

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

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

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Dr Beth Vale, Emma Finestone and Sibahle Magadla are all under 35 years old.

Executive Summary

Africa has the world's fastest-growing labour force, presenting both a tremendous challenge and an unprecedented opportunity (ILO, 2020c). This research paper synthesises evidence from a collaborative research project called 'Boosting decent employment for Africa's youth'. It is a joining initiative of the Knowledge Platform on Inclusive Development Policies (INCLUDE), conceived by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the International Labour Organization (ILO), under the aegis of the Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth. This paper calibrates cutting-edge evidence from across Africa, centring knowledge produced from the collaborative research project, and drawing out best practice for a more just, sustainable and inclusive approach to jobs for young people. In doing so, we aim to centre the experiences, understandings and everyday tactics of young people themselves.

Boosting decent employment for Africa's youth is a three-year multi-funder partnership between IDRC, INCLUDE and ILO, under the umbrella of the Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth. This initiative aims to support cutting-edge research projects in the following key thematic priority areas:

- Enhancing soft and digital skills for youth;
- Fostering effective work-based learning programmes and mentorships;
- Tackling gender constraints that hold women back; and
- Identifying strategies for boosting the demand for labour.

Over the years, the 'Boosting decent employment for Africa's youth' partnership has produced wide-ranging knowledge products on youth unemployment, offering context-specific case studies, regional positions, as well as actionable policy-relevant syntheses. It has also demonstrated responsiveness to emerging global and local challenges affecting youth employment. The decline of industrial wage labour, the challenges of building an environmentally sustainable economy, and rapid technological advancement are global phenomena unfolding with local and regional particularity across Africa. As they do, they are often deepening pre-existing inequalities related to young people's age, gender, poverty, and geography. It is widely acknowledged that we cannot rely on the formal economy alone to shift youth employment, and that extractive, industrial wage labour is ripe for disruption. As such, this synthesis leverages knowledge and innovation from both within and outside the formal wage economy. The synthesis offers recommendations to a) recognise, grow, and remunerate women's work; b) create a youth-absorbing green economy; and c) realise quality work amid the possibilities and constraints of digitisation.

A synthesis of evidence^[1] across the INCLUDE Knowledge Platform and beyond, shows that the most successful interventions for advancing youth employment in Africa are multi-solving, often addressing quality jobs, climate mitigation and equity simultaneously as interdependent imperatives. They are also multi-dimensional, working to both train and resource young people, while also creating more enabling environments to activate and sustain young people's participation in the labour market.

[1] Given that this paper is in effect a meta-synthesis, drawing evidence from both individual papers and other syntheses, there are occasions when attributions are made to syntheses rather than original sources, requiring readers to refer to these syntheses for original sources.

A central finding of the synthesis is that false dichotomies between the formal and informal sectors will not serve an inclusive youth employment agenda, nor are they reflective of the context in which young people's work and futures are unfolding. Indeed, robust research on the lives and livelihoods of young people shows that the lines between formality and informality are often far more blurry than imagined, with connections and overlaps between them. More so, the tropes of 'decent, dignified work in the formal economy'; versus 'insecure, exploitative work' in the informal economy fail to chime with what is in fact a much messier reality. Policy, programming, regulation and research must focus on creating sustainable livelihoods for young people. Many of these livelihoods will be made in the interstices of the formal and informal sectors, and often outside traditional wage jobs, demanding that we build a supportive scaffold for young people to navigate complex and shifting employment trajectories. The paper's recommendations offer guiding principles for advancing more just employment futures for Africa's youth, but in all these efforts, youth participation, careful targeting and local adaptation will be critical for success.

Recommendations

Policy

Social and labour protection must extend to the informal sector. Given the limited (and arguably diminishing) prospects of waged work and the predominance of informal jobs in Africa, this will be essential to enabling inclusive, quality jobs.

Investing in electricity, telecommunications, transport and ICT infrastructure can unlock young people's ingenuity and participation in the digital and service sectors, offer opportunities for vulnerable youth, and drive growth in emerging non-manufacturing industries.

Public works programmes can offer employment subsidies for young people, facilitating experience and entry in the labour market, while also building valuable local assets. But public employment programmes must also build transferable skills and exploitable networks to avoid being piecemeal.

Strategies for inclusive growth should promote innovative, non-traditional value chains in which young people can set the standard for decent work and are capacitated to leverage 4IR technologies. How the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) affects youth employment depends on whether country governments adjust their education curriculums and social protection systems, invest in adequate infrastructure, and create an enabling environment for home-grown innovations and decent jobs for youth.

Improving access to, and quality of, basic and secondary school education is essential, but supply-side solutions to boosting youth employment are not sufficient. While growing young people's education and skills, we also need to be creating quality livelihood opportunities, and stimulating demand. Linkages between training providers and private businesses must also be strengthened, particularly for technical and vocational training colleges.

Regulation

Informal enterprises should be enabled, not hamstrung. Responsive regulation should reduce bureaucratic red-tape and unnecessary formalisation, while still safeguarding worker protection and sound governance.

Legislation should protect vulnerable workers by addressing discriminatory policy against women, and regulating work contracts for those outside permanent wage employment.

Programmes

While creating new green jobs for young people in Africa, we must also ensure - rather than assume - that these are quality jobs. Employment initiatives in the green economy are all-too-often piecemeal and have not translated into sustainable livelihoods.

Gender-responsive interventions should focus on providing access to finance, land, and affordable childcare and social services, as strategies to boost and sustain women's labour participation.

Youth employment interventions should recognise and alleviate the financial and psychosocial costs of the job search and offer wrap-around support. This might include cash transfers to support job-seeking or improved access to affordable transport, or programmatic interventions like mentorship and psychosocial services.

An enabling environment should be created for small, medium-size and micro-enterprise, facilitating access to finance and markets, as well as training and continuous learning.

Research

Future research should avoid binaries and stereotypes, and instead account for mobility, flexibility and reversibility (between sectors, between city and countryside, and between regional and international levels). It is in these in-between spaces that young people across Africa are creating livelihoods and defining the future of work. It is also in the in-between spaces that policy and programmatic responses are most lacking.

More research is needed on how young people are making and negotiating livelihoods in unexpected, often unseen, parts of the economy, particularly in the spaces between the formal and informal sector. The voices and experiences of rural, queer, disabled and migrant youth should be amplified in research generated through the partnership.

The impact of youth employment interventions must be measured and tracked, in terms of the quantity of jobs created, who these jobs are for (including women and rural youth), and their quality (in terms of wages, working conditions, benefits etc.). Without this, the design and implementation of inclusive youth employment interventions is hamstrung.

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Africa has the world's fastest-growing labour force, presenting both a tremendous challenge and an unprecedented opportunity: the continent has seen rapid economic growth over the past two decades and is home to a large, young working population with rising education rates (ILO, 2020c). But job creation is not keeping up. Each year, 10-12 million youth enter Africa's labour market and only 3 million formal jobs are created in the same period (African Development Bank Group, 2016).

While the official unemployment rate across the African continent sits at 10.6% (International Labour Office, 2015), this masks extraordinary variation across countries, discouraged job-seekers that fall outside official statistics, as well as the millions working in vulnerable, insecure, poorly or irregularly paid and unsafe jobs (Yeboah & Flynn, 2021). Millions of young Africans, who are technically 'employed', have volatile livelihoods constituted through a combination of insecure, ad-hoc, and low-paid jobs, often in the informal sector (Izzi, 2020).

Despite two decades of solid economic growth, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), many countries have found themselves on the back foot once again, following the major shocks wrought by Covid-19 on both the local and global economy (Fox & Signé, 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic made quality work for young people even more fragile, tracing pre-existing inequalities, and illuminating regional differences. Labour incomes have fallen across the continent: richer countries of Southern and Northern Africa have seen a spike in unemployment because of the loss of waged work; while in poorer countries, where people survive predominantly off the informal economy, underemployment has increased (Fox & Signé, 2021a).

In many countries, the youth face a future without the prospect of industrial waged work and uncertain possibilities for making a living in the agricultural sector, on which the majority of African livelihoods still depend (Solidaridad, 2020). This has translated into slower than expected reductions in poverty across the continent. To ensure sustainable livelihoods and improved standards of living, it is paramount that Africa understands and addresses the multi-faceted challenges that hinder quality employment so as to better enable its young labour force.

This imperative is made even more urgent since Covid-19, which not only exposed the fragility of young people's livelihoods, but also the interdependency between domestic labour, household well-being, and quality work. Women, like youth, are particularly hard-hit by blows to local and global economies, because of their struggles to gain entry into employment (Fox & Signé, 2020). When labour markets shed workers in response to Covid-19 lockdowns, young people (Bordeleau et al., 2020a) and women (Tsikata & Torvikey, 2021) were among those most likely to lose their jobs, especially if they worked in the informal sector. Gender norms also shaped who took on the added caregiving burden that the pandemic and lockdown regulations produced (Khan, 2020). In the historical construction of a 'proper job', care work is often rendered invisible.

While the number and scope of policies promoting youth-employment has increased across the globe over the past decade, the impact of these interventions is rarely evaluated (Chacaltana & Dasgupta, 2021). In general, there is a dearth of research available to guide policy and intervention targeted at addressing youth unemployment in Africa (IDRC, 2019).

Aims of the synthesis

The collaborative research initiative, 'Boosting decent employment for Africa's youth' (INCLUDE, 2019), is a three-year (2019-2022), multi-funder partnership that aims to strengthen and drive research in Africa around key youth employment priorities. This paper aims to synthesise and critically evaluate knowledge products produced under the frame of the partnership, drawing out their most significant findings as well as recommendations to drive evidence-based youth employment programmes in Africa.

This synthesis paper draws together evidence from across the African continent with the aim of answering this key question: How do we create just, quality employment for young Africans in a context of deepening labour and climate precarity, as well as rapid technological change? Drawing particularly from research generated under the partnership, as well as other transdisciplinary and grey literature, the synthesis aims to draw out imaginative, actionable recommendations that can help shift the trajectory of youth unemployment while also being responsive to the imperatives of a changing world.

From a theoretical perspective, this synthesis is oriented around two key principles:

First, any engagement with the future of decent work for Africa's youth must expand its definition of 'work' beyond the standard wage-paying job, and look beyond the dichotomies and assumptions that inform readings of the 'formal' and 'informal' economy. Our solutions to youth unemployment - and unemployment more broadly - cannot come from the so-called 'formal economy' alone, but they also cannot put all the responsibility on young people to 'self-start'. We must find systemic and structural ways to support, secure, and protect the multifarious, alternative livelihoods that young people are making for themselves.

The second principle is related to the first: to take young people's experiences of work and joblessness seriously. While reflecting on the many global forces shaping young people's working lives, a synthesis of the evidence must elevate local knowledge, lived experience, and context-specific realities. In this synthesis, this was achieved through using existing literature - no primary data collection was conducted.

Methodological approach

Data for this synthesis paper draws primarily from knowledge products produced within the frame of the 'Boosting decent employment for Africa's youth' partnership between the Knowledge Platform on Inclusive Development Policies (INCLUDE), Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the International Labour Organization (ILO), under the aegis of the Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth, supplemented by additional academic and grey literature, with a particular focus on drawing out the voices of young people themselves.

The partnership has produced knowledge products that fall within five cross-cutting thematic areas:

1. Understanding drivers and patterns of youth employment, unemployment and underemployment (Hassan et al., 2021; Richardier, 2021; Yeboah & Flynn, 2021), including how young people themselves experience work, jobs (Richardier, 2021) and labour market inequality, with a particular focus on women (Bordeleau et al., 2020a; ILO, 2020d; Khan, 2020; Revenga & Dooley, 2020; Wambalaba et al., 2021) and vulnerable populations (Hackl, 2021; Hassan et al., 2021; ILO, 2020d; ILO Global Business and Disability Network, 2021).
2. The impact of Covid-19 on youth employment across the continent (Bordeleau et al., 2020a; Fox & Signé, 2020).
3. Work in a time of climate crisis, including both the impact of climate crisis on jobs and industry (Aoudji, 2022a, 2022b), and the possibilities for green jobs for youth (Coulibaly & Page, 2021; Mwaura & Glover, 2021; Skotnitsky & Kohli, 2021).
4. Digitisation and the future of work (Chacaltana & Dasgupta, 2021; Hackl, 2021; Kazimierczuk, 2020b), including the impact and possibilities of technology and automation, as well as how youth are leveraging technology to make and sustain livelihoods.
5. Recommendations for boosting youth employment, including critical evaluations of existing youth employment interventions (Ismail & Mujuru, 2020a; Kazimierczuk, 2020a) and commended pathways for alleviating the unemployment crisis (Turolla, 2022).

This synthesis uses content analysis to compare and contrast within and across these themes, drawing out patterns and connections in the literature. In doing so, it aims to calibrate learnings across countries without losing contextual specificity, drawing out recommendations that are both actionable and appropriately nuanced. By surfacing similarities and differences across cases, and keeping a sharp eye on youth experience, the synthesis gestures toward a youth-led agenda for quality work in Africa. This agenda should guide answers to context-specific questions, while also offering comparative insights that can help attend to large-scale patterns.

1. Frames and debates in the literature on youth employment in Africa

All writing on youth employment in Africa is inevitably shaped by particular theoretical assumptions about the nature of the unemployment crisis, and implicitly, the strategies to solve it. Embedded in these assumptions are also disagreements about what constitutes quality work for young people, and therefore, what we should be striving towards to secure a just and responsive employment future. In this section, we draw comparisons and connections across these diverse products to provide a critical analysis of the theoretical frames through which youth employment in Africa has been understood within (but also without) the partnership. The analysis will pay particular attention to how these frames relate to young people's own experiences of work and livelihoods. This discussion is intended to build a conceptual framework in which to ground a future-oriented, more just approach to youth employment in Africa.

1.1 Formal employment vs informal employment: A false dichotomy?

Literature on youth employment in Africa often falls in two camps with respect to its approach to the formal economy. For some, dwindling prospects in the formal sector, both within Africa and globally, signal the imperative to think differently about work. For others, creating jobs in the formal sector is the only way to transform the economy at the scale that is required to shift livelihood prospects. The former camp might be accused of romanticising precarious work and placing the onus on young people to 'transform themselves'. Meanwhile the latter camp often relies on an increasingly tenuous dichotomy between the informal and formal sectors. Here, interventions in the formal economy are structural and sustainable, while interventions in informal economy are piecemeal and individualised; where formal work is decent (Sumberg et al., 2020) and secure, and informal work is not.

As it stands, the vast majority (80.8%) of employment in Africa occurs in the informal sector, where youth and women are also disproportionately represented (ILO, 2018). As such, the informal sector represents a key lever for change in creating decent employment opportunities, including innovative solutions that do not focus solely on formalisation. Indeed, 'the prevalence and persistence of "informal", "precarious", and "non-standard" employment in so many sites around the world... requires a profound analytical decentring of waged and salaried employment as a presumed norm or telos, and a consequent reorientation of our empirical research protocols' (Ferguson & Li, 2018). As this synthesis will illustrate, knowledge produced within the frame of the partnership has been largely focused on how to stimulate traditional waged employment for youth or better prepare young people for the needs of changing industry, with consideration of the informal economy centring almost exclusively on entrepreneurship, rather than other modes of self-employment or multi-modal livelihoods.

While we dare not romanticise the informal sector, we cannot afford to ignore it, or to hold to rigid dichotomies that belie a much more complex economy. Rather than being dichotomous, the lines between the formal and informal economy are often far more blurry than expected: there are linkages and overlays between them. Similarly, the tropes of 'decent, dignified work in the formal economy'; versus 'insecure, exploitative work' in the informal economy are in fact far messier than they seem. Primary research with young people across the continent show that their conceptions of a 'decent job', while varying significantly across regions, were not reserved to the formal sector (Hassan et al., 2021).

Research with young people in Kenya (Hassan et al., 2021), for example, suggests that many have a preference for formal sector work, not because it necessarily offers more 'decent' work, but because of the promise of employee social protection. Young people in a Zambian research study (Gough et al., 2016) believed that, in addition to employment benefits, they were also less likely to be fired from formal-sector jobs. But social security for state employees in Zambia is shrinking rapidly, and many are losing jobs in the wake of structural adjustment (Gough et al., 2016).

In these studies, young people understood Africa's formal and informal labour markets as containing different aspects of decent work, with the former offering security and the latter autonomy (Gough et al., 2016). Young participants in an INCLUDE workshop argued that exploitation was more difficult to challenge in the unregulated informal sector, but that it also offered greater opportunities for queer, disabled and rural youth to create and sustain livelihoods (Hassan et al., 2021). Indeed, the partnership could be driving more research into how these traditionally marginalised young people are finding and making a living in unexpected, and often unseen parts of the economy.

Despite apparent job security, wage-workers in the formal economy are also susceptible to feeling 'disposable', exploited and unsafe (Siegman & Schiphorst, F, 2016). The history of low-paid wage work in Africa has been associated with colonialism and - in South Africa - apartheid (Lebaron & Ayers, 2013). Migrant waged work in the South African mines oriented and organised many people's lives throughout the twentieth century, providing powerful forms of social order - what anthropologist, James Ferguson, calls 'work-membership'. But mineworkers' incorporation within the labour market was never uniformly voluntary and often equated to forced migration, oppression and abuse (Dawson & Fouksman, Elizabeth, 2020). This is part of the reason why some young people in post-apartheid South Africa have reported choosing insecure self-employment over the indignities of certain forms of wage labour (Webb, 2016). Evidence from ten African countries suggests that agriculture-related work or medium-skilled jobs in manufacturing are the least attractive for young Africans (Lorenceau et al., 2021).

Qualitative literature from across the continent is showing that, while wage employment might bring regular income, this is not the same as a living wage. Many young people in formal employment are therefore supplementing their income with additional activities, moving between sectors (Hassan et al., 2021). In Zambia, for example, researchers found that many young people were taking on additional income-generating activities on top of their government jobs (Gough et al., 2016). Others have opted out of wage work entirely, arguing that the coupling of low pay with time-poverty is something they can ill-afford (Dawson & Fouksman, Elizabeth, 2020; Gough et al., 2016).

Meanwhile, articulations of work outside the frame of the 'proper, waged job' often rest on descriptions of what the latter is not (i.e. informal, non-standard, unstable or insecure) with little scholarly frame of what it is, and how we might meaningfully respond to it (Ferguson & Li, 2018). Section 3.3 (below) describes how some young people are struggling, surviving and, in some instances, thriving outside the formal sector.

The imperative to think about just, quality and stable jobs beyond traditional wage labour is particularly important - for example, for women in the care economy, for growing numbers of gig workers, and for small-scale farmers who might drive a more sustainable agricultural future. This synthesis recommends (see Section 5) improving social safety nets, career pathways, and transferable skills for workers in both sectors, and offering tangible recognition, protection and value to work (whether waged or not) that has been historically demeaned.

1.2 Approaches to the formal economy: strategies of supply and demand

Current approaches to boosting youth employment in the formal sector fall largely into three categories: 'supply-side solutions', 'demand-side solutions', and solutions that aim to better bridge supply and demand. Supply-side solutions work to boost young people's employability through training and skills (Goluba et al., 2021; ILO, 2020d); demand-side solutions are focused on how to 'create jobs' (Kazimierczuk et al., 2020) that can better absorb young people into the formal economy; and finally, 'matching' solutions aim to ready young people for the needs of industry (ILO, 2021b), while also attuning industry to the needs of young people (Chacaltana & Dasgupta, 2021).

These approaches are borne out in the knowledge products produced by the partnership, but reflect a wider set of approaches and assumptions in addressing youth unemployment.

Supply-side solutions proceed with the core assumption that a primary driver of young people's unemployment is that they do not have the right technical or 'soft' skills to be absorbed into available and emerging jobs (Fox et al., 2020). This includes a growing digital economy (ILO, 2020a; Youth Foresight, 2021a), which has been dramatically accelerated by Covid-19 (ILO, 2020a). Enhancing young people's skills has also been shown to operate as a protective mechanism: in many countries, those with fewer skills and qualifications have been most affected by Covid-19-related job losses and salary cuts (ILO, 2020a). Literature on workplace-based training (Ismail & Mujuru, 2020b), skills training, and mentorship (Aoudji, 2022b, 2022a), for example, would fall within this category.

Evidence (Ismail & Mujuru, 2020a) suggests that, in Africa, workplace-based learning is delivered primarily through technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programmes, which are provided or regulated by national governments. However, these programmes are often underfunded with limited linkages to private employers.

Tunisia's national professional training agency is recognised as the top TVET model in Africa (Ismail & Mujuru, 2020a). It combines employer partnerships with significant on-the-job training. Although the private sector is an important stakeholder in the Tunisian TVET system, the public sector dominates provision. And even here, linkages to private-sector employers are limited.

Demand-side solutions focus on growing industries in which young people have the greatest chance of being hired. Literature on demand-side solutions is often informed by an analysis of industry trends and absorption capabilities, with a view to identifying those areas of the economy that have the highest possibility of creating quality work for young people (Quak & Flynn, 2019b). This might include private sector development interventions (Quak & Flynn, 2019b) that link a firm's performance to their ability to create quality jobs for young people. Researchers in the partnership have also explored the job creation and economic growth potential of industries without smokestacks (IWOSS) in Senegal, Uganda, Kenya and Ghana (Coulibaly & Page, 2021; Goluba et al., 2021; Mbaye, Gueye, Mbaye, et al., 2021; Onsomu et al., 2021). These non-manufacturing industries are characterised by being internationally tradeable, generating high value per worker, having exponential potential for technology change and productivity growth, and showing evidence of scale. In Africa, leading IWOSS include agro-industry and horticulture, tourism, business services, information and communications technology (ICT), and transport and logistics.

Across Africa, manufacturing, which has the capacity to absorb large numbers of unskilled and low-skilled workers, is dwindling. Instead, the bulk of African workers leaving agriculture and moving to cities are being absorbed into the services sector (Mbaye, Gueye, Beye, et al., 2021). In Senegal, for

example, while there has been a 10% decline in the number of workers absorbed into agriculture, there has not been a concomitant growth in manufacturing. Instead, the growing working-age population has been almost entirely absorbed into the informal sector, particularly informal services in urban areas (Goluba et al., 2021).

INCLUDE research findings (Goluba et al., 2021; Mbaye, Gueye, Beye, et al., 2021; Shibia et al., 2021) suggest that IWOSS could increase the number of high-quality jobs in Senegal, Uganda and Kenya if, among other things, governments were to create a more enabling regulatory environment and improve key infrastructure (electricity, telecommunication and transport). To be enabling, regulation must work to unlock rather than hamstringing small business, including protecting the livelihoods of informal vendors and service providers, rather than policing them. Meanwhile, regulators must also protect workers' rights; enabling job creation without enabling exploitation.

Research also surfaced context-specific nuances related to the constraints and possibilities for IWOSS in different countries: For example, while Kenya has comparatively strong ICT infrastructure, the exorbitant cost of broadband (a problem in many African countries) is a major inhibitor to growth in the ICT sector.

Both demand-side and supply-side solutions have critical limitations if they are undertaken in isolation from one another, and the wider policy and socio-economic context (Linssen et al., 2021a). Local economies are often shaped by political power brokers, and related networks of patronage, that mediate access to jobs (Izzi, 2020). Supply-side solutions arguably place significant responsibility on young people to ready themselves for work, with little guarantee that the labour market will be able to receive them, or that they will have the support and resources they need to secure a job. We need responsive policy and programming to develop priority sectors, stimulate demand for young workers (Ismail & Mujuru, 2020a) and alleviate often-overlooked barriers to entry. More so, growing industries like ICT often depend on post-primary level skills, which, beyond targeted skills-building, demands strong primary-level education (Shibia et al., 2021).

Matching solutions aim to resolve some of the impasse between supply and demand-side solutions by building better linkages between employers and candidates (Goluba et al., 2021; Goluba & Kakuru, 2021). This includes strategies for how young people can best 'signal' their skills to employers, who are accustomed to assessing candidates' aptitudes on the basis of formal, documented qualifications. It also means finding ways to recognise and document the knowledge and skills of young people whose aptitudes often go unseen. UNESCO, for example, has developed a methodology for assessing and recording the education level of refugees, producing a 'Qualifications Passport' where other documentary evidence is unavailable. In Nigeria, digital platforms like Youth Marketplace are allowing young people to log and grow their skills and experience, producing richer CVs (International Labour Organisation, 2021).

Notably, young people's own experiences of job-seeking in the formal sector are not neatly captured by current supply-side or matching solutions. For many young people, the barriers to finding and securing work have been far less about their own skills deficits and far more about the financial and psychosocial costs of job-seeking (Youth Capital, 2022). In South Africa, research suggests that the cost of job-seeking amounts to R938 per month (US\$51), including mobile data, CV printing, internet usage, application fees and transport costs (Graham et al., 2019). This was often more than research participants' monthly income, which meant young people could not afford job-seeking without becoming indebted (Graham et al., 2019). Three out of four young people had been looking for work for more than a year (Graham et al., 2019). South African research shows that the longer young people are

out of work, the more difficult it is to find a job, owing not only to deepening discouragement and declining mental health, but also because employers now view them as a riskier hire (Youth Capital, 2020). Research from Zambia suggests that the cost of job-seeking can be further exacerbated by corrupt practices among human resource officials (Gough et al., 2016). Some young people report having to pay a fee to be interviewed, or being pressured to commit a portion of their salaries to HR managers (Gough et al., 2016).

While workplace-based learning is one of the most popular strategies used to promote youth employment, allowing young people to gain experience, showcase their adeptness, and build industry-relevant skills; employers often neglect their particular resource constraints. Considering that the young are often affected by extreme poverty, it is often necessary to integrate financial aid as part of vocational training packages (Richardier, 2021).

When young people talk about the obstacles to finding a job, the language of social deficits is often more pronounced than skills deficits. Most people find jobs through friends and family, who refer them to employers, notify them of work opportunities or lend them money to keep looking for work. Similarly, employers often rely on employees to refer people for job openings. In other words, having social ties in the labour market is a gateway to entry. Yet 42% of young people in South Africa, for example, live in a house where no one is employed (Youth Capital, 2022). Without these connections, many young people (especially rural youth) are locked out of jobs. Increasingly, mentorship programmes are recognising that, rather than simply offering young people skills and training, mentors can be critical social bridges into the world of work. They can also provide a rudder for young people whose employment aspirations and ability to navigate the world of work might have been constrained by their social frame (Gardiner, 2020).

For many young people, employment security – that is the ability to find and keep a job – is inexorably tied to household security (Gough et al., 2016). When faced with household responsibilities, like caring for children, the elderly, or the sick, many young women, in particular, find it difficult to sustain a job. Death, birth, disability and illness can come as unexpected shocks to a household that often affect the ability of some members to earn an income.

1.3 Approaches to the informal economy: precarious survival or intrepid entrepreneurship

Informal trading is a critical livelihood strategy for young people in many African countries (Gough et al., 2016). These businesses are varied and often gendered. In Chamwa, Zambia, for example, there are some businesses run by young people of both genders: grocery stores, bottle stores, brewing kachasu (liquor), taverns, night clubs, bakeries, trading salaula (second-hand clothes), selling airtime (for mobile phones) and hairdressers.

But other forms of trade are markedly gendered: men dominate carpentry, welding, car-washing and shoe-mending trades, while the selling of fresh vegetables, fruits, roasted maize cobs, groundnuts and prepared food (sold through vendor stands or *tuntamba*) are women-led activities (Gough et al., 2016). Women and young people are over-represented in the informal economy. Given that unemployment insurance typically does not cover informal workers, workers in these sectors are extremely vulnerable.

'Entrepreneurship' has been a dominant frame for thinking about the prospects of youth employment in the informal economy, both within and outside the partnership (Dawson, 2021; ILO, 2020b; Revenga & Dooley, 2020; Wambalaba et al., 2021). Here, it is often assumed that young people are

innately innovative, and therefore their entrepreneurial potential needs to be awakened (Fox et al., 2020), often through training and skills development programmes (Revenga & Dooley, 2020). The limitation of these entrepreneurship programmes is that they tend to individualise responsibility for finding a job, shifting attention away from unequal economic structures (Fox et al., 2020). Indeed, INCLUDE research spanning 27 developing countries found that training had to be complemented with other forms of enablement - whether finance, technical assistance, or mentorship - in order to have a meaningful effect on encouraging entrepreneurship among women (Revenga & Dooley, 2020).

While the vast majority of young people will be forced to create their own living through forms of self-employment, only a small percentage are able to create businesses that employ others (Revenga & Dooley, 2020). There is limited crossover between these two types of entrepreneurs; few microenterprises will ever grow to become small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs) (Revenga & Dooley, 2020). Yet both micro-enterprises and SMEs regularly operate in hostile economic environments with limited capital or networks (Finn & Oldfield, 2015; Mbaye, Gueye, Beye, et al., 2021). Being self-employed didn't seem to reduce the need for relevant social connections. In Zimbabwe, for example, the high level of politicisation of Harare's SME sector has meant that partisan allocation of resources such as market stalls has been a longstanding feature of the ruling party's political mobilisation strategy (Izzi, 2020).

While some view unemployed youth as vessels of untapped entrepreneurial potential; for others, they represent a ticking time bomb. There is a common assumption that when young people are not formally unemployed, they are idle, lazy, or dangerous (Fox et al., 2020). This has given way to employment programmes positioned as interventions to prevent the latent violence of jobless youth (Izzi, 2020).

The twenty-first century has been awash with images of 'waiting youth' (Honwana, 2014), who have been marginalised through under- and unemployment, and are becoming increasingly detached from their life aspirations. But all-too-often these young people are not just waiting, nor is youth unemployment accurately characterised as a security threat. Instead, literature from both within and outside the partnership shows that unemployed youth are regularly developing new subjectivities to navigate changing labour markets (Dawson & Fouksman, Elizabeth, 2020; Hassan et al., 2021; Richardier, 2021). Even young people in Chamwa, Zambia, who described themselves as 'just sitting' were assisting families with their businesses, doing household chores, or looking after younger siblings (Gough et al., 2016).

Qualitative literature illustrating practices of 'hustling' at taxi ranks in Zambia (Gough et al., 2016) and car washes in South Africa (Dawson, 2021), for example, shows that these sites act as nodes for a range of other businesses from informal mechanics to food vendors. Young people spend time in these spaces, take up odd jobs, and become known to the people in surrounding industries. By being visible to potential employers and co-workers, and growing their social connections, they gain leverage in this particular slice of the local economy.

Similarly, in Bamako, Mali, researchers have documented the emergence of new social and economic networks, circulating around motorcycle taxis, casinos, Premier BET20 (an online sports betting portal) and promotional sales (Richardier, 2021). While some (usually more educated) young people are opting out of poorly-paid work and willing to wait for a better opportunity, few have the luxury of waiting. Instead work opportunities emerge from vigilance and inventiveness. This has included selling masks in a time of Covid-19, or returning to rural areas to benefit from humanitarian and aid programmes.

Informal trade, and trading networks, rather than being hamstrung, should be enabled and supported through transparent and simplified regulation, as well as improved access to markets, finance, networks, and training. Sometimes 'hustling' emerges outside the bounds of 'trade' or service-provision, taking on illicit and survivalist forms. In a Zambian focus group study, young people discussed young men who had taken up roles as 'professional' mourners, meeting their basic needs by moving from one funeral to the next, eating and drinking alongside 'genuine' mourners (Gough et al., 2016).

In other words, when faced with crises, young people tend to abandon traditional employment patterns, and instead leverage social skills to gain footholds in an unstable context (Richardier, 2021).

In many instances, entrepreneurial activity is unfolding in the interstices of formal and informal sectors. In Kenya, side-hustling (Muthoni Mwaura, 2017), which refers to an engagement in diverse income-earning activities, has become a common phenomenon among educated youth who are increasingly faced with formal employment uncertainties. While working in the formal economy or finishing their schooling, many young Kenyans are also reported to do work 'on the side', during free time, evenings and weekends. This is not only to supplement their incomes, but also to accumulate capital in preparation for other livelihood opportunities. However, research (Muthoni Mwaura, 2017) suggests that it would be a mistake to see this side-hustling as a vindication of youth employment policies or entrepreneurial programmes that place the burden of job creation on the shoulders of the young people themselves. While side-hustling can be read as an instance of young people's resilience, more than anything else it 'reflects the failure of the state to uphold its end of the intergenerational bargain' (Muthoni Mwaura, 2017).

To valorise these tactics of survival and adaptation as 'entrepreneurship' is to negate their volatility. But it is nevertheless important to make these practices visible to surface the adeptness and skill of Africa's young people, who are often seen as lacking in skills, as well as to draw attention to youth-driven markets-in-the-making, many of which traverse the formal and informal sector, and some of which will shape the future of work in the continent (discussed in the next section).

1.4 Challenging the frames

Young people undertaking ad hoc, precarious or survivalist work in the informal economy are often described as underemployed. They are 'surplus' labour with surplus time. But this renders invisible much of the unpaid work that many young people, particularly women, are occupied with. It also reduces the problem of unemployment to a neoliberal ratio - time vs output - rather than the more pressing question of whether young people are able to build quality lives and livelihoods from the work they undertake, whether this work is 'full-time' or not.

Indeed, both the language of underemployment, and the language of unemployment, miss something crucial about the problem that young people in Africa are facing, and that is, of 'bad jobs', rather than no jobs. These jobs are insecure, poorly paid, or carried out under unsafe and exploitative conditions. Similarly, few are struggling with too much time on their hands, but rather too little reward, recognition or enablement of their efforts.

Taking seriously the work that young people, particularly young women, do in the informal economy should also prompt us to consider the language of 'decent' - and implicitly 'indecent' - work. Undoubtedly there are high-quality jobs and low-quality jobs, exploitative jobs and rewarding jobs, just pay and unjust pay, and so on. But what does it mean to imply that some work is 'indecent' - a term

that is often treated as synonymous with 'undignified', 'dirty' or tasteless? By labelling poor-quality jobs as 'indecent', rather than 'exploitative', 'insecure' or 'under-valued', we might inadvertently diminish the respect, recognition and reward that this work, and the people who perform it, receive. This is particularly pressing for jobs like domestic labour, lay care-giving or street cleaning, in which workers have been historically demeaned. Arguably, recognising these occupations as 'decent' (in the sense of being dignified) work, is a critical step to achieving quality jobs in these industries.

1.5 Multidimensional inequality and the labour market: Generation, geography and gender

From the perspective of a just employment future for young Africans, the question of who gets which jobs, and how, is just as important as the overall quantity and quality of jobs created (Izzi, 2020). Writing on youth unemployment often runs the risk of homogenising young people's experience (Linssen et al., 2021a), not only across countries, but also across a range of other differences and inequalities that intersect to shape young people's relationship to work. Knowledge produced within the frame of the partnership has primarily explored three critical sites of inequity: generation, geography and gender, each of which will be explored below in terms of their intersection with youth employment.

Generation

The partnership, as well as the wider academic and policy literature on employment and livelihoods among Africa's young people, is often framed in the language of a 'youth employment crisis' in Africa, when in fact it might be more aptly described as a general employment crisis that affects youth (and others) in particular ways (Mwaura & Glover, 2021). The root of the problem is the scarcity of quality jobs, the structural constraints within African economies, and the challenges of industrial change and climate crisis, rather than with young people themselves. Undoubtedly, young people are uniquely affected, and often uniquely vulnerable. Relative to older adults, young people have less work experience and financial capital, weaker social networks and are prone to higher levels of informality and in-work poverty. Young people are also often ineligible for unemployment benefits, having not yet worked for the period required to qualify for welfare.

Clearly, young people in Africa face myriad constraints in accessing and succeeding in the labour market. The primary response of youth employment programmes has been to adopt one or more supply-side strategies. These include providing training and skills development, promoting youth entrepreneurship, and supporting small and medium enterprises. The limitation of these approaches is that, rather than ameliorating the constraints themselves, they work to build young people's resilience to them, with varying levels of success. In both the formal and informal economies, and in the spaces between, we need to build enabling environments for quality youth employment to flourish (Linssen et al., 2021a). We need policy, regulation, infrastructure and programming that is youth-responsive, without positioning young people as the problem (Lijfering, 2021a).

Gender

Women have less access to quality job opportunities in the African job market than men (Khan, 2020), driven by unequal access to education, financial services, and land; as well as gendered social norms that ascribe women the bulk of childcare duties (Khan, 2020). Some research articulate the 'triple burden' of women in Africa as: the struggle to balance paid employment, unpaid family care, and the maintenance of social and community networks (Khan, 2020). These social norms, coupled with the

uneven burden of childcare, contribute to women's exclusion from more profitable sectors and help to reinforce their position on the social and economic margins.

Women are also over-represented in some occupations and under-represented in others, with a disproportionate number of women working in the informal economy (Hidrobo et al., 2020). Evidence confirms that jobs with a high concentration of women were characterised by low wages, long working hours, limited opportunities for career advancement and exposure to occupational health and safety risks as well as violence and harassment (ILO, 2021a).

It is unsurprising then that while there are some attributes of a quality job that are resonant to young people of all genders, there are others that are especially important to young women, demanding a gender-responsive construction of 'decent'/quality work. In an INCLUDE webinar featuring youth voices from nine African countries, the majority of young women signalled maternity leave, fair income and protection against workplace violence as critical components of a quality job (Hassan et al., 2021). Many signalled that they had chosen to work as entrepreneurs to guarantee equal pay and jobs that dignified them. Some Kenyan participants said that the desire for safety, dignity and fairness was part of why women were overrepresented in the informal sector (Hassan et al., 2021).

Young participants from Nigeria explained that access to quality work can be limited by cultural and religious beliefs that create obstacles for women in the workplace. Women seeking work in Northern Nigeria, for example, are obliged to wear hijabs or niqabs at work in adherence with Islamic law. Participants believed they were less likely to secure quality work than their Southern peers, because some businesses and educational institutions discriminate against women who wear head coverings (Hassan et al., 2021).

It is also not uncommon for some occupations - particularly care work - to be seen as reserved for women, while others - particularly manual labour - are reserved for men. As part of an INCLUDE webinar series, young Rwandans reported that hospitality and tourism were seen as 'female sectors', while mining was regarded as a 'male sector' (Hassan et al., 2021).

While social and cultural norms are incredibly powerful, they are not static or immovable. Despite the gendered nature of casual work in Zambia, researchers observed that, in the early noughties, casual labourers were increasingly transgressing gender norms in response to an economic crisis. Women engaged in stone crushing, previously thought of as men's work; while young men were increasingly taking up jobs as domestics, cooks, dishwashers or hairdressers, which had been historically reserved for women (Gough et al., 2016).

Yet the poorer position of women in the labour market remains stubbornly resilient. Across many African countries, women are more prone to labour market insecurity: their participation is lower, unemployment is higher, and women are less paid, often not paid, and hold more insecure positions. Policy which addresses these challenges is both urgent and critical.

Geography

Despite rapid urbanisation, Africa is still a predominantly agrarian society, with the majority of its population, including rural youth, still involved in agriculture (Yeboah & Flynn, 2021). Around 60% of Sub-Saharan African youth, for example, are expected to continue to live in rural areas for the next decade (Yeboah & Flynn, 2021). Agricultural production on one's own farm accounts for about a third of total hours worked in Africa—even more in rural areas (ILO, 2020a).

The climate crisis is affecting the agricultural productivity and livelihoods of millions of people in Africa, with implications for rural youth employment. Smallholder farmers in Sub-Saharan and North Africa are particularly affected, since they depend directly on natural resources, and have little access to social protection or extension services, which include training in new farm technologies, managerial skills and environmental adaptation. This support could help build their capacity and resilience (Linssen et al., 2021b). Young women in the agricultural sector are also often especially vulnerable, because of limited access to land and mobility, or agricultural resources and extension services.

Despite the potential of the agriculture sector to, with the right support, sustain the livelihoods of rural young people in Africa, quality jobs remain scarce (Yeboah & Flynn, 2021).

Rural youth employment programmes are often focused on agricultural businesses and/or entrepreneurship opportunities (e.g. in handicrafts or tourism). But equally important is access to land, without which most of these businesses cannot get started. This demands a gender lens, as men have more opportunities to access or own land than women: this is compounded in contexts where child marriage is still common (Linssen et al., 2021b). Some young women in rural Tanzania have reported that, because of their limited access to and control over resources, they find it difficult to translate their labour into earnings that could ultimately lift them out of poverty (Hassan et al., 2021). Young women in rural areas may also face the challenge of combining education and training with farming, household, community and care responsibilities. Care responsibilities can also make it more difficult to relocate to urban areas in hopes of a better life.

While the needs of young people in rural and urban settings are different, they also cannot be viewed in isolation, as both agricultural commodities and youth themselves regularly move between them.

To tackle intersectional inequalities related to generation, gender and geography requires targeted, and multi-dimensional support. To safeguard young people in the labour market, they need expanded access to employment benefits that do not rely on having 'earned' it over many years of service. Employers must also be incentivised and supported to hire young employees, through initiatives like wage subsidies (Quak & Flynn, 2019b) or employment tax incentives (Youth Capital, 2020).

Public works programmes (PWP) can also serve as a subsidised employment intervention, helping young people gain work experience and initial entry into the labour market (Chelangat et al., 2021a). But because public employment opportunities are temporary, they must also build meaningful and transferable skills for young people, and offer pathways to their next earning opportunity.

Workplace-based learning offers another route to opening up targeted opportunities for young people, but only if training is created in collaboration with those looking to employ skilled young workers, and includes employer training on fostering enabling environments for young people. For example: before receiving their first salary, young, entry-level workers may not have the means to pay for their own transport, work attire or packed lunches. In South Africa, funding from Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) has sought to support work experience placements for young people, including through stipends for young people or financial incentives to small businesses (Youth Capital, 2021). For workplace-based learning to be successful and beneficial to both students and employers, both employers and young people need support and coaching to ensure that the placement is beneficial.

Alleviating the marginalisation of rural youth, particularly those in the agricultural sector, might include improving their access to and training in agricultural technology, like crop breeding, soil fertility management, weed control, soil and water management and agronomic practices. But high,

far-reaching returns will depend on whether these technologies are accepted and adapted to local contexts (Yeboah & Flynn, 2021).

Investing in and deepening access to infrastructure (e.g. roads, electricity, irrigation), as well as land, inputs, credit, and extension can also support productivity and improve access to markets (Yeboah & Flynn, 2021). Finally, rural public employment programmes offer an employment guarantee that might stabilise income and consumption for rural youth, especially if offered off-season when demand for agricultural labour is low (Chelangat et al., 2021a).

Efforts to expand quality work for Africa's youth are hamstrung by the social and economic exclusion of young women. To address this demands that we, first and foremost, redress discriminatory regulation, policy and practice to unlock women's access to land and finance. Evidence (Khan, 2020) shows that providing women with access to, and control over, finance, for example, improves their success in starting and maintaining businesses. This might include financial management training, together with access to savings accounts or digital funds (Khan, 2020; Revenga & Dooley, 2020).

Gender-responsive policy and programming must also recognise and reward women's often unpaid contributions to the labour market through the care economy. Supporting quality work in the care economy will not only improve job security and incomes for social service practitioners, it will also expand access to affordable childcare and early education, unlocking women's participation in the labour market. Yet, the care economy is rarely incorporated in official employment policy (Khan, 2020).

1.6 Covid-19 impacts

Because of the widespread informality of work, border closures, and generally poor social policy, African countries experienced severe economy-wide disruptions as a result of Covid-19 containment, with implications for livelihoods, inequality and food security (Tsikata & Torvikey, 2021, p. 19). While shocking economies across the continent, the pandemic also played out differently in different contexts. In countries, like Ghana, Uganda, and Nigeria, the services sector contributes the largest share of GDP. These services sectors in Africa, which are dominated by small and often-precarious enterprises, were, with the exception of ICT, especially hard-hit by the pandemic (Tsikata & Torvikey, 2021).

Across the INCLUDE platform, Covid-19 has been understood as an amplifier of young people's challenges. The effects of the pandemic across Africa (and the world) have worked to deepen and reproduce pre-existing inequalities, igniting vulnerabilities related to gender, generation and geography in marked ways. By May 2020, more than one in six young people across the world had lost their jobs due to Covid-19, illustrating the pandemic's disproportionate effect on young workers (Bordeleau et al., 2020a). Their training, education and entry into the labour market have been severely disrupted and delayed, with significant consequences for mental health (Bordeleau et al., 2020b).

The pandemic has also hit those at the bottom of the wage scale harder than those at the top, with particular impacts on urban and informal livelihoods (Tsikata & Torvikey, 2021), and a disproportionate effect on the jobs and incomes of women (Tsikata & Torvikey, 2021). This is partly because women are over-represented in low-paid, informal jobs, where it is easier to fire workers. Women also dominate those sectors (like hospitality, domestic labour, arts and entertainment) that were most affected by the pandemic (Tsikata & Torvikey, 2021). To add to this, the closure of schools and other care facilities,

along with the need to care for those with Covid-19, created an unprecedented demand for care within the home, placing a disproportionate burden on women. While some were forced to leave paid work, those who remained in employment often cut down on paid working hours, or extended their total working hours (paid and unpaid).

In Tanzania, as in many other countries across the region, young people reported (Hassan et al., 2021) that the weaker position of women in the labour market was exacerbated during the pandemic: women became even more vulnerable to lay-offs and insecure working conditions. Many women were obligated to take on more responsibilities in the household, as they assumed the roles of nurturers, nurses, teachers and housekeepers. Gender-based violence was also reported to have intensified during the pandemic, adding to women's physical and psychosocial vulnerability, as well as their capacity to work (Hassan et al., 2021).

Many governments used social protection programmes to respond to the economic crisis and health risk induced by Covid-19 (Hidrobo et al., 2020). Even prior to the pandemic, social protection programmes have been expanded across Africa, supported by a robust body of evidence that shows their impact on poverty alleviation, labour productivity, sustainable economic growth and social cohesion (Altaf, 2021). This is particularly pressing since unemployment insurance fails to reach those in the informal economy. Even institutions, like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), that have historically been ideologically opposed to large state welfare programmes have been persuaded by this evidence (Altaf, 2021). There have also been growing calls for gender-sensitive social protection that might target women as primary recipients, both to redress gender imbalances in access to finance and to amplify benefits for households (Hidrobo et al., 2020). While budgetary constraints make careful targeting and design of social protection programmes critical (Altaf, 2021; Hidrobo et al., 2020), this targeting, in a context of widespread vulnerability and precarious employment, can also generate resentments (Dawson & Fouksman, Elizabeth, 2020). In South Africa, some young men have expressed worries that social grants, for which women as caregivers are the primary recipients, had come to substitute men's role as 'provider' (Dawson & Fouksman, Elizabeth, 2020).

Thoughtfully designed social protection is a key intervention for boosting youth employment in Africa. This starts by positioning social protection as an investment, as opposed to a donation (Altaf, 2021).

2. A future-oriented approach to youth employment

The global labour market is at a point of major transformation: production processes and resource sourcing are changing, there are new environmental considerations (including the impact of climate change), and the technology of the Fourth Industrial Revolution is ever-growing (Chacaltana & Dasgupta, 2021).

This section surfaces evidence (from within and outside the INCLUDE platform) that reflects how the Fourth Industrial Revolution and climate crisis are being experienced in specific African contexts, expanding opportunity while also deepening inequality. In doing so, the section will also articulate the possibilities for creating just, quality employment for young Africans in this context.

2.1 Critical conceptions of the Fourth Industrial Revolution

Rapid technological change is altering the nature of work around the world, and Africa is no different. Cyber-physical technologies are radically shifting production, consumption, trade, the cost of goods and services and living standards across the world. Digitalisation is also a core element of companies and institutions' Covid-19 recovery policies. This wave of technologically driven change is often termed the Fourth Industrial Revolution, in part because of its transformative potential, and also because it builds on computing and digital technologies of the Third Industrial Revolution (Lijfering, 2021b).

Africa is not expected to see a mass shedding of jobs as a consequence of automation, primarily because of a large informal economy and limited digital infrastructure (Fox & Signé, 2021a; Kazimierczuk, 2020b). At least for the foreseeable future, human labour will likely remain cheaper than automation technology (Fox & Signé, 2021a; Kazimierczuk, 2020b), barring some exceptions in Sub-Saharan Africa where digital infrastructure and capital might make this calculus more appealing. Instead, 4IR technologies are expected to promote an expansion of formal jobs in the service sector, driven by new and existing firms, particularly in e-commerce and business process outsourcing (BPO) (Fox & Signé, 2021a). While the 4IR is more likely to curb rather than grow agricultural or manufacturing employment, the quality of jobs in these sectors stands to improve along with reduced environmental impacts (Fox & Signé, 2020).

But the experience and reception of the so-called 4IR is by no means universal, nor are its effects evenly distributed. Major gaps in physical and digital infrastructure in many African countries make modern information and communications technologies inaccessible to some (Kazimierczuk, 2020b), often deepening geographic and socio-economic inequalities (Gough et al., 2016; Pantuliano, 2020).

Some commentators are also optimistic about the potential of the digital economy, crowdsourcing and mobile telecommunications to create high-quality (including non-wage) jobs, particularly for marginalised groups like young women (Khan, 2020) or disabled youth, and better match clients and workers. For example, digital jobs might be more accessible to women with care responsibilities and could help bridge the gender divide when it comes to youth employment (Youth Foresight, 2021b). Others, however, see increasing automation of once labour-intensive processes as a threat to jobs, the rising gig economy as ripe for worker exploitation (Gardiner & Goedhuys, 2020), as well as a growing divide between those who are digitally connected and highly educated, and those who are not (Lijfering, 2021b). While mobile phones are ubiquitous in Africa, only 24% of Africans have access to

the internet and, in Sub-Saharan Africa, internet penetration remains the lowest in the world, while the costs of mobile broadband are the highest (Kazimierczuk, 2020b).

Literature on youth employment and 4IR often positions the digital sector as a way for Africa to leapfrog the industrialisation phase straight into becoming a modern service economy (Fox et al., 2020). But access to data and connectivity remains patchy and uneven, often entrenching pre-existing lines of inequality.

Africa's relative positioning in the global Fourth Industrial Revolution remains to be determined, with the risk of reproducing age-old extractive patterns. Like every industrial revolution before, 4IR will likely both destroy and create jobs with ferocious unpredictability (Lijfering, 2021b).

With the emergence of digital platforms, like Uber, Bolt or TaskRabbit, a lot of workers are misclassified as independent contractors to bypass existing labour regulations or the obligation of employee social protection (Lijfering, 2021b). There is a critical need to re-imagine workers' regulation and social programming for a shifting, largely informal, and increasingly digital economy.

The outcomes of 4IR in Africa will likely depend less on technological development, and more on public policy and structural economic transformation that can help encourage and support quality jobs for young people. To mitigate the effects of 4IR on deepening inequality demands that we drive support to populations and geographies at highest risk of exclusion - particularly poor and rural youth. This must include an expansion of electricity, fibre infrastructure and affordable broadband (Fox & Signé, 2021a).

Given the skills-intensive nature of 4IR technology, we must also find ways to equitably skill the future labour force, starting with expanding access to quality basic and secondary education, and increasing private financing of post-secondary institutions (Fox & Signé, 2021a).

While considering how 4IR might affect the quantity of jobs for Africa's youth, there is also an imperative to safeguard quality work. Regulation must be developed to protect workers in the digital platform economy, by regulating work contracts or enabling collective bargaining, for example. Countries can also leverage the potential of digital platforms and technologies to connect workers and jobs, alleviating precarity and churn for young people in the informal labour market, while also creating bridges between sectors (Kazimierczuk, 2020c).

2.2 Climate crisis and jobs

In the coming decades, Africa will bear the brunt of climate crisis effects, despite having had little relative contribution to escalating carbon emissions. Because many countries remain dependent on natural resources, their economies are acutely vulnerable to climate change. Environmentally unsustainable activities, continue to offer huge employment opportunities in African countries (Nebuloni, 2021). Climate action, or inaction, has radical implications for the employment prospects of young people in Africa. Making a just transition to a more ecologically sustainable economy is an imperative to securing quality and long-term work for youth (Lijfering, 2021a).

The agricultural industry is particularly vulnerable to climate shocks. Heat stress, drought and floods pose direct threats to rural livelihoods in North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa, with crop yields and livestock production expected to halve in certain parts of Africa (Linszen et al., 2021b). In some parts of Africa, urban workers take up seasonal work in rural areas during harvest periods when labour is in highest demand. But these patterns may shift with the effects of climate change (Mueller & Francesca, 2020).

As with 4IR, the effects of climate change on work and livelihoods are also unevenly distributed. Desertification in South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo, for example, has led to an influx of climate change refugees into Rwanda and Uganda (Mugereee et al., 2021). This has meant that children and young people are living in urban camps, often with limited access to education and healthcare (Mugereee et al., 2021).

Much of the literature on youth employment and climate change in Africa has focused on stimulating green economies. The 'greening' of economies describes a process of resource reallocation, from unsustainable production to sustainable and regenerative reproduction, in ways that reduce vulnerability while also protecting human wellbeing (Mwaura & Glover, 2021). In the process, there is the expectation for the creation of new 'green jobs', which some have looked to as a salve for Africa's youth unemployment crisis (Mwaura & Glover, 2021). Literature (Coulibaly & Page, 2021; Onsomu et al., 2021; Rooney & Asmal, 2021; Shibia et al., 2021) produced within the INCLUDE platform has explored the potential of a range of non-manufacturing industries as drivers of quality, green jobs for youth, including horticulture, tourism and agro-processing.

Despite widespread optimism, the evidence linking green jobs to improved youth employment in Africa is thin, as is the evidence to suggest that young people are in a special position in relation to the green opportunities (Mwaura & Glover, 2021). Like the 4IR, the greening of the economy will likely destroy and displace some existing jobs, while creating new ones (Mwaura & Glover, 2021).

More so, not all 'green jobs' will amount to decent, quality work. Decent Jobs for Egypt's Young People, for example, is a youth employment programme aimed at facilitating work opportunities for young people, with a particular focus on green jobs, green skills and green entrepreneurship. The project covers multiple sectors, including renewable energy, environmental conservation, waste management and recycling, organic farming, agro-processing, and eco-tourism. However, there is little evidence that the young people involved in the programme are now in sustainable employment or if the sectors in which the programme operated have now shifted towards green economic practices. Furthermore, the programme has now come to an end with no indication of continued funding (Mwaura & Glover, 2021).

Meanwhile, in Kenya and Nigeria, there have been attempts to stimulate growth in the renewable energy sector, with a particular focus on opportunities for youth and women while strengthening countries' environmental resilience. But while the renewable energy sector promises, and has created some, green jobs; there has been less focus on other principles of quality work like social protection, or better wages and working conditions, largely because many of the jobs created have been informal (Mwaura & Glover, 2021).

In advancing climate-responsive work for young people, and real alternatives in the green economy, we must hold the imperative of quality jobs alongside the imperative of green jobs. To do this, we need more evidence on young people's experiences of green jobs and improved monitoring, evaluation and learning.

Given the likely impact of climate change on employment prospects on particular regions and sectors, more research is needed to inform mitigation efforts. This type of evidence is sorely lacking within the INCLUDE Knowledge Platform. An urgent question for researchers is how meaningful livelihoods might be impacted by regional and domestic climate migration (Mueller & Francesca, 2020). Should climate migrants move countries, they will likely have less access to social protection, public services, and employment opportunities - challenges which must be better understood and addressed.

Governments must build realistic pathways for a transition out of environmentally and socially unsustainable activities, which currently generate significant employment, towards quality and sustainable livelihoods in the green economy, where activities are often piecemeal (Mwaura & Glover, 2021).

In the agricultural sector in particular, attention needs to be given to supporting youth-led mitigation and adaptation efforts, including through access to finances and skills training.

2.3 How are young people innovating?

While much of the youth employment literature articulates a 'skills deficit' among young people in the face of a changing world, young people are in fact parsing together livelihoods and re-ordering markets in the face of severe constraints and overwhelming uncertainty. When attention is paid to the everyday tactics and ingenuity of young people, their activities are often framed in the language of 'resilience'. In doing so, we valorise young people's ability to 'bounce back' in the face of deep distress and trauma. We put the locus of change in individuals and all-too-often abdicate the systemic work required to create more just employment futures.

In Freetown, Sierra Leone, for example, researchers have explored the logic of 'straining', which was the language young people often used to describe survivalist activity and hustling in the informal economy. "We are straining here in Freetown," says Olucia, a 25-year-old research participant, living in the Kroo Bay slum. Olucia lives in a tiny house with 14 other people. When researchers met him, he had saved enough money to buy 30 jerry cans, which he would fill with water at one of the few public taps in Kroo Bay. Olucia then lines the jerry cans up outside the public toilets of the slum and charges people a small fee to take them into the toilets with them to clean themselves (Finn & Oldfield, 2015).

The research explored both the demands and the innovation entailed in straining, especially when these activities came up against the prohibition and criminalisation of informal trading in Freetown (Finn & Oldfield, 2015). Straining was ingenious and opportunistic, but also took a toll on the young people undertaking it.

In this section of the synthesis, we explore the ways that young people are innovating, not as illustrations of resilience, but rather as 'emergent strategies' (Brown, 2017) that are often volatile and survivalist, while also being insistent and revealing of alternatives-in-the-making. These are the ways that young people, often collectively, are responding to a hostile and changing economy. Their innovations gesture towards alternative structures for supporting quality work outside the formal economy, and the everyday overlaps between the formal and informal sectors. Because this area remains largely untapped by the INCLUDE Knowledge Platform, this section draws from literature outside the partnership to signal areas for further consideration.

Emergent strategy in the digital economy

Across the continent, young people are leveraging a growing digital economy to build livelihoods and networks, while also developing strategies to bolster security and solidarity in a traditionally precarious industry.

Research from two Ghanaian cities, for example, has illustrated how young people use mobile phones to create and sustain both social relations and income-generating opportunities (Amankwaa et al., 2020). Some of them advertise products through social media, operate gambling centres, or offer services as computer programmers or IT support. The flexibility, and often remoteness of the work,

allows them to balance family responsibilities and financial shocks, with the need to keep earning. The mobile phone was seen as offering a critical (and lucrative) social infrastructure, which was occasionally prioritised at the expense of food, schoolbooks, clothing or other basic needs. In both cities, a category of young people (usually young men) had risen as 'mobile elites' or 'infomediaries' in their neighbourhoods, because of their knowledge of IT and mobile-enabled platforms, such as soccer betting and 'lottery staking'. Mobile phones also allowed young Ghanaians, regardless of their formal education, to protect and promote their businesses, adapting to current and emerging trends on social media (Amankwaa et al., 2020).

Young people working in the gig economy, as Uber drivers or crowdsourced service providers, have also joined new and hybrid forms of collective action and workers' associations, which have the potential to shape the terms of digitalisation and the conditions of the future of work (Lijfering, 2021b). This includes Uber drivers in Kenya, for example, joining a global strike.

In South Africa's rural Eastern Cape, there are also young people working collaboratively to leverage digital technology to bridge urban-rural divides and create livelihood opportunities. The Zenzeleni Networks project (Mhleku, 2020), has become the country's first Internet Service Provider (ISP) owned and run by a rural cooperative. Local people in Mankosi village co-designed the network layout and installation, alongside postgraduate students. Zenzeleni's voice calls and data costs are much cheaper than national providers. The network is not only co-owned and maintained by local youth, it has also helped young residents apply for education and work opportunities, or undertake online freelance work.

The Zenzeleni Network illustrates the radical possibilities that open up with affordable, accessible internet infrastructure. To capitalise on the potential of digitisation to drive quality work for young people, countries need comprehensive and implementable strategies to address gaps in digital and physical infrastructure; and nimble regulation to enable innovation. At the same time, programmatic, regulatory, and policy interventions must foreground inclusion to avoid widening inequality, and support emergent structures that strengthen workers' rights (Fox & Signé, 2021a).

Emergent strategy in response to climate crisis

There is much to learn from the indigenous knowledge and local innovation of those most affected by the climate crisis, particularly those working in agriculture, where both the risks and opportunities are extraordinary. Here, we learn not only the unexpected impacts of climate change on young livelihoods, but also emerging mitigation and adaptation strategies that warrant our support.

In Uganda and other neighbouring countries, for example, sugarcane and sugar yields are fluctuating in response to extreme climate events, like drought and tropical cyclones. In response, some young people are diversifying their cultivation of the crop with alternatives like apiary, poultry-keeping and zero-grazing (Mugere et al., 2021).

In addition to diversification, migration is another key adaptive response of young people. For some, cities offer off-farm work, relatively near to rural areas, in difficult seasons. Changing migration patterns might also include a reduction in urban-out migration as seasonal work on farms becomes increasingly scarce (Mueller & Francesca, 2020). In Rwanda, young people - both migrants and host community members - are taking leadership in tackling climate change issues through an NGO called Choose Yourself. Choose Yourself empowers young migrant women to navigate the job market and avoid gender-based exploitation (Mugere et al., 2021) in a way that is uniquely responsive to multidimensional vulnerabilities.

In the face of un- and under-employment, youth are adapting and innovating using the often inherent optimism and ingenuity that comes with being young. This has a remarkable impact on the youth's ability to earn and broaden their opportunities. The need for regulation and policy that both supports this ingenuity but still safeguards workers' rights among these 'emergent strategies' is pressing, particularly where the new types of work require entirely new ways of thinking about regulation, workers' safety and rights, and the notion of decent work itself.

3. Key levers for change: Recommendations for policy and programming

Given this synthesised (while still context-specific) view of the evidence, what levers might encourage radical systems change to boost youth employment in Africa? The final section of this synthesis paper offers first a frame for our response to youth employment, followed by a series of actionable, context-specific and evidence-based recommendations to drive policy and programming; and inform catalytic investments. The audience for these recommendations include governments and policy-makers, development organisations with a youth-employment focus, and potential funders.

3.1 Framing our response: creating an enabling environment

Multi-solving

Evidence suggests that the most effective efforts to boost youth employment sustainably in Africa are multi-solving (Skotnitsky & Kohli, 2021). That is, they work to find strategic solutions for interconnected problems facing both the climate and human society. Key to a multi-solving approach is the recognition of intersectionality - what this synthesis has termed 'multidimensional inequality'. Effective responses to youth unemployment in Africa must, by their very nature, pay attention to the nexus of gender justice, climate responsiveness, change readiness, and infrastructural development.

Similarly, programmes aimed to bolster young people's capacity should recognise that barriers to labour market entry extend well beyond skills, including financial constraints, geographic location, restrictive gender norms, and limited social networks. In an Africa-wide review of programmes to support rural youth, interventions in the agricultural sector were most effective in driving youth engagement when they tackled multiple barriers to entry. These interventions offered several forms of support to young people, including training, financial support for start-ups, and mentorship on the technical and financial dynamics of agribusiness (Yeboah & Flynn, 2021). Similarly, private sector development interventions that combine access to finance with tailor-made training and mentoring have shown the most promising results (Quak & Flynn, 2019b). In the agricultural sector, young people's engagement in agribusiness was boosted by interventions that combined multiple training, mentorship on technical and financial dynamics of agribusiness, and financial support (Yeboah & Flynn, 2021).

Social responsiveness

Creating an enabling environment for just, quality youth employment in Africa demands attention not only to the individual sphere, but also to the policy, institutional, legislative, socio-economic and socio-cultural environments in which young people's labour market experience is embedded. Throughout this synthesis are many examples of programmatic interventions that aim to bolster the capacities of young people or small business, but pay little attention to the labour, industry, policy, and regulatory dynamics that are likely to shape their reception into the job market. In Uganda, for example, most interventions aimed at supporting women entrepreneurs have focused on training or finance, with very few interventions focused on other core constraints women face, such as child care, market or regulatory burdens, or sector choice (Miroro, 2021).

Socio-structural conditions are very difficult to shift (Linssen et al., 2021a). In South Africa, for example, despite women and girls' having experienced radically improved access to education, and outperform boys and men at primary, secondary and tertiary level; they continue to fare consistently worse than men in the labour market in terms of both employment and earnings (Van Broekhuizen & Spaull, 2017). Policy, regulation and programming must acknowledge and account for these structural constraints, and be responsive to young people's multidimensional needs, which are shaped disproportionately by their gender, geography and generation.

Collective power

Young people's mobilisation of the mobile phones as a social infrastructure in Ghana, for example, is indicative of the real power of connection and collectives. Similarly, researchers' reports of the effects of skills training often remark on the accumulation of valuable friendships and networks, which are just as powerful in shaping employment futures as the accumulation of skills (Linssen et al., 2021a). Interventions to boost youth employment should focus not only on empowerment at the individual level, but also how we empower collectives of young people, particularly in the informal economy where there is limited protection through labour organisation. This includes championing young people's advocacy.

Just as connections need to be built for young people, so too do connections need to be built between key actors like educational institutions, government, and business, that should be working together to advance youth employment. In reality, however, institutions that should be working closely together - like TVET colleges and the private sector - are not (Linssen et al., 2021a).

Youth participation and local ownership

Just as our policy and programmatic responses must be tailored for young people's diverse and intersectional needs, so too must they be tailored to local context. Effective youth policies demand strong contextualisation and ownership at local level, with meaningful participation from young people from design through to implementation (Chelangat et al., 2021a). Too often, the voices of youth in Africa are not heard, and young people are rarely involved in implementing and shaping the policies that affect them (Hassan et al., 2021), or articulating what makes a job 'decent' to them. Climate policy programmes, in particular, should consider how to include more women and youth - who are most affected by climate change - at the frontlines of decision-making and policy.

3.2 Recommendations

A synthesis of evidence across the INCLUDE Knowledge Platform, and beyond, shows that the most successful interventions for advancing youth employment in Africa are multi-solving, often addressing quality jobs, climate mitigation and equity simultaneously as interdependent imperatives. They are also multi-dimensional, working to both train and resource young people, while also creating more enabling environments to activate and sustain young people's participation in the labour market.

A central finding of the synthesis is that false dichotomies between the formal and informal sectors will not serve an inclusive youth employment agenda, nor are they reflective of the context in which young people's work and futures are unfolding. Indeed, robust research on the lives and livelihoods of young people shows that the lines between formality and informality are often far more blurry than imagined, with connections and overlaps between them. More so, the tropes of 'decent, dignified work' in the formal economy; versus 'insecure, exploitative work' in the informal economy fail to chime with what is in fact a much messier reality. Policy, programming, regulation, and research must focus on

creating sustainable livelihoods for young people, many of which will be made in the interstices of the formal and informal sectors, and often outside traditional wage jobs, demanding that we build a supportive scaffold for young people to navigate complex and shifting employment trajectories. The paper's recommendations offer guiding principles for advancing more just employment futures for Africa's youth, but in all these efforts, youth participation, careful targeting and local adaptation will be critical for success.

Policy

Social and labour protection must extend to the informal sector (Altaf, 2021; Hidrobo et al., 2020). Given the limited (and arguably diminishing) prospects of waged work and the predominance of informal jobs in Africa, this will be essential to enabling inclusive, quality jobs. This could include social assistance, social insurance, labour protection and services for mistreatment (e.g. violence). Recently, many African countries have been experimenting with strategies to extend social security coverage to workers in the informal economy, delinking social protection from labour contracts. These efforts need to be multiplied and scaled (Kazmierczuk, 2020b).

Investing in electricity, telecommunications, transport and ICT infrastructure can unlock young people's ingenuity and participation in the digital and service sectors, offer opportunities for vulnerable youth, and drive growth in emerging non-manufacturing industries (Fox & Signé, 2021b; Goluba et al., 2021; Hackl, 2021; Mbaye, Gueye, Beye, et al., 2021; Shibia et al., 2021). There should be a focus on equality in access to telecommunications and digital services, with targeted support to poorer youth and rural areas (Yeboah & Flynn, 2021).

Public works programmes (Chelangat et al., 2021b) can offer employment subsidies for young people, facilitating experience and entry in the labour market, while also building valuable local assets. But public employment programmes must also build transferable skills and exploitable networks to avoid being piecemeal.

Strategies for inclusive growth should promote innovative, non-traditional value chains in which young people can set the standard for decent work and are capacitated to leverage 4IR technologies. How the Fourth Industrial Revolution affects youth employment depends on whether country governments adjust their education curriculums and social protection systems, invest in adequate infrastructure, and create an enabling environment for home-grown innovations and decent jobs for youth. (Kazmierczuk, 2020b). Policy, programming, and regulation should make room for, encourage, and recognise, young people as potential drivers of innovation (Chelangat et al., 2021a).

Improving access to, and quality of, basic and secondary school education is essential (Fox & Signé, 2021a; Shibia et al., 2021), but supply-side solutions to boosting youth employment are not sufficient (Izzi, 2020; Linsen et al., 2021a). While growing young people's education and skills, we also need to be creating quality livelihood opportunities in youth-absorbing sectors (Hassan et al., 2021), and stimulating demand through wage subsidies or employment tax incentives. Linkages between training providers and private businesses must also be strengthened (Ismail & Mujuru, 2020b), particularly for technical and vocational training colleges. Meanwhile, employers need to be capacitated to recognise and assess young people's knowledge and skills (outside formal qualifications) and to create environments that support young people's retention.

An enabling environment should be created for medium-, small- and micro-sized enterprises, facilitating access to finance and markets, as well as training and continuous learning (ILO, 2020b; Revenga & Dooley, 2020; Wambalaba et al., 2021).

Regulation

Informal enterprises should be enabled, not hamstrung. Responsive regulation should simplify tax and registration requirements, make labour market regulations and procedures more transparent, and encourage investment (Quak & Flynn, 2019a), while still safeguarding worker protection and sound governance. Regulation should facilitate access to relevant, affordable, and digital financial services for small and medium-sized businesses and unlock job creation, while also protecting workers from exploitation, with a focus on young women and rural youth in particular (Revenga & Dooley, 2020; Wambalaba et al., 2021).

Legislation should protect vulnerable workers by addressing discriminatory policy against women's fair pay while also enabling equal access to land and finances (Khan, 2020). Regulating work contracts, and facilitating collective bargaining, for those outside permanent wage employment is of increasing import, particularly with digital platforms on the rise (Lijfering, 2021b).

Programmes

Small enterprises require an enabling policy environment and supportive infrastructure. Further, while many must rely on self-employment, literature shows that those without networks or social capital struggle to overcome the hostile regulatory environment in which they must operate.

While creating new green jobs for young people in Africa, we must also ensure - rather than assume - that these are quality jobs (Mwaura & Glover, 2021; Nebuloni, 2021). Employment initiatives in the green economy are all-too-often piecemeal and have not translated into sustainable livelihoods. Youth-led climate adaptation and mitigation strategies, particularly in the agricultural sector, must be supported. This is partly about anticipating and softening the impacts of climate change, and targeting support to those people and industries that are most vulnerable. It is also about advancing green subsidies, such as those for microgrids or solar energy, which may be helpful in encouraging micro and small entrepreneurs to start green enterprises.

Gender-responsive interventions should focus on providing access to finance, land, as well as affordable childcare and social services (Khan, 2020), as strategies to boost and sustain women's labour participation. This could diminish the precarity women face and position them well for future crises (Hassan et al., 2021).

Youth employment interventions should recognise and alleviate the financial and psychosocial costs of the job search and offer wrap-around support. This might include cash transfers to support job-seeking or improved access to affordable transport, or programmatic interventions like mentorship and psychosocial services.

Research

Research should avoid set narratives and instead account for mobility, flexibility and reversibility (between sectors, between city and countryside, and between regional and international levels) (Richardier, 2021). Indeed, it is in these in-between spaces that young people across Africa are creating livelihoods and defining the future of work. It is also in the in-between spaces that policy and programmatic responses are most lacking.

More research is needed on how young people are making and negotiating livelihoods in unexpected, often unseen, parts of the economy, particularly in the spaces between the formal and informal sector. Rather than valorising precarious forms of 'hustling', this research should take these experiences as signals of the constraints and possibilities of young people's labour participation, directing us to markets-in-the-making and areas where targeted support is needed. Greater attention could be paid to marginalised groups like migrant, queer, disabled, or rural youth, whose voices remain relatively muted within the partnership.

We must measure and track the impact of youth employment interventions, both on the quantity of jobs created, their quality (wages, working conditions, benefits etc.), and who they are created for (women, rural youth) etc. Interventions aimed at growing green jobs, boosting employment through private sector development (Quak & Flynn, 2019b), or supporting youth in the agricultural sector (Yeboah & Flynn, 2021), hold promise for young people, but there is little evidence to evaluate or enhance their impact. More so, a dearth of gender disaggregated data and analysis on labour market barriers and employment opportunities for women makes the design and implementation of interventions in both formal and informal labour markets challenging (Khan, 2020).

4. Closing reflections: A call for greater attention on youth action and in-between spaces

Between 2019 and 2022, the partnership has produced a broad swathe of knowledge related to youth unemployment, offering context-specific case studies, regional positions, as well as actionable policy-relevant syntheses. It has also offered up this knowledge in a range of formats, including webinars, long papers and short briefs - making insights relevant and accessible to a range of audiences. Indeed, this is one of the partnership's core strengths; as is its responsiveness to emerging global and local challenges affecting youth employment. For example, the partnership produced a robust body of evidence on the impacts of, and responses to, Covid-19, as the pandemic was unfolding in the lives of young Africans, showing marked sensitivity to the diversity and unevenness of young people's experiences. While attending to these immediate effects to youth employment, the partnership has also managed to sustain knowledge production on longer-term change precipitated by climate change and technological advancement.

In addition to holding a breadth of subject matter, knowledge produced within the frame of the partnership also holds a breadth of ideological and theoretical positions on how to address youth unemployment. While creating space for opposing approaches is a significant asset, creating room for critical dialogue and debate; it has also left the 'in-between spaces' relatively unattended to. For example, while there is a wealth of literature on demand-side (largely formal-sector) approaches to boosting youth employment, as well as a complementary literature on supply-side approaches (mainly skills development in both sectors), literature on how to bridge supply and demand or link formal and informal economies is comparatively thin. How do young people signal their skills and experience to employers? How can interventions create supportive pathways into the labour market, as well as between jobs, while also alleviating the financial and economic costs of job-seeking? How do we design youth-friendly workplaces that recognise young people's capacities and needs, and support young people to gain transferable skills and networks? What approaches, resources, and forms of social protection can be transferred between informal and formal sectors to bolster quality work?

Importantly, it is in these in-between spaces that many young people are seeking and creating lives and livelihoods, and building hybrid markets. Young people are moving and cycling between formal and informal, education and work, unemployment and short-term jobs, paid and unpaid work, urban and rural. In this, is a call for greater attention to youth voices and youth experience, which is growing within the partnership, but warrants more emphasis.

Finally, while knowledge in the partnership does well to call attention to the systemic barriers to youth employment, including gender discrimination, inappropriate regulation, limiting policy, poor infrastructure, or state corruption, more work could be done on effective, youth-driven strategies to shift policy and regulation and drive structural change.

With respect to how we create just, quality employment for young Africans in a context of deepening labour and climate precarity, as well as rapid technological change, this synthesis has produced a range of recommendations (signalled above). But, at the core of these responses are a number of guiding principles. First, we must address the challenges of youth employment, youth inequality, 4IR and climate crisis as intersectional, targeting support to those most vulnerable to employment shocks and intervening in systemic barriers to employment for marginalised youth. Second, youth employment interventions and support programmes cannot respond only to the formal sector or treat it as dichotomous to the informal sector. Third, we must take seriously, and learn from, young people's multifarious livelihood strategies, finding creative ways to offer social protection and pathway support outside of traditional structures. Lastly, our work must centre youth participation and context-specificity, systemically and sustainably supporting local ownership and youth-led action, without positioning young people themselves as the problem or expecting them to individually solve what is a fundamentally structural employment crisis.

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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.