INTRODUCTION

Just over half of the world’s population is under the age of 30, with almost 90 percent living in low- and middle-income countries—particularly in Africa and the Middle East.\(^1\) In 2012, countries in Sub-Saharan Africa had the youngest population in the world, with more than 70 percent of their population below 30.\(^2\) This demographic divide can be an asset for developing economies, but such disproportions also raise challenges. For many of these emerging nations, booming youth populations are not receiving the skills they need to compete in the current labor market. The result can be seen in countries like South Africa, where the youth unemployment rate climbs past 53 percent.

To tackle this issue, many education programs around the world have developed effective strategies to equip teenagers and young adults with the training and skills necessary for work. The Center for Education Innovations (CEI) has identified more than 130 such programs.

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http://blog.euromonitor.com/2012/02/special-report-the-worlds-youngest-populations-.html
COMMON THEMES ACROSS PROGRAMS

1. General skills curricula for workforce trainings:

Almost 25 percent of skills for work programs in the CEI database impart general skills and attitudes designed to develop value-adding skills for youth, regardless of which field of work they eventually pursue. These programs can target students in school preparing to transfer to the workforce, or youth who are out of school and unemployed.

Programs like the Vidya Poshak Graduate Finishing School in India deliver comprehensive curricula that include basic English, computer and Internet skills, as well as soft skills like leadership, teamwork, and communication. These are skills that can be applied to positions in a variety of fields. After the three-month training program the students, all under age 25, receive career counseling and assistance in finding a job. About 20 percent of program participants receive financial aid through in-kind donations, and many others are eligible to receive loans.

Programs employing this general approach to skills development can operate as standalone alternatives to formal education, such as Vidya Poshak, but many others are targeting students that are still in school in order to help facilitate their transition directly into the workforce. For example, Advancing Girls’ Education in Africa (AGE Africa) supports girls in rural Malawi to complete secondary school and transition to higher education or employment through life skills training, as well as scholarships and post-secondary assistance.

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2. Targeted skills development for certain trades:

About 25 percent of skills for work programs in the CEI database aim to equip youth with the technical skills required for a specific trade or field of work. The most frequently offered courses among these programs include agriculture, finance and banking, and tourism and hospitality.

In India, to address the large numbers of untrained and unemployed youth, RUDSETI’s Vocational Training for Youth offers free training for more than 60 professions in four sectors: agriculture, production (manufactured and hand-crafted goods), processing (electronics or information and communications technology [ICT]), and general entrepreneurship. RUDSETI runs 27 training centers across India, and selects the courses based on the needs of each center’s surrounding community and local labor market.

Many other skills for work programs study or analyze local labor markets to identify which
sectors or industries have a high demand for workers. One such program in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, Education for Employment’s Job Placement Training program, conducts targeted research to identify sectors with high levels of economic growth. Then, through discussions with businesses and employers, it determines the skills necessary for jobs in those fields, and provides the appropriate training.

3. Emphasizing science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM):

Recognizing the growing importance of fields such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), 15 percent of skills for work programs in the CEI database are delivering the skills necessary for employment in these sectors. A large part of these programs (about 75 percent) operate in Sub-Saharan Africa, and most of the CEI-profiled STEM-focused programs target post-secondary students.

In Tanzania the Youth Innovation Partnership develops students’ knowledge in the STEM fields and encourages them to apply the knowledge in entrepreneurial contexts. Students interact and collaborate with local entrepreneurs and innovators in the field and are encouraged to participate in competitions for science, technology, and innovation.

Another STEM-focused organization, the Samsung Electronics Engineering Academy, operates in Kenya, South Africa, and Nigeria. The academy works to address the shortage of technical engineers in Africa. It selects students from local technical vocational education and training (TVET) institutions in Kenya, and provides them with supplementary instruction. The program’s innovative approach emphasizes a hands-on, practical training style on how to maintain and repair handheld devices, information technology, and consumer electronics.

Other programs focus on encouraging girls and women to get more involved in these fields. The AkiraChix Training Program targets unemployed or underemployed women in informal settlements in Nairobi who have completed secondary school. The free, full-time, one-year program delivers training in programming, web and mobile development, soft skills, and entrepreneurship, so

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participants can utilize their knowledge to secure employment or launch their own start-up.

4. Providing career guidance, support, and mentoring:

15 percent of skills for work programs offer support in professional or personal development to participants, in addition to delivering skills training.

To promote education and employment in Likoni, Kenya, the Hatua Likoni: Mentoring and Career Guidance program provides students with guidance in both academic and professional pursuits. Participants receive financial support for their education, and attend weekly mentoring sessions where they learn of employment opportunities and build networks related to their interests. Hatua Likoni also links university students to professionals in the field of work in which they are interested. These mentors help the students develop the skills and experience that can ultimately aid them in launching their own careers.

Other programs use a “pay-it-forward” system to provide professional guidance and support through program alumni that share their experiences and knowledge with current students. In India, for example, Unnati’s Vocational Training Program, which trains and places youth aged 18-25 in jobs that align with their strengths and interests, organizes regular alumni meetings and invites former participants to discuss their career experience with the new cohort of students. All alumni of the program, which launched in 2003, are encouraged to volunteer to teach the students about computers, technology, or other relevant workplace skills.

5. Partnering with local businesses:

A growing number of skills for work programs in the CEI database partner with local businesses to provide students with opportunities for practical, hands-on training and potential job opportunities upon completion of the program.

In South Africa, the Pinotage Youth Development Academy, a vocational training program centered on the value chain of wine partners with more than a dozen local wine farmers. These partners offer students an opportunity to gain experience through apprenticeships, and many employ the students upon completion of the program.

Go for Gold is another program, also in South Africa, which collaborates with external businesses to provide tutoring, life skills training, and professional development workshops to
6. Awarding funding for business ventures:

In addition to providing students with the requisite skills to launch successful business careers, several programs within the CEI Database also provide their program graduates with the microloans or micro-grants they need to start their own enterprise.

In Colombia, through Jovenes + Emprendedores, students receive training in business and job skills, and develop plans for their own business. Students then showcase these business-plans at the end of the training period, and the most promising ideas are supported with micro-grants. Jovenes + Emprendedores provides additional skills training and support during the early stages of the business, allowing the young entrepreneurs the guidance they need to set their operation on the path to success.

Balloon Kenya convenes young local entrepreneurs for a one-week program in entrepreneurship and innovation, delivering a curriculum tailored to individuals’ needs.
and environment. After the initial program the participants, in partnership with international teams that provide support and training, then launch a small business venture over a period of six weeks. At the end of this process, the entrepreneurs present their business model in a competition, after which the top 30 to 40 percent of participants are given loans to support their innovations and businesses.

7. Reaching marginalized youth through skills development and vocational training:

Other skills for work programs focus on providing skills training and support to youth with disabilities to enhance their potential for employment and financial independence.

**Sparrow Schools** in South Africa works with students between the ages of 7 and 18 with learning disabilities, with the goal of transitioning them into mainstream schools or helping them achieve independence through employment. The school not only provides a tailored curriculum for students but also offers vocational training through accredited courses in numerous fields, including mechanics, cooking, and sewing.

Similarly, the **Noida Deaf Society (NDS) Vocational Training Programme** in India delivers a specialized curriculum and emphasizes workplace readiness. The program bases its course curricula off of both the needs of the students and the needs of the market. This synthesis keeps NDS’s courses relevant, leading the organization to pursue trainings in desktop publishing and graphic design, Microsoft Office, and English communication.