



KNOWLEDGE PLATFORM ON INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT POLICIES

The way forward for sustainable youth employment in Ghana

Stakeholder Engagement Session 9 September 2020

African Policy Dialogue summary report

By **University of Ghana Legon,**
Department of Economics
Published September 2020



Accra, Ghana

Table of contents

- 1. Introduction 1
- 2. Opening of the policy dialogue 1
- 3. First portrait of youth Ghana: Mavis Morkporkpor Akura..... 2
- 4. Opening speech by the Deputy Minister for employment and labour relations..... 2
- 5. Remarks by the Senior Trade Officer at the Netherlands Embassy in Ghana..... 3
- 6. Second portrait of youth: Emmanuel Deku 4
- 7. Presentation by Keynote Speaker Professor William Baah-Boateng 4
 - 7.1 Main findings of the study 4
 - 7.2 Challenges behind youth employment and unemployment 5
- 8. Questions and answers..... 5
- 9. Round table discussions 7
 - 9.1 Knowledge sharing and governance..... 7
 - 9.2 Private sector support..... 9
 - 9.3 Political parties 11
- 10. Third portrait of youth Ghana: Theodore Makafui Adovor 13
- 11. Plenary discussion on opportunities for youth employment in Ghana 13

1. Introduction

The challenge of creating sustainable employment opportunities and decent jobs for the teeming youth of Ghana has remained a structural problem for successive governments since the country attained independence in 1957. During presidential and parliamentary election seasons in Ghana, youth unemployment challenge emerge paramount in all political discourses and affect outcomes of elections, yet, sustainable solutions to the problem have been elusive.

It is against this backdrop that on September 9, 2020, an African Policy Dialogue Stakeholder engagement was organized through a collaboration between the Department of Economics at University of Ghana, the Netherlands-African Business Council (NABC), and the Ghana Netherlands Business & Culture Council (GNBCC) at Lavilla Boutique Hotel in Accra. The forum brought together over 90 key stakeholders from academia, political parties, industry, policy makers among others, to discuss findings of an evidence-based research conducted to ascertain the outlook of youth unemployment in the country and also to proffer sustainable solutions.


The Dialogue could also be followed through the **#YouthFocusGH** to keep the Dialogue as accessible as possible. The full digital engagement can be found here: <https://twitter.com/GNBCC/status/1303631237463117824?s=20>

2. Opening of the policy dialogue


The Master of Ceremony for the forum, Mr. Bernard Koku Avle who is also the Director of News Programming at Citi FM, welcomed all participants to the event and briefly introduced the dignitaries therein present.

AFRICAN POLICY DIALOGUE
THE WAY FORWARD FOR SUSTAINABLE YOUTH EMPLOYMENT IN GHANA
SEPTEMBER 9, 2020 | ACCRA, GHANA






"A Dialogue Across Sectors on Youth Development in Ghana Informed by Evidence-Based Knowledge"



KEYNOTE SPEAKER
PROF. WILLIAM BAAH-BOATENG
Associate Professor & Head of the Department of Economics
University of Ghana, Legon



MASTER OF CEREMONY
BERNARD KOKU AVLE
Director of News Programming
Citi 97.3 FM

3. First portrait of youth Ghana: Mavis Morkporkpor Akura

This was followed by a video, showcasing the case of a young university graduate battling it out on the Ghanaian labour market. Mavis' story of working in a job which she described as far below her capabilities and skills acquired is a classic case of "invisible" underemployment. From the video, even though she was formally engaged, the nature of her employment can be classified as "vulnerable". In addition, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and its adverse socio-economic impact have deepened her woes as she no more receives salaries from her employers. Her economic well-being would have been dire if she had not redeployed her skills to making African hair accessories. The aim of the video was to pre-empt the day's discussions, as well as disclose the plight of an unemployed youth who is coerced into taking up a job that requires low skills than she has. Mavis aims at working for an international organization in the near future and this reflects a resolve to work towards her ambition.

Watch the video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Md6oRQ0PpME&t=16s>

4. Opening speech by the Deputy Minister for employment and labour relations (Mr. Bright Wireko-Brobby)

In his opening address, the Deputy Minister for Employment and Labour Relations acknowledged that youth employment remains one of the topmost priorities of government, not only in the short term but even in the medium through to the long term and therefore, discussions of this nature was very crucial in shaping policies of the state toward job creation. According to him, studies conducted by the Ghana Statistical Service indicate that the formal sector both private and public will not be able to generate adequate jobs to fully absorb the growing labour force and hence the need for a large proportion of the labour force to be guided into alternative employment opportunities in the informal sector.

Making reference to a report published by the Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER) in March 2017, Mr. Wireko-Brobby indicated that only 10 percent of graduates find jobs after their first year of national service. He said the research further revealed that it takes up to 10 years for the large number of graduates to secure decent employment as a result of several challenges ranging from lack of employable skills, low capacity of industry to absorb the growing labour force, and poor attitude of graduates towards job opportunities among others.

However, the Honorable Minister stated that despite these challenges, the government of Ghana, in the past few years has implemented and is instituting initiatives which he was optimistic was capable of reducing the youth unemployment in the country. Some of these policies, according to him, are as follows:

- Youth Employment Programme (YEP)
- National Entrepreneurship and Innovation Programme (NEIP)
- Planting for food and jobs programme
- One District One Factory (1D1F) Initiative
- Nation Builders Corps (NABCO)

Finally, the Minister reiterated that government was commitment to consolidate the gains made under these job creation interventions to provide more decent employment for the teeming youth and ready to fine tune existing policies using findings from evidence-based research. Some of these government efforts include reviewing the various incomes paid to beneficiaries of the above programmes, as well as explore the payment of social security contributions and social insurance for the beneficiaries are part of government’s mission to ensure the creation of decent work and jobs in the country at the broader level.

5. Remarks by the Senior Trade Officer at the Netherlands Embassy in Ghana (Mrs. Gladys Ofei)

In her address, Mrs. Gladys Ofei indicated that the Dutch government is very passionate about youth economic empowerment in line with the Sustainable Development Goals 8. She stated that government policy actions and inactions can go a long way to impact the youth of Ghana negatively or positively when it comes to employment. “Therefore, without well-researched and fact-based information, it will be very difficult to address the challenges and to provide sustainable solutions to the youth of Ghana”, she said.

The Senior Trade Officer also highlighted the Embassy of the Netherlands in Ghana had initiated several youth developments programmes to augment efforts reduce youth unemployment. Some of these interventions and initiatives were outlined as follows:

- **Orange Corners Ghana Programme;** provides access to capital and markets, equip for young entrepreneurs with skills.
- **Ghana Climate Innovation Programme;** targets innovative green businesses that are looking at climate change mitigation measures.
- **The New Business Challenge;** brings together young Ghanaian and Dutch students to brainstorm and come up with solutions to business and investment challenges facing Ghana.
- **The Dutch Expert Academy;** focuses on providing support for local businesses to get products exported.
- **The Orange Knowledge Programme;** provides scholarships to young Ghanaian professionals to take up master degree and PhD programme hence enhance their employability on the job market.

She added that the training and economic department of the embassy has also been very active in attracting foreign investment and enabling technological transfer, therefore creating more avenues to curb the youth unemployment challenge. She further opined that some of the programme will up scaled in 2021.

Mrs. Ofei said it was her fervent hope that the information obtained from the research would not be allowed to gather dust like many others, but would be used to change the lives and the outlook of the Youth of Ghana. She also assured the organizers of the continuous support of the Dutch government on critical matters such as youth unemployment issues in Ghana.

6. Second portrait of youth: Emmanuel Deku

In contrast to the first video, the story of Emmanuel captures the difficulties many uneducated young people who migrate from rural to urban areas in search of greener pastures face. As described by Emmanuel, he makes a living by doing menial jobs (giving a helping hand for masonry and tiling work) and assisting neighbours do household chores on periodic basis. He further lamented that, in very difficult times, he had to depend on the benevolence of friends. Just like Mavis, Emmanuel also aspires to better his fortunes by setting his own business to sell motorcycles and mobile phones once he gets the startup capital.

Watch the video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cRcZhhCfbpQ&t=7s>

7. Presentation by Keynote Speaker Professor William Baah-Boateng

Providing the background to situate the study, Prof. Baah-Boateng outlined what the youth generally represent; the segment of the population that are vibrant, bold, and technologically-driven and possesses high hopes. He said, as at 2017, the youth (15-35 year olds) constituted about a third of Ghana's population (35%) and that effective utilization/wastage of the potential of this demographic group have consequences – dividend or poses security threat.

He mentioned that the youth are however not homogeneous (differences in terms of gender, age groups, education and location: urban versus rural exist) and therefore policy initiatives to address youth unemployment challenge have to be tailored to these varied dimensions. Prof Baah-Boateng noted, however, that due to the heterogeneity nature of the youth, certain government employment initiatives such as the Nation Builders Corps (NABCO) may not benefit some groups.

Prof Baah-Boateng before presenting the main findings, provided the conceptual framework by highlighting on the differences between employment and jobs, underemployment versus vulnerable employment, unemployment versus non-working, discouraged workers, as well as decent or productive employment.

7.1 Main findings of the study

The main findings of the study were reported as follows:

- It was revealed that as the age of individuals increases, schooling declines and working increases and therefore, unemployment decreases with advancement in age. Specifically, unemployment rate declines with age with a peak at 20 years.
- The percentage of the youth with no level of education was 27.2 % for those within the 25-35 age group and 41.3% for those within the 15- 24 age group.

- Unemployment is higher among the educated than the uneducated, and this was explained based on the fact that educated people do not see the informal sector as attractive.
- In terms of programme of study, the youth with educational backgrounds in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) recorded the lowest level of unemployment compared with those with social sciences, business and law backgrounds.
- The length of time a jobseeker remains without employment was longer for educated and older youth (average unemployment duration of 19 months) as compared to 15 months for their younger counterparts.

7.2 Challenges behind youth employment and unemployment

- Employment growth lagging behind economic growth
- Rising youth population amidst limited job creation and employment opportunities
- General concerns of skills mismatch
- Few Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) graduates against over production of Humanities graduates
- Poor perception about Technical Vocational Education Training (TVET)
- Absence of a well-functioning Labour Market Information System (LMIS)
- High expectation of the youth against labour market realities

8. Questions and answers

After the presentations, some participants commended Prof Baah-Boateng for an excellent delivery whereas others made the following inquiries:

- Are the youth unemployment rates revealed by the study not understating the gravity of the problem on the ground?**

Answer: Prof Baah-Boateng indicated that there was the need to always consider both absolute figures and percentages as adopted by the study. According him, focusing on only the unemployment rate without verifying their corresponding absolute figures may be misleading. He said for instance, 50% unemployment rate in Cape Verde may only refer to 50,000 people in absolute figures whereas 5% unemployment rate for Ghana may be over 800,000 people. He concluded that the percentages may be small but their corresponding absolute values can be very high.

ii. How do we influence the process of integrating research recommendations into political manifestos since most politicians are governed by manifestos instead of a national development plan?

Answer: Although the objectives of a politician is different from that of an academic, political policies must be founded on informed research. Therefore, there is the need for effective coordination and engagement between the two divides.

In his response, Prof Baah-Boateng explained further that where we have gotten to as a country and globally, the issue of national and development plan for the long term does not help as the labour market is changing rapidly. He said “I don't also go for manifestos because they might have been written by people who have not done any research to be able to know what is on the ground”.

“As a country, I am expecting all the parties to come together and see where we want to go, and then go to Parliament with a common vision for this country. Political parties should be able to determine which policies they want to target regardless of the model to be used”.

He further indicated that it was crucial for political parties to come together to determine whether indeed what they are doing are what they planned doing, if that is the case then everybody will just look at the same kind of objective.

iii. Could the source of growth of an economy be a contributing factor to the growing unemployment rate?

Answer: Prof explained that Ghana’s economic growth is driven by the mining and oil sectors which tend to suffer from volatilities in international prices and unfavorable exchange rate, leading to low returns hence unable to expand to full capacity to provide job opportunities to the masses. Foreign exchanged earned from export of extractives are held externally and only an insignificant portion (in the form of royalties) flow to the country, so the cascading effect of proceeds to all sectors is lost.

iv. Why are universities not redesigning their course curriculum to shift focus from Humanities to STEM courses in order to enhance the employability of the youth?

Answer: The cost of training one medical student is about ten times the cost of training a student in the humanities hence sometimes you cannot blame policy makers too much. Therefore, we need to start from the scratch by beginning to integrate science into Humanities programme. Increasing enrolment into science programmes at the secondary school level have to be encouraged. We must begin to incorporate scientific ways of doing things, even in the way we solve problems in the classroom.

v. **Did the study also consider competition for job between the old and those in the young age categories?**

Answer: No job is meant for anybody. A 24-year-old who has just come out of the university cannot perform the task of a 40-year-old Professor and this is due to difference in experience acquisition. The moment we go on the tangent of thinking that older people are blocking the job opportunities, we tend to think that job can only be created when somebody dies or when another retires. Therefore, the issue is not about competition for jobs but how we can create jobs for everybody.

9. Round table discussions

9.1 Knowledge sharing and governance

The discussion among participants in this group were based on three main thematic areas, unemployment rate among the educated and uneducated, the skills that determine the future of work and the absence of a platform that efficiently link job seekers with job openings.

AFRICAN POLICY DIALOGUE
THE WAY FORWARD FOR SUSTAINABLE YOUTH EMPLOYMENT IN GHANA
SEPTEMBER 9, 2020, 10:00 GMT | ACCRA, GHANA

ROUND TABLE: KNOWLEDGE SHARING & GOVERNANCE

MODERATOR
BEATRICE ANOWAH BREW
Development professional
@ba_brew

#YOUTHFOCUSGH

i. **“The irony is that unemployment rate is higher among the educated than the uneducated and thus, raising questions about the quality of education and skills training in the country”.**

- Mindsets of the students, not wanting to work on available jobs
- Some young people are not employable due to lack of soft skills
 - Deliberate policy to incorporate soft skills in formal education
 - Career advisory services; career choices, CV building
- Lack of policy framework and standardization; we do not have a national structure on what we want to achieve.
 - the need for standardization of education in national policy
 - standardization of work experience (what qualifies for a work experience)
 - Deliberate in our decisions as a country on what we want to achieve.

- Undertake a human resource need assessment to inform educational programme and not the other way round as it is now
- Over prioritization of grades over soft skills interaction
 - Holistic approach to education (talents plus skills)
- Rigidity in our educational sector i.e. no flexibility to opt for areas that one thinks he/she has the talent to develop.
 - Educational reform- diversification of educational course options to broaden career paths and options

ii. What are the skills that determine the future of work?

- Soft skills: communication, critical thinking, problem solving, interpersonal relationship among others
- Bridging the gap between academic and industry/workspace
 - Practice-oriented research/education
 - Linking academia to where we can find potential such as the natural resources and Technical Vocational Education Training (TVET).
- Disaggregation of the youth – diversification of employment of employment options
- Strengthening the NSS programme to facilitate skills development

iii. In the absence of a platform that efficiently link job seekers with job openings continue to be a bane of youth unemployment. Although a number of public employment agencies are mandated to match job seekers with prospective employers, the coordination process is inefficient.

- Innovative in job placements- generate internship, distant learning
- Funding volunteerism/internship
- Knowledge and access to career/job opportunities
- Incentives for teachers
- Career guidance
- Opportunities for collaboration
- Career exploration

iv. Key Takeaways

Challenges:

- Social norms and uninformed expectations when it comes to employment and career choices
- Course mismatch with what the industry expects
- Issues around nepotism; who you know, who knows you
- Lack of avenues for mentorship and training
- Other incentives and remuneration for trainers and educators

Opportunities and the way forward:

- The need to change the mindset about jobs, career, employment and what seems to be socially acceptable when it comes to employment
- Policy oriented research
- Consider providing career advisory services
- National development agenda; focus on how to make it more effective
- National service reforms to ensure that the national service really does what it is meant for
- Need for disaggregation of youth
- Innovation; the need to train young people to be innovative and educators alike getting innovated

9.2 Private sector support

The thematic areas which formed the basis for discussion among participants in this group included; identification of the skills set that are in high demand, examining how employers, CSOs and NGOs can support the skills development drive to balance out the mis-match, and the specific solutions to the youth unemployment problem in Ghana from the private sector’s perspective.



The suggestions provided by participants under each thematic area were as follows:

i. Identifying the type of skills that are in high demand

- Research skills
- Technical and digital skills
- Problem solving skills
- Creative skills
- Job search skills and personal development skills
- Good attitude / behavior/ culture-fit character
 - Shift from focus on money or salary

- Soft skills and candidate profiles
 - Ability to adapt more quickly
 - Time management skills
 - Professionalism
 - Willingness to learn

ii. How can employers, CSOs and NGOs support the skills development drive to balance out the mismatch?

- Mapping and feasibility studies to identify areas for need and support
- Exploring existing initiatives and best practices
- Provide a platform for volunteering to help the youth learn and build their confidence for the job market
- Place value and reward on volunteering jobs
- Identify linkages or create synergies between the public and private sectors, academia, NGOs and CSOs
- Prioritize or help place the voice of the youth at the core or center stage
- Recognizing career development as Corporate Social Responsibility of the private sector
- Private sector to have a collective voice to advocate for skills development initiatives
- Providing informed training models for adoption and implementation
- Providing credit facilities for learning hubs to provide the needed training

iii. Specific solutions to the youth unemployment problem in Ghana from the private sector’s perspective.

- Create opportunities for practical job experience while in school as a requirement for graduation. For instance, volunteering, practical internships etc
- Employers to look out for new and young talents to groom
- There is the need to target changing the mindset and expectations of the youth
- The need to review what constitutes work experience
- Creation of more career centers
- Standardization of certificates and skills set for specific jobs
- Recognizing private sector driven employment initiatives as a transition model
- Expanding ideas of remuneration beyond salary in order to solve the problem of poaching which often increases the risk of engaging new talent by new businesses
- Revising the national service scheme to ensure that talents are posted or placed where they are most needed
- Resource informal learning platforms or hubs
- Incorporate digital learning models into existing curriculum

9.3 Political parties

Participants for this group were mainly representatives of political parties and youth representatives. Not in attendance were representatives from the two main political parties (New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress). Giving the opening remarks, the moderator re-echoed the heterogeneity nature of the Ghanaian youth (in terms of education, gender, location etc.) that was highlighted during the presentation by the keynote speaker, Prof. Baah-Boateng. Various Perspectives on the youth unemployment challenge and the role government (political parties) can play to firm up good employment policies for the youth were gathered through responses to three main questions posed by the moderator.



i. In lieu of the heterogeneity of Ghanaian youth, how can we have a targeted (cohort-specific) approach to deal with the multifaceted dimensions of youth unemployment as against a one-size-fit-all policy?

- To deal with youth unemployment challenge in its various forms, community-based policies have to be adopted. Without incorporating/decentralizing employment policy for the youth, any attempt at resolving the challenge will fail.
- The need for political actors to be realistic in formulating policies rather than the usual partisan interest that permeates employment initiatives for the youth was emphasized. These partisan remedies (short-term or adhoc) are embraced at the detriment of long term interventions to ward off agitations by youth groups within governing parties for jobs.
- Tailored employment policies could be drafted to address the needs of educated, uneducated, skilled and unskilled youth. In this way, existing initiatives such as the Nation Builders Corps (NABCO) or future interventions should have versions for educated and uneducated youth.

ii. During the presentation by the key note speaker, it was reported that employment lagged behind economic growth in Ghana, that is, growth is characterized by low employment elasticity. How can gains from economic growth which in Ghana has largely been driven by increased extraction of natural resources be broadened to generate returns in employment promising sectors such as agriculture, tourism and manufacturing? How can more quality jobs be created in the process?

- Opportunities in the agriculture sector can be expanded and similar efforts by countries such as Malaysia in oil palm plantation learnt and incorporated.
- Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) was observed to be crucial in ensuring that revenues generated from extractives “spill over” to other sectors of the economy. A caution was however raised on reliance on PPPs. With a large informal sector, private sector actors do not appear that potent to forge such partnerships so State-Led PPPs were proposed.
- As captured by a 2014 report put together by the African Center for Economic Transformation (ACET), for growth to be more inclusive, it should have **DEPTH (Diversity, Export-oriented and competitive, increase Productivity, upgrade Technology and improve Human well-being)**. If Ghana had integrated these transformative perspectives to develop a petrochemical industry when oil production began, this would have made economic growth more inclusive generating decent employment for disadvantaged youth.
- The state has to use its large purchasing power to create much needed markets for new businesses owned by the youth.

iii. How can youth employment be at the top of policy agenda and which themes are more important?

- Participants agreed that a long-term development plan with an entrenched legal framework binding on all political parties voted into power should be commissioned with manifestos feeding into national plans and vision. The keynote speaker joining the discussion attributed the lack of a long-term national plan to a provision in Ghana’s constitution that enjoins every president to prepare a short-term coordinated programme.
- Support for young entrepreneurs and in skill development, time-sensitive but forward looking programmes/training modules, institutionalization of internship, volunteering schemes, and reform of National Service Scheme were recognized as themes that future policies should lay emphasis on.

iv. Key recommendations

- Design of community-based employment policies within the national framework devoid and protected from excessive partisanship.
- Context-specific youth employment policy that addresses the varied needs of educated and uneducated youth.

- Economic growth must have **DEPTH**.
- Government should be leading initiators in Public Private Partnership arrangements.
- Restructuring of curricula at educational institutions and training centres.

10. Third portrait of youth Ghana: Theodore Makafui Adovor

Theodore's video shows a young business executive who own a farm, a venture shunned by many youths. His interest in the agriculture sector was whetted through a business incubator programme he participated in at the university which provided support to successful awardees. The proposal he presented did not earn him an award but it served as the launch pad that urged him to pursue a build a business in farming.

Theodore represented the young cohort who are venturing into unusual terrains while appreciating that the courses taught in schools (marketing, management and accounting) could be combined in managing their own enterprises. As he rightly put it, "young graduates need to open up their minds to other ventures". Doing so will not only reduce graduate unemployment, but generate decent employment as well. In his case, he employs both agronomists and farm hands. This video provided some form of hope that perhaps young people hold the magic wand in formalizing the Ghanaian economy.

Watch the video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=99XFAPQXZ18&t=19s>

11. Plenary discussion on opportunities for youth employment in Ghana

Before the plenary discussion, moderators for the three sessions made brief presentations on issues raised and very importantly touched on how various perspectives could be brought to bear to tackle youth unemployment in Ghana. This provided the right atmosphere for a fruitful session and climaxed the dialogue.

- Dr. Nana Akua Anyidoho of the Centre for Social Policy Studies (CSPS), University of Ghana recommended that further disaggregating of the formal sector to reveal precarious jobs within the sector could be enrich policy as the binary of informal versus formal categorization of jobs is inadequate.
- A youth advocate called for active and heard representation of youth in government and recommended the compilation of a national database to generate data that help address diverse dimensions of youth unemployment challenge in Ghana.
- Kofi Arhin, a representative from the Ministry of Business Development indicated that many 'real' opportunities are available for the youth to take advantage of in setting up businesses. Thus, youth entrepreneurship which is panacea to reduce youth unemployment could be championed if young people explore and utilise support schemes initiated by the government.

- Answering a question on how businesses in the informal sector could be empowered (through formalization), Prof. Baah-Boateng asks that a policy on entrepreneurship should be holistic because entrepreneurship is a function of the entire economy. He additionally noted that there should be succinct distinction between entrepreneurship as a way of life and as a business in formulating policies.
- Soft skills and modification of curricula to meet changing demands from industry (erratic nature of the current labour market making the future of work uncertain) dominated discussions. Participants recognized that the following skills if integrated into educational/training curricula and instilled could make the youth employable: innovativeness, communication and adaptability skills.