

**BOOSTING
DECENT
EMPLOYMENT
FOR AFRICA'S
YOUTH**

EVIDENCE SYNTHESIS PAPER SERIES

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PROMOTING DECENT EMPLOYMENT FOR AFRICAN YOUTH AS A PEACEBUILDING STRATEGY

Valeria Izzi

Executive summary

Youth employment programmes are a common tool in the international community's strategies for countries emerging from conflict or experiencing fragility and violence in different forms. Yet the evidence of their impact on peacebuilding is mixed at best.

Programmes have long been shaped by the notion of a causal link between youth unemployment and violence. **It is increasingly clear, however, that this relation is far more complex and context-specific. For most African youth, the main problem is not unemployment *per se*, but rather 'bad jobs' - jobs that are precarious, badly and irregularly paid, carried out under unsafe and exploitative conditions, mostly in the informal economy, offering little or nothing in terms of security and upwards mobility.** As a further complicating factor, employment and entrepreneurship opportunities are mediated by complex webs of personal ties or patronage networks.

In recent years, Africa has seen a sharp increase in violent extremism and terrorism. **The literature offers no conclusive answers as to the relevance of employment-related factors on radicalisation.** Violent extremism flourishes in deprived areas, where decent work opportunities are scarce; however, these macro-level conditions do not explain individuals' choice to participate (or not) in violence.

Until recently, issues related to youth employment were notably absent from policy discussions on peace and security - and the challenges of conflict and violence did not feature in policy discussions on employment promotion and quality of work. The emergence of violent extremism, and the gradual realisation that 'hard' security responses alone are inadequate to address this threat, played a key role in bringing these two policy strands together.

Today, employment creation for youth is a policy priority in global, regional and national policies. **While initially large cohorts of unemployed youth were mostly seen as a security threat, more recently policy narratives on youth have gained both nuance and optimism, alongside an increasing emphasis on acting 'with' youth rather than just 'for' youth.** This shift is shown by the United Nations Security Resolution on Youth, Peace, and Security (SCR 2250/2015) and the follow-up report *The Missing Peace*.

Employment for Peacebuilding programmes represent the logical consequence of this policy convergence. **The two objectives of these programmes (*employment and peacebuilding*) have long been assumed to be complementary and mutually reinforcing. However, recent experience has shown that conceptual tensions and practical trade-offs can emerge in the design, implementation and evaluation of these programmes.**

Experience also shows the **importance of distinguishing between *impact on programme participants* and *impact for society at large*. Even if an intervention is successful in improving the situation of its participants, this may not necessarily translate into benefits for the whole of society, and non-participants may even suffer as a result.**

Programmes do not happen in sterile lab conditions. **The selection of programme beneficiaries plays a crucial role in relation to the political economy of jobs, as it inevitably generates 'winners' and 'losers'. Who gets which jobs, and how, is just as important, from a peacebuilding perspective, than the overall quantity of jobs created.**

Key Recommendations

Recommendations for research

- Focus on **connecting the dots between 'employment literature' and 'violence literature'** through interdisciplinary research.
- **Invest in evidence synthesis** that can facilitate research uptake and use for policymaking and programming.
- **Engage with the 'programme ecosystem'**, examining how policy principles play out in the context of programmes, once translated into activities, indicators and targets.
- Take the long (and large) view, **going beyond the impact of programmes on participants and looking at their broader, longer-term impact on society at large.**

Recommendations for policy

- **Promote greater convergence between the Peace and Security policy agenda and the Decent Work policy agenda**, by tackling complex issues such as the role of informality and the political economy of employment generation.
- **Distinguish youth-specific issues** from broader socio-economic issues that affect youth.
- **Explore learning for other related areas of policy** (e.g. use of employment programmes to address illegal migration).

Recommendations for programming

- Recognise that peacebuilding is not a mere 'add-on' to traditional employment programmes: **Employment for Peacebuilding are a qualitatively different type of programmes and are not necessarily suitable for all circumstances.**
- **Ground programmes in an in-depth context analysis**, including an understanding of violence dynamics, actors and opportunities for peace; an analysis of the world of work; the weight of work-related factors in the history of violence.
- **Explore innovative approaches to Monitoring and Evaluation**, that explicitly look at peacebuilding impact and the impact of interventions beyond participants.
- **Commission longitudinal evaluations**, including assessment of impact a few years after the end of the programme.

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Knowledge Platform INCLUDE
Email: info@includeplatform.net
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International Development Research Centre
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International Development Research Centre (IDRC)
Email: eg@idrc.ca
Twitter: @IDRC_CRDI
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Canada



**International
Labour
Organization**

International Labour Organization (ILO)
Email: youth@ilo.org
Twitter: @ILOYouth
Facebook: ILO.org

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Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth
Email: decentjobsforyouth@ilo.org
Twitter: @DecentJobsYouth

About INCLUDE

INCLUDE was conceived in 2012 by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs to promote evidence-based policymaking for inclusive development in Africa through research, knowledge sharing and policy dialogue. INCLUDE brings together researchers from African countries and the Netherlands who work with the private sector, non-governmental organizations and governments to exchange knowledge and ideas on how to achieve better research-policy linkages for inclusive development in Africa. Since its establishment, INCLUDE has supported more than 20 international research groups to conduct research on inclusive development and facilitated policy dialogues in Africa and the Netherlands.