has not led to the expected successes on the labour market, we would suggest this is because the issue of demand has been neglected. While there are undeniable benefits from investing in greater education for adolescents and young adults, and many young people in poorer parts of the world desire and deserve better education, focusing only on the supply side of the youth labour equation risks providing young people with skills and knowledge that are not matched with enough opportunities. Indeed, the types of jobs that require education are needed, and must be promoted, if growing investments in education are to pay off, economically speaking.

### **3.1.2 Skills training**

Some programmes focus on building specific skills or, more generally, seeking to ease the transition into specific jobs through training. Skills training includes upskilling programmes, on-the-job training, apprenticeships and similar interventions to facilitate young people's transition into identified forms of employment, for which they are currently seen as insufficiently equipped. These interventions aim to help young people overcome final hurdles on the way to employment.

For example, the Sindh Skills Development Project, funded by the World Bank, aims to train 50,000 Pakistani youth (aged 18–35) in key sectors of the economy (including textile, heavy manufacturing, and retail and hospitality services). Trainings take place over a period of three months to a year, with varying degrees of classroom-style education and practical training, which are provided by private-sector trainers (including enterprises) and government and non-government institutions. In exchange for funding, trainers commit to a minimum of 30 per cent placement rate of trainees, and unsatisfactory trainers are barred from the programme for a year. The 2015 implementation status document reported a 35 per cent rate of project participants being employed and/or enrolled in continuing education three months after completion of training (compared to a target of 40 per cent of trainees either employed or in continuing education). On the one hand, this indicates the project attaining some success *vis-à-vis* its own targets, including placing some young people in jobs, yet on the other hand, an (unspecified) proportion of graduates still had to seek further education to improve their labour market prospects, and nearly two-thirds were still seeking work even after completing the programme.

In skills training, as in education more generally, it is young people's capacity to be employed (or to perform work) that is seen as lacking, albeit specifically in a certain job, and job-specific training is seen as the remedy. Therefore, in the case of these training programmes, it is doubly important to pay attention to the demand side of labour markets: not only that the specific skills learned in apprenticeships, technical education or on-the-job training are actually matched with the right *specific* jobs, but also – again – that the issue is actually a lack of skills, rather than lack of jobs in which to apply their skills.

### 3.1.3 Behavioural change

One approach – which is more often woven into other interventions rather than a stand-alone intervention – is to change the attitudes and behaviours of young people to make them more employable or more entrepreneurial. Behavioural change for activation refers to the aspects of many programmes that aim to instil the right values and performances of responsibility and employability in young people.

Some UN documents, for instance, have called for a change in attitudes towards entrepreneurship among young people. For example, an assessment of youth entrepreneurship in Swaziland found that young people were ‘less committed to entrepreneurship than adults’, partly because young entrepreneurs were 2.5 times more likely than adults to search for another job while operating a microenterprise, and because they spent less time working on this enterprise. As such, the findings of the study ‘seem[ed] to indicate the need for a change of mindset and attitudes towards entrepreneurship among young people with a view to raise their awareness of entrepreneurship as a viable career choice’ (UN 2013: 20). In terms of interventions, the ILO’s Know about Business programme (KAB)<sup>14</sup> also specifically aims to ‘Provid[e] knowledge and practice about the desirable attributes for starting and operating a successful enterprise’ (ILO 2014: 1). These attributes can include self-confidence, communication and negotiation skills, networking, initiative and motivation (*ibid.*).

Thus, the objective clearly is to foster a change in young people’s values and attitudes to encourage them to pursue certain specific types of work. In the weaker form, this refers to changes in behaviour and self-presentation in the process of seeking work or approaching customers (dress, manners, etc.), and in the stronger form this is the intention to change the mindsets and motivations of young people where they are seen as idle, dissuaded or insufficiently motivated or entrepreneurially minded (and therefore unwilling either to seek work at all, or to take up such work as is available). Especially in the stronger form, this approach is evidently supply-oriented as it proposes that accessing work is a question of willingness and ability rather than availability of work. At the same time, this approach promotes an understanding of young, rational and individualistic workers whose behaviour should be to invest in a business, and therefore investments in intangible goods such as relationships is deviant from this image. However, as the next section will show, young men and women’s aspirations are informed by social relationships, and they may wish to use their business to the advantage of their families and networks.

### 3.1.4 Entrepreneurship promotion

Finally, given the enthusiasm that entrepreneurship currently garners from many donors, as well as the often vague usage of the concept, entrepreneurship-oriented approaches warrant special attention. Enterprise and entrepreneurship appear to fascinate donors and policymakers not only because of the role that breakthrough innovations driven by entrepreneurs may play in generating growth, but also because of the way many poor people already appear to be entrepreneurs. As seen in Table 3.1, interventions typically include business and financial literacy training and often also include access to finance (typically microfinance in poorer settings), but also sometimes business plan development and mentoring. The Kenya Youth Business Trust (KYBT),<sup>15</sup> partly funded by USAID, is a good example of an entrepreneurship promotion intervention, which combines several of these components, including a four-day business course, direct funding or linkage to financial institutions, business plan development, and one-on-one mentoring on business management.

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<sup>14</sup> KAB is an entrepreneurship education programme, and its overall objective is to ‘introduce young women and men to the world of business and entrepreneurship’ (ILO 2014: 1).

<sup>15</sup> More information about the programme can be found at: [www.youth-employment-inventory.org/inventory/view/947/](http://www.youth-employment-inventory.org/inventory/view/947/); [www.ilo.org/youthmakingithappen/PDF/2j\\_Kenya\\_Kenya-Youth-Business-Trust\\_26Nov07\\_.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/youthmakingithappen/PDF/2j_Kenya_Kenya-Youth-Business-Trust_26Nov07_.pdf).

Of the four approaches summarised here, entrepreneurship training and promotion has perhaps the least obvious supply orientation. It is even seen by some as overcoming the demand constraint because it removes young people from the status of job-seeker, and perhaps even turns some of them into job-creators for others (see Box 3.1).

### Box 3.1 Entrepreneurship: a demand-side intervention?

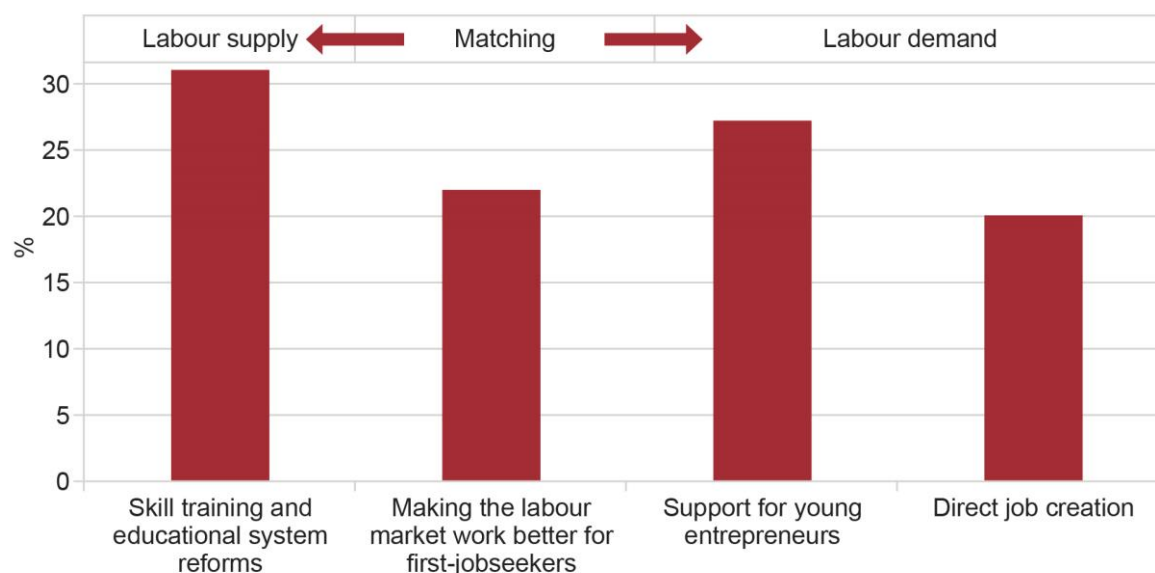
Donors and policymakers often believe they are addressing the demand side of labour markets with entrepreneurship programmes. Figure 3.1 and the two quotations below clearly showcase this.

Almost every African country is running Active Labour Market Programmes (ALMPs) to reduce unemployment and promote employment for young people. Following the framework of analysis from the preceding section, ALMPs can be classified into three categories, addressing labour demand, labour supply, or labour market mediation and matching. Programmes addressing labour demand aim to create jobs through promoting entrepreneurship; but also through direct jobs creation (public works programmes). (AfDB *et al.* 2012)

The potential of entrepreneurship as a pathway to decent work for young people is well acknowledged. It is especially relevant to countries where growth in labour demand lags behind their new labour market entrants and current unemployed, creating a gap between shares of labour market entrants and available wage employment opportunities. (ILO 2005)

Some other policy documents do, however, acknowledge the supply-sidedness of entrepreneurship interventions, such as the S4YE Coalition, which recognises micro-enterprise development as a supply-side intervention (Goldin *et al.* 2015: 14).

**Figure 3.1 Entrepreneurship counted among demand-side approaches**



Source: Adapted from AfDB *et al.* (2012).

However, entrepreneurship approaches only seemingly tackle the demand side. First, while young people who are entrepreneurially engaged may no longer be statistically counted as unemployed, demand constraints on their ability to sell their labour-power remain and only resurface in other forms. Contrary to what the term ‘self-employment’ may suggest, entrepreneurship does not (in some mysterious way) enable young people to create their own demand for their labour. Instead, self-employment entails using a small enterprise as a vessel for supplying labour to the market, in which young people must nonetheless navigate

the structural constraints of the market. Rather than seeking payments from employers (wages), they instead strive to sell their labour to the consuming public directly, in the form of goods and services. Yet under conditions of poverty, the consuming public has very limited purchasing power, as the disappointments of many young people exiting entrepreneurship programmes also testify to (see, for example, Dolan and Rajak 2016: 525 ff.). Where market conditions do not offer young entrepreneurs many opportunities to make sales, entrepreneurialism does not resolve the underemployment problem and instead merely makes young people (what we may call) ‘entrepreneurially underemployed’.

Second, where donors expect that young entrepreneurs will create jobs for other young people, this is often based on confusion between informal economy enterprises and larger formal enterprises. This relates to the dualistic nature of many economies: in developing countries there generally coexist a ‘collection of smaller, typically informal firms that operate at low levels of productivity along with larger, highly productive firms that are better organized and use more advanced technologies’ (McMillan, Rodrik and Verduzco-Gallo 2014: 17). While the former often serve to sustain a vast number of households’ livelihoods at fairly low levels,<sup>16</sup> it is the latter that create greater labour productivity (yet also, problematically, do not create as many jobs as needed). Given the aim to empower significant numbers of young people, youth entrepreneurship interventions generally try to create as many young entrepreneurs as possible, which inevitably transitions most of them into small, survivalist, ‘necessity’ types of enterprise that do not generate growth. Fuelling such a proliferation of small businesses may even prove fatal for the economy overall, as Bateman and Chang argue in their critique of microcredit:

The more an economy’s scarce financial resources are effectively directed *towards* the very simplest ‘no-tech/no-capital’ – mainly petty-trade-based – microenterprise projects, [the more they are] channelled *away* from more sophisticated and technology/innovation-based projects that offer far more to the economy and society in the medium to longer term... We find many developing countries have, thanks to microfinance, evolved an enterprise structure that is structurally (in addition to the scale economies problem noted earlier) incapable of giving rise to sustainable productivity growth, and so also poverty reduction.  
(Bateman and Chang 2012: 20)

### 3.2 Supply-side bias and demand-side inadequacies

As seen, education, skills training, behavioural change and entrepreneurship promotion approaches for getting young people to work have a supply-side bias. In terms of constraints on young people’s ability to access paid work, analytically speaking, we can identify two broad sets of constraints: insufficient labour demand (*demand-side* constraints) and inadequate preparedness of young people for the job market (*supply-side* constraints). While policy documents often in general terms advocate carrying out a mix of interventions, which address both demand- and supply-side issues (AfDB *et al.* 2012; OECD 2013; UNDP 2014b), we find that the balance is rarely attained, and a majority of policies pursued aims at enhancing the supply of young people’s labour to the market.

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<sup>16</sup> ‘The majority of such enterprises are home based or mobile street vendors, operating without a regular workplace in a commercial neighbourhood (Fox and Sohnesen 2012). Often disparaged as “survival business” because of their limited growth potential, they nonetheless provide a better livelihood to most owners than their alternatives (e.g. agriculture or day labourer), especially for those without complete secondary education, the majority of Africa’s labour force (Fox and Sohnesen 2012)’ (Quotation from Fox, Senbet and Simbanegavi 2016: i19).

### 3.2.1 Misconceptions and wishful thinking

A number of factors may account for the bias towards interventions on the supply side:

- First, supply-oriented programmes appear to offer more incremental and small-scale approaches that are compatible with limited budgets, such as improving schooling in one region of a country, or a localised entrepreneurship programme.
- Second, focusing on the supply side matches recent decades' general emphasis in macroeconomic policy focused on cutting taxes and 'making markets work', rather than spending taxpayer money and interfering in markets.
- Third, as we have seen (in Box 3.1), entrepreneurship-oriented programmes are often misunderstood as demand-side interventions.
- Fourth, supply-oriented work programmes may fall for a 'fallacy of composition', in that they falsely take one young person's success to suggest that, for instance, education or skills-training programmes will work similarly well for others.<sup>17</sup>
- Fifth, these programmes are seen as 'apolitical' instruments that can serve the common good while in reality they can be used as a political resource, as Section 4 will discuss.

These policies are fragmented and individualistic, doing little to address structural constraints around aggregate demand, and for those reasons are likely to be of limited effectiveness (AfDB 2016a; AfDB *et al.* 2012). *A fortiori*, there even appears sometimes to be a variant of 'Say's Law' at work in some donor thinking, in presupposing that supply of (the right kind of) labour would create its own demand; the idea being that better-educated, properly skilled, entrepreneurial young people with the right attitudes would attract or create the work that is currently lacking in their home environments.

### 3.2.2 Inefficient or insufficient labour markets?

Apart from supply and demand constraints, some policy documents also mention external and intermediary factors affecting youth unemployment or underemployment. External causes include general issues of underdevelopment, such as inadequate electricity supply and credit access (AfDB *et al.* 2012; UN 2014). Others highlight the need for a more enabling environment with improved capacity of governments, including ministries and youth councils, or fora for youth engagement and participation (UNDP 2014b).

Some intermediary factors are also blamed for causing inefficiencies in labour markets, preventing supply from actually meeting demand. For instance, strict regulations on hiring and firing employees (requiring severance packages, etc.) might make employers reluctant to hire youth on open-ended contracts (OECD 2013). Or a lack of access to labour market information might make young people unable to find opportunities (AfDB *et al.* 2012; OECD 2013).

Such factors may, in particular cases, play an important role. At the same time, however, focusing on such market inefficiencies could miss the broader picture of market insufficiency overall, in that markets often simply do not present young people with enough opportunities to sell their labour, even if they work efficiently. An analysis of the labour market in developing countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, shows that broader, structural, demand-side problems abound: 'youth employment is a subset of the overall challenges... that stem from poor progress in structural transformation' (Fox and Thomas 2016: i17).

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<sup>17</sup> Education, skills, entrepreneurship and behavioural-change initiatives of sufficient size are bound to create some individual success cases, perhaps even some spectacular ones. Yet extrapolating from these cases to the aggregate level is fallacious. For instance, one young person's success at obtaining a job may be explained from their partaking in a training programme; but if there was only one open position, then only one person will ever benefit from that training. In the worst case, training further young people for this job will even create downward pressure on wages for the sole successful applicant and reduce their gains.

While youth do face particular challenges in finding work compared to adults – for instance, they are newcomers to job markets in which equally qualified incumbents can hold on to jobs – the labour market as a whole in developing countries is insufficient. It is constrained by structural issues, especially the lack of employment provided by private enterprise (Fox and Thomas 2016: i17). And the World Bank (2012: 18) states that ‘the problem is often more on the demand side than the supply side’, while AfDB *et al.* (2012: 133) conclude that ‘[y]outh face specific entry barriers [to labour markets] but the biggest obstacle is insufficient demand for their labour’.

Lack of demand has often been identified as a problem in labour markets for young people, as much for high-income countries as for low-income countries (AfDB 2016a; AfDB *et al.* 2012; IDRC 2015a; ILO 2013c, 2015a; OECD 2013; UNDP 2014b; World Bank 2012). Aggregate demand has a direct impact on growth and employment creation, and the lack of aggregate demand at a global scale has had a clear impact on developing economies, particularly since the financial crisis in 2008:

the slow recent growth performance is a shortage in global aggregate demand. In particular, the growing disconnect between labour incomes and productivity may have affected private consumption and global demand, thereby also reducing private investment. A vicious circle may be at work, with lower demand affecting output and employment, thereby further depressing demand.  
(Kapsos *et al.* 2015: 20)

For high-income countries, the OECD emphasises ‘tackling weak aggregate demand’ (OECD 2013: 1), particularly in a context where ‘youth employment outcomes have deteriorated significantly following the economic crisis’ (OECD 2013: 4). In lower-income countries, weak aggregate labour demand often continues even amid a context of economic growth (AfDB *et al.* 2012; IDRC 2015a). As the ILO concludes in no uncertain terms, the current supply-side focus of programmes therefore not only misses the mark, but also reflects a fragmentation of donor activity and a failure to address broader issues of policy:

Policies that promote employment-centred and inclusive growth are vital if young people are to be given a fair chance at a decent job... A boost in aggregate demand is key to addressing the youth employment crisis as this will create more job opportunities for young people... Far too often, however, interventions that aim to increase labour demand remain underutilized. It is quite uncommon to find a comprehensive set of policy priorities, targets and outcomes for youth employment, let alone with sufficient funds and resource allocations.  
(ILO 2015a: 62–63)

Most often, young people are willing and able to work, but the economy fails to provide adequate work, and current market-based approaches do not effectively address demand. For instance, Hansen (2010: 21) reports how more than 3,500 young job seekers, mostly university graduates, stood in line for a job fair held in Lusaka – no more than 200 jobs were up for grabs. Golub and Hayat explore the issue through national-level comparisons in sub-Saharan Africa, testing whether underemployment was a product of lack of education or lack of demand. They clearly conclude that African labour markets provide insufficient opportunities to those who seek jobs, rather than Africans being insufficiently ready or able to access jobs.

The observed patterns of wages and employment suggest that low demand for labour is the primary cause. In general, education explains only about 30 per cent of variations in labour compensation... Enterprise surveys and poll data provide further evidence that low demand for labour rather than lack of education is the most binding constraint.  
(Golub and Hayat 2014: 6)

### 3.2.3 Economic dualism and lack of structural transformation

Structural transformation in developing countries in recent decades, with the exception of a few emerging Asian economies such as China and Vietnam, has not followed the 'conventional' path of transformation from agriculture to manufacturing leading to wealth and job creation. Manufacturing (industry) is the sector most amenable to increases in labour productivity, but most developing countries have failed to achieve growth in this sector.<sup>18</sup> Instead, in the majority of developing economies, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, the agricultural sector has retained its importance, and labour migration away from agriculture has primarily fed into the growth of an unorganised service sector (de Vries, Timmer and de Vries 2015: 679).<sup>19</sup>

Under these circumstances of weak productivity (and therefore earnings growth), the labour market in less- and least-developed countries is 'marked by a sharp dualism with very small formal employment. Agriculture and urban informal sectors feature pervasive underemployment rather than open unemployment' (Golub and Hayat 2014: 2). With dualism, only a small proportion of jobs are formal jobs in the public sector or the private sector:

In low-income countries where informality is omnipresent, where the labour market institutions for promoting formal employment and labour standards are weak, where self-employment is the dominant employment category and few young persons are reaching even secondary school levels, it remains a small minority who will ever benefit from a standard employment relationship... In developing countries with widespread informality, vulnerability and short working hours go hand in hand. (ILO 2015a: 40).

Dualism implies marked differences in economic development within countries, with a vast subsistence agriculture and informal service sector being disconnected from a small, more advanced formal sector, which is often export-oriented. Especially in resource-rich low-income countries this is salient, as any growth is dominated by the export of extracted commodities, but these activities do not generate many jobs or otherwise foster linkages with the broader economy, and they operate in enclaves. These divisions constrain young people's options in navigating the world of work, especially when paired with high supplies of labour seeking work, as theorised in the 'Lewis Model' of developing economies (see Box 3.2). The problem for young people under Lewisian dualistic conditions is that, no matter what they do, there is far too little demand for what they offer, regardless of skill, education or ambition. They are usually forced to remain outside the enclaves of capitalist growth, or find highly precarious work.

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<sup>18</sup> In fact, the rise of China in manufacturing is an important explanatory factor for the paucity of manufacturing in developing and developed countries (McMillan *et al.* 2014: 28).

<sup>19</sup> A look at the available numbers on agricultural employment shares in Africa, however, paints an inconclusive picture due to large gaps in data for most countries (World Bank Development Indicators, <http://databank.worldbank.org/>, accessed 6 September 2016).



### **Box 3.2 An unlimited supply of young labour? The ‘Lewis Model’ of developing economies**

Oversupplies of labour are hardly a new problem issue for development economics, but they are an issue which has seen far less research and policy attention in recent years. Some of the earliest thinking in development economics started from the recognition that developing countries had ‘dual economies’, with a small capitalist core and vast reservoirs of potential workers, including young people, outside it. These workers were willing to take up any jobs as soon as they were created.

Arthur Lewis (1954) thus modelled developing economies as having an effectively ‘unlimited supply of labour’ thanks to their large rural subsistence farming sector. The problem, he argued, was that as long as these labour supplies were not absorbed, wages in the emergent urban capitalist sector would remain so low that the country would not develop economically. It would sit in a poverty trap caused by wages stagnating at bare-subsistence level, and capitalists having no incentive to invest in improved technologies. The solution, Lewis and his followers suggested, was to focus on creating demand in the urban economy – artificially (through state investment and public spending) if need be – until the rural farming sector (and urban informal sector) held no more surplus labour. After this ‘turning point’, urban wages would sharply rise and poverty would begin to be reduced.

Clearly, the ‘Lewis Model’ is just axiomatic and abstract, and nowhere to be found in reality. But it holds a simple and powerful lesson: lack of work, rather than lack of ability or willingness to work, is the fundamental hindrance to development and growth in poor countries where there are large supplies of labour. The ‘youth bulge’ trope already clearly points to the issue of an increased ‘supply’ of young people. Viewed as a job-market phenomenon, this ‘youth bulge’ may be reinterpreted as a growing supply or perhaps near-unlimited of young people’s labour into economies that, at least given present conditions, especially in Africa, cannot accommodate it. Lewis would argue policymakers urgently need to focus on urban demand creation.

### **3.3 Market inclusion or adverse incorporation of young people**

The broad focus, as we have seen, is on including young people in labour markets through interventions that enhance their supply of labour. Integration into markets is the key to young people’s economic empowerment (for a good example, see Fine *et al.* 2012). In this sense, most current programmes for young people’s work fundamentally are market-inclusion programmes, rather than ‘work’ programmes in a broader sense; the latter would also include non-market-oriented work such as subsistence work, sharing-based work or public works initiatives. What can we say about the conditions under which young people must navigate the process of their inclusion into markets, especially given the conditions of dualism and weak aggregate demand discussed above?

The broad focus of policymakers on ‘inclusion’ emerged from the struggles for *social* inclusion, which proposed that the denial of ability to participate in certain spaces, institutions or processes is not only a cause of injustice, but is also an injustice in itself. Appropriated and transferred into the economic realm as inclusion into markets, the notion is that lack of access to markets is a key cause of poverty, as well as an injustice in itself. This often finds its expression in projects to ‘include’ smallholders, micro producers, or poor people in general in global value chains, under headlines such as M4P (Making Markets Work for the Poor). Applied to economic inclusion for youth, the suggestion is that markets either need to be altered to accommodate young people, or young people need to change in order to gain access to markets. The sources of young people’s exclusion from formal labour markets are sought in their individual inadequacies; a decontextualised, individualised notion of youth and work, which Section 4 critiques in greater depth. Education, skills training, behavioural change and entrepreneurship promotion programming suggest that markets do (or would) hold sufficient opportunities for young people, but young people must be empowered or otherwise changed to enter these markets and grasp the opportunities.

As Kate Meagher (2015: 837) notes, inclusive growth discourses involve ‘a reframing of poverty and informality as a product of inadequate inclusion in markets, rather than a result of inequities in the way markets function’. Policies consequently focus on individual shortcomings instead of, for instance, mechanisms which exclude young people, from discrimination to structural factors. Most strikingly, a focus on inclusion risks overlooking not only how the conditions and constraints within those markets themselves may be the source of exclusion, but also the quality of inclusion that is likely to result if inclusion is achieved. For instance, many textile workers in Bangladesh are strongly economically included in global value chains, but their terms of incorporation arguably have often proven to be very adverse.

The critical concept commonly fielded against the one-sided emphasis on economic inclusion is ‘adverse incorporation’ (e.g. Hickey and du Toit 2013). The concept does not so much suggest inclusion necessarily to be clearly good or bad, and rather exposes how incorporation *can* have adverse characteristics. It is the *terms* of inclusion which matter, as they can be beneficent or adverse. As Hickey and du Toit (2007: 4–6) elucidate, it is often not people’s lack of participation in markets that explains chronic poverty, but also processes of subjugation and exploitation that take place *within* markets, on the basis of economics as well as local history, politics, culture, gender and identity, which matter. Such a lens on the conditions and dynamics of incorporation into markets broadens the scope beyond the narrow ‘residual’ view of disenfranchisement as resulting from exclusion. It opens up what Phillips (2013: 175) refers to as a ‘relational’ perspective, which illuminates how development processes (and policies themselves, such as youth work policies) ‘themselves can produce and reproduce poverty’ through the power relations they build.

In contexts where labour markets are characterised by a general lack of demand for young people’s labour (and labour overall), seeking to bring young people into these markets without addressing structural factors clearly risks incorporating them adversely, with low incomes and precarious conditions. Programmes aiming for ‘market inclusion’, ‘economic inclusion’, ‘financial inclusion’ or ‘inclusive growth’ focus on the sheer fact of bringing young people into markets rather than the conditions and relations which they face there.

We would echo the argument made in parts of the literature that the ‘problem’ lies with the ‘lack of demand rather than employee characteristics’ (Golub and Hayat 2014: 1). In some cases, particularly where subsistence plays a major role in household economics, there may be few markets at all. But in many other cases markets exist, and young people are already incorporated in them or could access them, but the conditions for incorporation are adverse. Many donor policies and projects – tacitly or explicitly – recognise this, when they note that the informal sector is here to stay (see, for example, MasterCard Foundation 2015: 2), and demographic trends will, at least for the foreseeable future, exacerbate economic dualism and informality. As Fox and Thomas (2016: i24) note for the International Monetary Fund, demographic trends compound all the structural issues young people face, particularly in Africa, as ‘the labour force itself is growing much faster... making it harder to transform the structure of employment’. But it is precisely these informal and oversupplied markets which, without any interventions on the demand side, are likely to offer the most adverse terms of incorporation.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

This section has critically engaged with currently dominant approaches to youth employment from a broadly economic perspective, explicating and problematising their supply-side bias. Most interventions are in one way or another premised on enhancing young people’s inclusion in increasingly global markets, although alternative literatures stress it is the *terms* of inclusion that matter much more than inclusion itself. Inclusion into markets as mass suppliers of an insufficiently demanded factor, young labour power, clearly will constitute ‘adverse incorporation’ rather than beneficent inclusion. Therefore, if young people’s

engagement with work is to be improved through market-based approaches, it is not just they who need to be made to work better, but also markets need to be made to work better for them. Otherwise, even 'included' young people will continually find themselves in precarity: either unemployed or entrepreneurially underemployed.

While many policymakers and donors increasingly recognise the importance of demand-side constraints to young people finding work, the most common types of intervention have a strong supply-side bias, as we discussed with regards to education, skills training, behavioural change and entrepreneurship. Particularly entrepreneurship is very problematic in how it is often mistaken for a demand-side intervention, although broad-based entrepreneurship promotion schemes in particular are liable to misdirect capital to no-growth enterprises and render many young people entrepreneurially underemployed.

An important discussion that thus needs to follow and grow in the policy literature is where more demand may come from. Demand for labour, formalisation of labour markets and a reduction in economic dualism may be brought about by generating more jobs in export-oriented sectors. But this entails tying the job-market prospects of young people to an unstable global economy. While some authors clearly advocate structural transformation based on an export-oriented enterprise sector (Golub and Hayat 2014), others also see space to nurture internal market demand (Onaran and Galanis 2013). Such a pursuit of domestic demand-creation, as much as possible, we would argue, is of particular importance in the global environment of continually depressed aggregate demand since the global financial crisis (Kapsos *et al.* 2015). But such approaches also must be accompanied with policies that back up young people's labour rights and security, and ensure young people no longer automatically end up at the bottom of the formal and informal economic hierarchy. We return briefly to policy suggestions in the conclusion of this report.

The following section suggests some potential ways forward analytically, by proposing a more comprehensive understanding of the meaning of work for young people and an improved lens for studying it.

## 4 Improving our understanding of young people and work

In this section we make use of the concept of ‘social navigation’ to substantiate our argument that current policy approaches to youth employment miss their mark, not only economically, but also in terms of how work figures in the reality of young people’s lives. Predominant approaches are based on the assumption that young people operate on individual, rational choice-based principles. Donor programmes, we saw previously, often focus on strengthening young people’s individual knowledge and skillsets as a way of helping them find their way on the job market. Beyond questioning individualistic and supply-oriented approaches from an economic viewpoint, we also want to emphasise more broadly how young people are embedded in social relationships and societal norms. These influence both their aspirations for the future and their actual agency when pursuing work opportunities and navigating uncertainty.

In this section, we provide a further explanation of the concept of social navigation before proceeding with a more relational analysis of how young people pursue various forms of work.

### 4.1 Social navigation

The concept of social navigation was originally developed for highly dynamic war settings, where uncertainty is the salient feature (Vigh 2006, 2009). Vigh (2009) speaks of young people as engaging in *dubriagem* in Guinea-Bissau, a term which he explains as ‘muddling through’. It describes the agentic behaviour of young people in unstable, dynamic contexts. Vigh (2009) explains the interaction between everyday practice and sociopolitical context, emphasising that the context itself can rapidly change. The concept, then, brings together two fields: ‘the movement and change of social formations and societies, and the movement and practice of agents within social formations’ (Vigh 2009: 426). This emphasis on the imagined or projected future is central to the concept, and young people are not just waiting for opportunities to emerge but actively form relationships that may help them seize further opportunities.

For its emphasis on agency in contexts of high or even extreme uncertainty, the concept of social navigation has been used to study how young people go about finding work or other opportunities to learn skills and earn some money outside the immediate context of war-affected economies, but in places where economic conditions are uncertain (Overå 2016; Langevang and Gough 2009, 2012). In this section we will explain some of the sociocultural and political, structural elements in the lives of young men and women that are particularly important regarding young people’s aspirations and their efforts to find work. Yet the structures that shape young people’s agency are also intermeshed: changes in economic conditions, for instance, can trigger changes in social structures. Economic hardship can have effects on social norms, as when parents and their children start having different expectations about who is responsible for bringing in earnings (Thorsen 2013; Podder 2015).

### 4.2 Situated aspirations

As young people navigate an uncertain and precarious economy, the emphasis in the social navigation literature on the continuous assessment of the present and unfolding future resonates with the notion of ‘imagined futures’ in debates on youth and work (Edley and Wetherell 1999; Hardgrove, Rootham and McDowell 2015) as well as with ideas about youth aspirations (Bajema, Wade Miller and Williams 2002; Hardgrove *et al.* 2015; Schaefer and Meece 2009; Tafere and Woldehanna 2012). Importantly, young people have aspirations, but they are forced to consider these (as well as the steps to take to realise them) in light of

their structural contexts and constraints. This takes us to a discussion about what work means in the lives of young people. While economic structures clearly shape their agency in pursuing work, economics is hardly the only factor in why and how they seek work.

Current policy approaches tend to focus on the remunerated aspects and benefits of jobs. The 2013 World Development Report, in detailing its perspective on the role of jobs in people's lives, first highlights the importance of the pecuniary aspect of jobs. Indeed, it states that 'Jobs are the most important determinant of living standards' (World Bank 2012: 9). In addition to assuming that 'jobs' provide rights (which only applies to a minority of jobs in developing countries), it emphasises especially the remunerated benefit of work, stating that 'Beyond rights, the most obvious outcome of a job is the earnings it provides to its holder' (World Bank 2012: 15). The African Union (n.d.: 24) also stresses the importance of paid work, and characterises it as central to a person's life, stating that 'every human activity that allows one to practice a legitimate profession [referred to as "paid work exercised regularly for a living"] gives meaning to life'.

#### **4.2.1 The broader values of work**

Beyond pecuniary benefits, jobs in the World Development Report are also seen to have other personal effects on people's lives, such as on identity, self-esteem and happiness. Jobs are said to foster social cohesion when people are employed, yet they can also play a destabilising factor socially when there is unequal or unfair access to jobs (World Bank 2012). The Report sums up the role of jobs as follows: 'jobs provide earnings, generate output, and influence identity, they shape the wellbeing of those who hold them – and they also affect the well-being of others' (World Bank 2012: 15).

However, we feel that current policy approaches assume that having work will automatically result in having a positive impact on identity and wellbeing. This is at least partially caused by the lack of policy approaches to meaningfully connect with young people's ambitions and aspirations, and a lack of understanding of the social meaning of work. Taking youth aspirations as a starting point would help integrate their views on the role of work in 'becoming somebody' (Langevang and Gough 2012) and thus pay attention to intangible aspects such as status and a sense of independence. For instance, studies in youth migration have pointed out that, aside from seeing migration to urban areas as a form of navigating a lack of economic opportunities in rural areas, young people may migrate in order to become more independent from families and kin, pursue further education and learn new professional skills, and improve their social status in the eyes of the people remaining in rural areas (Thorsen 2013).

Various policy actors do recognise the importance of starting from young people's aspirations (UNDP 2014b; USAID 2012; Vargas-Lundius and Suttie 2014). For example, in the context of policy around youth involvement in rural and sustainable development IFAD states that:

There is often limited understanding or attentiveness to the aspirations of young rural women and men, not surprising given their marginalization from development processes and initiatives and the lack of forums for them to express themselves. In addition, little empirical research has been conducted in this area. It would be useful, for example, to investigate the types and forms of agricultural and rural activities that young women and men associate with both economic benefits and increased status. Such research should then inform agricultural and rural development planning. (Vargas-Lundius and Suttie 2014: 55)

However, despite this recognition there is generally a lack of approaches that start off from youth aspirations, and most are instead based on the assumption that young people prioritise the remunerative aspects of work.

In contrast with the view that young people pursue individual objectives, numerous studies have shown that young men and women aspire to contribute to their families and communities, and seek their recognition. We would underline the importance of social relations and positionality in shaping the preferences and aspirations of young people. Langevang, Namatovu and Dawa (2012) find that young people engage in entrepreneurship for such reasons as wanting to 'make a difference in the community', 'achieve respect in the community', or due to 'family tradition of running a business', while Yeboah *et al.* (2016) find that improving society or 'building the nation' are of primary concern as desirable job characteristics for secondary school students in different study sites in rural Ghana. Korzenevica (2016) describes how young migrants in Nepal often return home from urban areas to take part in community work or on the fields to cover for their parents, in order to enable their participation in community and political meetings. Parents call back their children studying in towns for these purposes, sometimes limiting their chances to successfully complete courses. Thus, these young people navigate a sense of responsibility towards their family, their aspirations for mobility and a life in towns, and their wish to contribute to community development at home. In Korzenevica's study the gendered experience of this navigation clearly came to the fore: while young men considered this kind of work as contributions to community development, young women felt these were family obligations. Social embeddedness thus shapes young people's motivations for doing different kinds of work, alongside remunerative aspects.

#### **4.2.2 Work and social position**

The social position young people have in society as 'youth' can also shape their aspirations (Oosterom 2016). Societies have certain expectations of what adult roles and responsibilities entail (Abbink and Van Kessel 2005; Honwana 2011; Honwana and de Boeck 2005; Ukeje and Iwilade 2012). Society specifies the social markers that mark the transition from youth to adult irrespective of age. Existing cultural models and everyday discourses that prescribe correct or moral behaviour for young people extend to the types of work and locations that are considered 'appropriate' for youth. These may be experienced as real constraints to what youth see as feasible economic options and what they assess to be socially accepted forms of work (Bürge 2011). Bürge (2011: 66) therefore uses the term 'moral navigation' to describe that young people need to navigate economic opportunities as well as social norms, and Langevang *et al.* (2015: 5) use the term 'mixed embeddedness' to describe how female entrepreneurs in Ghana need to balance demands and expectations from families and communities with the ongoing changes in their economic and political contexts simultaneously.

Evidently, such models of norms are strongly gendered and shaped by other intersecting identities, as certain types of work are considered more appropriate for young men than for young women, or there might be beliefs that young women are simply not 'cut out' for certain types of work (Çelik 2008; Thorsen 2013). For Ghana, Overå (2016) shows that gendered constraints regarding work and access to resources limit the opportunities of female entrepreneurs to take part in the emerging oil and gas service sector, while many men have been able to fare well. While existing in society at large, these norms are, as mentioned earlier (see Section 2.4.4 on household reproductive work), reproduced within the family, by adults and siblings, as part of the everyday socialisation of young people. Part of young people's trajectories of self-actualisation is how they negotiate the norms and expectations they encounter. When young men and women have internalised social norms their aspirations may be in line with such moral conventions, but they may also challenge them.

Being embedded in social relations that have developed through work can help negotiate and challenge existing norms. In Sierra Leone, young males in urban areas have been attracted to drive motorcycle taxis to earn a living (Menzel 2011). This profession is considered to be the opposite of what 'good adults' are expected to do. While adults are to settle down and spend their income on the family and kin, young motorcyclists are believed

to waste their money, and they are highly mobile. However, Bürge (2011) argues that by spending their money in gambling and savings groups, the motorcyclists invest in social relationships of their choosing and free themselves of the material demands from their kin. Through participation in several savings groups, they diversify their networks and also contribute to their communities, although not through the routes prescribed by moral conventions.

At a higher level, social networks and institutions can also contribute to a sense of status and identity in certain types of work, as Langevang and Gough (2012) explain for the hairdressing and tailoring professions in Ghana. While globalisation stimulated growth in the hairdressing sector it slowed down the demand for Ghanaian clothing. Trade associations in the hairdressing sector responded to the growth by professionalising systems of apprenticeships and training, while tailor associations were unable to initiate reforms. These developments have led to changes in the prestige of these professions: while tailoring is considered as a profession for youth with no options, young women see hairdressing as a modern profession, and the associations have become vehicles for developing a sense of professionalism among workers.

### 4.2.3 Great expectations?

Another important factor which has influenced young people is what Diouf calls the 'globalization of desires and expectations' (Diouf 2003: 2, cited in Frederiksen and Munive 2010: 251). This has been transmitted by mass communication, information and communication technologies (ICT), migration and the movement of goods across borders, leading to young people to aspire to modern lifestyles, especially in the city (FAO 2014; Langevang and Gough 2012; Leavy and Hossain 2014). Education has also played an important role in changing people's aspirations, where the best-educated generation in history (ILO 2004), seeks to find employment in white-collar jobs, but where expectations of finding formal-sector work are simply unrealistic.<sup>20</sup> This mismatch of aspirations and outcomes has helped shape, among other things, current forms of migration (Crivello 2011; Gough, Langevang and Owusu 2013; Mabala 2011) and spurred increased youth unemployment (Chigunta *et al.* 2005) while at the same time fostering the engagement of young people in 'a bewildering variety of microenterprise' in the informal sector (Jeffrey and Dyson 2013), away from agriculture (White 2012).

Youth employment policies will benefit from a better understanding of the type of employment young people desire and aspire to in their respective contexts. Indeed, while young people aspire to having a livelihood that provides stable and higher levels of income, these are not the only drivers of what makes a job desirable, or what young people aspire to. Relational aspects of work also influence the types of occupations young people look for. The fact that engaging in specific activities is seen as being backward, owing to a lack of societal support or to a favouring of other lifestyles due to expanding globalised popular culture, also shapes young people's idea of the type of work they want to engage in and the type of person they want to become. Additionally, the desire to contribute to one's community or country, or to be recognised by one's peers, or to gain greater independence can all be strongly influential in pursuing a specific livelihood. The idea that income is the most important – or only – benefit from work or motivator in shaping one's aspirations thus falls short.

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<sup>20</sup> For example, Golub and Hayat (2014) find that more than 50 per cent of young African workers aged 15–24 aspire to formal employment despite the fact that the formal wage sector only accounts for 16 per cent of all employment in Africa (Filmer *et al.* 2014).

### 4.3 Situated agency: re-structuring navigation

Contexts of political and economic insecurity create a high degree of uncertainty for many young people when it comes to finding the means to earn some income: 'Young people experience that what they have today they may not have tomorrow and what they originally planned or envisioned might have to be re-evaluated' (Langevang and Gough 2009: 747). Studies have highlighted different causes and aspects of economic uncertainty. Life in African cities is often marked by economic hardship and unemployment, for instance (Langevang and Gough 2009). The lack of stable demand for labour, opaqueness and fluctuating conditions in some global industries have in some instances resulted in new opportunities; however, not everyone has equal access to them, and in many cases these fluctuations have compounded economic uncertainty (Overå 2016; Langevang and Gough 2012). In these circumstances, with many people struggling, families often cannot offer the support and security networks for their young family members, such as paying for the education of their children, or offering young people start-up capital, or even contacts.

Young people therefore need to engage in practices of social navigation that see them adjusting to rapidly changeable circumstances and getting by through being disposed towards uncertainty. Forms of social navigation have recently been emphasised in relation to entrepreneurship, for instance. An important aspect of youth entrepreneurship, as discussed above, is the fact that many young entrepreneurs are simply 'getting by' – remaining entrepreneurially underemployed – and only some succeed (AfDB *et al.* 2012). Jeffrey illustrates this with his studies of young Indian men, many of whom are educated but are waiting to find a job, who end up creating their own jobs. These include jobs as improvised car mechanics, or where men DJ at weddings using their own equipment. Terms he uses to describe these types of ventures or behaviours include *jugād*, roughly meaning to 'make do and mend' or 'find a way around', and to 'zigzag' through the economy (Jeffrey and Dyson 2013; Jeffrey and Young 2014). In such ways, young people endeavour to navigate the economic structures of low demand and high uncertainty.

#### 4.3.1 Social embeddedness and situated agency

Although the onus is often on young people themselves to access productive work, some organisations have also recognised the influence of social relations in helping them transition into adulthood and paid work, often referred to as 'social embeddedness'. They mainly emphasise the support function of families and social networks. For example, the ILO (2015a) represents this view well:

most youth today are ready to create their own futures, yet they still look to their families, communities, institutions and governments to empower them and to ensure that they are best equipped to navigate their way towards adulthood in an environment that supports their aspirations and productive potential.  
(ILO 2015a: 4)

The 2013 World Development Report recognises the importance of social skills, stating that:

[s]ocial skills are often the ones missing [for accessing jobs], but they can rarely be acquired in schools or training centers... This... assessment is confirmed by harder evidence showing that returns to the socioemotional trait of perseverance are as high as returns to average cognitive ability.  
(World Bank 2012: 176)

However, the Report does not immediately clarify where these social skills are fostered, emphasising the learning of skills in schools and in the work (job) environment especially. Finally, USAID (2012) also emphasises the importance of social relations in young people's lives, recognising that 'Families and communities provide the primary level of support for



youth development that is reinforced by health, education, and other systems' (USAID 2012: 13). Certain studies on entrepreneurship have shown that engagement in social networks offers entrepreneurs access to clients and resources (Korsgaard, Ferguson and Gaddefors 2015).

Yet we argue that social embeddedness goes beyond looking at how social relationships have instrumental value. It must include a focus on young people's social *position*, both within the family and in society at large. Households are sites of both joint and separate interests (Thorsen 2013: 206), wherein young people need to navigate and negotiate their own preferences and interest, and the expectations from family members. Young people's decisions are influenced by their responsibilities associated with their social position within a household, as well as the expectations siblings and adults in the extended family have of them (Whitehead 1994, 1998). Hence, instead of focusing on young people's agency in an individualistic, atomised manner, we must speak of their *situated agency*.

The positionality of young men and women as *young* people *vis-à-vis* other generations influences the types of opportunities and work that they can pursue, and how they go about this. Studies on youth employment revealed the importance of families in particular, with many youth engaging in self-employment in families where other members are self-employed (Burchell *et al.* 2015). They find that the level of success depends in part on 'the extent to which self-employment is common and well-understood in their [the young self-employed person's] families' (Burchell *et al.* 2015: 40); further stating that starting a business without other self-employed family members to provide support is a risky affair (*ibid.*).

The role of social networks has been a controversial topic in some circles. Among economists, there is a tendency to interpret family relationships as potential hindrances to entrepreneurs. Assuming that investing profits in businesses is the most rational decision young entrepreneurs could take, the decision to invest in family relationships is considered deviant. Some have gone as far as labelling such family networks as 'predatory' (Kuada 2009). Scholars who recognise the social embeddedness of youth, on the other hand, do not at all find it irrational when young people 'invest' in family relationships, emphasising their intangible value as social safety nets, especially because many new businesses fail (DeJaeghere and Baxter 2014; Vivarelli 2013).

Also, studies on youth migration have demonstrated the social embeddedness of young people. They move back and forth between rural and urban areas, often to maintain social relationships and fulfil responsibilities. Many migrant youth remain heavily involved in caring for the families that remained and may come back frequently to assist with various tasks (Korzenevica 2016). Networks of kin figure in young people's lives during and after migration. Young men and women will migrate to places where relatives live for initial support and finding work. Thorsen (2013) writes how young people's embeddedness in networks of kin shapes their ability to navigate opportunities to migrate from rural to urban areas and find a means of living in the city. Relatives can provide lodging and initiate young migrants into certain niche areas in the urban economy. Yet other young migrants experience exploitation in these relationships when their relatives ask for financial or in-kind contributions. These young people may not gain the independence they aspired to when leaving home. However, as Thorsen (2013) argues, young people are not simply being moved around by others; they also use these relationships and actively produce kinship relations in their everyday practices.

Social networks are so vital to everyday survival among young migrants that they do not only use their networks of kin but actively seek to build 'stock' of social capital by creating and sustaining new social networks (Overå 2016; Langevang and Gough 2009). It thus becomes part of social navigation; a way of accessing resources and facilitating their movements in pursuit of further work opportunities. Young men and women often use their social network

to find a better job opportunity, as changing jobs within the same sector is an important strategy for finding higher wages and fairer employers (Thorsen 2013). For those who have access to it, modern technology such as mobile phones has been incorporated into this practice of maintaining networks of peers and clients (Langevang and Gough 2012).

It is important to stress social positionality and identity, since gender and socioeconomic backgrounds strongly influence how young people can navigate. It influences the kind of network one has access to, the kind of public space one can safely access to engage in work. For instance, unemployed men from higher castes in India are generally better-connected than men from lower castes and therefore better able to find some informal work (Jeffrey 2008). Women are largely included in the most vulnerable, low-paid segments of the informal economy (Chen 2007; Kabeer 2008; Meagher 2010) and may need to consider risks to their bodily security when working in public spaces (Lahai 2012).

### **4.3.2 Political embeddedness**

Aside from their embeddedness in social relations, it is increasingly clear that young people also assess and navigate opportunities for paid work within dynamics created by political contexts. Despite the salience of large-scale structural issues, the specific nature of and dynamics of local economies are usually not simply products of economic factors. Politics deeply pervade many sectors of the economy (Hansen 2010; Honwana 2011; Meagher 2014, 2015; Oosterom 2016), and often political actors act as gatekeepers to both formal and informal work. However, young people themselves may also act politically to influence local economies, and thus their social embeddedness may serve to advance forms of political collective action.

Politicians can have a strong hand in running large firms or sectors of the economy in specific geographical locations. In Cameroon, for instance, politicians can decide which groups of youth are able to engage in youth-specific activities such as operating motorcycles taxis (Konings 2006), and in Zambia political parties have historically had a strong influence in allocating market stalls to vendors in cities (Hansen 2010). In turn, political actors also use this power to leverage young people as support bases for their own political ends (*ibid.*). Especially when labour markets and sectors are marked by political divisions such as these, politics can form an additional major challenge for young people trying to find work, as they need to navigate not only broader and specific economic constraints and opportunities, but also the local political dynamics (Oosterom 2016; Oosterom and Pswarayi 2014).

Studies have therefore shown how young people's agency to get paid work can be entangled with their political agency: their efforts to secure an income can be seen to constitute a form of politics itself, and forms of collective action through networks are arguably important dimensions of this agency. This is clearly illustrated by studies on 'area boys and girls' in Nigeria, who organise access to and control over economic resources and distribution. These are groups of young people who identify themselves socially with a particular space, collectively engage in petty entrepreneurship and casual labour, and claim the right to access those local resources through their identification with the locality (Gore and Pratten 2003). They collect illegal levies and taxes from private and commercial transporters, builders and other enterprises and visitors of 'their' area (Ismail 2009), thus regulating the flow of resources.

In other countries, young people make up large sections of the workforce in other, often informal, sectors and have been at the forefront of political action. Motorcycle taxi drivers in Kampala, Uganda, have, for instance, been able to exercise political pressure on the presidency to resist regulation on their transport sector (Goodfellow and Titeca 2012), while in Cameroon they have resisted extortion by the police (Konings 2006). In Freetown, Sierra Leone, youth are well-represented among the people who formed cooperatives, and this was partly motivated by the idea that cooperatives offer them bargaining power to gain access to

land owned by 'big men' (Maconachie, Binns and Tengbe 2012). The networks within the sector and shared identity enabled young people to take political action and challenge some of the institutions that, in their view, limited their work opportunities.

Importantly, current youth employment interventions are often very little concerned with these politics governing local economies – as if interventions occurred in apolitical spaces. However, the political factors such as party patronage and the appropriation of resources by political actors may very well interfere with youth employment interventions. Such interventions may be considered a resource that is suitable by political exploitation. For instance, 'youth villages' in Sierra Leone are skills-training centres for youth, but many young people feel they have been captured by political elites and used to 'feed' their constituencies (Oosterom, Wignall and Wilson, forthcoming). Furthermore, interventions for youth work generally do very little to nurture or build on the collective capacities that young people can employ to negotiate a range of issues such as better pay or working conditions, or regulations specific to their sector.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

Using the concept of social navigation we have highlighted the importance of social relationships, cultural norms and political contexts in shaping very practically young people's aspirations as well as their agency when they pursue opportunities for work. Some young people have more room for defending their own priorities than others, with gender being a strong factor in articulating one's aspirations. We have, furthermore, shown that horizontal relationships among young people have often been crucial for the collective navigation of economic uncertainty and politics in local economies, which is another element that interventions may seek to better understand and incorporate. What we aim for is to expand the scope of present discussions on young people's working lives, which we find to be often biased towards individual agency in analysis and in policy response; as if young people made their individual life plans in isolation. We have thus complemented the debate with a discussion of social and political structures that also directly influence young people's ideas and strategies around pursuing and accessing work.

## 5 Conclusions and implications for policy

Young people are the future – of course they are. This has led many policymakers to rightly recognise them not just as passive victims of their circumstances, but as agents of change. However, there is also an evident tendency in some programming to individualise young people and treat them as agents who can overcome broader structural constraints. This is asking too much. Instead, we have urged here that both the structural constraints and young people's situatedness and embeddedness need to be better recognised and taken into account more effectively in policies and programmes that seek to get young people into work.

*De-individualising young people* and rediscovering the issue of *demand for labour* in the youth context hardly obviates any clear or easy policy options, of which we are aware. On the contrary, we find the issue of labour demand raises fundamental problems and should force some academics and policymakers to reconsider what broader range of options may be possible, which do not simply augment young people's supply of labour to the market while leaving the demand for them as workers unaddressed. Similarly, recognising young people's situatedness and embeddedness in their social world requires a fundamental shift in approaches to understanding young people. We discuss the implications of each of these shifts.

In terms of addressing the oversupply of young people's labour, some adjustments may be made to existing programmes to maximise their positive effects in light of lacking demand. For instance, prolonging the time that young people spend in full-time schooling could somewhat reduce the aggregate supply of young people's labour to the market, at the same time as equipping them with better knowledge and skills. But a focus on full-time schooling alone may also be unrealistic or even harmful where families depend on young people's incomes, or where young people's engagement in work is seen as desirable and integral to their becoming valued members of society. They may themselves prefer work over education at times, if they feel that offers them a better trajectory in terms of social and economic opportunities. Also, internships, apprenticeships and on-the-job skills-training programmes can be immediately positive where they engineer a rise in demand for young people's labour, and do not require young people to work without pay but instead pay a wage that at least covers the cost of living. Participation in certified training or education programmes could, for instance, be rewarded with a donor-funded or state-funded living-wage-equivalent 'youth stipend'. Finally, entrepreneurship development is another intervention that is widely promoted by development actors, but, as seen in the review by Burchell *et al.* (2015), while self-employment interventions may help young people cope slightly better in situations of precarity, it is unlikely to have transformational and wide-ranging effects on poverty reduction.

Yet the question remains whether supply-enhancing approaches can really be effective without any broader industrial and structural transformation policies that address aggregate demand. Recognising the widening gap between the inadequate demand and the growing supply of young people's labour also challenges us to cast the net wider, because the road to structural change is hardly obvious (were it known, more countries would be travelling it) and young people cannot wait until then. There are multiple pathways that need to be part of a broader discussion on models of developmental change, in which the state is likely to play a central role. For instance, approaches that make subsistence, particularly in agriculture, more feasible, could change the game. If sustainable and dignified livelihoods outside of the marketplace are feasible, this will give young people more options to avoid adverse incorporation into dysfunctional markets, at the same time as it lowers the influx into already saturated labour forces. The ability to support family farming will probably help to increase resilience within households, as the family production unit absorbs the thrust of young

members to leave farming and enter the urban economy, and embeds young people's choices in broader concerns – hence the need to recognise young people's social embeddedness. Also, demand generation that creates paid jobs for young people can come directly from domestic governments and international donors. Welfare-oriented programmes that directly shore up the demand for (skilled and unskilled) labour – such as India's massive National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS), which guarantees employment in public infrastructure – can work to immediately create jobs, put cash in the hands of young people now (creating additional demand), and improve economic prospects in the longer term when infrastructure investments pay off (see, for example, Kareemulla *et al.* 2013).

Recognising that young people are social and culturally embedded, meanwhile, requires a more profound shift in understanding what work means in the lives of young men and women. How young people need to negotiate personal and family interests, and their ability to reflect on how to invest in different social relationships either financially or in other ways, is an element that could be much more strongly reflected in youth-work interventions, in order to align with the aspirations of youth. In doing so, interventions may somewhat overcome the individualistic approach to youth employment and work *with* these relationships in order to be more successful.

We argue that it is part of a wider citizenship trajectory and cannot be narrowed down to making young people 'productive citizens', as emphasised by the monetary, remunerative aspects of having work. Approaches to young people and work need to go hand in hand with strengthening notions of rights, equality and participation; building the individual and collective capacities among young people to negotiate their roles in the family, within wider social networks, and within the state. Young women especially may need extra support that reflects their roles in marriage, household and families, enabling them to articulate aspirations while balancing and negotiating their multiple roles.

As highlighted above, it is important to remain aware that young people's aspirations are shaped by various different factors, all of which include social, political and economic components. One way young people may seek to break the economic-structural and social-structural constraints on the lives they want to live might be to develop more empowering relations with peers. Young people do not tend to passively wait to be empowered, but they are also often not individual masters of their own destiny. If youth-work policy is to work, it will probably benefit from better reflecting both the situated, embedded nature of young people's agency as well as the structural constraints which individual agency and support alone cannot overcome.

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