



CENTRE FOR  
DEVELOPMENT  
AND ENTERPRISE

*Informing South African Policy*

# COPING WITH UNEMPLOYMENT



Young people's strategies and their policy implications

The Centre for Development and Enterprise is one of South Africa's leading development think tanks, focussing on vital national development issues and their relationship to economic growth and democratic consolidation. Through examining South African realities and international experience, CDE formulates practical policy proposals for addressing major social and economic challenges. It has a special interest in the role of business and markets in development.

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This publication summarises the proceedings of a workshop on youth policy in South Africa. This report was written by a team at CDE with contributions from Antony Altbeker, Stefan Schirmer, Rebecca Schorr, Mandisa Melaphi and Ann Bernstein.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarises the findings of a CDE project on young people's strategies for dealing with unemployment and the implications these have for policy development. Our work included a review of government policies, commissioned research from leading experts and engagement with expert researchers from a variety of fields (politics, economics, sociology, anthropology) through two workshops. CDE focused on three key issues:

- how young people are making the transition to adulthood;
- how young people look for jobs and what they want to get out of employment;
- how young people are using democratic processes to achieve their political aims.

Informed insight into these issues will help the country formulate policies that are better targeted towards solving the most pressing problems that young people confront. A key challenge constraining the project was the paucity of South African research on critical questions, limiting the extent to which definitive findings can be made and recommendations offered. *(See box on p6 concerning CDE's research)*

### South Africa's youth challenge

In South Africa, 29 per cent of the population is aged between 15 and 29. The National Planning Commission notes that this demographic weighting can be a great asset if properly harnessed for development, but could become a source of potential destabilisation under conditions of rampant unemployment.

Levels of youth unemployment have worsened since the beginning of the 2008 financial crisis. According to the latest StatsSA figures, in the second quarter of 2012, 1,3 million people aged between 15 and 24 were unemployed, as were another 1,9 million people aged between 25 and 34. Thus, if we

accept that 'youth' are all South Africans from the ages of 15 to 34, then 3,2 million of the 9 million young people who are currently in the labour force were not working. Apart from the hardship this involves, there are long-term consequences for the delayed start of employment. Young people who cannot find work are losing out on opportunities to expand and strengthen their skills. They are also likely to become increasingly disconnected from a society that provides them with such restricted opportunities.

Much of this joblessness is the result of the dismal state of the education system. The unemployment rate for people who did not complete secondary school is more than three times higher than for those who completed matric, while young people who have some tertiary education have a 100 per cent better chance of finding employment than those with only a matric. In 2000 there were 1,06 million children in grade one. Twelve years later, in 2011, 348 000 passed the National Senior Certificate (NSC). This constitutes a throughput rate of 33 per cent. Of those who get the NSC only 29 per cent make it into further education. Only 13 per cent of Africans who get a matric participate in higher education, compared to 50 per cent of white matriculants.

### The state of youth policy

In this context, youth policies appear to have had very limited effect. Government-led initiatives implemented since 1994 have been marked by ambitious rhetoric, but they are seldom converted into practical youth-centred programmes. Even when programmes have been implemented, their impact has not been evaluated properly, making it impossible to differentiate between initiatives that work and should be strengthened, and initiatives that have little or no impact from which funding should be withdrawn. Most importantly, while numerous youth agencies within government have proclaimed the importance of pressurising

critical ministries into adopting a 'youth focus', there is no indication that such a process has happened or has had any discernible impact on the way education, employment or growth policies have been formulated.

### **How young people are coping**

The central message that came out of CDE's two workshops was that the entrenched problems that many young people confront are legion and that it is difficult for individuals to overcome them on their own. Young people who live in poor neighbourhoods with bad schools and little support confront an economy that generates too few jobs. They struggle to access appropriate training opportunities to either improve their employability or set up their own businesses. They have no clear idea how to look for what jobs are available. Many have little or no access to social networks that could link them to job opportunities, partly because many have parents who have themselves been unemployed for substantial periods of time. A growing number of young people are living in environments of multi-generational unemployment. Young people who find themselves in these situations are becoming increasingly resigned to never finding a job.

Young people do not always engage optimally with the opportunities that exist. 'Insiders' have better resources, education and connections, all of which helps them secure jobs more easily than 'outsiders'. Insiders also have a better sense and understanding of how the labour market works. 'Outsiders' lack this knowledge and, as a result, often overestimate their chances of finding work. They use ineffective job search strategies, like sending out their CV in the hope that this will encourage someone to employ them; they give up on jobs because they do not feel comfortable in the work environment; they wait until they find an ideal job rather than gaining work experience in a job that is less than ideal while keeping an eye out for better opportunities.

There is evidence from Cape Town and rural KwaZulu-Natal that suggests that some young people – men, in particular – will not accept jobs that either pay too little or offer too little employment security. Research from rural KwaZulu-Natal suggests that some of the unemployed will not take jobs which are perceived to provide insufficient income to establish a family and a household.

One question that must be asked is why people in rural areas are not moving to the cities more quickly given the profound lack of opportunity in these areas. In the northern KwaZulu-Natal municipal district of Uthungulu, for example, only 28 per cent of Africans from the ages of 15 to 65 have employment. In the neighbouring district of Zululand, the figure is 20 per cent. In the urban areas of Gauteng, where 47 per cent of working age Africans have jobs, employment prospects are significantly better. Why, then do people stay in the rural areas? One possibility is that the differences between employment prospects (particularly for recent arrivals from the rural areas) are not wide enough to encourage more rapid migration. It may be, therefore, that if more jobs were being created in the cities, urbanisation rates among the young would accelerate dramatically.

### **The need for more research**

South Africa needs to know and understand much more about the challenges young people face and how they cope. Policy-related questions which require further investigation include the following:

- Are young women and young men responding differently to the challenge of finding a job? If so, what factors explain these differences?
- How do young people access local support networks and the government transfers that go to the elderly and single mothers? How does this affect family structure? Does this affect levels of participation in the labour force and the kinds of work that might be accepted?

- Where are young people finding guidance and information about how the job market, and the wider world, works? What is the role of religious, sporting and political organisations in this? In what way does a dysfunctional school system affect young people and their attitudes to adults and work?
- How do young people learn about the world of work, and what opportunities exist to provide them with more effective information via radio and television, or through schools or through other organisations?
- What is standing in the way of further urbanisation amongst young people trapped in rural poverty and unemployment? If staying in rural areas is more attractive than moving to a town or city, why is this so?

### Policy considerations

Growing youth unemployment in South Africa constitutes a national crisis that must be addressed. It is critical to ensure that interventions in education, training, social support, finance and mentorship all focus on ensuring that young people are being provided with expanding opportunities to become part of – and to contribute to – the South African economy. Carefully-designed monitoring and evaluation systems are needed to assess how effective current and future interventions are at connecting young people to viable and sustainable economic opportunities. Thus, training programmes should be assessed to determine whether they have been successful in making unemployed young people more employable and whether they did, in fact, find and keep jobs. Such monitoring and evaluation exercises need to follow individuals for a period of time to assess how interventions have affected their long-term career prospects.

The most important set of policy interventions required to change the prospects of young people stuck in multi-generational unemployment is

to find ways of increasing the proportion of South Africans in wage employment. This is a youth intervention only to the extent that the 'youth challenge' makes expanding this form of employment an urgent priority. According to Gallup, which recently conducted an international survey in 148 countries, 27 per cent of the world's adults have jobs that pay a monthly salary. In South Africa the figure is 18 per cent. The need to increase this by 9 percentage points (which currently would mean putting 2,9 million additional adults into salaried employment) should be our primary policy goal. Although achieving such an outcome will not be easy, it may be more realistic than the goal of 'creating' all at once, the many millions of jobs required to bring unemployment down to full-employment levels. A larger proportion of the adult population with stable forms of employment will lead to the development of skills, improved understanding of how the economy works, and more secure forms of income.

More jobs will only be created once South Africa significantly raises the rate of investment and removes the barriers that inhibit the creation of labour-intensive forms of employment. We need to focus on jobs that create an element of stability, are part of a dynamic, expanding economy, and which put employees onto a viable earnings path that takes them out of long-term unemployment.

Another policy focus is to improve the fairness of the job-search process. To ensure that as many young people as possible are making informed decisions about how to find work and keep it, we need to develop policies and institutions that will help 'outsiders' compete more effectively against 'insiders.' Numerous policy ideas flow from this observation.

CDE research (*Routes into Formal Employment: Public and private assistance to young job-seekers, released in July 2012*) has already pointed to the importance of large, well-established 'labour broking' firms in helping 'outsiders' gain a foothold in the world of work, albeit in temporary forms of employment. In the same report CDE also found

that government programmes like the National Youth Development Agency's *JOBS placement programme* – although operating at a small scale – are helping young people find suitable forms of employment. Similarly, CDE has supported the implementation of a wage subsidy for young people as this should encourage employers to take a chance on inexperienced workers who may otherwise be stuck in unemployment. This could also help reduce the gap between what employers can pay and what young workers hope to earn, thereby getting young people into work while providing them with the pay level they see as necessary to move out of dependence and into adulthood.

There could be an important role within all this for well run and accountable youth organisations with a practical advocacy orientation. They can become more vocal in promoting the interests of young people with respect to labour markets, the education system and the economy. In addition, these organisations should be promoting experimental ways of providing young people with mentoring, training opportunities, linkages to the labour market and useful work experience. Such programmes exist, but they tend to run on a small scale and their impact and cost effectiveness is seldom properly assessed. Experimental programmes are required that start small, are rigorously monitored and evaluated and are then scaled up on the basis of their demonstrated success. These principles should apply to all programmes, regardless of whether they are implemented by government, civil society organisations or the private sector.

### **Concluding remarks**

Young South Africans need jobs. This means that they need the economy to grow faster and with increased labour intensity; they need much better education and tertiary training opportunities; and they need a labour market regime that encourages employers to take a chance on them. These are not outcomes that 'youth policy' interventions can generate. They are, instead, the purview of

economic, education and labour departments. The job of youth organisations, in this respect, is to ensure that the policy discussions within these departments are taking young people's need for more jobs, better education and working labour markets into account. The size of South Africa's youth unemployment is very large and the potential consequences of getting this right or wrong are enormous. A cabinet-level focus on addressing the challenges faced by young people is, therefore, appropriate and desirable.

Large numbers of economically sustainable jobs are the only way we can absorb young people into the economy and start to change their lives. However there are a number of other issues we need to take into account that relate to the way in which young people are coping, or trying to cope, with unemployment. The available research shows that attitudes are an important factor at play, that education about labour markets and the world of work are vital, and that 'becoming adult' is an attitudinal and policy issue that needs to be talked about in rural and urban South Africa. Young people are often trying to make effective 'transitions' into adulthood, so that they can become responsible and productive members of society. How they define and understand this process impacts on the choices they make.

This modest project has been instructive. Some ideas that are generally taken for granted have been undermined and the country's considerable lack of knowledge concerning how young people are dealing with the challenges they face, has been striking. If South Africa really intends to look at the future through a 'youth lens', as the National Planning Commission suggests, then we need to think through what this means. We do not know enough, but from what we do know it is clear that effective general policies are essential and specific youth focused programmes can be useful. However this can only be the case if the programmes are linked to effective monitoring and evaluation and a clearly defined strategy of withdrawing funds from those programmes that don't work, and scaling up those programmes that do.

### **CDE Commissioned Research**

As a first step, CDE asked a team of researchers led by Jeremy Seekings, professor of political studies and sociology at UCT, to collect data on how young South Africans are doing in reaching some of the milestones from which a productive adult life could be launched – that is, becoming educated, earning an income, adopting a healthy lifestyle and establishing functional households.

To build on this baseline, CDE asked some of South Africa's leading social scientists to reflect on how young people look for work, what drives the job choices of some and how their political engagement compares with older South Africans. Jeremy Seekings provided a perspective on how young people look for work, based largely on the Cape Area Panel Study (CAPS), which tracked a cohort of young people in Cape Town as they progressed through the final years of school, left school, and engaged with the labour market. CAPS began with a first wave of interviews in 2002 with almost 5,000 'young adults' aged between 14 and 22, spread across metropolitan Cape Town. Forty five per cent of the respondents were African; 40 per cent were coloured and 15 per cent were white. The panel was re-interviewed in 2003/04, 2005, 2006 and 2009.

Hylton White, lecturer in anthropology at the University of the Witwatersrand, looked into the factors that shape young people's job preferences in rural Kwa-Zulu Natal. Dr White's presentation was based on long-term, intensive ethnographic research in northern KwaZulu-Natal, most recently over a six month period in 2009 in a community near Richards Bay.

Robert Mattes, professor of political studies and director of the 'democracy in Africa' research unit at UCT, analysed the ways in which young South Africans understand and use their democratic rights. His presentation was based on a longitudinal series of surveys of the country's political culture carried out initially by IDASA (1994 to 1998) and subsequently by Afrobarometer (2000 to 2008).

All this research was then discussed and debated at a CDE workshop with other experts involved either in research or in working with young South Africans.



## COMMISSIONED EXPERTS



**Prof Robert Mattes**

Robert Mattes is a Professor of Political Studies and Director of the Democracy in Africa Research Unit at UCT. Mattes is co-founder and Deputy Director of Afrobarometer, a regular survey of attitudes toward democracy, markets and civil society in a number of African countries and Principal Investigator in the African Legislatures Project and the Comparative National Elections Project. He has a PhD in Political Science from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.



**Prof Jeremy Seekings**

Jeremy Seekings has a joint appointment as Professor of Political Studies and Sociology at the University of Cape Town. He is also Director of the Centre for Social Science Research (CSSR) at UCT. He has an undergraduate degree in Politics, Philosophy and Economics from Oxford, an Honours degree in African Politics from the University of the Witwatersrand, and a D.Phil in Politics from Oxford.



**Dr Hylton White**

Hylton White is a senior lecturer in Social Anthropology at the University of the Witwatersrand. He has done extensive research in rural communities in northern KwaZulu-Natal since the mid-1990s, focusing especially on the interplay between changing economic lives, organisation of the life course, and conceptions of family, obligation, and dependency. He has a PhD in Anthropology from the University of Chicago.

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## Introduction

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Youth policy discussions in South Africa are mostly informed by awareness of extremely high rates of youth unemployment, and by emotionally-charged concerns that 'youth dissatisfaction' is a 'time bomb' waiting to explode.<sup>1</sup> Statistics reveal the shocking truth that more than half of South Africans between the ages of 15 and 25 who want to work are unable to find employment.

There is far too little known about how young people are dealing with this situation. How do they understand and how have they responded to the challenges they face? How effective are young people in creating their own opportunities and how do they relate to and use democratic opportunities to make their voices heard? The paucity of research in this arena is one of the key findings of our modest project.

At the end of 2011 CDE convened two workshops with practitioners, researchers and stakeholders from the 'youth sector'. The aim was to gain a better understanding of how young people are coping with the challenges they confront. To find out more about these issues and to get a better sense of what the experts know, we gathered together leading researchers from a variety of fields (politics, economics, sociology, anthropology) and asked them to answer some questions. In particular:

- how young people are making the transition from childhood to adulthood;
- how young people go about looking for jobs and what they want to get out of employment;
- how young people are using democratic processes to achieve their political aims.

Informed insight into these issues will contribute to helping the country formulate policies that are better targeted towards solving the most pressing problems that young people confront. This will also help South Africa to find ways in which the state, business sector and civil society can support young people as they seek to construct their own solutions.

More than half of South Africans between the ages of 15 and 25 who want to work, are unable to find employment

### South Africa's youth challenge

According to the National Planning Commission (NPC), for the next 20 years, 'policies should be viewed through a youth lens'. Twenty nine per cent of the population is aged between 15 and 29. This is just below the 30 per cent 'youth bulge' which is internationally recognised as holding the potential to destabilise social and economic systems. In other aspects of South Africa's demographic balance:

- Seventy two per cent of Africans are under 35 years;
- There are 3,6 Africans between the ages of 15 and 29 for every one between the ages of 50 and 64. For African males the ratio is 4,2:1.<sup>2</sup>

The NPC notes that this demographic weighting can be a great asset if properly harnessed for development, but a source of potential destabilisation under conditions of rampant unemployment.<sup>3</sup>

As is well known, youth unemployment has only gotten worse since the beginning of the 2008 financial crisis. According to the latest StatsSA figures, in the second quarter of 2012, 1,3 million people aged from 15 to 24 were unemployed, as were 1,9 million people aged from 25 to 34. Thus, if we accept that 'youth' are all South Africans from the ages of 15 to 34, then 3,2 million of the 9 million who are currently in the labour force are not contributing to the economic development of the country. Apart from the suffering this involves, there are long term consequences for the delayed start of employment. Young people who cannot find work are losing out on opportunities to expand and strengthen their skills and there is a danger that they are becoming increasingly disconnected from a society that provides them with such restricted opportunities.

## The state of youth policy

The NPC's 'youth lens' prescription implies that there is a 'youth problem' that needs to be tackled more effectively. It is not the case, however, that 'the youth' have been entirely neglected at the policy level. We have a suite of youth policies; and a number of major policy programmes – such as the Expanded Public Works Programme – have a special focus on assisting young people. A review of current government policy suggests the following:

- Policy aims are broad and ambitious, and often lack operational and measurable strategies and goals;
- Insofar as specific interventions are proposed, many of them are initiatives that key government economic or delivery departments are already doing or should be doing under their own remit.<sup>4</sup>

Young people who cannot find work are losing out on opportunities to expand and strengthen their skills

The major agency in charge of youth policy is the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA), which was created in 2009 by the amalgamation of the National Youth Commission (NYC) and the Umsobomvu Youth Fund (UYF). Restructuring was intended to address what critics saw as the NYC's lack of operational focus on the central challenges of youth unemployment and health. NYDA reports reveal that they are spending resources on providing young people with information, training and finance but, in the absence of proper monitoring and evaluation, it is impossible to assess the impact of these programmes. We know that youth unemployment remains at very high levels. We have insufficient information on how young people view these NYDA programmes, and what kinds of assistance young people really need and want. A core question that this CDE report raises is whether a better understanding of young people's challenges, perceptions and initiatives will allow us to design youth policies that focus on tackling the biggest obstacles while also supporting initiatives that young people are already undertaking?

## GOVERNMENT-LED YOUTH POLICY INITIATIVES

The ANC-led government set out to provide special assistance to young people right from the start of democracy. CDE undertook a desk-top survey of the various initiatives that have been launched since 1994 and discovered the following:

1994 – The National Youth Development Forum (NYDF) aimed to integrate all existing youth organisations; design and pilot innovative schemes that would focus on the development of young people; including improvements in 'education and training, rehabilitation of urban and rural infrastructure, rural development and environmental conservation, and housing, health and social services'. These initiatives did not produce any concrete policies.<sup>5</sup>

1997 – 1999 - After the NYDF shut down, the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) office briefly continued to tackle youth development by exhorting 'appropriate government departments' to 'more forcefully represent youth interests'.<sup>6</sup> This plea had little noticeable impact.

2000 – Parliament passed the National Youth Commission Amendment Act, designed to provide an outline for the mainstreaming of youth development. The National Youth Commission (NYC), established through this act, aimed to 'prioritise national youth issues and initiate youth programmes in accordance with national youth policy'.<sup>7</sup> Even when the NYC did make recommendations to government departments to implement youth oriented policies, it had no power to ensure that their recommendations led to real action.<sup>8</sup>

2001 – The Umsobomvu Youth Fund (UYF), under the energetic leadership of its CEO, Malose Kekana, was able to launch a range of interventions to assist young people, including the issuing of business loans, training programmes and job placement services. Umsobomvu annual reports gave a clear account of the money spent on programmes, but provided little clarity on the impact UYF projects had on youth unemployment or youth entrepreneurship.

2005 – The launch of the Expanded Public Works Programme. In its first five years, the programme created 1,4 million 'work opportunities', of which at least 30 per cent went to people between the ages of 18 and 35.<sup>9</sup> These work opportunities were mostly short term, and it is not clear whether they had any impact on the long term employability of beneficiaries.<sup>10</sup>

2007 – The Department of Social Development's National Youth Development Strategy (NYDS) was launched. It focused on strengthening the capacity of youth organisations, reducing the number of vulnerable youth in poverty by 30 per cent, facilitating youth work professionalism, and promoting social cohesion among young people. There is no clarity on whether any of these goals were achieved.

2008 – National Youth Service projects were launched, leading to 34 906 unskilled youth being trained and enrolled in projects; 542 volunteers from Higher Education and Further Education and Training institutions registered and 'ready to provide service'; 34 064 other volunteers were registered and ready to serve their communities. It is unclear what these volunteers actually did and to what extent they, or anyone else, benefitted from this service.

2008 – The National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) Act of 2008 led to the merging of the UYF and the NYC.

2009 – The Presidency’s National Youth Policy generated few obvious benefits for young people. The only activity this policy programme appears to have produced is a vague ‘partnership with the National Youth Development Agency’.<sup>11</sup>

2011 – The NYDA released the Integrated Youth Development Strategy (IYDS), which aims to:

- promote a uniform approach by all organs of state, the private sector and civil society organisations;
- facilitate endeavours aimed at job creation and economic freedom of the youth;
- initiate strategic anchor projects to benefit young people from disadvantaged backgrounds (rural, disabled, and young women);
- guide programming for other stakeholders including private and civil society sectors.

This ‘new approach’ sounds very similar to previous initiatives, and it is not at all clear how the NYDA will be more effective than previous initiatives. The NYDA continues to run UYF-type programmes, but in the continued absence of proper monitoring and evaluation, it is difficult to assess actual outcomes.

## Defining the youth challenge

‘Youth’ is often defined as a transitory phase between childhood and adulthood. It is a time when people, who once depended on their parents, have to start making their own decisions and are often expected to embark on, or want for themselves an independent ‘adult life’. This definition of youth was very usefully employed in the *World Bank Development Report of 2007*. This report, *Development and the Next Generation*, set out the core challenges that ‘youth’ confront in the following terms:

When young people enter adolescence, the most important decisions are made for them by their parents and the elders in their families. As they get older, decision making shifts from parents and families. The speed of the shift varies greatly for the different transitions. In some societies, the transition comes early. For many others, it comes only for some decisions—and at an older age. For some, such as young women in traditional societies where decision making simply shifts from parents to husbands, independence never comes. Even if there is no outright independence, young people everywhere make important decisions that can affect their futures, even in what are seemingly tradition-bound communities. Young primary school completers may dutifully enrol in secondary school to please their parents, but their own efforts will be important to their success. Young couples may be prohibited by laws from marrying too young but can still have sexual encounters that could lead to unwanted pregnancies. That is, they are exercising their ‘agency’, defined by social scientists as the ability of young people to define their goals and to act on them.

It follows from this definition that the major development issue confronting ‘youth’ is their ability to make effective ‘transitions’ into adulthood, so that they can become responsible and productive members of society. Thus, a first step in gaining a better understanding of how young people are coping with the challenges they face, is to marshal the facts on particular transitions in South Africa. To achieve this, CDE commissioned Professor Jeremy Seekings and a team of researchers based at UCT to collect data on how young South Africans are doing in reaching some of the milestones from which

a productive adult life could be launched, that is, becoming educated, earning an income, adopting a healthy lifestyle and establishing functional households.

Pulling together the indicators of adulthood that Professor Seekings and his team provided gives a useful baseline for understanding the South African situation. But presenting the facts in this way only provides a rough outline: it does not cover all the dimensions of moving into adulthood, it glides over many complexities and provides little insight into the motives and perceptions of those who are trying to make the transition into adulthood. To build on this baseline, CDE asked some of South Africa's leading social scientists to reflect on how young people look for work, what drives the job choices of some and how their political engagement compares with older South Africans.

The experts CDE commissioned (see bios on p7) made the following presentations at the workshop:

- Jeremy Seekings: How young people look for work (presented in absentia)
- Hylton White: What shapes young people's job preferences, a view from rural Kwa-Zulu Natal
- Robert Mattes: How do young people use their democratic rights?

Each presentation was followed by an extensive discussion, which provided additional insights and raised important questions. In the sections that follow we provide the facts on young South African transitions, a summary of the experts' presentations and the important issues raised in the subsequent discussion. The final section presents CDE's perspective on the workshop's key insights and potential policy implications.

Young people who have some tertiary education have a 100 per cent better chance of finding employment than those who have no such training

## Transitions into adulthood: Baseline facts

A project on 'Transitions to Adulthood in Developing Countries', organised by the American National Research Council, defines adulthood as 'a set of culturally, historically and gender-specific activities, rights and responsibilities that people acquire over time by means of a process of transition' and notes that 'transition to adulthood begins during adolescence, but it continues beyond adolescence, sometimes even into the late 20s and early 30s'.<sup>12</sup> The report highlights the preparation of young people for key 'adult' roles: as adult workers, citizens and community participants, spouses, parents, and household managers.<sup>13</sup> CDE's workshop distilled these into the four transitional periods of young people's struggles to: obtain a useful education, earn their own income, live healthily and start their own families. There is no readily available information on young South Africans as 'community participants'; however the presentation by Professor Mattes covered many of the aspects pertaining to young people becoming engaged citizens.

### Finding employment

**Key insight:** Unemployment rates for the general public are very high, but it is women, the very young and the uneducated who face by far the biggest challenges.

**Key facts:**

- For boys in the labour force who are in their late teens, the unemployment rate is above 70 per cent. Among girls in their late teens, it is above 80 per cent. These rates drop to about 50 per cent among young men aged about 23, and among young women aged about 25. Even among 30 year-olds, however, the unemployment rate is 28 per cent for men and 43 per cent for women.
- The unemployment rate for people who did not complete secondary school is between 3 and 4 times higher than for those who completed matric. Young people who have some tertiary education have a 100 per cent better chance of finding employment than those who have no such training. According to the latest StatsSA figures, in the first quarter of 2012, some 2,7 million people who did not complete secondary school were unemployed, 1,5 million people who had a matric were unemployed, and there were 280 000 unemployed people with a tertiary qualification. This last number is not confined to university graduates. It includes people with any kind of tertiary qualification, including one-year certificates.
- Seventy per cent of young people who are working are in formal employment, with informal work, agriculture and domestic work accounting for only 30 per cent. Given the very high levels of unemployment in South Africa one might expect the informal sector to be larger and the variety of jobs that young people are willing to access more diverse. There are either barriers preventing young people from finding informal jobs or young people are averse to working in the informal sector despite the limited number of formal jobs available.

## DEFINITIONS OF UNEMPLOYMENT

Statistics South Africa uses the following terms to describe the South African labour market, and therefore to define unemployment:

Working-age population: all people aged between 15 and 65 – (32 903 000 people).

Labour force: The sum of employed and unemployed people – (17 916 000 people).

Not economically active: People who are not available for work. These include scholars and students, full-time homemakers, retired people, and people who are unavailable or unwilling to work – (14 987 000 people).

Employed: People aged between 15 and 65 who did any work, were in a job, or had a business in the seven days prior to the survey interview – (13 447 000 people).

Unemployed (official definition): People aged between 15 and 65 who did not work or run a business in the seven days prior to the survey interview, but had looked for work or taken steps to start a business in the four weeks prior to the interview, and were able to work within two weeks of the interview – (4 470 000 people).

Discouraged work-seekers: Unemployed people who are available to work but say they are not actively looking for work – (2 311 000 people).

Source: Stats SA's QLFS Quarter 2, 2012



## Movement through school and into higher education

**Key insight:** Many young people move through the schooling system without actually obtaining a qualification that helps them find employment. Further training opportunities are very limited, and those that are available are often neither tailored to young people's needs nor useful in linking them to employment opportunities.

**Key facts:**

- In 2000 there were 1,06 million children in grade one. Twelve years later, in 2011, 348 000 passed the National Senior Certificate (NSC). This constitutes a throughput rate of 33 per cent.
- Only 35 per cent of those aged 18 to 24 attend any educational institution. Twenty five per cent of these are still in secondary education, indicating very high levels of grade repetition;
- Employment rates for people with a tertiary qualification are high, especially for university degrees;
- Of those who get the NSC only 29 per cent make it into further education. Only 13 per cent of Africans who get a matric participate in higher education, compared to 50 per cent of white matriculants.

Despite the reality of low participation rates, a higher percentage of African youth expected to complete an undergraduate degree than their white peers.

## Health and mortality

**Key insight:** Situated within a general crisis of healthcare outcomes in South Africa, young people display acute vulnerability to life-threatening conditions and events.

**Key facts:**

- Estimated HIV prevalence for women in 2006 was highest between the ages of 25 and 29. For men the peak was between the ages of 30 and 34. The total number of people living with HIV was approximately 5,4 million in 2011;
- Between 1997 and 2004 the death rate among men aged 30 to 39 more than doubled, while that for women aged between 25 and 34 quadrupled. The death rates for those aged between 15 and 20 and those over 55 were little changed. In 2008, 237 000 people between the ages of 25 and 49 died, compared to 252 000 who were 50 and older;
- Sixty eight per cent of unnatural deaths (mostly assault, road traffic deaths and suicide) take place below the age of 44. Of these 80 per cent are males. The age group most affected by violent assault is between 20 and 34.

This vulnerability is partly attributable to risky behaviours, including multiple partners, inconsistent condom use, sexually-transmitted infections, engaging in transactional sex, alcohol and drug abuse and rape.

## Beginning a family

**Key insight:** Fewer young South Africans are getting married, but they have children early. African men are the group least likely to get married while still in their twenties.

Young people display acute vulnerability to life-threatening conditions and events

**Key facts:**

- Adolescent girls display high fertility rates and in 2001, by the age of 20, almost one third of African women had had their first child;
- General Household Survey figures from 2009 showed that in only about one third of households both parents live with their children, while in two out of five households children live with their mother but without their father. By contrast, single fatherhood is rare, with only three per cent of children living with just their father;
- The proportion of young people who have never been married is increasing. Fifty seven per cent of males between the ages of 24 and 30 had never been married in 1996. By 2007 the levels had reached 75 per cent. Eighty per cent of African males between the ages of 24 and 30 had never been married in 2007.

Despite the declines in marriage worldwide evidence from the World Values Survey suggests that marriage remains an important normative institution. It appears that many young people want to get married but are finding it increasingly difficult to do so.

The challenges that young South Africans face in making effective transitions into adulthood are clearly enormous

These facts help to establish a picture of the enormous challenges that young people face. In South Africa, 'transitions' are rarely moments of permanent and irreversible change from one state (characteristic of adolescence or youth) to another (associated with adulthood). There is no neat movement from school to work, from financial dependence to independence, or from living with parents to marriage and parenthood of one's own. 'Adulthood' understood as a state of financial independence, increasing prosperity, a stable home and family is something many South Africans do not achieve. The lives of many men and women well past their twenties are not characterised by economic independence, forming a household or marriage or partnership, or (for many men) close contact with children.

The challenges that young South Africans face in making effective transitions into adulthood are clearly enormous. How do they understand and cope with these challenges, and what can policy makers learn from a better understanding of what young people are doing? These were the questions that CDE asked three leading social scientists to address at a workshop in November 2011.

## How young people look for work

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### Jeremy Seekings

*Professor of Political Studies and Sociology, University of Cape Town*

While the cross-sectional data collected by the Labour Force Survey (LFS) reveal the magnitude of the jobs crisis for young people, they tell us little about individuals' experiences. The Cape Area Panel Study (CAPS), by contrast, allows us to track more systematically the experiences of a cohort of young people in Cape Town as they progress through the final years of school, leave school, and engage with a labour market that is, for many of them, distinctly unfavourable. CAPS began with a first wave of interviews in 2002 with almost 5 000 'young adults' aged between 14 and 22, spread across metropolitan Cape Town. Forty five per cent of the respondents were African; 40 per cent were coloured and 15 per cent were

white. The panel was re-interviewed in 2003/04, 2005, 2006 and 2009, and supplementary, in-depth interviews were conducted with sub-samples at different times.

The CAPS research underlined the reality that South African society is highly stratified. People's life-chances are to a considerable extent constrained or enabled by their starting-points. Inequalities are reproduced over time, between generations. How young people enter the labour market in their late teens or twenties has enduring consequences.

Young people in different neighbourhoods were in very different positions in terms of schooling and work. It was interesting therefore that most of them shared optimistic expectations. Given the range of ages in the whole CAPS sample, let us concentrate on the specific cohort of CAPS participants who were aged 18 in 2002, i.e. who were born as South Africa underwent its transition to democracy in 1994. In 2002, one in five of these 18 year-old CAPS participants had already taken the matric examination (and almost all of these had passed). Asked what work they expected or planned to be doing at the age of thirty – i.e. twelve years hence – most adolescents in poorer neighbourhoods voiced high aspirations: they expected, or at least wanted, to be professionals or businessmen. They expected to be working in three years' time (i.e. in 2005) and of getting jobs that were well-paid and enjoyable. Even in poor or very poor African and coloured neighbourhoods, between 40 and 50 per cent of adolescents put their chances of getting a well-paid job as 'high' or 'very high'. Many other indicators reveal a similar picture of optimism and even a high degree of perceived control over life among all the respondents.

These attitudes sit at odds with reality, although perhaps not as much as observers might have expected. Seven years later, in 2009, 350 members of the initially 18 year-old age cohort were re-interviewed during wave 5. By then, aged 25, 67 per cent of them were working, 12 per cent were unemployed and actively looking for work, 14 per cent wanted to work but were not looking actively (the so-called 'discouraged' unemployed), and 8 per cent did not want to work. (The higher prevalence of employment and lower prevalence of unemployment and non-participation, compared to StatsSA's Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) – which reveal that half of 23 year old males are unemployed – reflects the fact that the CAPS sample was drawn entirely from Cape Town, whilst the LFS covered South Africa as a whole.)

A group of CAPS participants that can be defined as the 'urban privileged' are, in Cape Town, predominantly but not exclusively white.<sup>14</sup> In other parts of the country this category is more multi-racial. Typically, these young people first work whilst at school or college. Indeed, working whilst studying is the modal behaviour of 20-year-olds in 'white' neighbourhoods in Cape Town. The urban privileged describe finding such casual work as easy, as long as one is not too selective. Their approach is to 'start low', doing odd jobs, and then 'work your way up'. Young people typically work first in restaurants and guesthouses, weekend craft markets, and shops. Most of these young men and women secure work through connections: 'all my friends got their jobs through people that they know', said one girl. Other examples included 'my friend's aunt' and 'a friend's father'. In the absence of such connections, they go and speak to possible employers. As one young man told the CAPS interviewers: 'don't send a letter to a company, they'll just throw it away; go to the shop and speak to the manager, one-on-one; he can then see that you're a good guy, ..., and that's it, it's simple... If it does prove difficult, persist. If necessary, create your own work by starting your own business.' In practice, having previous experience of working makes it easier and easier to find more work. For these young people, education was not as important to them to getting their first (often casual) job, as understanding in this context, how the labour market

South African society is highly stratified. People's life-chances are to a considerable extent constrained or enabled by their starting-points

works, what employers value and how to 'sell' their labour or services. Fundamentally, they understood something about what constitutes a 'work ethic'.

Respondents from less affluent coloured and African neighbourhoods who can nevertheless be defined as 'urban insiders', share some of the advantages of their urban privileged peers: some social capital, through kin, friends, friends' kin, neighbours, or others (priests, school principals, etc.); some cultural capital; and proximity to some employment opportunities. Few gain much work experience whilst at school but having left school, they move from job to job, trying them out, before settling on what seems like a long-term opportunity. In Cape Town, their first work tends to be for larger firms than their more privileged peers. They also find work in retailing and services more often than in manufacturing. Whilst they access jobs through connections, their connections tend to be workers at these firms rather than owners or managers. These urban insiders tend to have few breaks in their employment history: either they leave one job only when they have set up another, or they find it relatively easy to secure new employment when they start looking.

Joblessness seems to trap many young adults in a condition of being 'non-adult'

In comparison to the urban privileged and insiders, urban outsiders – respondents from informal settlements who have mostly failed to complete secondary education and lack close connections with people who are employed – struggle to find employment; if they find work, they often struggle to retain it, and if they lose it, they struggle to find new employment. The consequence, in aggregate, is a high unemployment rate, with as many as one in five young women and almost as many young men in long-term unemployment in their late twenties. Some young people had no employment across the seven years of the CAPS study (2002-09); most had very little; even those who did work, for a while, invariably spent extended periods jobless after the spell of work ended. In few cases do these outsiders make the transition into stable employment.

In-depth interviews with these individuals provide a depressing picture. Complaints about 'boredom' recur. Respondents who have dropped out of school express the desire to obtain additional training and to access decent jobs, but they often lack both motivation and any sense of how to navigate their way into the labour market. Not completing schooling leaves a sense of failure. Questions about how the reality of their lives compared to their prior expectations often elicited long pauses or silences. These are clearly not easy topics for discussion.

Joblessness seems to trap many young adults in a condition of being 'non-adult'. The passivity of many jobless adolescents is striking. Only a minority of jobless adolescents are actually looking for work at any one time. Most jobless adolescents who were not looking for work said that they wanted work.

Most urban insiders know people who can and do help them to find job opportunities. If they don't, they will enquire directly at workplaces. Urban outsiders, by contrast, have few useful connections, are unlikely to enquire directly, and rely on sending off CVs to employers. This is an especially futile form of job search, as is clear from CAPS data on how young people who are working actually got their jobs. In short, there is a disjuncture between the strategies that urban outsiders use, and the strategies that work.

Urban outsiders' (mis-) understanding of the labour market is important also with respect to their reservation wages, i.e. the minimum wages that they would accept for employment. CAPS repeatedly asked individuals in the panel whether they would accept a range of hypothetical jobs. Among young people in poor neighbourhoods who had left school without matric and were either looking for work

or said that they wanted work, a large minority said that they would not take a job as a domestic worker at a wage of (in 2004-05) approximately R900 per month, but almost all would take higher-paid jobs. It seems that urban outsiders may be pricing themselves out of the kinds of jobs that they are most likely to get, setting reservation wages for themselves that could be paid for the more formal employment that they are unlikely to get.

Economists tend to look for rational explanations of such behaviour. An alternative interpretation is that some of these young people simply do not understand the labour market, and their own prospects of employment. Our interviews corroborate an argument suggested by Mamphela Ramphele based on research conducted in Cape Town in the early 1990s. She found that the young men and women from poorer African neighbourhoods who succeeded – in terms of both education and then employment – were typically pushed or guided by strong mothers or other close kin. Moreover, they often had to cut themselves off from the prevailing culture of township life, and put up with some ostracism from neighbours.

Unemployment is not the result only of a failure to find work. It can also be because someone has been retrenched, or even chosen to leave employment. One young woman, after dropping out of school, got a job as a cashier at a Pick 'n Pay supermarket. She quit this job because, she said, she 'wasn't getting on well' with her manager. She was still unemployed when interviewed. It is possible that, in cases like this one, someone quits a job because they overestimate their chances of finding other employment. It is also likely that pressure at work is in part because young people do not understand fully what is expected of them at work, and how to perform at the required level. In a second case, a young man had passed matric and then got a telemarketing job (through his aunt, who was working there as a cleaner). His job required him to achieve a minimum volume of sales, and he quit after only one month because of the pressure. In this case, however, the young man then took a welding course and started a welding job with a friend in the township. He quit this too (when he discovered that working conditions were unhealthy). Through connections he soon got another job at another telemarketing company, where he was working when interviewed. Unlike the young woman, this young man had not only opportunities provided through connections but also some understanding of how the labour market worked.

It seems that urban outsiders may be pricing themselves out of the kinds of jobs that they are most likely to get

## What shapes young people's job preferences? A view from rural KwaZulu Natal

**Hylton White**

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In rural KwaZulu-Natal, the experience of unemployment is deeply embedded in intergenerational relationships. If we do not pay attention to that, if we do not try to understand how unemployment is made into a question of generational ties, we fail to grasp the dynamics affecting many of our jobless youth. Despite the nihilistic image often attached to young people in our public life, most of the time, young unemployed South Africans are neither alone nor lacking in aspiration. They tend to find their

social ties, if anything, demanding, and much of what they do is led by hopes of either fulfilling or deferring obligations to their families.

In northern KwaZulu-Natal, where I have conducted intensive ethnographic research, the process of becoming an adult is very closely tied to the work of producing a home as a place of dignity. At issue here is much more than constructing a set of dwellings. It is also a matter of building up and affirming social ties, particularly with in-laws and with various sorts of relatives. Marriage is among the most important parts of this process, and in most families that still means the payment of 'bride wealth' and a variety of associated demands. In many households keeping close connections with the dead is another important task, which can be very costly. The living are called on take care of unfinished business that the dead left behind, such as outstanding payments of bride wealth, or payments of fines to legitimate the children they had out of marriage. To appease the dead many young people also feel that they must establish viable households in which they can perform appropriate ceremonies. For the most part, though, the burden of building a home is also found in the everyday challenge of sustaining a space where living kin find safety, sustenance, comfort, and growth.

For many generations in KZN building a home has depended on having a job

For many generations now, building a home has depended on having a job. Wage employment became an integral part of social relationships in northern KwaZulu-Natal by the start of the twentieth century, by which time many men were working in cities. This allowed them to purchase herds and pay their own bride wealth in ways that made them much less dependent on their fathers than they had been in earlier times.

It also allowed them to establish their own households. This new connection of work and home created much concern about the young African men who left their homes to become migrant workers. On the one hand they could take responsibility for hosting the cycle of homestead reproduction for their relatives; on the other they could just as easily use their new autonomy to make entirely different kinds of lives for themselves – such as setting up home in South Africa's new urban centres. That prospect famously terrified the proponents of white supremacy in the cities, but it also caused anxiety throughout the African countryside, where it sponsored an elaborate moral discourse contrasting absconders to thoughtful men. Both of these – the prodigal and the responsible son – are types of moral persons who derive their standing from choices that they make about their wages. That tells us how essential waged employment became to the constitution of social ties.

But what happens when we move over into a situation of mass unemployment, such as what we have faced for a generation now in South Africa? What develops when young people in places like northern KwaZulu-Natal lose their access to wages and thus to choices? One clear possibility would be a change in the social fabric just as marked as the one that changed the lives of men here more than a hundred years ago. If work became the basis on which men founded households and reached adulthood in the early twentieth century, then surely the mass decline of work at the end of the twentieth century would lead to radical changes in that same arrangement of social forms. Marriage rates, for instance, have declined to the point where in one part of KwaZulu-Natal two surveys done in recent years discerned that less than a third of adult men and women had ever been married. Some would take a figure like that to suggest a radical change in social structure.

I would argue exactly the opposite, though. Declining rates of marriage do not mean that the structural link between work and marriage has changed; only that in the face of unemployment the continuing strength of the very same link means that most adults are simply unable to marry. Change takes place

in personal life, in other words, but not in the nature of social ties. And that means that young men experience unemployment in forms of exclusion, inequality, and private frustration.

Declining rates of marriage mean that the composition of households has changed dramatically, for instance. Most young men and women live in the homes of their mothers' relatives and not in those of their fathers. One conceivable outcome of that change would be the reconstitution of new conceptions of kinship to match. For the most part, though, this situation only produces anxiety arising from cultural expectations on younger people, especially men.

Completed bride wealth payments are a distant dream for most young men, but they nonetheless are trapped in endless accountings of outstanding debts and fines to their partners' relatives. Not to speak of the needs that materialise every day in the lives of their own domestic kin. One response is to seek complete extrication from this web of ties and debts. The obvious route to that is Pentecostalism, which encourages its adherents to avoid the forms of sacrifice and obligation based in customary ties of kinship and marriage. But even the most enthusiastic evangelical converts cannot silence or ignore the pleas of their relatives all the time and the much more common route is to defer obligations with small promissory gestures and a ceaseless rearrangement of debts.

But none of this is enough to mount a serious step towards adulthood. Doing that would demand acquiring the money that comes only from a dependable job at decent compensation. And the tight connection between that kind of work and having the chance to build a home is also decisive, I think, in shaping general attitudes to jobs at lower levels of pay and security, particularly for unemployed young men. If jobs will not provide the means required for getting married and building a home, then many men are not very interested in either seeking or keeping such jobs. Hence the otherwise counterintuitive phenomenon of young men walking away from low-paid jobs despite the mass unemployment surrounding them in their communities. Most of the time, the back story turns out to be that the job provided no plausible hope of ever being able to gather the kinds of resources required for personal maturation. The situation is not quite the same for young women, and particularly not for young single mothers who are confronted with the daily consumption requirements of their children. For young men, on the other hand, it is not always clear that any kind of job is better than idleness. Likewise with micro-enterprise. It is often said that South Africans must be generating much more private income through informal sector activity than they are through jobs and grants. I can only speak from an anecdotal sense of things, but I doubt that this is the case. Nor is that very surprising. If a business or a job does not permit a man to imagine building up a new home, it is seldom worth the time that he could better spend on staying at home and maintaining closer ties with friends and relatives who are able to support his basic needs. If patterns of life in KwaZulu-Natal are any indication, there are millions of young South Africans literally waiting for their adult lives to begin.

Completed bride wealth payments are a distant dream for most young men in rural KZN

That means, I suspect, that few of the policy options now on the table for expanding young people's access to work will have the desired effect, or at least not for jobless men in the kinds of areas where I have done my research. To many people, a job is simply not to be regarded as a means to acquire subsistence at a very basic level. That is provided, anyway, by relatives, friends, and at least indirectly, by social grants. A job is understood rather as the means to an adult existence: to a form of life that is organised around one's capability to build a home and to honour one's ties to one's relatives and to previous generations. In the absence of the kind of work that allows for such capabilities, it is much more likely that forms of generational antagonism will intensify and that youth will pressure the state to make them adults through strong interventions in the organisation of economic and social life. It is

unlikely that this pressure will assume the nihilistic forms that many observers currently seem to fear. But it is increasingly likely that it will take the form of intensified calls for authoritarian governance, on behalf of those who claim a special kinship with the state, and directed at securing the conditions for conservative visions of socio-moral order.

## Young people and democracy

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**Robert Mattes**

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Perhaps blinded by the misleading measures of voter turnout released by the Independent Electoral Commission, and the lack of scholarly attention to legislative politics at the national, provincial or local levels, few political analysts have grasped the generally fragile nature of democratic citizenship in South Africa. At the same time, possibly driven by media portrayals of township protests, the antics of the ANC Youth League, and comparisons with romanticised memories of the Soweto uprisings and the struggle against apartheid, commentators routinely worry about the ‘the problem’ of the country’s youth. In order to explore the veracity of these particular concerns it is helpful to turn to a longitudinal series of surveys of the country’s political culture carried out initially by IDASA (1994 to 1998) and subsequently by Afrobarometer (2000 to 2008). These surveys reveal that there clearly are a series of real problems with citizenship in the country. At the same time, these problems are not peculiar to young people.

Few political analysts have grasped the generally fragile nature of democratic citizenship in South Africa

What the most recent results, from 2008, show is that there are no meaningful age-related differences in political interest between generations. There were a few differences – and surprisingly it was the aged who were the most apathetic – but the differences were actually very small. As of the 2008 survey, there was at most a five percentage point difference between the youngest and oldest age cohorts, and it is senior citizens who from 1997 to 2006 were consistently least likely to talk about politics. Relative to other age cohorts, the youth (18 to 25 year olds) are now more likely to read newspapers on a frequent basis than at any point in the last 15 years, falling just slightly behind younger adults (26 to 45 year olds). At the same time, the youth exhibit very low levels of what political scientists call ‘internal efficacy’, which denotes young people’s sense of control over their own lives and the political system they inhabit. Just 17 per cent of youth disagree with the statement, ‘Politics and government seem so complicated that you can’t really understand what’s going on.’ But this was virtually the same result as yielded by all other age cohorts, a result that has remained extremely stable since 1997.

How do young South Africans understand the role of a citizen? Three in five (58 per cent) agree with the statement: ‘We should be more active in questioning the actions of our leader’ (as opposed to the statement) ‘We should show more respect for authority’). They are still more likely to see themselves as ‘children’ with government as the ‘parent’ than to see themselves as ‘bosses’ who control the government like an ‘employee’ (a characterisation with which just 40 per cent agree). Finally, just one in ten say ‘the voters’ when asked ‘Who should be responsible for making sure that, once elected, local councillors or members of parliament do their jobs.’ Most rather answer: ‘the party’ or ‘the President’.



There are some areas in which young people are behaving differently than older people. As reflected in answers to questions in post-election surveys, the youth have become less and less likely to vote relative to other South Africans. At the same time, this is common around the world, and seems more a function of the universal aging process than anything specific to South Africa.

There are also meaningful age effects when it comes to participation between elections. The youth are indeed significantly less likely to attend community meetings, join with other people to raise local issues, or contact a local councillor. Moreover, the gap between the youth and other cohorts appears to have widened over the last six years of each of these surveys.

At the same time, and in contrast to the typical media depiction of township protests, young respondents are not any more likely than other cohorts (except for senior citizens) to have reported attending a demonstration or protest march.

Young people are slightly less likely than other age groups to agree with the statement: 'People should be able to speak their minds about politics free of government influence, no matter how unpopular their views may be' (as opposed to the view that 'Government should not allow the expression of political views that are fundamentally different from the views of the majority'). Perhaps more important is the fact that 76 per cent of youth affirmed the right to free expression in the most recent sounding in 2008.

On the one hand, the fact that the youth are not worse than their elders might reassure those who engage in a moral panic about the state of the youth. On the other hand, this same finding should be cause for concern given that the youth have reached political maturity in a free and democratic political system, and that they have been educated by a new school curriculum that claimed to have democratic citizenship as one of its key 'outcomes.' My recent analysis of the 'Born Free' generation (defined as all people who had come of age politically since the passage of the 1996 Constitution) concludes: whereas in Germany strong differences of opinion emerged between the older generation and the generation born after World War Two, in South Africa most of the key fault lines of Apartheid (such as race, urban-rural residence, and poverty) have been replicated for most people within the new generation.<sup>15</sup>

The reality of post-apartheid South Africa is that while a new generation has come of age with freedoms and liberties of which their parents could have only dreamt, all South Africans now confront a 'thin' form of democracy in which, with the exception of local ward councillors, no putatively elected representatives at the provincial or national level are actually elected to office by the voters, but are rather selected by party officials. By producing disincentives for elected officials to learn too much about the needs and policy preferences of the voters, lest those opinions lead them into conflict with their party leaders, it also teaches citizens that active engagement with elected officials is not a rational use of scarce time or resources.

The closest thing we have to representative democracy exists at the level of ward councillors, who have greater scope to build up local fiefdoms based on the votes of the people in their wards. However, party discipline still affects ward councillors. Parties can still replace ward councillors who do not toe the party line. At all the levels above ward councillors, politicians are accountable to the party to a greater extent than they are accountable to the people who voted for them. In African countries that have more directly representative systems the sense of political participation is much stronger than in South

The youth have become less and less likely to vote relative to other South Africans

Africa. For example, when surveyed, 66 per cent of Malawians say that it is their job to watch over the Member of Parliament they elected. In South Africa only 14 per cent hold this view.

Reform of the political system would certainly strengthen South Africa's democracy, and could lead to young people using democratic processes more effectively to change things in their favour. We must remember, however, that in 2003 the Slabbert Commission, which was appointed by cabinet to draft new electoral legislation required by the Constitution, recommended changes that would make South Africa more directly representative. It is not in the interest of politicians to make such changes, so neither the ruling party nor those in opposition were prepared to pursue the recommended reforms. It is very unlikely therefore that any politician would implement such changes unless they were forced to.

## Participants responses

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Reform of the political system could lead to young people using democratic processes more effectively to change things in their favour

The presentations were followed by a vibrant set of discussions in which people from a range of backgrounds (*see list of participants on p8*) provided additional material, put forward other insights and debated policy implications. This section summarises the most interesting contributions and highlights the important issues that were raised.

### Making sense of young people's job search strategies

An important theme was the idea that many young people have no experience of working and often know very few people who have successfully looked for jobs. As a result, one participant claimed, 'young people do not know enough about how the job market works. They are mostly focused on what they do not want. Their aspirations are based mostly on not wanting the instability and struggle that their parents experienced. They want something better, but they have no clear idea how to get there.' Another participant worried that young people have not adequately understood that a job is 'part of an income-earning path that links the present to the future. Rather than only considering what a job pays in the present we need to find ways of making it clear that there is a connection between what a job provides in the present and what it means for a person's future prospects.'

On this theme, a participant argued that young people often decline to accept low-paid jobs because they see them as a trap. Once they are in low-paid employment, they believe, they will not be able to move up to better positions. Another participant made a similar point: 'The aspirations of young people are incredibly high. They do not aspire to working class positions. They aspire to non-menial jobs that offer stability. Many young people say that it is no use for them to take a part time job at Pick 'n Pay if they may lose their job at any time. They feel that such jobs would not get them anywhere. They would rather sit and wait until a job comes along that will allow them to create an adult life for themselves.'

One participant found this behaviour 'terrifying'. He said: 'Anything is better than waiting. If one takes on a low paying job or enrolls in a course, one benefits from new experiences, learns new things and meets new people. In this way new possibilities open up. A worrying aspect of South Africa's political system is that it promotes an external locus of control. It encourages people to wait for something better because it has become the responsibility of others to support them, to provide them with a job. We must

find ways to turn this around so that we promote an internal locus of control. We should encourage people to rely more on their own efforts. They should believe that they can change the world through their actions.'

Another participant pointed out that the problem might be that our labour market is too rigid to make the benefits of moving into bottom levels of employment very obvious. He suggested that there were two ways to improve the situation. The first is to loosen up the labour market so that mobility from one job to another, and from one employment level to another, becomes more likely. The second is to provide young people with information about the labour market, giving them a clearer picture of career paths, and of the importance of getting into the world of work and proving themselves within it.

A final insight on this theme was that the lack of connection between public sector and private sector jobs distorts incentives for young people. The public sector offers career paths that are based on seniority and on political connections. The private sector is much more likely to reward hard work, skills and accumulated work experience. At the same time, taking on a low-paid private sector job does not always enhance a person's likelihood of obtaining a public sector job. The opposite may in fact be true. This situation encourages young people to wait for a public sector job and to get involved in politics rather than the world of work.

## Support networks and unemployment

A participant pointed out that young people can refuse low paid jobs only to the extent that they have support networks to fall back on. As the unemployment crisis in South Africa persists and deepens, however, these networks must be coming under increasing strain. A factor that has delayed the inevitable collapse is the state stepping in, to supplement these community and family networks.

Another participant who has experience in other African countries argued that in contrast to most other states in Africa, the South African state provides some, albeit indirect, form of social security to young people while they are not working. Although the youth personally receive no welfare payments their ability to draw on the payments received by the elderly, for example, may create an insidious incentive structure. It possibly enables many young people to live their lives without worrying too much about being unemployed. This may help to explain why the levels of entrepreneurship seem to be much higher in other African countries.

Another participant felt that this issue needs to be researched. 'We know too little about the current incentive structure that shapes young people's choices' he argued. 'Once we understand the effects of our current welfare system better and see whether pension pay-outs and other grants, increase the levels of dependency in some of South Africa's poorest areas, then we can start to explore ways of changing the system to encourage more proactive behaviour. What is it about the current incentive structure that needs to change?'

This point was reinforced by the observation that 'we also need to know more about how the networks that provide informal unemployment insurance work' One could make the case that these support networks hold people back. Firstly, they create a sense of dependence amongst the unemployed. Secondly, they reduce the incentive to try hard, because if someone succeeds they become responsible for all those around who remain unemployed.' The participant then asked: 'Would the solution to this

Young people can refuse low paid jobs only to the extent that they have support networks to fall back on

problem be to create a formal system of welfare support, which would take the pressure off informal networks and provide more stability within which poor people could experiment with ways of generating their own income? Are there, furthermore, welfare models that create stronger incentives than the current welfare system to find work, seek training or start businesses?’

## Moral guidance and sources of information

The general feeling at the workshop was that we know far too little about the guidance that young people in disadvantaged areas receive as they struggle to make the transition to adulthood. A participant asked: ‘Are parents, teachers or the state assisting young people who are looking for answers? Are the youth drawing on community networks such as gangs; or the ANC Youth League? What role do churches play in this regard?’

This led a participant to ask a further set of questions. He pointed out that ‘when experts talk about the dysfunction of our schools and the fact that teachers do not teach, they normally focus on the consequences of this for educational outcomes. They should also think about how young people’s understanding of their place in the world is affected by this experience. For many students their sense of the schooling system, and possibly other bureaucracies (hospitals, the police), is that these are arbitrary systems that are corrupt and incomprehensible. How does this influence young people’s sense of whether they matter, and whether their individual choices will determine how their lives pan out? To what extent do people’s interactions with inefficient, arbitrary institutions give them a sense that the only way to get ahead is through luck, or through personal connections?’

The on-going role of churches and sports clubs as agents of socialisation has been neglected as an area of research

The discussion also highlighted the fact that the on-going role of churches and sports clubs as agents of socialisation has been neglected as an area of research. A pioneering study of the ‘lost generation’ of struggle and transition years showed how important these institutions were in the 1990s. The report showed that young South Africans were serious about religion. More than 50 per cent of women and 37 per cent of men attended services weekly. Only 9 per cent of youth said they never attended church at all. It also emerged that youth were three times more likely to be involved in a church (38 per cent) or a sport’s club (32 per cent) than in political organisations (12 per cent). Fifty three per cent of younger youth aged between 16 and 20 attended church once a week or more. It is unlikely that the attraction of churches for young people has lessened dramatically since the study was published, especially since research on the expanding Pentecostal denominations testifies to their role in socialising their congregations, for the job market among other things.<sup>16</sup>

## Youth politics

In response to Robert Mattes, it was pointed out that young people represent a group who could inject new ideas and new energy into our politics, but a coherent political programme has not crystallised around the youth. ‘There is no distinctive youth movement in South Africa, and, despite the high levels of inequality, the “occupy Wall Street” movement has not caught on here. A major problem is the extent to which the ANC Youth League has failed to really connect with young people, but continues to dominate the political arena. It has yet to be determined whether the kind of economic demagoguery espoused by recently dismissed ANC Youth League leader, Julius Malema, has significant resonance amongst young people. In terms of young people’s involvement in service delivery protest, youth are at

the fore in those protests, but rather than youth politics, these protests seem to be community politics in which community organisations organise and respond to local problems. The ANC Youth League draws on some of the energy generated by young people's sense of disenfranchisement and injustice, but rather than represent young people the leaders have focused on using the political threat that the youth represent to create a cash generator for themselves.'

## Key insights and policy considerations

The central message that came out of these workshops was that the entrenched problems that many young people confront are legion. It is difficult for individuals to overcome them on their own. Young people who live in poor neighbourhoods with bad schools and little support confront an economy that generates too few jobs. They struggle to access appropriate training opportunities to improve their employability, or set up their own businesses. They have no clear idea how to look for what jobs are available. They have little, if any, access, to social networks that could link them to job opportunities with their contemporaries, and their parents are likely to have been unemployed themselves for substantial periods of time. A growing number of young people are living in environments of multi-generational unemployment. As a result, the young people who find themselves in these situations are becoming increasingly resigned to never finding a job.

In this context, the government policies CDE reviewed appear to be having a very limited effect. Government-led initiatives implemented since 1994 have been marked by ambitious rhetoric that is often repeated, but only seldom converted into concrete youth-centred programmes. Even when programmes have been implemented their impact is not clear, which prevents government from strengthening the initiatives that work and withdrawing resources from those that have no or only a limited impact. Most importantly, while numerous youth agencies within government have proclaimed the importance of pressurising critical ministries into adopting a 'youth focus,' there is no indication that such a process has had any discernable impact on the way education, employment or growth policies have been formulated.

Young people do not always engage optimally with the opportunities that actually exist. The 'insiders' have better resources, better education and better connections, all of which helps them secure jobs more easily than outsiders. Insiders also have a better sense and understanding of how the labour market works. 'Outsiders' lack this knowledge and, as a result, often overestimate their chances of finding work. They use ineffective searching mechanisms, like sending out their CV in the hope that this will encourage someone to employ them. They give up on jobs because they do not feel comfortable in the work environment. They wait until they find an ideal job rather than gaining work experience in a job that is less than ideal while keeping an eye out for better opportunities.

There is evidence from both Cape Town and from rural KwaZulu-Natal that suggests that some young people – particularly, men – will not accept jobs that either pay too little or offer too little employment security. And the research from the rural KZN case study suggests that some of the unemployed will not take jobs which are perceived to provide insufficient income to establish a family and a household.

One question that arose is why people in rural areas are not moving to the cities more quickly given the profound lack of opportunity in these areas. In the northern KwaZulu-Natal municipal district

Young people who live in poor neighbourhoods with bad schools and little support confront an economy that generates too few jobs

of Uthungulu, for example, only 28 per cent of Africans from the ages of 15 to 65 have jobs.<sup>17</sup> In the neighbouring district of Zululand only 20 per cent have jobs. In the urban areas of Gauteng, where 47 per cent of working age Africans have jobs, employment prospects are significantly better. Why, then do people stay in the rural areas? One possibility is that the differences between employment prospects (particularly for recent arrivals from the rural areas) is not wide enough (or perceived as wide enough) to encourage migration. It may be, therefore, that if more jobs were being created in the cities, urbanisation rates among the young would accelerate dramatically. These, as well as many of the other issues discussed at the workshops, require further research.

Some workshop participants voiced the concern that young people will increasingly turn to the state for solutions and may become open to less democratic forms of government if the state does not deliver for them. However the research on political attitudes shows that young people are neither more nor less likely to call for authoritarian solutions than older South Africans. There is, nevertheless, a more general problem with democratic citizenship in South Africa. The country's proportional representation electoral system means that national and provincial representatives are chosen by their parties rather

than being directly elected. As a consequence politicians' loyalties are to the party head office that appoints them and can fire them. They are essentially therefore representatives of their party, not of their voters. One implication of this is that citizens come to understand that active engagement with elected representatives is not always a fruitful use of time and resources. It is hard to see how this will change in the absence of electoral reform. And with existing politicians and their parties having a vested interest in the status quo, reform will only take place if organised voters put the politicians under pressure.

This modest project by CDE reviewed government strategy with respect to 'youth' and 'youth strategy'. We did this by asking leading experts to present their research and holding two workshops with informed people. It has been a worthwhile and instructive exercise. Some ideas that are generally taken for granted have been undermined and the country's considerable lack of knowledge concerning how many young people are dealing with the challenges they face, has been striking.

There are more questions than answers at this stage. If South Africa really intends to look at the future through a 'youth lens,' as the National Planning Commission suggests, then there is a great deal more that the country needs to know.

There are many areas where more research is required. In particular, we need more extensive panel surveys that cover a full cross section of South Africa's diverse regions. For starters, an investigation in Gauteng, in Limpopo and in the Eastern Cape of the issues raised by the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal-based research presented by Seekings and White would be important steps in this direction.

More specifically, policy-related questions raised by the workshop discussion which require further investigation include:

Are young women and young men responding differently to the challenge of finding a job? If so, what factors explain these differences?

How do young people access local support networks and the government transfers that go to the elderly and single mothers? How does this affect family structure? Does this affect levels of participation in the labour force and the kinds of work that might be accepted?

If more jobs were being created in the cities, urbanisation rates among the young could accelerate dramatically

Where are young people finding guidance and information about how the world or the job market works? What is the role of religious as well as political organisations in this? In what way does a dysfunctional school system affect young people and their attitudes to adults and work?

How do young people learn about the world of work, and what opportunities exist to provide them with more effective information via radio and television, or through schools or through other organisations?

What is standing in the way of further urbanisation amongst young people trapped in rural poverty and unemployment? If staying in rural areas is more attractive than moving to a city, why is this so?

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We started this project wondering if there was a genuine need in South Africa for a specific youth policy or strategy. More research is needed before a definitive answer can be provided. However, there is a strong case to be made for developing and implementing youth-targeted support and training programmes in a more effective, impactful way. It is even more important to emphasise that core government departments must initiate a more effective schooling system and a faster growing, more labour intensive economy.

The extent to which a growing number of young people are stuck in an almost permanent state of unemployment is a massive social crisis that South Africa has to tackle on a number of fronts. It is critical to ensure that interventions in education, training, social support, finance and mentorship all focus on ensuring that young people are being provided with expanded opportunities to become part of – and to contribute to – the South African economy. Carefully-designed and rigorously-implemented monitoring and evaluation systems are needed to assess how effective current and future interventions are at connecting young people to real, sustainable economic opportunities. Thus, training programmes should be assessed to determine whether they have been successful in making unemployed young people more employable and whether they did, in fact, find and keep jobs. Such monitoring and evaluation exercises need to follow individuals for a period of time to assess how interventions have affected their long-term career prospects.<sup>18</sup>

Training programmes should be assessed to determine whether they have been successful in making unemployed young people more employable

The most important set of policy interventions required to change the prospects of young people stuck in multi-generational unemployment is to find ways of increasing the proportion of South Africans in wage employment. This is a youth intervention only to the extent that the 'youth challenge' makes expanding this form of employment an urgent priority. Internationally, the average percentage of adults who have jobs that pay a monthly salary is 27 per cent. In South Africa the average is 18 per cent. It may, therefore, be helpful to make our number one policy goal, shifting this proportion by 9 percentage points (which currently would mean putting 2,9 million additional adults into salaried employment). Although achieving such an outcome will not be easy, it may be more realistic than the goal of 'creating' all at once, the millions of jobs required to bring unemployment down to acceptable levels. The central idea is that by bringing South Africa in line with international norms, a range of additional economic activities will be stimulated. Putting a larger proportion of the adult population into stable forms of employment will lead to the development of relevant skills, a better understanding of how the economy works and more secure forms of income. Entrepreneurship levels are also likely to rise as South Africans acquire more skills, are better able to identify economic trends, and begin to operate in a more secure financial environment. Rising entrepreneurship levels will therefore produce a second round of employment creation.

More jobs will be created only once South Africa significantly raises the rate of investment, and removes the barriers that inhibit the creation of labour-intensive forms of employment. Rather than debating the means of achieving this outcome, our understanding of the 'youth challenge' leads us to conclude that all options that have a chance to stimulate an increase in wage employment in South Africa should be considered. The desperate situation confronting most young people means that as a country we cannot afford to be choosy about how we create jobs, or even what kinds of jobs we create. Rather than only creating jobs that match ideal, developed country standards, we need to focus on jobs that create an element of stability, are part of a dynamic, expanding economy, and which put employees onto a viable career path that takes them out of long-term unemployment.

Another policy focus suggested by the CDE workshops is to improve the fairness of the job-search process. To ensure that as many young people as possible are making informed decisions about how to find work and keep it, we need to develop policies and institutions that will help 'outsiders' compete more effectively against 'insiders'. Numerous policy ideas flow from this observation. CDE research has already pointed to the importance of large, well established 'labour broking' firms in helping 'outsiders'

gain a foothold in the world of work, albeit in temporary forms of employment. In the same report CDE also found that government programmes like the National Youth Development Agency's JOBS placement programme – although operating at a small scale – are helping young people find suitable forms of employment.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, CDE has supported the implementation of a wage subsidy for young people as this should encourage employers to take a chance on inexperienced workers who may otherwise be stuck in unemployment.<sup>20</sup> This could also help reduce the gap between what employers can pay and what young workers hope to earn, thereby getting young people into work while providing them with the pay level they see as necessary to move out of dependence and into adulthood.

As a country we cannot afford to be choosy about how we create jobs

At the workshops a number of local and international programmes were outlined which try to give young people exposure to work and career options while they are still at school. One participant argued that, while some initiatives already exist, more extensive programmes should be developed through which young people in schools spend time in places of work, where they will receive mentorship and a sense of the effort required and the opportunities offered within actual careers. Another participant lauded a programme in the Northern Cape that 'links schools with businesses and other service providers, social workers and community support workers.'

The programme takes children from grades 10, 11 and 12 on holiday jobs, helping some to work their way up into the system and find viable career paths.

A government initiative that has the potential to strengthen young people's links to the world of work is the idea of setting up 'job centres'. Such an initiative was recently launched by the Gauteng Provincial Government (SEE BOX on p31).



## 'JOB CENTRES': A PROVINCIAL INITIATIVE WITH POTENTIAL?

The first of twenty planned jobs centres was launched by the Gauteng Provincial Government on 23 July 2012. The aim of the centres is to provide 'an affordable, safe and efficient way for job seekers to connect with employers.'<sup>21</sup> Although the locations of the job centres has not been confirmed, they will be in areas such as Thembisa, Alexandra, Khutsong, Kagiso, Mamelodi, Diepsloot and Siculo in Midvaal.

The first centre, the Lulaway Job Centre near Alexandra, is targeting young people who regularly use internet cafes in the area. Businesses are able to view CVs on the job centre portal and can advertise vacancies. Once loaded onto the system, the job-seeker has a CV generated for them, together with supporting documents which include identification documents, residence permits and educational certificates. Potential employers who register on the site can then make selections from these CVs for interviews.<sup>22</sup> This is all done at no cost to the candidate.

In addition, a non-governmental organisation, Batataise, has been tasked with giving young people who use the centre life skills training and assessments. The assessments include testing basic numeracy and English language skills. Importantly, potential employers are able to develop and supply further tests that they would like potential candidates to take before they select them for interviews. It is reported that more than 107 companies having pledged their support for the project, although it is unclear which companies these are. The two major companies that are already using the centre to employ young people are Dis-Chem Pharmacies and Bidvest Prestige Group. Vacancies range from cashiers to drivers.

Gauteng's job centres initiative will likely only make a small difference (the province's goal is to register and train 8 000 young job-seekers by 2013), and there is the danger that the centres will become just another inefficient government bureaucracy that young people are asked to engage with. However, the fact that employers are involved and can use the centres to get a better sense of the capabilities of potential applicants suggests that they at least have potential to reduce the distance between chronically unemployed young 'outsiders' and the labour market.

The key is scale for all these ideas. While experimentalism is desirable, such an approach can only have an impact if it is linked to effective monitoring and evaluation and a clearly defined strategy of withdrawing funds from those programme that don't work and scaling up those programmes that do.

## Concluding remarks

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Young South Africans need jobs. This means that they need the economy to grow faster, with more labour intensity; they need much better education and tertiary training opportunities; and they need a labour market regime that encourages employers to take a chance on them. These are not outcomes that 'youth policy' interventions can generate. They are, instead, the purview of economic, education and labour departments. The job of youth organisations, in this respect, is to ensure that the policy discussions within these departments are taking young people's needs for more jobs, better education and working labour markets into account. The size of South Africa's youth unemployment is great

and the potential consequences of getting this right or wrong are enormous. A cabinet-level focus on addressing the challenges faced by young people is, therefore, appropriate and desirable.

Large numbers of economically sustainable jobs are the only way we can absorb young people into the economy and start to change their lives. But, in addition to expanding young people's opportunities, there are a number of issues we need to take into account that relate to the way in which young people are coping, or trying to cope, with unemployment. The research available shows that attitudes are an important factor at play, that education about labour markets and the world of work are vital, and that 'becoming adult' is an attitudinal and policy issue that needs to be talked about in rural and urban South Africa.

There could be an important role within all this for accountable youth organisations with a practical advocacy orientation. They can become more vocal in promoting the interests of young people with respect to labour markets, the education system and the economy. In addition, these organisations should be promoting experimental ways of providing young people with mentoring, training opportunities, linkages to the labour market and useful work experience. Such programmes exist, but they tend to run on a small scale and their impact and cost effectiveness is seldom properly assessed.<sup>23</sup> Experimental programmes are required that start small, are rigorously monitored and evaluated and are then scaled up on the basis of their demonstrated success. These principles should apply to all programmes, regardless of whether they are implemented by government, civil society organisations or the private sector.

## Notes

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