

INCLUDE

KNOWLEDGE PLATFORM ON INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT POLICIES

WORKING CONFERENCE REPORT

'What works to promote employment prospects for women and youth:
Policy-knowledge interactions for inclusive development in Africa'

15 October 2015

Leiden, the Netherlands



There is ‘no one-size-fits all’ when it comes to promoting youth and women’s employment. However, it is clear that taking into account the social and political context of employment interventions is crucial. This was the main conclusion of the biannual [working conference](#), ‘What works to promote employment prospects for women and youth: Policy-knowledge interactions for inclusive development in Africa’, organized by INCLUDE in Leiden, the Netherlands.

On 15 October, more than 80 participants from policy, civil society and academia from a wide range of countries discussed employment prospects for women and youth in Africa – a theme that is at the heart of INCLUDE’s [knowledge agenda](#). A great deal is already known about these topics. Hence, the conference’s aim was to showcase existing knowledge and enrich it with new reports and insights. The presentations provoked a lively discussion and produced relevant takeaway messages for policy-makers and researchers.

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Executive summary

On 15 October, more than 80 participants from a wide range of countries gathered in Leiden for the INCLUDE working conference on 'What works to promote employment prospects for women and youth: Policy-knowledge interactions for inclusive development in Africa'. The conference showcased existing knowledge, which was further enriched with new reports and insights. The conference also strengthened exchange between Dutch and African scientists, policy-makers and practitioners on employment prospects for women and youth in Africa - a theme that is at the heart of INCLUDE's knowledge agenda. The findings of the conference can be summarized in the following seven principles relating to policy analysis and decision-making, which also guide the INCLUDE strategy:

- Policy analysis should recognize the heterogeneity of target groups, and interventions should, therefore, be tailor-made.
- Employment policies need to be comprehensive and deal with institutions in order to empower women in livelihood and employment opportunities.
- Youth policies should aim at building skills to improve employability; at present youth are entering the labour market without the requisite skills and knowledge.
- Transformation should be aimed at both increasing productivity within sectors and promoting transitions across sectors.
- Policies should reap the demographic dividend and reduce the demographic curse.
- Policy-makers should recognize that most current and foreseeable future employment in Sub-Saharan Africa is in the informal sector and that rural unemployment is especially high.
- Governments must ensure the implementation of employment policies and involve stakeholders in this process.

The members and the secretariat of INCLUDE are actively supporting local initiatives in Africa aimed at knowledge sharing on inclusive development between stakeholders and researchers.

Full report

Welcome and opening

- What is the role of African governments, think tanks, civil society and the private sector in providing a (better) future for youth and women in Africa?
- How can Dutch, European and international donors, companies, knowledge institutes and civil society contribute to this aim?

These are the key questions raised by **Isa Baud**, Emeritus Professor in International Development Studies at the University of Amsterdam and Chair of the Steering Group of INCLUDE, in her opening address at the working conference on women and youth employment in Africa.

These questions are relevant in guiding INCLUDE in its mission to identify which knowledge gaps exist and where the Platform may play a role as a broker between experts working in policy, practice and research. Baud noted the topicality of the meeting, stressing that the prospects of employment for women and youth was the focus of the recent [policy letter on 'Inclusive development in the Dutch programmes for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation'](#) sent by Lilianne Ploumen, Dutch Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, to Parliament in September 2015. The members of INCLUDE are now taking initiatives in Africa, Baud said, and this meeting is one of the ways that INCLUDE is encouraging exchange with Dutch and African policy-makers and practitioners, based on the wealth of evidence on what works to create jobs.

Introduction to the policy letter on inclusive development

The policy letter on 'Inclusive development in the Dutch programmes for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation' of the Dutch Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation was introduced by **Margriet Kuster**, Senior Policy Advisor in the Directorate General for International Cooperation at the Ministry and member of the Steering Group of INCLUDE. Kuster discussed the meaning of the letter for youth employment and women's entrepreneurship.



Women's entrepreneurship development

The moderator of the session on women's entrepreneurship development, **Roel van der Veen** (Scientific Advisor, Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs) explained that INCLUDE is building on existing knowledge to **get a better understanding of what we already know**. [The value of starting from existing knowledge was also highlighted at the last meeting of INCLUDE, which was held in Nairobi in May 2015](#). Therefore, Van der Veen explained, this session starts from what is already known about women's entrepreneurship development and looks at what factors contribute to women's entrepreneurship.

Mayra Buvinic, Director of Gender and Development at UN Foundation, praised the Dutch government for taking the lead on gender equality and marginalized groups in the international arena in her presentation on

the UN Foundation's **systematic review** '[A Roadmap to Women's Economic Empowerment](#)'. The roadmap gives an overview of what we already know when it comes to promoting women's employment, consisting of a combination of existing and new insights. When working on the roadmap, the team discovered that they should not only ask what works, but (also) for whom and where, as women, especially young women, face specific constraints that others may not.

As women are a heterogeneous group, Buvinic stressed the need for differentiation when reviewing women's employment interventions. The first differentiation that is necessary is between different types of employment. In this respect, the UN Foundation distinguishes four categories: entrepreneurship, farming, young women's employment and wage employment. The next differentiation is between different groups of women: the very poor, the poor, the non-poor and young women. A final differentiation is needed in terms of demographic trends and job prospects and four country settings can be distinguished (agrarian economies, urbanizing economies, formalizing economies, and aging populations) and two crosscutting scenarios (conflict affected countries, and resource rich countries and small island states). However, despite evidence that such differentiations are necessary when analysing employment interventions, many researchers still do not disaggregate data in terms of employment type, different groups of women, or country context.



Buvinic presented some conclusions from the roadmap:

- **The women who are most likely to seek work are the very poor and poor women entrepreneurs, farmers and young women in highly-fertility agrarian economies.**
- Additional interventions are needed, such as policies on family planning.
- Heterogeneity affects outcomes:
 - **The same class of interventions has different outcomes depending on the target groups.** What works for young women does not necessarily work for older women.
 - For small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), capital (loans or grants) works, but capital alone does not work for subsistence-level enterprises.
 - Very poor women need more, and donors have to be aware of that. They need a more intensive package with more money, technical assistance services, and someone to walk them through this technical assistance.
- Many programmes that were investigated work for both men and women, but work better for women. That is because **women face more severe business constraints and social pressure to divert capital.** When they do obtain capital, women can feel pressure to divert some of the money for family needs and, thus, do not invest all of the money. Small design features can enhance effectiveness, for example, by giving a cow rather than cash (which is divisible and may leak). Alternatively, according to Buvinic, mobile banking could be a solution, as it would enable women to keep their transactions private, making it easier to invest all the money in their business.

The roadmap identified a lack of knowledge on the characteristics and determinants of success: the 'cross-overs', successful school-to-work transitions, and upward mobility in wage work. Other **knowledge gaps** include lessons from failed programmes, the impact of business networks, mentors and firm certification, and evidence on financial and economic costs and sustainability.

In addition, Buvinic remarked that when measuring what works for women's entrepreneurship development:

- many projects measure outputs, not outcomes
- intermediate outcomes have to be measured too, not only direct outcomes

- randomized control trials usually do not measure long-term effects, but only immediately impacts (e.g. young women are hired, but fired after six months).

See the slides of the [presentation](#) by Buvinic and watch a [video interview](#).

Read INCLUDE's one-pager on the Roadmap to Women's Economic Empowerment [here](#).

In analysing women's entrepreneurship development, it is crucial to also discuss the role of men because women need time, resources and space to conduct business, as argued by **Saskia Vossenber**g, a consultant and researcher at the Gender Resource Facility. In her presentation, Vossenber provided an answer to three policy questions raised by policy-makers and practitioners [at the last INCLUDE working conference in Nairobi](#).

The first question asked in Nairobi was: How is technology used in women's entrepreneurship development? Vossenber answered that the use of technology in women's entrepreneurship is a new development. By building a database, she found that various private and public actors (alone or in partnership) use technology, including mobile technology, to collect business information. Nevertheless, more research is needed on whether or not this really works.

The second question asked in Nairobi was: What works and where in terms of the use of technology, the role of husbands to support women in business and the capacities and resources needed to build viable businesses? According to Vossenber, not much is known about what works where, as implications are not so clear-cut and individual benefits can differ due to social trade-offs. Nevertheless, a lot of research is being conducted, for example, on inclusive innovation and women's entrepreneurship development in Kenya and Malawi, focusing on the role of husbands and the use of technology.

The third question was: How can we engage men in supporting women in business? What works and where? Vossenber gave the example of CARE Rwanda, which found that when women's income increases in a standard intervention, domestic violence also increases. However, when men are immediately included in all aspects of the trajectory, violence decreases and household income rises. At the same time, entrepreneurship also became a joint effort of the couple. This change was achieved because, according to CARE Rwanda, trainers offered a role model of an alternative way to be, which in turn carried economic benefits, and because training sessions encouraged the active participation of couples. Nevertheless, even though business and family are interconnected, research usually focuses on only one at a time.

According to the Gender Aware Framework from the research by Brush, De Bruin and Welter (2009), building a viable business requires more than 'money, markets and management'. Rather, it should also include 'motherhood' (care responsibility) and consider the 'macro-meso' level (institutional environment, regulatory and policy frameworks, and development strategies).

Watch the [presentation](#) by Vossenber or see the [slides](#).

The cultural beliefs of women in business often prevent women entrepreneurs from reaching their full potential. **Désiré Assogbavi**, Head of Oxfam International Liaison Office to the African Union in Ethiopia, argued that international organizations have a key role to play in eradicating such normative constraints. The challenge is to make sure that all stakeholders (from policy, research, practice and civil society) work together to change cultural beliefs that constrain women's entrepreneurship?

In Togo, Assogbavi noted that some things have changed recently regarding women: now, women are able to register their child after birth, without the presence of the father. However, there are still civil servants who still do not accept this and ask for proof that the man could not come (even though this is not legal).

Discussion with the audience

During the discussion with the audience, a participant noted that women should not be seen as 'honorary male entrepreneurs' but as women entrepreneurs in their own right. Another participant remarked that having the right network is also an important factor for successful entrepreneurship; accordingly: Has research been done on how having a right network increases the voice and economic opportunities of women? A fellow participant replied that Cordaid has some experience in strengthening the right networks for women, as this has indeed proven to be beneficial to women's economic outcomes and agency.

Platform member Sara Ruto stated that **approaches also need to reach out to those who are usually left behind** - those who do not even have the promise of education and, therefore, have not learned the competences that are needed for women's entrepreneurship. She also remarked that we have to look at the women who are disillusioned and disempowered.



Watch a [video interview](#) with Ruto.

Panel discussion on women's entrepreneurship development

The importance of targeted interventions for women's entrepreneurship development was highlighted in the keynote speeches and during the vibrant panel discussion.

Sarah Ssewanyana, Executive Director of the Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC) in Uganda and INCLUDE Platform member, gave a presentation on behalf of **Ida Kigonya**, the Principal Women in Development Officer of the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development of Uganda. The presentation described **the socioeconomic and demographic profile of Uganda and the lessons learned and experiences from policy on women's entrepreneurship development**.

In Uganda, women make up the majority of the poor living below US\$1 a day. This is because they lack access to and control of assets and resources needed to improve their livelihoods, and also because of structural factors: funding for programmes targeting women is inadequate and the jobs that they do are unstable and low paid. The Ugandan economy is largely based on subsistence agriculture and women represent 80% of the agricultural labour, are responsible for 80% of the food crop production and contribute about 60% of the cash crop production.

With regard to women in business in Uganda, Ssewanyana noted that **women are increasingly taking up commercial activities**, especially in commerce, services, animal husbandry and manufacturing. Women work longer hours (12-18 hours) a day, compared to men (8 -10 hours). Whereas male employees dominate business services, manufacturing and agriculture, female workers dominate employment in hotels and restaurants, education and health. Further, about 43.7% of SMEs are owned and operated by women, of which 29.5% are in the export business.

Ssewanyana's presentation also highlighted interventions that the government of Uganda has initiated to promote **women's empowerment**. These interventions focus on the modernization and commercialization of agricultural activities, increased agricultural funding, the protection of women's land rights, entrepreneurial training and the development of requisite skills, post-harvest handling, the provision of credit facilities and export promotion.

Ssewanyana also discussed the challenges that women entrepreneurs in Uganda experience, including a lack of access to markets and credit facilities, limited access to information on opportunities and the East Africa Common Market, and cultural barriers.



Ssewanyana reiterated that **the way forward** involves:

- training young women and women entrepreneurs in business skills
- building the capacity of microfinance institutions on gender responsive loan management
- providing accessible credit to women
- policy interventions to eradicate poverty
- interventions to address women's access and use of ICTs.

See the slides of the [presentation](#) by Ssewanyana and Kigonya.

Yvette van Dok, Owner and Founder of Brilljante Onderneemster (Brilliant Female Entrepreneur), shared experiences of this programme on women's entrepreneurship development, which offers women an opportunity to run and manage a small or medium-sized enterprise. Van Dok emphasized that **women have huge potential, but they need a little support to reach their full potential**. The Brilliant Female Entrepreneur is an integrated programme that consists of three-months of entrepreneurship training in the entrepreneur's country, another three-months training in the Netherlands for match-making, and the last 3-months focusing on mentorship and networking. The business results projects of Brilliant Female Entrepreneur in Uganda include a new operational rice mill and a new kindergarten with at least 50 children.

See the slides of the [presentation](#) by Van Dok.



Sytske Groenewald, Lead Impact Measurement at Oxfam Novib, provided a highlight of the Impact Roadmap SME Fund that supports ambitious local (women) entrepreneurs in Uganda, Nigeria and Vietnam. She reiterated that Oxfam's business development support provides finance and training and is expected to impact on investments, which will **stimulate SME growth and eventually lead to improved livelihoods and empowerment for women, youth and smallholder farmers**.

She stated that Oxfam has established a method to measure and quantify the social impact of investments by evaluating what kind of training works best, the impact of female entrepreneurship, whether or not programmes lead to more inclusive business models and ensure the rights of female staff, and what products should be invested in, as well as viability.

Watch a [video interview](#) with Groenewald.

To Tjoelker, Head of the Civil Society Division at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, appreciated the fact that the previous speakers had emphasized that context matters. She noted that men are an important area of focus in any attempt to change the situation of women. Drawing on her experiences, she pointed out the following lessons for women's entrepreneurship development:

- Because context is not only micro, it is important to work with women and to document how men and women can work together to ensure that their entrepreneurial activities succeed.
- Technology is a means and not a panacea for women's entrepreneurship development.
- **Influencing culture and policy are important.** There is a need to finance the capacity of organizations to influence policies and the elders in communities of interest. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has developed a new instrument for this: Voice.
- With regard to individual entrepreneurs, Tjoelker noted that the Ministry uses the value chain approach. Therefore, it is important to analyse gender inequalities along value chains. Women are generally at the bottom of value chains. Hence, there is a need to look at how to work with entire families.

Discussion with the audience

A lively discussion with the audience followed including a couple of questions about the presentation by Yvette Van Dok. One participant asked whether or not there are examples and cases of poor women, especially very poor women, who have been involved in the Brilliant Female Entrepreneur programme. Van Dok underscored the necessity to differentiate between different groups of women, and stressed that indeed, for very poor women, a package of services is needed. Very poor women are able to transform, but they need upfront investment. Another participant asked whether the focus of women's entrepreneurship development should be on talent or on how to come up with gender sensitive policies. Van Dok stressed that it should be on both, because women require extra motivation and support for their talent to grow. A final question for Van Dok entailed whether or not there are differences between women and men in terms of the extent to which entrepreneurs take and manage risks. Van Dok stressed that this is indeed the case, and that men are inclined to take more risks and more loans, while women start with their own resources and avoid taking risks. One participant disagreed with this statement and stressed that women do not take less risks, they just take different risks.

To Tjoelker was asked whether or not she sees opportunities to influence decisions at the systems' level in other departments of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and in other ministries to invest in women's entrepreneurship development. Tjoelker answered that the aim is indeed to try to influence other colleagues at the Ministry, but that there is a need for more knowledge about women's entrepreneurship development.



Statements on women's entrepreneurship development at the [IDEA Debate Tree](#)

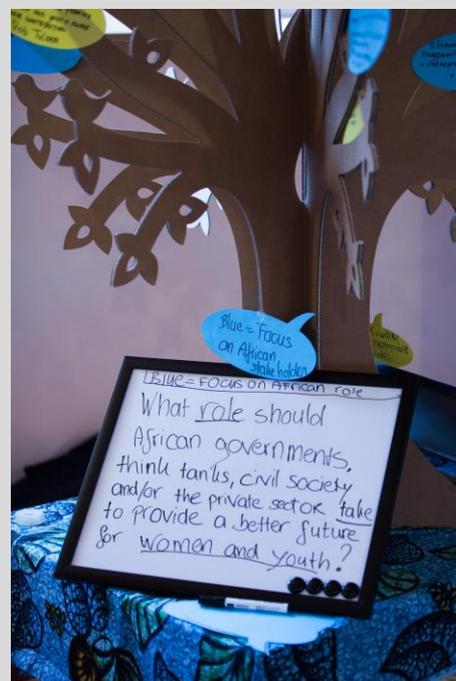
An IDEA Debate Tree was set up at the conference for participants to write down statements on two questions on women's entrepreneurship. The following are the questions and a selection of statements:

What role should African governments, think tanks, civil society and the private sector take to provide a better future for women and youth?

- African governments should increase budget allocations to resources and services for women entrepreneurs and farmers.
- Strengthen the business climate: More and stronger businesses equals more jobs! We need social corporate responsibility and decent jobs for women and youth.
- Dedicate more specific efforts and funds to human security and justice with a focus on women and women's rights, and women's political inclusion. These are preconditions for everything else.

How can European partners, donors and international donors support African partners to provide a better future for women and youth?

- Exchange knowledge and experience on what works and what doesn't; support promising partnerships.
- European policy-makers need to realise that development and transformation is not necessarily inclusive by definition, nor should it be. It might be necessary to work with emerging entrepreneurs and those 'better off' to set in motion processes of economic change that involve the poor so they benefit in the long run.



Youth employment

Marije Balt, Director of SpringFactor, opens the floor for a fruitful discussion on youth employment in Sub-Saharan Africa. She underscores the key role that jobs play for youth, especially in fragile settings.

Watch a [video interview](#) with Balt.

Youth employment interventions took centre stage in the afternoon session, which started with a presentation of **ILO's systematic review and meta-analysis** on the topic. ILO researchers **Sara Elder** and **Felix Weidenkaff** (ILO) discussed **employment trends and policy measures for youth employment in Sub-Saharan Africa**. In contrast to the situation in, for example, North Africa where youth unemployment rates are high and increasing (30%), youth unemployment rates in Sub-Saharan Africa are lower and slightly decreasing (12%). However, the quality of jobs is often low. Many young people (15-35 years) are considered 'working poor', trapped in subsistence self-employment or with jobs in the informal sector.

To address youth unemployment, a wide range of interventions have been implemented and evaluated worldwide since 1990, from skills training to entrepreneurship promotion, subsidized employment and employment services. In Africa, ILO's systematic review covered the evaluation of 17 interventions in 7 countries, including Ethiopia, Uganda and Kenya. Although skills training is the most widely used youth employment intervention globally, **in Africa the focus is on entrepreneurship promotion** (53% of the interventions in Africa evaluated in the review). The systematic review shows that youth employment interventions have a statistically significant and positive effect on jobs, income and business performance, especially those that promote entrepreneurship in combination with finance. The magnitude of this impact is, however, small. Evidence also shows that the impact of skills training interventions on labour market outcomes may materialize only in the long term. For Sub-Saharan Africa, there is also a lack of evidence on subsidized employment and employment services interventions, as the ILO Youth Employment Evidence Gap Map shows. An integrated approach involving impact research, policy influence and capacity development is needed.

Research that investigates the effectiveness of programmes and policies for youth is vital to inform policies and programmes and to equip practitioners and policy-makers with skills and evidence.

Addressing the school-to-work transition, Weidenkaff said that people who attended higher education usually get a fairly good job quite quickly, but people who only attended primary or secondary education often take longer to get a good job. Education is, thus, important, and especially higher education.

See the slides of the [presentation](#) by Elder and Weidenkaff.



Commenting on the ILO presentation, **Olawale Ismail**, Research Director at International Alert, stressed that youth employment is not just an economic issue; it is above all a social phenomenon, an insight that should find its way into policies. For many young Africans, the main problem is not unemployment but underemployment. Youngsters often fall back on jobs in the informal sector where jobs are available but risky. Based on a number of case studies, he argued that African youth are not just focusing on income generating activities and waiting for change from African governments and international donors, but are actively engaged in activities across generations, social groupings, and religions that drive processes of social change. The informal sector, however, also provides opportunities. A motor bike rider in Sierra Leone, for example, earns more than someone with a mid-level career job in the formal sector. The informal sector cannot be seen separately from the rest of society and partnerships are needed to engage the informal sector. It is also important to study the decision-making of young people in the informal sector.

Yet not everybody can be an entrepreneur, as **William Baah-Boateng**, senior lecturer at the University of Ghana, stressed. Entrepreneurship is a function of the economy and the legal system. Young people have survival strategies, which they develop when the formal sector is not functioning as it is supposed to. Knowledge about these strategies is required. Just like women, youth are not a homogeneous group. Baah-Boateng stressed that the best way to provide jobs for young people is for Africa to transform. Job diversification and structural transformation are necessary and electricity is an essential enabler to create sustainable employment. Furthermore, there are 54 different African countries and, thus, 54 different labour markets - these require different interventions.

Watch a [video interview](#) with Baah-Boateng.

Stressing that **the quality of employment is key**, **Assefa Admassie**, Director of the Ethiopian Economic Policy Research Institute, noted that young people do not gain in terms of productivity when relocating from agriculture to the informal sector. In addition, he argued that evidence and research uptake are important to inform policy, which researchers need to be aware of. While Africa's growing and young population is often framed as a challenge, Admassie sees it as an opportunity: it forces African governments to invest in training, education and health. Economic transformation is the new buzz-word and key to inclusive development in Africa.



Round table discussion on youth employment

In the panel discussion, participants emphasized that **both the Netherlands and African countries face a mismatch between education and labour market demand**. Skills development and training are crucial, and the private sector can play a key role in this as emphasized in the panel discussion on youth employment.

Jan de Ridder, Programme Officer of CNV International, described some of the **ways in which trade unions can contribute to youth employment**, noting that the focus should not be on just any work, but on decent work. By referring to the taxi moto industry in many African countries, De Ridder said that although unions do not create employment, they create employability. The concern is what could be done to capacitate youth. In his view, trade unions can contribute the following to youth employment:

- Trade unions can train youth, show them how to write their resume and assist them to acquire skills to prepare for job interviews.
- Trade unions can give youth a voice to organize themselves.
- Trade unions can work with employers in order to create internships for youth.
- The Confederation of Trade Unions can work with governments to develop better policies on employment and lobby for better vocational training.

Sara Elder, Chief Technical Advisor of ILO, discussed what ILO has done regarding 'what works' in promoting youth employment. She noted that, whereas impact research is important, there is also a need to look at what makes sense, even without empirical evidence. In addition, Elder regretted that **there are too many players in the coordination of youth employment** (a point also made by Dickson Malunda, a senior research fellow at the Institute of Policy Analysis and Research in Rwanda and Platform member, in a [video](#) on the World Bank website). In Uganda, Elder said, there are 20 groups or areas of focus and different members of the donor community are focusing on different areas. In response to this, ILO is attempting to bring all actors together, as evident in the High Level Panel, which announced the prioritization of youth employment and the World Bank coalition for youth employment.

Johan Veul, from the Division of Sustainable Economic Development at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, argued that, **for promoting youth employment, a comprehensive approach works best**, but is also most difficult to achieve. To pursue a comprehensive approach, the Ministry needs to team up with specialized organizations and let them do their job, for example, in skills training.

The Dutch government has invested in private sector development to support youth employment and is working with different partners to:

- create a viable business environment, moving from the informal to the formal economy and, therefore, to decent jobs

- cooperate with the private sector to bring in foreign companies by partnering with local businesses and, thereby, creating more jobs, especially through labour intensive businesses
- address the ten-point plan on how to address the challenges of youth employment contained in [the policy letter on inclusive development that Minister Ploumen sent to the Parliament](#)
- make agriculture more attractive to youth and transform the sector from survival to business strategies
- work together with other agencies like ILO in order to achieve more.

In addition, Veul stated that, **to address the root causes of migration from Africa to Europe**, migrants need more opportunities in their countries of origin, and this can be achieved by increasing youth employment and self-employment. This implies a comprehensive approach that must take into account the dynamics of women and youth and retain talented people in Africa.



Mangaliso Ndlovu, representing Africa 2.0, addressed **the role of the private sector in creating youth employment**. He pointed out that the role of the private sector is confusing, particularly with reference to the colonial history of Africa, in which the private sector exploited labour and resources across the continent. In discussing Africa, Ndlovu said that the tendency to view Africa as a single basket, despite its diverse regulatory, infrastructure and other structures, is inappropriate. He suggested that the private sector can:

- play a big role in stakeholder engagement in order to avoid duplication of effort by different players
- facilitate education in informal sector development, although there has been an increase in education among youth
- apply or employ ethical practices for long-term sustainability, through which they can influence change based on how they perceive themselves
- lead in the identification of the shortcomings of the private sector and propose how to address these shortcomings (because the private sector ventures into countries in the name of creating employment, but concerns remain as to how decent and effective the jobs created are).

Mirjam Sterk summarized the highlights of **youth employment issues in the Netherlands** and explained interventions that she initiated when she was the Dutch Youth Employment Ambassador. She noted that youth unemployment in the Netherlands was estimated at 11.5% and is increasing. Another trend is that there is a growing job flexibility. She attributed youth unemployment to a mismatch between education qualifications and available jobs, lack of communicative, digital and entrepreneurship skills, and lack of work experience. Some of the challenges in generating youth employment can be addressed through policies that protect unemployed youth. For instance, in the Netherlands, youth who prove that they have tried to get a job and have enhanced their skills are granted some benefits.

Other initiatives to create jobs for the youth undertaken during Sterk's time as Youth Employment Ambassador include:

- Career learning: creating opportunities for youth to acquire communication, entrepreneurial and digital skills. In a flexible labour market, you need to be an entrepreneur. Some young people, especially those who are less educated, do not have such skills and these need to be learned. Such skills should be learned in both high-level and low-level education, as well as throughout one's career. Best practices, such as the '[startersbeurs](#)', need to be shared.

- Integrate all relevant stakeholders into policy-making: In order to secure jobs for youth, national governments need to work together with employment agencies and local governments. For example, collaboration with a temporary employment agency created 10,000 jobs during the first year and collaboration with a local government offered 10,000 jobs in just five weeks in the second year.
- Work with big employers: Identifying big employers and discussing with them how to incorporate the youth. In this way, an internship of six months was created with an employer of choice.

On another note, Sterk expected that the importance of the employment issue will increase in the Netherlands and in Africa because of the migration issue.

Discussion with the audience

Marije Balt opened the floor for discussion. A representative from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs asked about employment strategies for youth work in fragile settings. In the absence of trade unions, what is the bare minimum that would constitute decent work in fragile contexts where people need to have something to do with their lives? Does this simply imply that jobs and salaries need to be reasonable? Sara Elder stated that, in the context of disaster relief, a social protection policy needs to be strongly embedded in the employment policy. Pointing to the Philippines as exemplary case, she stressed the importance of adopting a comprehensive approach to social protection, in which the whole household is included. Platform member Ton Dietz stressed that, in order to create decent jobs for youth, indecent imports should be stopped. Wages should be low enough to be competitive in the global market, but standards for decent work need to be guaranteed. The question is how to make employment a political issue. National governments have a vital role to play in stimulating manufacturing. Platform member Rolph van der Hoeven underscored that the lack of jobs for young people stems from a lack of structural transformation. One of the causes of migration is a lack of opportunities, rather than poverty as such. In order to create jobs, economic diversification and industrialization are key. Margriet Kuster, Senior Policy Advisor at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and member of the Steering Group of INCLUDE, added that in order to tackle youth unemployment, youth should be given voice in political decision-making.

Read the INCLUDE one-pager on youth employment [here](#).

Statements on youth employment at the IDEA Debate Tree

What role should African governments, think tanks, civil society and the private sector play to provide a better future for women and youth?

- Ensure that women and youth are visibly involved, also in leading roles.
- Provide (vulnerable) youth with soft skills/labour market skills, improve access to financial resources (also for the missing middle), improve markets for entrepreneurship, and focus on the strengths and potential of youth.
- Continue providing an enabling environment; invest in youth by way of skills and training, taking advantage of the great resources that youth represent. We should also ensure that all efforts including those of CSOs and the private sector are well coordinated to achieve the common good.

How can European partners, donors and international donors support African partners to provide a better future for women and youth?

- Empower youth to raise their voice in multi-stakeholder networks.
- Quality education, relevant to the labour market is very important. European and international institutions should hold African governments accountable for the quality of their education systems. Too many people drop out, which means they have no skills!
- A big forgotten issue is that the reputation of blue collar work is low. However, universities can educate for unemployment (blue collar workers often earn more than white collar workers).



Read the tweets from the conference at [@INCLUDEPlatform](#) and [#includeplatformmeeting](#).

Watch a short video report from the conference [here](#).



Key messages from the conference

Isa Baud closed the working conference by reiterating the relevance of the systematic reviews on women's economic empowerment and youth employment and repeating the importance of cultural issues, the recognition of power relations at the micro as well as the macro level, and the observation that job creation is in fact political. Important questions are: What do the heterogeneity and contextual solutions that have been discussed mean for policy-making? And what is the role of various stakeholders?

In line with these closing remarks, INCLUDE Platform members formulated the following key messages, based on the keynote speeches and discussions on promoting employment for women and youth in Africa:

Issue 1: One size does not fit all

Heterogeneity among women entrepreneurs and youth matters - very poor, poor and non-poor women and youth require different interventions. Contextualized solutions are also needed, with women being recognized as members of social networks in families and communities. This means that interventions work better if they include couples, rather than women as individuals. What works for men may not work for women, because women face additional social, cultural and legal constraints. Pre-existing gender differences and inequalities affect interventions and outcomes. The implication for design features and interventions is that more complete packages are needed for the poorest and most vulnerable, and over longer periods of time.

Issue 2: Employment policies need to be comprehensive

Employment policies need to be holistic and comprehensive and not restricted to labour market policies. At the macro-level, economic growth matters, but growth needs to be inclusive and driven by structural change. It is not only about creating more employment, but also different kinds of employment. Labour market policies and interventions need to include demand for labour based on the growth of large and small-scale enterprises, a productive agricultural sector and supply side interventions, particularly for education and training beyond mere cognitive skills. The more integrated the packages, the more effect they have in terms of changing outcomes. However, comprehensive policies are more challenging in terms of implementation. They require coordination, teamwork and partnerships between stakeholders.

Issue 3: Youths are entering the labour market without the requisite skills and knowledge

The most effective way to reduce youth unemployment is through shared economic growth based on structural change, in which industrialization has an important role to play. Education policies and strategies should be geared towards addressing both cognitive and non-cognitive skills gaps of youth, focusing on both technical and communication skills. They need to address challenges that hinder access to quality education for poor people. Special attention needs to be given to youth working in informal sector activities to make their work more productive and to ease the transition to more formal sector activities.

Issue 4: Limited structural transformation

Transformation is essential in all economic sectors, especially in agriculture, manufacturing and services. At the basic level there should be robust investment in infrastructure. In the agricultural sector, investment in modernization and commercialization (agribusiness) is needed. Key potential areas of investment include transport infrastructure, energy and irrigation. Governments could also support smallholder farmers by enhancing their access to credit and inputs. Further, governments should work with the private sector in activities such as value addition in agriculture, small-scale or informal enterprises and service activities, and enforce local content regulations. Transformation should be aimed at both increasing productivity within sectors and promoting transitions across sectors.

Issue 5: Africa's youth bulge: Demographic curse or demographic dividend?

Africa has the youngest population in the world. Part of the youth bulge is attributed to rapid population growth fuelled by a high fertility rate and declining infant mortality rate. On the positive side, this creates the potential for the mobilization of youthful energy, entrepreneurship, wage employment and for generating accelerated growth and inclusive development. On the negative side, with lack of employment opportunities it reduces social cohesion by making alternative social movements sound attractive, and detracts from inclusive growth and development.

Several measures and interventions can help maximize the dividend and minimize the curse; in particular, we need to:

- continue to invest in youth development programmes including health and education
- invest in robust entrepreneurship promotion programmes and scale-up employment generation programmes based on the lessons learned from employment and training programmes
- in addition to safety nets, formulate policies that foster economic growth that generates many jobs, including low-skilled jobs, and that provide incentives for labour-intensive firms
- provide more support for research to generate data on youth employment and evidence on the cost-effectiveness of different employment generation interventions to guide the formulation of appropriate policies.
- ensure that outcome measures to evaluate the efficacy of interventions go beyond immediate and direct outcomes and consider intermediate and long-term outcomes (not outputs)

Issue 6: Most current and foreseeable future employment in Sub-Saharan Africa is in informal work

Policies and programmes should be relevant to the specific context of the labour market in different countries and should be based on the voices of youth. To the extent that the informal sector will be there for the foreseeable future, it will continue to provide jobs. African policy actors need to invest in areas that raise productivity in the informal sector, such as demand driven skills development, infrastructure (broadly defined), trade facilitation, and so forth, while at the same time fostering structural change. Policy-makers need to learn from and work with youth and women to ensure the scalability of initiatives for youth and women.

Issue 7: Widespread underemployment especially in rural areas

Typical employment measures and indicators give limited insight into whether or not employment is productive. The quality of employment matters: underemployment in the form of grossly low earnings and lack of full time employment is prevalent in rural areas, across all population groups. The distinction between formal and informal is less clear cut than often assumed. This distinction should be re-examined, especially to support productive employment in the informal sector. A better understanding of the labour market and youth employment prospects is needed to guide policies. This touches upon the issue of the 'aspiration gap': African youth have aspirations that cannot be met in the current labour market. It is also necessary to come up with measures, not only for job creation, but also to address the issue of underemployment.

Issue 8: Young women are disempowered in livelihood/employment opportunities compared to their male counterparts

An important bottleneck for women farmers and entrepreneurs is the availability of time, linked to socially designated responsibilities. Therefore, programmes that address challenges such as early marriage, bearing children at an early age and social chores that hinder young women from fully participating in livelihood activities should be supported. Interventions should focus on changing social norms and legal discrimination to empower women's participation in employment and entrepreneurial activities. Entrepreneurial activities and enterprises specifically designed around women's combination of responsibilities should be supported.

Issue 9: Entrepreneurship and family

Income disparity within a household stemming from women's entrepreneurship can lead to tension in the family, including domestic violence. This calls for policy measures that promote women's empowerment including the promotion of the family's stake in women's enterprises. The focus here should be on policy innovation, especially evidence that contributes to empowerment. Behaviour change is needed to overcome the constraints faced by women.

Issue 10: Political economy of policy making

Workable solutions and interventions that enhance youth employment and women's economic empowerment are meaningless unless they are put into place and accepted by stakeholders. Political will matters. All these measures require consideration of the political economy and support for policy making.





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