

Research Article

What Works for the Youth: Analysis of Youth Employment Policies in Rwanda

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Abstract

In Rwanda, over 75 percent of youth are not in education, employment and training (NEET). These are mostly absorbed in the informal sector that provides little or no protection to workers against shocks, and are prone to several socio-economic, technical, and financial constraints. Through desk review of existing policies and studies, key informant interviews (KIIs), and focus group discussions (FGDs), this study reviews and analyzes the existing youth employment policies (YEPs) and interventions with intent to identify the hurdles and outcomes of the actual implementation of these YEPs in Rwanda. Youths aged 18 to 30, policy makers, policy implementers, and implementing partners were the key target respondents. The study finds a multitude of YEPs and interventions to promote youth education and skilling, entrepreneurship, and business development funding; though most of them are more focused on supply than demand-side of the labor market, with limited vulnerable youth inclusivity. Common hurdles encountered during implementation of YEPs include: poor coordination among the vast YEPs causing monitoring challenges both at national and district level, and duplication of services. Difficulty to integrate education and skilling into decent youth employment, matching labor laws with youth welfare, cultural bias limiting young women from participating in some labor market activities, funding gaps, and limited youth engagement during program design. Addressing these challenges requires a well-coordinated stakeholder engagement, and strong collaboration between the public and private sector, as well as civil society organizations.

Keywords

Youth Employment Policies, Youth Labor Market, Supply-Side, Demand-Side, Youth Employment, Rwanda

1. Introduction

One-third of Africa's 420 million young people aged between 15 and 35 years are either unemployed or vulnerably employed causing massive emigrations to developed countries, constant looting, local insurgencies, and cases of terrorist activities (ILO, 2020b). Only 1 in every 6 youths is in wage employment (ILO, 2023c). Out of 10-12 million African youth who enter the workforce each year, only 3 million formal jobs are created annually [1]. About two in every five

young people of working age are in some form of employment in Africa translating into youth unemployment ratio of 3:5. In 2023, about 11.2 percent of the African youth aged between 15 and 24 years old were recorded as unemployed [2]. Majority of Africa's youth have no choice but to either work informally, or take up vulnerable employment. This makes many youths remain in poverty due to lack of decent salaried jobs that offer social safety net [3]. In partnership with many

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development partners, African governments are implementing youth-skilling programs to address unemployment challenges [1]. What young African people need most is well-functioning labor markets with decent job opportunities along with quality education and training opportunities for those yet to enter the market [3].

Rwanda is a member of the International Labor Organization (ILO) and subscribes to the values and principles of ILO's constitution, which provides for "the prevention of unemployment and underemployment, and provision of adequate living wage". Rwanda ratified the 'Employment Policy Convention' No. 122 of 1964 in August 2010, which is a most significant instrument from the perspective of the objectives and goals of the national employment policy (NEP). Rwanda is also a signatory on the ILO's decent work and global employment agenda. Together, these call for an integrated approach to employment promotion with interventions on the demand and the supply side of the labor market, and at macro and sector levels, with the aim to improve both the quantity and quality of employment. Amongst the non-YEP policies that may be influencing youth labor market outcomes include: the Vision 2050, National Strategy for Transformation 1, small and medium-size enterprise policy, made-in-Rwanda policy, education Sector Policy (2003), education sector strategic plan (2018-2024), information and communication technology policy, private sector development strategy, and Rwanda trade policy. These are some of the most important public policies that provide a framework for YEPs, plans and strategies that affect youth labor market outcomes [4]. These policies are not in isolation but are aligned with ILO and other regional, continental and international conventions including the SDGs, International Gender Equality, Social Inclusion and anti-discrimination policies.

Rwanda has maintained an impressive macroeconomic performance since 2000 [5] with GDP growth averaging 7.5 percent and per capita GDP more than doubling from US\$404 to US\$818 [6]. Despite of this, the economy has not generated enough formal and decent jobs to absorb the country's large and growing youth population [6]. In response to lack of formal jobs, many youths have turned to self-employment, though three in four youths are employed informally [7] with over 75 percent of youths in informal sector [8, 9]. Between 2019 and 2022, youth unemployment rate averaged 23.41 percent far above the global average of 13.6 percent (ILO, 2020a).

Non-farm work opportunities provide better youth transition pathways out of poverty in Rwanda because on average, salaried youths earn Rwf. 1629 per day which is double the daily wage for youths working either within their own household farm, or those employed as wage workers in the agricultural sector [10]. Unemployment in Rwanda is mostly urban-based. Achievement of national employment targets requires a credible and comprehensive pro-employment policy framework that addresses macroeconomic, structural and labor market policies. Youth population (16-30 years) in

Rwanda has a median age of 19 years. Female youth have a high share of youth not in employment, education or training (NEET), with female employment to population ratio of more than 14 percentage points below that of their male counterparts. NEET rates are also much higher amongst young people with disabilities of both sexes [11].

Among the key constraints in Rwanda's labor market include low levels of educational attainment, inadequate strong technical skills, and poor alignment between attained skills and market needs [12]. Transition from school to work was problematic because of skills gap [13]. Improvements in outcomes from youth skills development are only meaningful when it is accompanied by a large number of young people across diverse socioeconomic contexts entering the labor market; including: in-school and out-of-school youth, urban and rural, male and female, and marginalized youth [14].

1.1. Purpose of the Study

This study was set to review existing YEPs in Rwanda and to explore how best the existing youth labor market challenges can be addressed particularly cognizant of the marginalized categories of the youth (persons with disabilities (PWDs), the internally displaced people (IDPs), refugees, and young women)).

1.2. Objectives

1. To review the existing YEPs and interventions in Rwanda's labor market.
2. To identify the hurdles and outcomes of the actual implementation of YEPs in Rwanda.

2. Methodology

Investigation used a purely qualitative method with 3 approaches: desk literature review, key informant interviews (KIIs), and focus group discussions (FGDs). Interviews and youth group discussions were conducted within the twenty three (23) districts of Rwanda. The study employed purposive sampling technique. Inclusion of the district in the study depended on: first, being a secondary city (Musanze, Nyagatare, Rubavu, Rusizi, Huye, Muhanga); second, within the city of Kigali (Gasabo, Kicukiro and Nyarugenge), third, being a setlight-city (Bugesera, Rwamagana, Kamonyi), and fourth, 11 rural districts (Ngoma, Kirehe, Kayanza, Gicumbi, Burera, Gakenke, Nyanza, Nyamagabe, Nyamasheke, Nyabihu, Ngororero).

2.1. Desk Review of Documents

Existing YEPs, strategies and interventions from: policy reports, laws and labor market regulations, and academic documents were reviewed. This led to formation of section 1 of this report.

2.2. Key Informant Interviews

Interviews were held with policy makers and implementers of employment policies at the national and district levels including: private sector organizations, civil society organizations, Youth led organizations. Respondents were selected based on their level of authority, decision making, technical expertise, and implementers of policies assumed to have highest influence and interest on youth employment. Study questions were set for the policymakers in charge of em-

ployment programs, policymaker in charge of labor inspection, and district officers in charge of the youth, women affairs, people with disabilities, and those responsible for the internally displaced persons. Questions about the nature of the program, participant selection criteria, participation of external partners, program evaluation, implementation hurdles, measures to address the hurdles, and youth experience with the program were asked. A total of 82 interviews were conducted for this purpose: 13 for policy makers at national level, and 69 at the district level as indicated in [Table 1](#).

Table 1. Sampling of the key informants.

Key informants	Number of participants	Gender		Location	
		M	F	U	R
Ministry/ Institution level		M	F	U	R
Ministry of Public Service and Labor	3	3	0	3	0
Ministry of youth and culture	2	1	1	2	0
National youth Council	2	2	0	2	0
Rwanda Development Board	2	2	0	2	0
Ministry of Commerce and Industry	3	3	0	3	0
Labor unions	1	1	0	1	0
Sub total	13	12	1	13	0
District level officials					
Directors of employment and entrepreneurship	23	20	3	12	11
District labor Inspectors	23	21	2	12	11
District Youth, Sports and Culture Officers	15	15	0	6	9
District youth coordinators	8	8	0	0	8
Sub total	69	64	5	30	39
Total	82	76	6	43	39

Source: Field data

2.3. Focus Group Discussions

At district level, young women and men (16-30 years) were rallied into group discussions. Purpose was to find their views on how the existing YEPs has helped them. Lived experiences including youth with disabilities, those who are internally displaced, and those under the category of the historically marginalized people were captured. This covered 114 participants from 14 FGDs from the 23 districts in Rwanda. Stratified random sampling to ensure inclusion of all categories of

youth was used to make 14 FGDs with a total of 114 participants in the entire 23 districts in Rwanda ([Table 2](#)). Each FGD was comprised of 6-10 young women and men. In total, there were 58 (50.8 percent) young men and 56 (49.1 percent) young women. Out of this number, 36.7 and 60.5 percent were respectively from urban and rural areas, 56 (49.1 percent) were aged 26-30 years while 58 (50.1 percent) were aged 16-24 years. Persons with disabilities were 14 (12.28 percent) all from rural setting. Internally displaced people were 8 (7.01 percent) all from rural districts. The historically marginalized people were 7 (6.1 percent) and refugees 6 (5.3 percent).

Table 2. Sampling strategy for participants in the FGDs.

Category	Gender		Location					
	Male	Female	Urban		Rural			
All youths	Location				Age category			
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Youth 16-24	Youth 25-30	Youth 16-24	Youth 25-30
	32	26	37	19	24	21	34	35
Sub total	58		56		42		69	
Total	114		114					
Persons with disability	12	0	2	0	0	0	3	11
Total	14		14					
Internally displaced youth	4	0	4	0	0	0	3	5
Total	8		8					
Historically marginalised people	4	0	3	0	0	0	5	2
	7		7					
Refugees	4	0	2	0	0	0	5	1
Total	6		6					

Source: Field data, 2022

3. Findings

3.1. Youth Employment Policies and Strategies

Since 2000, Rwanda put in place many policies and strategies aiming at increasing decent employment and particularly, for the youth. Below, is an overview of some of them.

3.1.1. The National Youth Policy (NYP)

In 2015, NYP was put in place to absorb new entrants into the labor market focusing on: youth education and skilling through technical vocational education training (TVET) especially for young women; and youth employment, productivity, and economic empowerment, particularly in the Green Economy. It recommends public and private employment support services including professional training, entrepreneurship, access to finance, and the use of new technologies. It envisions the development of an ICT innovation and policy strategy to improve access to ICT facilities, digital literacy, and promote innovation for job creation [15].

From KIIs, VUP targeted creation of 3.2 million jobs by 2020 from the 200,000 in 2000. In regard to skills development, by 2020, over 449,244 households had benefited from classic public works while 84,962 households had benefited

from extended public works. In regard to creation of decent and productive jobs, the target was to create 1,500,000 jobs which translates into over 214,300 jobs annually. For the years 2017/18 through 2019/20, the average achievement rate was 75.3 percent [9]. In terms of effectiveness, VUP succeeded significantly. The program is monitored by local authorities.

3.1.2. The Private Sector Development and Youth Employment Strategy (PSDYES)

PSDYES was established in 2018 to: provide entrepreneurship skills in carpentry, welding, electronic repairing, artisanal production and tailoring; youth start-up capital for MSMEs in form of subsidized loans; and to facilitate access to employment information to reduce the cost of [19].

3.1.3. National Agricultural Policies (NAP)

The NAP was established in 2018 to recognize the importance of agricultural skills development and incentives for agribusiness entrepreneurship in generating decent rural jobs and income for women and youth. The policy puts emphasis on skills development, youth entrepreneurship in the agri-food sector [20]. Under NAP, there is also the Agriculture Gender and Youth Mainstreaming Strategy (AGYMS) established in 2019 to ensure that women and youth have improved

access to knowledge and services, enjoy equal participation in value chains, and work in collaboration with men to improve agricultural productivity and economic empowerment. Key strategic actions being emphasized are: financial services, markets and value chain representation, extension, support, inputs and technologies; institutional mainstreaming; and empowerment and decision-making [21].

3.1.4. The National Employment Policy (NEP)

The 2019 NEP is a revision of 2006 NEP with general objective to improve work productivity by delivering a better synergy between education and employment. The mandate of this policy is “to create sufficient and productive jobs in order to reduce labor underutilization and enhance productivity and competitiveness”. Unlike the more supply-side based NEP 2006, the NEP 2019 is more demand driven. It intervenes on entrepreneurship promotion and access to finance by the youth, women, and people living with disabilities [22].

3.1.5. Education Sector Policies (ESP) Related to Youth Employment

Established in 2003, the mission of this policy was to combat ignorance and illiteracy and to provide human resources useful for the socio-economic development of Rwanda through the education system. The major aims of education and training were: 1) to give all Rwandan-women and men, girls and boys-the necessary skills and values to be good citizens, and 2) to improve the quality of human life through the formal and informal education systems at all levels [29]. Later, other related policies were brought on board as highlighted below:

- 1) Technical Vocational Education Training (TVET) Policy (2008) had three objective to provide the economy with qualified and competitive workers and to train citizens able to participate in sustainable growth and poverty reduction by ensuring training opportunities to all social groups without discrimination including the marginalized groups such as; early school leavers, out-of-school youth and demobilized soldiers to re-enter the world of work; elder workers and unemployed to adapt to technological progress and new occupations [26]. The Workforce Development Authority offered certificates to Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) students who qualified over the last three years. A total of 51,851 students who completed in the academic years 2011, 2012 and 2013 had never got their certificates. A total of 25,941 of them were females, representing 50.03 per cent [17] and got jobs after completing six months of work place learning.
- 2) Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) of 2013-2018 and 2018-2024 premised on strengthening Rwanda's education system to produce a ready workforce, as well as upgrading the skills and competencies of the existing workforce to meet the labor market demand [30].

- 3) Workplace Learning policy (WPL) of 2015 was enacted focusing learners in the higher institutions of learning and TVETs. Key considerations are: industrial attachment, internship, apprenticeship training, TVETs in companies, and company-based (skills upgrading) training [16, 17]. Through field KIIs, it was revealed that Industrial attachment facilitated 1,850 apprentices to acquire hands-on skills and experience from companies. Out of 4,535 graduates who enrolled in professional internships in the formal sector, 62 percent were retained for employment in host institutions. For TVET Certificate I, students spend 1,200 internship hours in companies, 2,400 hours for TVET Certificate II, and 3,600 hours for Certificate III, 4,800 hours for TVET Ordinary Diploma and between 6,000 and 7,000 hours for the Advanced Diploma.
- 4) The National Skills and Employment Promotion Strategy (NSEPS) of 2018-2024 aimed at providing the workforce with labor market relevant skills, and access to quality employment under three pillars: skills development, employment promotion, and job matching. Each pillar has programs with specific interventions. Skills development focuses on the delivery of TVET and higher education relevant to the labor market. Employment promotion aims at promoting business growth to create employment opportunities, through access to markets, finance, business development services, and labor market analysis for SMEs. Job matching provides evidence-based workforce planning and job matching to inform the skills development strategies, including a “Global Talent and Opportunities Program” to share the talent and experience of the Rwandan diaspora and foreign citizens [18].
- 5) The Special Needs and Inclusive Education policy of 2018-2024 aimed at ensuring quality, equity, and inclusion education. It is in harmony with the National Policy on Disability and Inclusion. Since then, the number of learners with disabilities accessing education has increased from 23,492 in 2019 to 30,803 in 2021. Likewise, the number of trained teachers on special needs and inclusive education increased from 3,398 in 2017 to 12,501 in 2020/21. The remaining challenge is the low enrolment rate in the pre-primary which the Government is strengthening by constructing Early Childhood Center at each village-formal and home based, as well as increasing well trained teachers every year [31].

3.1.6. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

The program targets unskilled and semi-skilled people, who wish to professionalize their occupations. It is implemented in partnership with PSF and Workforce Development Authority. RPL covers hairdressing, auto-mechanics, carpentry, construction, garment and textiles-tailoring among others. The program involves a short-term training for not more than a month after which, beneficiaries are assessed and

certified for formal labor market. From KIIs, this initiative enrolled 17,000 beneficiaries between 2014 and 2018 and 40 percent were women though most of them were in the informal sector.

3.1.7. ICT Sector Strategic Plan (2018-2024)

The ICT Sector Strategic Plan (2018-2024) set up to fast-track Rwanda's transformation to a knowledge-based society. The target was to create 100,000 ICT-related youth jobs by 2023. This involved boosting youth employment and careers in ICT, digital skills development, digitalization of public services, and stimulating entrepreneurship. This plan does not include expansion employment opportunities to young persons with disabilities and young women [25].

3.1.8. The National Labor Mobility Policy

This was established in 2019 to allow young graduates to profit from foreign employment; promote safe and legal labor mobility, and minimize negative effects of irregular migrants, enhance skills transfer and remittance, contribute to the generation of stable jobs that are productive and adequately remunerative with core purpose to reduce unemployment among young graduates. The policy includes developing financial support schemes for youth to develop skills, conducting short-term vocational training in high-demand skills within foreign labor markets, formalizing skills acquisition through apprenticeships [27].

3.1.9. Revised National Gender Policy (2021)

In 2021, this policy came up to overcome the gender divide in the labor market, and promote women employment. It aims to strengthen and extend capacity development programs for women and girls, while also identifying, documenting and addressing gender and age stereotypes in the private sector. It also seeks to ensure a shared responsibility of domestic and unpaid care work between women and men [23].

3.1.10. National Policy on Persons with Disability

The 2021 National Policy on Persons with Disability (NPPWDs) targeting increasing the participation of PWDs in employment in all sectors, access to employment services and skills training, including in entrepreneurship, and improving their access to finance for self-employment. This policy does not contain any specific provisions for youth with disabilities and has limited gender [28].

3.2. Key Youth Employment Interventions in Rwanda

3.2.1. Vision Umurenge Program (VUP)

In 2008, Rwanda established VUP under the Ministry of Local Government within the Common Development Fund with different components including safety net, public works

for some wage income, health scheme and asset transfer. The safety net component guarantees unconditional monthly cash transfers to the extremely poor, most vulnerable households for their most basic needs. The public works component ensures a 4-5 hours per day part-time, multi-year, year-round employment to the vulnerable households with objective to alleviate extreme poverty. The health scheme component helps to provide health support to vulnerable pregnant women, new mothers and young children. The asset transfer scheme helps to provide small livestock (chicken, rabbits, goats and pigs); agricultural inputs (seeds, seedlings, and fertilizer); small-scale agricultural processing equipment including milling machines; and small equipment for off-farm micro-enterprise development like carpentry tools and sewing machines. Selection of youth participants in this program was based on being in Ubudehe (social strata) category D and E [11].

3.2.2. The 2009 Akazi Kanoze (AK)

Since 2009, the Akazi Kanoze (AK) program has been focusing on empowering youth with market-relevant livelihood skills, work readiness training, and business support. It collaborates with the Private sector, NGOs, and the government including Ministry of Education, USAID and other development partners. By 2011, it had reached over 220,000 in-school youth nationwide, trained over 700 teachers, directly supported 438 schools in the roll out of the new competence-based curriculum, supported 8,063 secondary students in gaining work experience through school-to-work learning opportunities, and has started 383 savings and internal lending groups in schools across Rwanda, with more than 8,000 students participating [33]. By 2021, the AK2 project had equipped high school and TVET students with market-relevant and transferable skills, and implemented school-to-work transition through work-based learning in 150 schools in Kigali and Southern Province (USAID Rwanda, 2022). An impact evaluation of AK2 students found that AK2 youth are 8 percent more likely to be employed after graduating second school than those that do not participate the program. Young women who participate in AK2 are 12 percent more likely to be employed than women who do not participate [33, 34].

- 1) The 2016 Huguka Dukore Akazi Kanoze (HDAK) which was established to provide learning and internship opportunities, entrepreneurship training and coaching, and access to financing, family planning, and reproductive information to Ugandan youth. Implementation was done in partnership with Education Development Center (EDC), USAID and the Mastercard Foundation. HDAK focuses on improving young people's work readiness skills and employment opportunities through accessing and sharing data on employment opportunities, building capacity of local organizations to deliver employment skills preparation and job intermediation services, training youth in relevant job skills for work and

self-employment, and growing the AK network of local youth-serving organizations and employment resources. Within the HDAK, service providers are elected to encourage youth participants in each training cohort to elect leaders. Youth leaders to receive extra training and resource support (such as a mobile phone and data packet) to take on an expanded role of gathering peers to exchange employment and entrepreneurship advice. Each training cohort to design and execute a youth-designed civic engagement project for their community as a way of solidifying their bonds, so that the support network continues after training through meetings and WhatsApp chat groups. As an outcome; within the first six months since 2016, more than 1,000 youth were offering each other peer-based mentoring, including business and employment support, under the guidance of 75 youth leaders (EDC, 2021). In the second year of its establishment, work readiness programs for vulnerable youth enrollment increased from 3,428 youth in the 8 districts to 15,850 youth enrolled across 23 of Rwanda's 30 districts. In 2018, HDAK trained 22 local organizations to assess and share local labor market data and deliver market-relevant employment preparation and job intermediation services as prerequisites to connecting vulnerable youth to stable work and self-employment [34, 35].

- 2) The 2020 Work Ready Now" (WRN) program. Due to Covid19 pandemic, HDAK project began a 5-year 'Work Ready Now" (WRN) program in 2020. It is a nationwide audio broadcasting of the WRN to train the youth in entrepreneurship-skills. This program was implemented by EDC, in collaboration with USAID, and other partners, targeting 40,000 Rwandan youth with market-relevant employability skills and links to job placement and self-employment; specifically, the youth from vulnerable backgrounds. By 2022, over 35,000 youth had been enrolled across the 25 districts in core activities of personal development, communication, job seeking, and workplace behaviors; as well as in complementary modules including civic engagement, digital literacy, health, and resilience [34]. From USAID-Rwanda evaluation, over 97% of Rwandan graduates met or exceeded employer expectations. Of those that found employment, 66% were hired full time [32] and about 8,220 youth received training on reproductive health and family planning as part of the WRN training.

3.2.3. Youth Friendly Centers

These centers were established to give young people access to computers with internet, digital skilling and entrepreneurship. Project implementation was in partnership with Ministry of Youth and Culture, Imbuto Foundation, UNICEF Rwanda, and DOTT Rwanda. These centers are operational in 10 districts of Kicukiro, Kayonza, Nyagatare, Ruhango, Huye,

Nyaruguru, Rubavu, Nyabihu, Gakenke, and Gicumbi districts. From this study's KIIs revelations, the project has benefited 299,210 young people, out of whom 62 percent were female. Participants who had never used a computer declined from 72 percent to 5 percent. Ability to network using these centers increased from 38 percent to 70 percent. Over 2586 youth were trained on personal empowerment, 70 percent of them being females. Only 1062 youth were trained youth on digital skills among which 62 percent were females; 105 youth-led projects were awarded a sum of Rwf. 62,000,000.

3.2.4. Youth and Women Cooperatives

These were established to jointly mobilize financial and training resources among the youth and women in partnership with the Rwanda cooperative agency, Ministry of youth and culture, and BDF. These cooperatives are a channel for capital and resource mobilization for business start-ups and job creation.

3.2.5. 'Hanga Umurimo' Program

Starting in 2011, this government program aimed at promoting and stimulating entrepreneurship development through provision of start-up capital from BDF. The project targeted MSMEs and was financed in partnership with Ministry of Commerce, BDF, Ministry for Trade, Private Sector Foundation (PSF), RDB, and Districts. The program targeted youths' investments in construction, ICT, and tourism.

Hanga Umurimo "job creation" project planned to lend money to the youth at lower than the normal rate at 10 percent. Consequently, about 3,000 new businesses and around 17,000 jobs were created [28]. Through FGDs with youth representatives, it was remarked that the leading challenge in implementing this program was limited Business skills leading to failure of many businesses and loss of capital. This discouraged banks and other micro finance institutions to give loans to young women and youth.

3.2.6. Youth Education, Apprenticeship and Entrepreneurship Services

The main objective of this intervention was vocational training and linking youths to potential employers. Job desks and entrepreneurship skilling were the key focus of the implementing partners: YES Rwanda, private sector companies, DOTT services, and MINICYOUTH. These services were introduced and managed through the Ministry of Trade and Industry, in partnership with RDB, the PSF, and the BDF. Key targets were youth and women projects. Through KIIs, the point on YEPs that enhance youth employability, education and apprenticeship was repeatedly mentioned. That by design, the program to enhance youth employability was implemented but has not had high positive impact. One informant mentioned that 'even though the government introduced workplace learning to deepen the linkage between the education sector and the world of work aimed at increasing

the relevant skills development through a strong partnership with the enterprises, very few youths have benefited from this initiative. That out of 4,535 graduates who were looking forward to acquire hands-on skills and experience from industrial attachment, only 1850 fresh graduates got connected and only 62 percent were retained for employment. This relatively a good indicator of enhancing youth employability. FGDs revealed various existing vocation in training centres: hairdressing, auto-mechanics, plumbing, construction, carpentry, garment and textile-tailoring, carpentry among others; many of them in informal sector, with limited opportunities to upgrade under formal education systems due to lack of suitable qualifications; and limited formal document to satisfy knowledge and skills competencies.

3.2.7. Businesses Development Fund

This program has 3 components: first, the proximity business advisors. This component support MSMEs through business advisory services. Two experts are deployed per district sector to help beneficiaries prepare feasible projects proposals for funding. Funds for successful projects are channeled through micro finance institutions and Saving and Credit Cooperatives-SACCOs. If the project is approved, SACCO commits 70 percent and the beneficiary pays 30 percent. Second, the tool kit loan facility. Once the beneficiary qualifies for the loan facility, the SACCO provides cash to purchase equipment or leased equipment to start own businesses. The beneficiary provides 25 percent full, but when the equipment is leased, the beneficiary covers half guarantee and the remaining part covered by equipment Third, the loan guarantee fund. The SACCO offers 75 percent of collateral to youth and women. From RDB report, this program supported creation of 5,400 businesses, 60,000 youth and women projects, 10,000 MSMEs accessed finance, and 4700 MSMEs acquired loans under tool kit facility [9].

3.2.8. Inkomoko Entrepreneurship Development

Started in 2012, the objective was to deliver financing to refugee entrepreneurs through fortified back-end technology at Inkomoko meaning “the origin”. The program offers business advisory, access to finance, and market linkages and supports entrepreneurs to create thriving communities. From one KII, the program has provided advisory services and more than \$7.7M of investments to small businesses, with more than half of clients being women refugees. It has spurred the creation of more than 35,000 jobs for all age categories mainly in Kigali. This program has helped integrate local people with refugee communities elsewhere in it exists including Kirehe, Gatsibo, Karongi, Rubavu, Nyamata, and Huye. It has supported small businesses to launch and grow and hire refugee colleagues to work alongside companies in Mahama, Nyabiheke, Kiziba, Kigeme, and Mugombwa refugee camps.

3.2.9. Employment Service Centers

These service centers provide job information to young men and women, run employment databases, provide free internet access, and organize readiness to work trainings to job seekers. When an opportunity occurs, qualified graduates

are placed for internship and or job placement. They are found in 3 provinces in Rwanda represented by Kigali, Musanze, and Huye [24].

3.2.10. Policies to Protect Youth Rights at Work

In response to Policies to protect youth rights at work (labour law), the government of Rwanda has implemented Incentive measures to ensure occupational Health and safety at the work place in Rwanda. For example, there exist Law N°01 of 17/05/2012: Ministerial Order determining modalities of establishing and functioning of occupational health and safety code Law N° 13/2009 of 27/05/2009 Law regulating Labour in Rwanda was adopted by parliament and sanctioned in 2009. This law governs labor relations between workers and employers as well as between the employers and the apprentices or the trainees under their authority as per contract. However, informal sector workers are not subjected to provisions of this law, except for issues relating to social security, the trade union organizations and those relating to health and safety at the work place. In particular, for legislation, youth from informal sector are frequently exposed to jobs associated with vulnerability income insecurity, without legal & social protection, no access to employment benefits and the poverty which has continued to affect them.

3.2.11. Programs for Vulnerable Youth (Migrant Workers, Refugees, IDPs)

Concerning programs for migrant workers, refugees, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), one key informant revealed that In February 2018, the government of Rwanda officially adhered to the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework, thus providing a favourable protection environment for refugees. For example, there is the de facto right to work, open borders, and access to durable solutions (resettlement, local integration, and return). In 2019, there were 15,222 Burundian and 18,030 Congolese refugee students integrated in the national primary and secondary schools, in line with the refugee integration process into their host communities. In 2020, Rwanda hosted 139,501 refugees, mainly from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (74,303) and Burundi (65,037), including 674 refugees and asylum seekers who arrived during 2021. Women and children make up 76% of the refugee population. Also, in 2020, 922 Rwandan former refugees returned home from the DRC.

3.3. Hurdles and Outcomes of the Actual Implementation

From both qualitative and quantitative evidence, this section presents two parts: critical evaluation of the programs, and hurdles encountered during implementation. On program evaluation, analysis was based on: how the program works, who the participants are, how they are selected, which group (s) is (are) over/under-represented, inclusivity-coverage of women, disabled persons, marginalized groups, and special interest groups like political parties and the private sector; existing reports on discriminatory practices, presence of external audits, and coordination among programs and gov-

ernment agencies.

3.3.1. Skills Supply-Demand Mismatch

Skills from education versus employable skills mismatch was mentioned by the majority of respondents in the KIIs and FGDs. For example, during FGDs, one respondent revealed there were certain courses in Social Sciences where graduates cannot find jobs. In addition, there is inadequate practicability in entrepreneurship trainings and have basic skills to perform well but it is very difficult to start their own businesses. As a result, most private companies recruit workers through head hunting and this creates a gap in transparency in recruitment process. A key education reform that has been implemented is the move away from curriculum-based towards Competence-Based Training is likely to address this matter. However, CBT needs to be enhanced through improved English skills to improve communications and delivery between lecturers and their students. In response to the Strategies in place to solve the challenge of education-employment mismatch, policy makers emphasized that by design, there are strategies to solve the challenge of education-employment Mismatch. However, it was emphasized that unemployment challenges in Rwanda consists of both educated and uneducated youths and the emphasis should be on programmes to provide uneducated young people with skills and incorporate them into the labour market. For example, unsuitable education combined with skills mismatches were 15.2 per cent of the youth not in NEET. Lack of experience accounted for 20.5 per cent while 11.4 per cent were the youth with unsuitable general education. Given that 30 per cent of the NEET youths lacked education, formal and non-formal, TVET and business training programmes in Rwanda need target not only young people who have completed school, but also youths who have dropped out of school or who have never had an education at all. This should be done to align education system with labour market requirements. However, the current status shows that though the supply of skills is increasing through training skills, mismatches are still existing due to lack of participation of private companies in skills development. Skills gap was repeatedly mentioned during both key informants and FGDs. The following is a replica of what some FGDs participants had to say:

“While at school, we are equipped with more theoretical knowledge, rather than having more practical skills, soft skills and ICT skills”. “Despite of having improved on vocational training, these technical institutions lack good quality technical trainers”. “Some of those who have been trained in entrepreneurship skills. capital limits their ability to kick start their own businesses into self-employment” “Most private companies recruit workers through head-hunting”.

3.3.2. Integrating Education and Training into Decent Youth Employment

Most of the programs were reported to be focusing more on education and training than decent work. However, most

respondents (policy makers, implementors, the youth and development partners) mentioned that there no minimum wage in Rwanda. This affects most youth, majority of whom are employed in informal sector which do not adhere to labour regulations, more so, occupational safety and social protection services.

3.3.3. Matching Labor Laws with Youth Welfare

The current minimum wage, set in the 1980s, amounting to 100RWF, is too low to support low-income earners given the current costs of living. This wage impacts not only to the youths but also employees in public and private sectors. In public sector, the least affected in terms of remuneration are primary and secondary school teachers as well as University lecturers.

“While a primary teacher earns less than 50 United States dollars per month, a university lecturer with a PhD earns less than 600 USD per month”in the informal sector, the most affected are the youths who work without contracts, sometimes, they do not know where to go when such a kind of thing has happened due to lack of information and guidance”.

3.3.4. Cultural Biases Limiting Female Youths from Participating in the Labor Market

Young women are disadvantaged while attempting to find jobs compared to men. In some cases, young women are barred from geographic migration say to cities for employment. Some parents take rural-urban migration as an excuse for participating in prostitution. Within an FGD, one responded had this to say.

“Even though there are some projects that would keep the youth out of extreme poverty, young women are not fully welcome in part-time jobs common in road maintenance, government construction projects in schools, ... Even when an opportunity comes, the cost of getting recruited is higher for young women than me.... there is never signed contracts”.

3.3.5. Funding Gaps

It was revealed during KIIs that most implementing ministries and districts often run short of funds. This has also affected monitoring and evaluation of program implementation to ascertain success stories, best practices and challenges beneficiaries encounter after graduation from the programs. Poor monitoring is also attributed to lack of coordinated database in most of the programs. This has affected traceability of beneficiaries.

3.3.6. Coordination Gap

Although the new National Youth Employment Policy was established in 2015 and registered a huge success to the policy makers, coordination mechanism is still a challenge. The coordination gap is exacerbated by duplication and fragmen-

tation of programs and initiatives which hinders centralized monitoring & evaluation. From KIIs, it was found out that the coordination mechanism in place does not have a data base, and participation of the civil society organizations in Joint Action Development Forums is not strong enough to cater for the needs of the youths. This creates a huge gap because beneficiaries after graduation are not followed up, no attempt is made by the local authorities and funding agencies such as BDF representatives in order to know their achievements, challenges or constraints as well as their future prospects. It was further revealed that there is limited coordination across all districts that were visited. Beneficiaries do not receive or get information in time about programs that support the youths in particular. However, Business development units make some follow ups on both Government programs and non-Government organization's programs simply because districts are mandated to show what was done annually under the arrangement of performance contracts. This is done by showing how much money was spent on a certain project or programs and beneficiaries in different sectors; agriculture, business, education, health, social protection programs and many others. The monitoring team is done on a monthly and quarterly basis and report to the district council.

3.3.7. Effectiveness of YEPs

Through FGDs, the response to the question on effectiveness of government policies to promote youth employment was answered in an affirmative no. That YEPs did not help them find a dignified and fulfilling job. That there was a problem of access to programs, lack of follow-up, lack of coordination between actors, and precariousness of the jobs obtained in terms of salary and social protection. For access to programs, many participants, particularly the vulnerable youth (disabled and refugees) felt more marginalized.

3.3.8. Online Jobs

Some other young men and women, explained that most of the information regarding job opportunities is posted online, while the digital divide is such that many youths cannot use these online platforms. Job in Rwanda is among other on-line service- centers where most of the jobs from the government and private sector post their different positions to be applied for. Many youths cannot visit the platforms due to lack of Internet access. While others reported that they were not aware of the existence of such platforms.

Others include:

i. Selection Criteria for Participation in YEPs

The common response was: 'you just have to be an unemployed Rwandan' though others mentioned that one must have connections with certain political leaders. Majority of young men and women with disabilities and refugees stated that they were not aware of the programs put in place by the government to promote youth employment.

ii. Level of inclusion

The extent to which all social strata are taken into account in YEPs, whether youth with disabilities, returned migrants, refugees and women are well included in employment policies was asked. Responses indicate that there is open discrimination and marginalization as attributed to: inability to move freely, low literacy rate, and limited digital skills.

iii. Consistency of YEPs with National Youth Programs

Through KIIs, it was noted that subsequent policies for youth employment have been consistent with the national youth policy strategy. For example, all subsequent YEPs are integrated and mainstreamed in key national policies and programs, including the four-year National Employment Program (2014 – 2018).

Sexual harassment and abuse were one of the mentioned challenges in accessing YEPs by some young women. On whether they knew of any policies or laws that promote the protection of women in the workplace, most responses from rural areas were negative.

Notable also, was that there is still insufficient decent work in the country for youth. Majority are engaged in subsistence activities, where labor law has not yet reached. As efforts are being made to put in place adequate employment opportunities for young women and men, the issue of decent jobs should not be left out. One angle through which this can be addressed is through revisiting the minimum wage and social security regulation in Rwanda.

From the KIIs, there is evident high political will in Rwanda to ensure that YEPs achieve their objectives despite of some evident implementation gaps regarding inclusivity, ownership, coordination and limitations in sensitization. For example, over time, annual performance contracts (Imihigo) have been a successful innovation. However, it was noted that different policy makers in the different government ministries tend to think differently leading to sabotaging some policies aimed at generating and sustaining jobs.

Appreciation was given to RDB for her role in designing and implementing YEPs in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Service and Labor, and Ministry of Youths and Culture. National leaders and the private sector were also noted to have helped in the implementation of the YEPs. Local administrative entities at all levels participate in the mobilization of the youth. Youth volunteers who are deployed in all administrative entities have also helped. Donor influence and development partners work together through collaboration and partnership with the government in most YEPs to find solutions to problems being faced by the youths in general.

4. Conclusion

The proportion of the young people who are below 30 years old is 65.3 per cent of the entire population (NISR, 2022a). This large size of youth labor force may still require skilling and employment. Since 2000, there have been a multitude of YEPs and interventions implemented in Rwanda; some of which are linked to International Labor Organization stand-

ards, SDGs, Rwanda's vision 2050 and the VUP and Rwanda's broader national development policy targets.

Interestingly, these numerous interventions are marred with poor coordination causing monitoring challenges both at the national and district levels, and duplication of services. It is still difficult to integrate education and skilling into decent youth employment. Other noted huddles included: difficulty in matching labor laws with youth welfare, cultural bias limiting young women from participating in some labor market activities, funding gaps, and limited youth engagement during program design.

Addressing these challenges requires a joint, well-coordinated stakeholder engagement, and strong collaboration between the public and private sector, as well as civil society organizations and development partners. Future inquiry should venture into the nexus between youth aspirations, size of informal sector, and cross-border youth mobility in relation to youth labor market demands. This subject matter might enlighten us more about the plight of the youth in NEET.

Abbreviations

BDF	Business Development Fund
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
IDPs	Internally Displaced People
ILO	International Labor Organization
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
MSMEs	Medium, Small Micro Enterprises
NEET	Not in Employment Education and Training
NEP	National Employment Policy
NISR	National Institute of Statistics and Research
NPPWDs	National Policy on Persons with Disability
PSF	Private Sector Foundation
PWDs	Persons With Disabilities
RDB	Rwanda Development Board
TVETs	Technical and Vocational Education Trainings
VUP	Vision Umurenge Program
YEPs	Youth Employment Policy

Author Contributions

Kibs Boaz Muhanguzi is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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