

PERSPECTIVES OF AFRICAN YOUTH



Secondary Education in Africa:


PREPARING YOUTH
FOR THE FUTURE
OF WORK



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SECONDARY EDUCATION WILL INCREASINGLY BECOME A KEY PLATFORM FROM WHICH YOUNG PEOPLE IN AFRICA WILL TRANSITION TO WORK.

Between 10 and 12 million youth enter the workforce each year across Africa, but only 3.1 million jobs are created, leaving many young people in the labour force un- or underemployed.



The vast majority (over 90 percent) of youth in Africa leave the education system and transition into the world without ever making it to university. Of the nine percent who do enter university, only six percent graduate. Secondary education, therefore, must prepare African youth to be successful in securing employment or creating their own livelihoods. But what progress has been made in equipping them with the skills, knowledge, and behaviours necessary to compete and succeed in today's evolving jobs market? How is secondary education preparing young people for a world of work that is constantly shifting, increasingly digital, and largely informal?

This summary of youth perspectives, which is based upon discussions between hundreds of young people across Sub-Saharan Africa, highlights personal experiences and provides insights into secondary education in Africa. The issues covered in this study reflect common themes that were identified during the numerous conversations that were held. Key issues identified by youth include:

EQUITABLE ACCESS. Youth highlighted the challenge that secondary education is not available to all young people across the continent and emphasized the need for increased inclusion, particularly for displaced youth and those with disabilities.

RELEVANCE AND QUALITY OF CURRICULA. Young people stressed the need to include science, engineering, mathematics, and technology in the curricula and to learn a broader set of knowledge and skills that will ensure they are ready for work or able to succeed as entrepreneurs.

TEACHING METHODS. The need to provide teachers with better training initially and throughout their careers, as well as to raise their status and value, was widely discussed. The 21st-century skills needed for work require new methods of teaching and learning.

BULLYING AND CLASSROOM SAFETY. Students must feel safe and secure in every environment to get the most out of their secondary school experience.

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES. The importance of subjects outside the classroom that are hugely beneficial, and often spark interests that follow through to career aspirations or higher education, was emphasized.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THIS STUDY PRESENTS EXPERIENCES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM AFRICAN YOUTH ON IMPROVING SECONDARY EDUCATION.

Over an eight-month period, they engaged in conversations with each other and shared their experiences and opinions on the responsiveness of secondary education in preparing them for work and to play wider roles in their society.

The Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) has been an integral partner and strategic advisor in the development of the Secondary Education in Africa Report.

The Foundation is thankful for ADEA's leadership role in selecting and training the Youth Ambassadors and providing ongoing support throughout the research assignment. Mastercard Foundation values the contribution ADEA has made in the analysis and summary of the youth findings.

The Mastercard Foundation and ADEA are grateful for the hard work, enthusiasm, and openness from the Youth Ambassadors and all young people who participated in the study. The dedication of the Youth Ambassadors who undertook the research and led the compilation of findings is greatly appreciated.

"As youth, we believe in our abilities. There is a need for governments and policymakers to make inclusive education and youth economic empowerment policies. There should be implementation plans outlining the roles and responsibilities and activities to be undertaken to make our education inclusive for all and create employability opportunities for young people."

Keneuoe Semphi, Youth Ambassador, Lesotho

"Education, or rather quality education, is of great importance to me because it is the bedrock of every successful society. It is my dream that one day Africa will be placed on par with other countries in the world, and for us to attain this height, our education system must be restructured and redeveloped."

Pamela Odibeli, Youth Ambassador, Nigeria

YOUTH DIALOGUES

TO BETTER UNDERSTAND THE THOUGHTS, EXPERIENCES, AND CONCERNS OF AFRICA'S YOUTH WHEN IT COMES TO SECONDARY EDUCATION, IT IS CRITICAL TO LISTEN TO THE VOICES OF YOUNG PEOPLE THEMSELVES.

Their perspectives are notably absent from many policy discussions on secondary education. To rethink secondary education to meet the needs of young people entering the labour force, it is critical that their experiences and needs be heard.

The Association for the Development of Education in Africa selected six Youth Ambassadors from over 1,500 applications across the continent. The rigorous selection process took into consideration age, regional background, gender, disabilities, and language diversity.

In 2018, the Youth Ambassadors were tasked to gather insights and opinions from young people throughout Africa to highlight areas and opportunities where secondary education can better prepare youth for the future of work. They did that over a period of nine months, gathering findings from a diverse range and wide network of young people.

The task was clear: Develop a deeper understanding of African youth's views on secondary education that allows policymakers, researchers, and global development organizations to incorporate youth perspectives and design policies with them in mind.

The Youth Ambassadors began their research with in-person consultations with students, teachers, and educationalists. They then created weekly WhatsApp discussion groups within their networks and conducted online surveys to explore key issues important to secondary school students in their respective countries. The research took place between April and December 2018 and reached over 600 young people in five countries.

African youth shared perspectives on how to improve the quality and relevance of secondary education. That method of engaging young people through peer-to-peer networks developed trust and understanding. The discussions generated hundreds of responses, providing the Youth Ambassadors with a rich array of real-life examples and diverse experiences.

Upon the completion of those sessions, the Youth Ambassadors met in Abidjan in January 2019, alongside ADEA and the Mastercard Foundation to identify, discuss, and agree on the most significant recurring themes that came from the discussions and to formulate recommendations to address the issues. From the gathering in Abidjan, the findings presented in this document were developed.



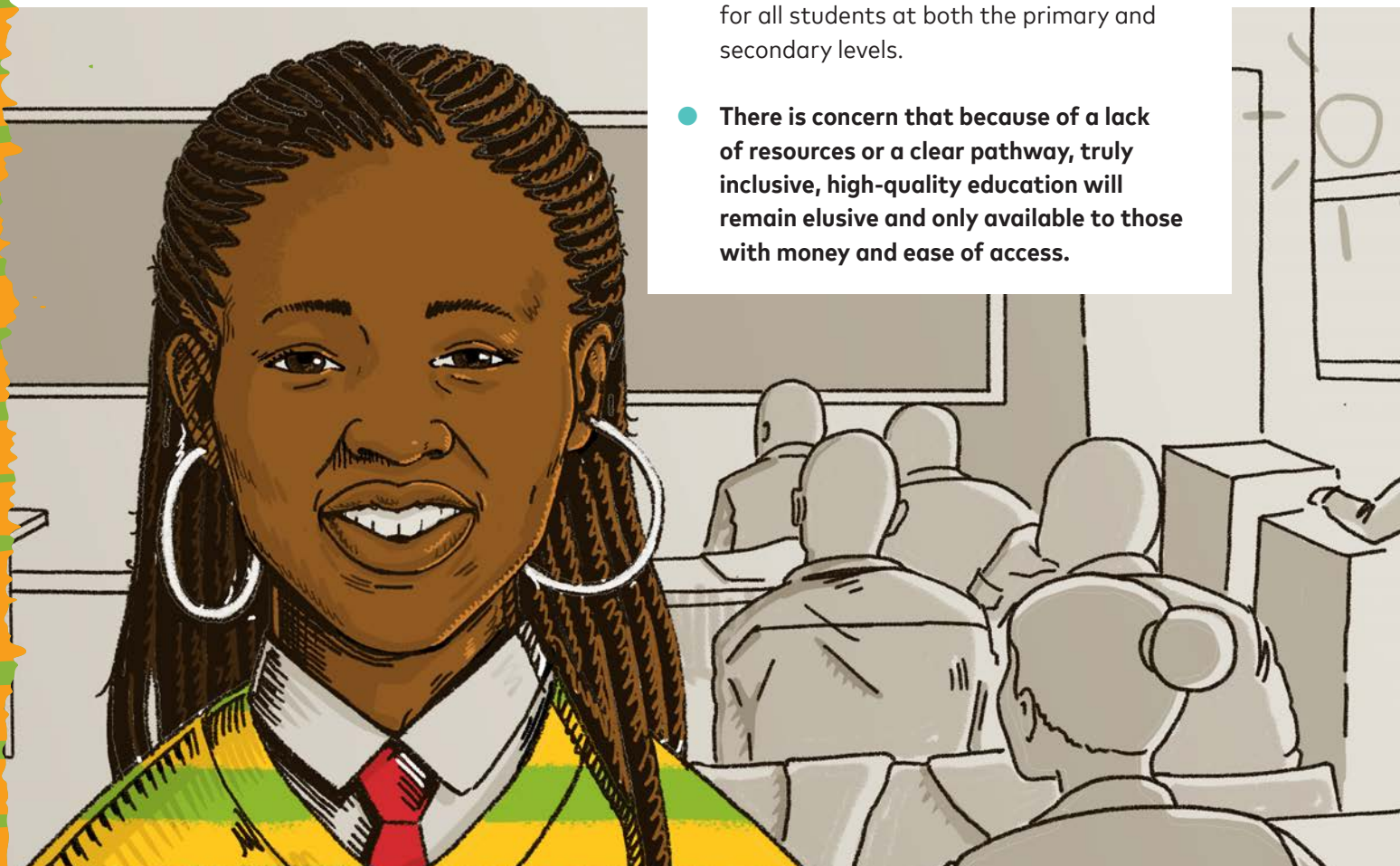


PERSPECTIVES

ENSURING UNIVERSAL ACCESS FOR ALL

Discussion points:

- **All youth felt strongly that no child should be denied, due to poverty, the right to access and complete an inclusive, quality education.** Poverty exacerbates the likelihood of exclusion for girls and children with disabilities.
- **There needs to be a stronger emphasis on how to ensure access to quality education no matter where a child lives, their gender, or if they are living with a disability.**
- **Many students noted that teachers are not well-prepared to deliver inclusive education for young people with disabilities.** There is an urgent need to make sure teacher education programs include training on school and classroom inclusivity.
- **Cultural settings and gender norms present challenges in secondary schools.** That influences the performance and confidence of all genders. There was often mention of gender discrimination, especially when pursuing a career in sciences and engineering-related courses. There was frequent mention of teachers not believing in the abilities of girls in those courses, or opportunities being denied to girls because they were deemed inappropriate for girls.
- **Youth respondents noted many examples where young people receive excellent education.** Youth identified that those are in private schools, or public schools in wealthy areas. They recognized, however, the efforts on the part of African governments to expand access to education for all students at both the primary and secondary levels.
- **There is concern that because of a lack of resources or a clear pathway, truly inclusive, high-quality education will remain elusive and only available to those with money and ease of access.**



YOUTH PRIORITIES

- ✓ Educate parents, teachers, and society on gender issues so gender equality is attained. Provide support programs that keep girls in school, such as education about reproductive health and access to sanitary products.
- ✓ Mainstream education systems can and should be adapted to meet the needs of all learners and should offer learning opportunities for every child. Children with disabilities have an equal right to access an inclusive, quality education, and a right to the support and adaptations necessary to facilitate their learning.
- ✓ Equip teachers with adequate tools to promote inclusive education. Particular attention should be given to delivering options within mainstream schools to cater to children with disabilities.

Growing up as a visually impaired learner, I experienced a lot of challenges. I was teased about my disability by other learners and even some teachers. The level of exclusion I experienced gave me a push to advocate for change in the education system. I want every learner, regardless of their disability, to realize their right to education. I want parents and governments to remove all the barriers to accessing quality education that prevent learners with disabilities from receiving an excellent education. As young people, we will only be able to effectively participate in the development of our countries and solve issues if we get a quality education.

Keneuoe Semphi
Youth Ambassador
Lesotho

RAISING THE QUALITY AND RELEVANCE OF SECONDARY EDUCATION

Discussion points:

- **Youth discussed their frustrations with being neither adequately prepared for higher education nor equipped for entering the world of work.** There is a clear understanding among young people that they need to be ready to work in a global economy and that they need digital and entrepreneurship skills to succeed.
- **Quality education should not only provide literacy and numeracy but also broader life skills that empower young people to be leaders and change-makers.**
- **Comprehensive sexual health and relationship education was discussed as a key element of quality education that youth require, with the awareness that they need to make decisions about their bodies and futures.**
- **There needs to be greater emphasis on ICT, Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), and soft skills.** Participants highlighted that a lack of digital skills and learnings often means young people leave school without feeling comfortable using technology, only knowing the basics, such as how to use their mobile phone.
- **Soft skills were often referenced as being absent from the current curriculum — emotional intelligence, communication skills, leadership, and critical thinking were those most shared.**
- **Young people highlighted the need to de-colonize the curriculum and allow for greater local content and relevance that would relate to and excite young learners.**

They noted that students often learn about European history and not that of their own country or region. Youth discussed how learning about their own region could institute a sense of pride, understanding, and civic engagement.

- **It was noted that some countries are reforming curricula, and youth participants described how that change is having a positive impact.** Kenya and Rwanda, for example, have integrated a skills-based curriculum that connects to job market requirements. Many young people in those countries shared stories of how that benefitted them and how they were able to find jobs more quickly after secondary education.

Our curriculum should make a way of teaching the students to be job creators, not job seekers.

Group participant

We need to seek innovative ways of solving our problems.

Group participant

YOUTH PRIORITIES

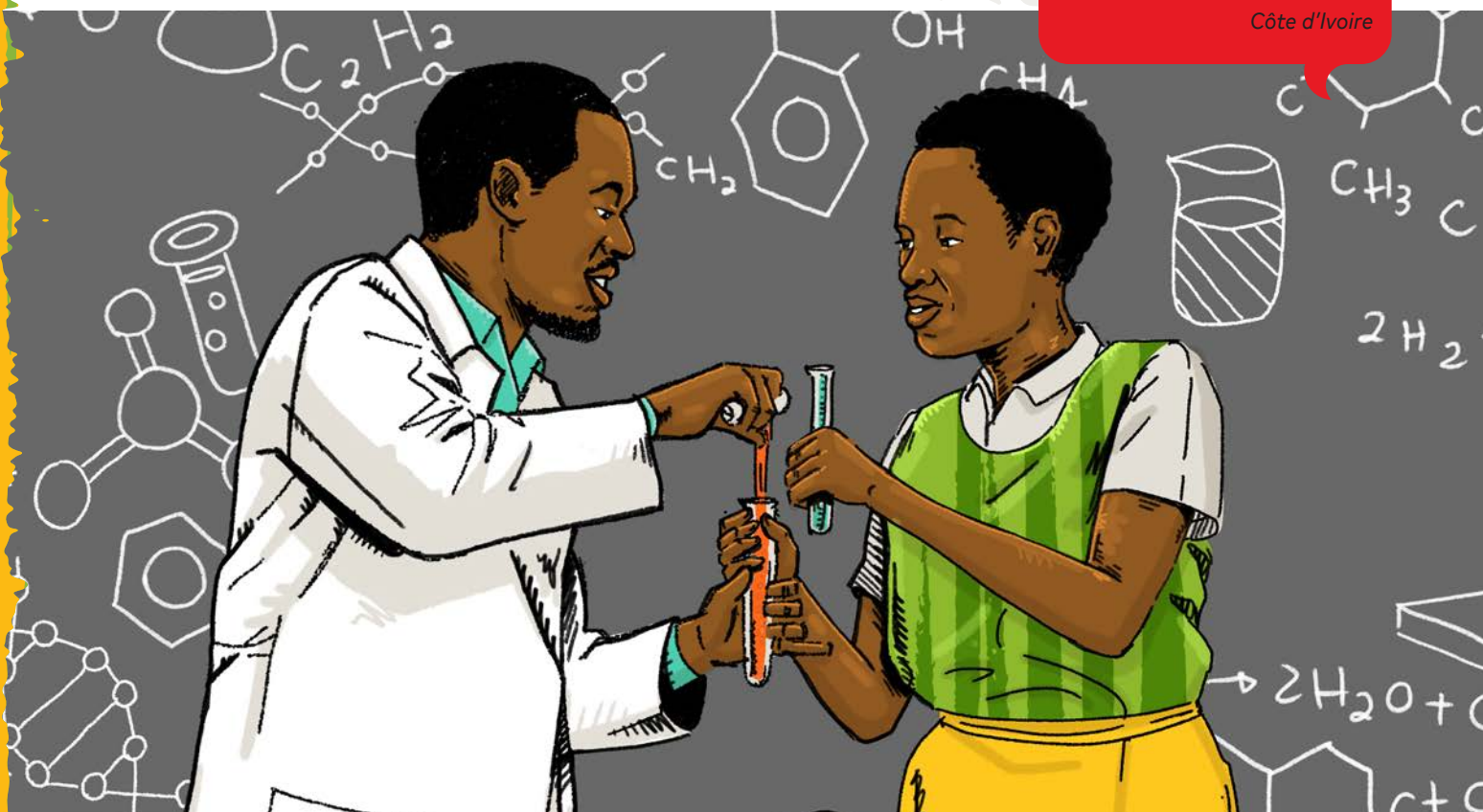
- ✓ In order to prepare African youth for life and work in a rapidly changing world, the young people in the group discussions agreed that secondary-level education systems need to be reoriented to impart a broad repertoire of life skills.
- ✓ Instead of accentuating the differences between academic subjects and vocational subjects, secondary-level education should focus on links between those subjects and their interdependence.
- ✓ Curricula in the general education system should be reformed to ensure young people are trained in technology, engineering, and mathematics to prepare them to transition into work, and training in those areas should be introduced during secondary school.
- ✓ Secondary education curricula should train young people to be leaders. Curricula should emphasize the skills that young people need in the 21st century, such as emotional intelligence, leadership, empathy, and critical thinking, as well as digital skills such as working with artificial intelligence and carrying out big data analysis.

Switch learning patterns ... they should include digital learning in our curriculum ... so that everyone becomes comfortable with technology.

Group participant

Our society today no longer has the same needs for manual workers. Everywhere, we are looking for intellectual workers. However, our educational model, with its inappropriate evaluation and scoring system, prevents many students from developing their potential to the best of their ability.

*Diallo Cheick
Youth Ambassador
Côte d'Ivoire*



CHANGING HOW TEACHERS TEACH

Discussion points:

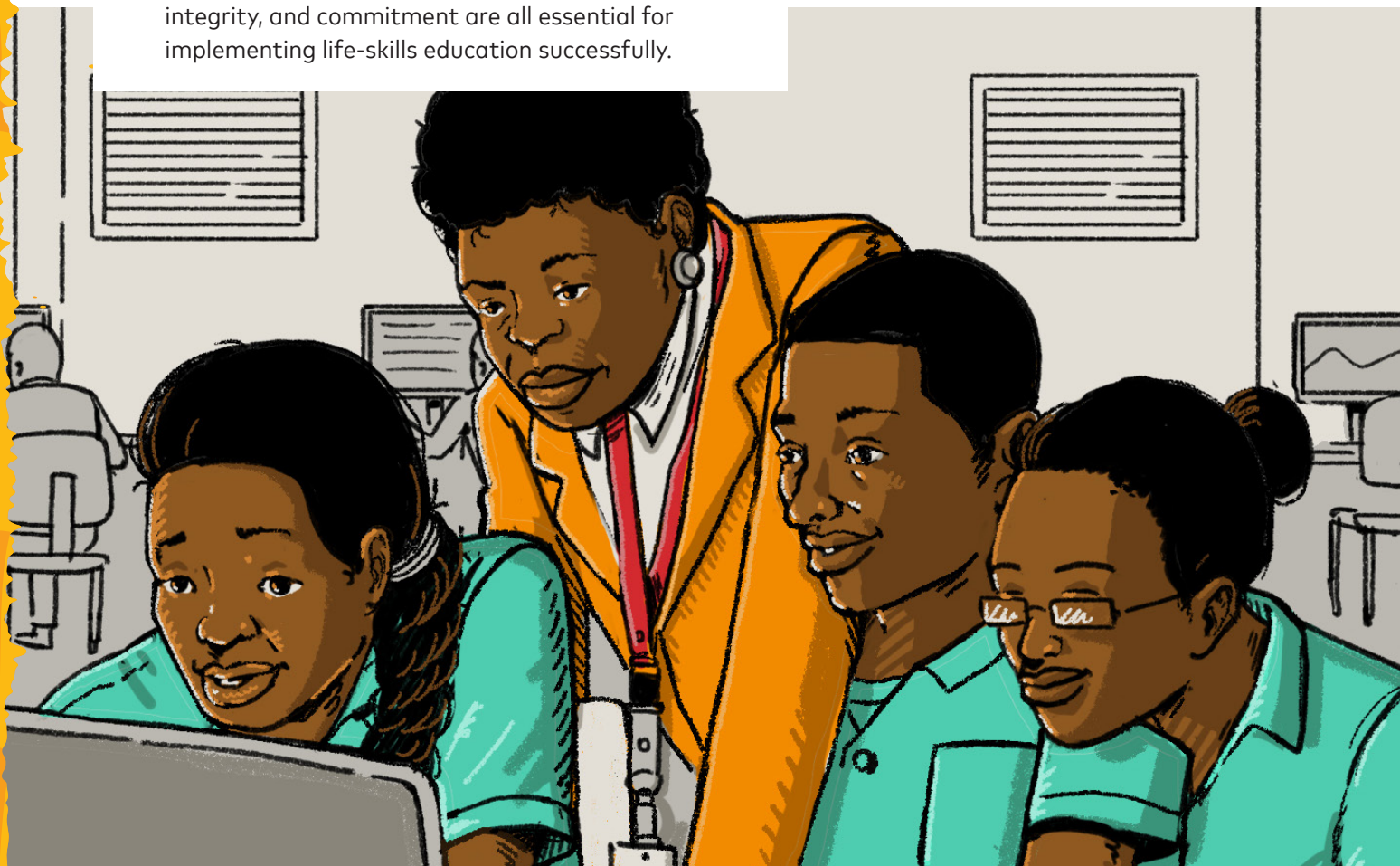
- **Quality of teaching is an integral part of the education experience.** The youth commented on a wide range of matters relating to their teachers and how their teachers engage with them, including the methods used by teachers in secondary education, their views on training, deployment, and retention of teachers, infrastructure, and learning materials.
- **It is thought by many participants that teachers are not adequately trained to provide quality education.** Students struggle to learn and achieve basic literacy and numeracy. Consequently, many students drop out of school and others finish without the foundational and 21st-century skills necessary to prepare them for the world of work.
- **Participants noted that teacher training is also not a one-time experience that happens at the beginning of a teacher's career.** The world is changing at a rapid rate and often teachers are unable to stay on top of new research or capitalize on developments that could positively impact the quality of secondary education.
- **Training goes beyond just the skills and knowledge of the curriculum.** Changes are needed to the way in which teachers teach to promote self-learning and exploration. The emerging role of teachers as facilitators and their status, integrity, and commitment were identified by the youth as being essential for implementing life-skills education successfully.
- **Discussion groups also commented that there is a strong emphasis on "teaching to the test" – i.e.,: focusing only on preparation for national exams.** That approach causes a lot of stress and does not showcase true knowledge or talent. Participants shared many compelling stories of very smart young people who did poorly on tests, which consequently changed their futures for the worse.
- **The idea of peer teaching and infusion of mentors can also support teachers in the classroom and provide students with alternative methods to learn and grow.** Participants cited examples of new ways of learning in primary school and higher education. For example, in Nigeria, the primary system is increasingly adopting play-based learning. Participants made note of the African Leadership University model for undergraduate studies. They felt that where successful, those new ways of learning could be applied to secondary education.
- **African countries have not advanced teacher education programs to give them the much-needed paradigm shift** from a purely academic experience to one that places emphasis on STEM subjects and workplace competencies.
- **Salaries are an important aspect of the teacher's condition of service** and poor remuneration is one determining factor that impacts the quality of education.

YOUTH PRIORITIES

- ✓ Teachers should be required to complete official teacher training and continue training to refresh and upgrade their skills.
- ✓ To build stronger foundations for a more impactful education system, governments should combine salary, motivation, incentives, and recognition to acknowledge the important roles that teachers play in society.
- ✓ Establish harmonized regional professional standards for teachers, which can be adapted by countries as guidelines and can foster teacher motivation and increased professionalism.
- ✓ The teacher education curriculum should be broadened and inclusive. The curriculum should prepare teachers for the emerging challenges in education and modern African society.
- ✓ The role of teachers should evolve so that they act more as facilitators than lecturers, as their status, integrity, and commitment are all essential for implementing life-skills education successfully.

I have seen educated people changing the world, challenging the status quo, and I believe that education leads to reason, reason leads to understanding, and understanding to more open dialogue. Investment in education will be the investment in people and peace.

Alice Mukashyaka
Youth Ambassador
Rwanda



CREATING SAFE, SECURE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Discussion points:

- **Bullying, while defined differently by different young people, was almost universally identified in reference to challenges in educational experiences.** Participants commented that there is little to no structure in place for students to report bullying or to seek support if they are being bullied. There are limited resources to promote well-being and mental health for young people who have been affected by bullying or have experienced trauma.
- **Two main types of bullying were identified in discussions: peer-to-peer and teacher-pupil.**
 - Peer-to-peer bullying comes in many forms; however, there were many stories of older students “hazing” younger students when they enter secondary school. Often, that happens off school grounds.
 - Teachers often play a role in teasing and embarrassing students, thereby acting as a negative role model for that behaviour.
 - Corporal punishment continues to be widely used as a tactic to change students’ behaviours.
- **Bullying was cited as affecting children’s self-esteem and their learning performance.** In the discussions, participants agreed that it should not be tolerated.
- **Group participants noted that when schools take strong stands on bullying by implementing different measures** (e.g., punishment such as detention or expulsion, creating ethical norms, and enforcing positive relationships between students), students’ overall experience and well-being increase dramatically.

YOUTH PRIORITIES

- ✓ All governments should put policies in place that ensure all children enjoy the right to learn in a safe and secure environment, free from the fear or threat of violence. That is an inseparable aspect of a quality education
- ✓ Individual institutions should have a process and supports in place to address bullying and classroom safety

Schools should have psychologists so as to address [bullying] among learners. Humanitarian courses could be of great help if introduced in schools as they might change learners' attitudes towards one another.

Group participant



LEARNING OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

Discussion points:

- **Extracurricular activities are viewed as an important part of young people’s development in both soft skills and technical skills.**
- **It was outside the classroom where participants had their first experiences interacting with subjects and tools, specifically in STEM subjects** – e.g., the first time they saw and used a microscope (instead of reading about them in a textbook), used test tubes, or performed a scientific experiment.
- **Extracurricular activities are also where young people find strong peer connections, relationships, and mentors.** Through that increased network and relationship building, young people often reference those experiences as where they developed their communication skills and ability to think creatively outside of the structured school setting. These activities are also where life-long friendships are developed and a safe place for young people to “be themselves”.
- **The types of extracurricular activities that are referenced in that way vary greatly** – from sports to math/science clubs, debate clubs to entrepreneurship skills trainings.
- **Often those programs are run by NGOs and are not always funded by governments.** Rarely do young people have the personal resources to fund extracurricular activities themselves.

Extracurricular activities are important and are in the interest of each student, especially when we know they desire certain professions. They allow students to flourish, for some to express their talent, others to discover hidden talents. And sports activities have positive effects on their health.

Christ Babong Thomason
Youth Ambassador
Cameroon

YOUTH PRIORITIES

- ✓ Youth expressed that extracurricular activities should be increased and actively supported to provide a wide range of learning that resonates beyond the classroom experience.



YOUTH AMBASSADORS



ALICE MUKASHYAKA – RWANDA

Growing up in a refugee camp without access to clean water and electricity and living on 24 cents per day was challenging. However, it was especially difficult to pursue secondary education as a refugee student. I finished elementary school with good marks, and I was directed to an excellent boarding school in Rwanda called Groupe Scolaire Notre Dame du Bon Conseil. I went to the school, but I dropped out after one term because my family could not afford to continue to pay for my education.

The only choice I then had was to transfer into a 12-year basic education program near home. The basic education had inadequate infrastructure and instructional teaching materials, and the school did not have combined sciences because of a lack of laboratories and limited qualified staff to teach science- and technology-related courses.

I am currently the co-founder of Starlight STEM Rwanda, an initiative that works with young girls in secondary schools; with aim to increase the number of girls in sciences studies. I also advise as a Youth Think Tank researcher with Restless Development in Rwanda.



CHRIST BABONG THOMASON – CAMEROON

Born to poor parents and raised in the Babimbi area of Cameroon, I had my own share of misfortune while growing up. I was born to a 15-year-old mother and lost my father to HIV/AIDS when I was only 10 years old. My mother struggled to pay my school fees, but I managed to achieve excellent results in all my studies during primary and secondary education. It was at school that I discovered I was also HIV positive. The social stigma was appalling, and I was a social outcast both at school and in the community.

The negativity in my peasant farming community stimulated me to rise above what is often labelled as a "charity case." I was inspired by the diversity and capacity of marginalized communities such as my own and envisioned a world where there is zero hunger and poverty through community-based participatory initiatives.

I opted for innovation and social entrepreneurship and decided to create something sustainable and beneficial to my community and many other youth like me. I formed a community youth group, SHINE FOUNDATION, to fight against marginalization and stigmatization and help young people to find their way, train teachers to tackle HIV issues in lessons and encourage family to accept people living with HIV. I am now a multi-award-winning young social entrepreneur. I have represented my community on several platforms nationally and internationally.

Currently, I live in Tunis studying for a Master in Monitoring and Evaluation of Projects at the UNIVERSITÉ LIBRE DE TUNIS.



PAMELA EJIRO ODIBELI – NIGERIA

Instinctively creative, I was easily frustrated with the education system because of its focus on being able to cram in what you are told to learn and spill it out on an exam.

There was no excitement in learning; you were not encouraged to try something new or put into practice whatever was being taught so you could have a better understanding. I became really frustrated, my grades began to drop, and nobody understood me. All that was expected of me was to make good grades. When those didn't materialize, I became depressed.

In my view, leadership encompasses a whole lot more than grades. Leadership is all about developing people and helping others reach their full potential. It is about equipping others with the right tools and strategies to not only maximize the success of an institution but also the lives of individuals.

I am currently the Co-Founder of StartRight Development Services and running my own project called The Entrepreneurs and Engagement Network (TEEN for Teens).



DIALLO CHEICK – CÔTE D'IVOIRE

The biggest challenge I faced in high school was my stutter. I carried it with me from childhood to high school. There, it was important to fit in to be left in peace and study, but it was no easy task with that handicap. I was often mocked by the class. I had to get used to it. It was impossible for me to speak up in class. As soon as I raised my hand, the mockeries would start. I remember one of my teachers telling me one day, "You never speak but you always have your hand up." I was deeply affected by that comment. The truth is, I was so scared to stutter that, even when I knew the answer or wanted to ask a question, I wouldn't dare to say anything.

Hearing a professor say, "What an insightful question!" to another student who had dared to ask the question I didn't was so frustrating. Eventually, with time, advice from parents and friends, and the desire to show everyone that I too had something to say, I rose up.

The secret is to dare! It doesn't matter if others make fun of you. Speak up in class, in clubs, in organizations: always have something to say. You'll see that the world is waiting for your words to lead it forward. Do not hesitate any longer!

As a graduate in Public Law, I now work as a Program Assistant at the Social Change Factory.



KENEUOE SEMPHI – LESOTHO

I am a visually impaired young woman and I grew up in rural areas of Lesotho. I attended my primary school, where I was the only learner with special needs. My teachers were aware of my potential to perform better but did not have the teaching skills to mould me accordingly, and that made me get lower marks than I could have obtained if I had had all the resources that a learner with special needs requires to perform well.

I believe that my ability to perform better in a classroom setting was restricted. Sometimes the teachers would snap at me if I raised my hand seeking clarity and tell me they would explain everything to me after the class, which made me appear to be the dumbest learner in the class, especially in mathematics. I had to be exempted from some modules like physics and chemistry because the teacher did not know how to deal with a visually impaired learner. That negatively affected my career choices as I continued to university.

All the challenges I encountered in both primary and secondary schools made me realize how important inclusive education is. I joined the disability movement in 2009. In 2011, I was elected as the Youth President for the Lesotho National Federation of Organizations of the Disabled. I now work for the Lesotho National League of the Visually Impaired Persons as the Inclusive Education Project Officer.

I am now founder and managing director of Information Access Solutions and also a member of the UN Youth Advisory Panel in Lesotho.



JOSEPH OPOKU – GHANA

I am an alumnus of African Leadership Academy and was a Mastercard Foundation Scholar at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, where I studied transnational studies and global social entrepreneurship. I am passionate about youth development and have begun using my skills to empower young people across Ghana through Youth Impact Workshop. In the past, I conducted research working with the Mastercard Foundation Youth Think Tank on effective youth engagement strategies for NGOs in Sub-Saharan Africa. I was also one of four Emerging Leaders to speak at the 2015 edition of the Skoll World Forum. I have worked with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, West Africa Civil Society Institute, and Opportunity International. I am a Resolution Fellow, having won seed funding to implement the Zongo Innovation Lab for Girls, a program that nurtures young women to start socially viable businesses in urban poor communities. I also served as a youth representative on the Strategic Advisory Group for the Secondary Education in Africa Report. I am currently Schwarzman Scholar pursuing a master's degree in global affairs at Tsinghua University in Beijing.



ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Musonda Kabwe is an award-winning artist and designer who was born in Zambia and is based in Johannesburg, South Africa. Musonda takes both traditional and digital approaches to art-making and integrates various media and contexts, making his art unexpected and moving. For more information, visit musondakabwe.com.

Perspectives of African Youth is part of Secondary Education in Africa: Preparing Youth for the Future of Work. For more information, please visit mastercardfdn.org/secondary-education-in-africa.



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