



CHAPTER IV

YOUTH AT WORK

Young workers: makers and breakers

Work is central to young people's well-being. It is, of course, a requirement for income generation, but it is also a key to advancing broader social and economic development. At the individual level, a job has a direct effect on each person's self-esteem, family life as well as relations with other people. A badly paid, dangerous job at which workers' rights are not respected will have a negative effect on personal development and relationships and will fail to contribute to the development continuum.

"The key to solving problems of social exclusion and poverty is employment[...] employment is the source of social inclusion in all sorts of ways, providing not just income, but security, self realization and self esteem for workers who are organized and represented"; such is the meaning of "decent work." This statement, made by Juan Somavia, the International Labour Organization's Director-General, to the Group of Eight Labour Ministers at a Conference in 2000, is even more pertinent today than 11 years ago.¹

Decent and productive work is thus at the centre of youth transitions into capable adulthood. The clear message from young participants on the e-discussion platform during week IV was this: job conditions for young people are difficult due to the economic crisis and, as Hasan from the Maldives said, "political chaos makes it hard for youth to be independent and live their dreams!" A lack of meaningful job opportunities (for growing youth populations) is contributing towards stagnation in the transition from youth to adulthood. For many cultures and young people, having a decent job is one significant marker towards becoming an adult.

Sadly, much of the critique of the perception of youth in Africa as "Makers and Breakers" (in a seminal book by the same name²) remains pertinent today. What is more, this dualistic view of young people as both innovators and destroyers is not just symptomatic in Africa (although it has particular post-colonial dimensions there), but it is widespread throughout the world. For youth, it has meant that opportunities to engage in meaningful discussion with policymakers, and to have a voice in decision-making, have been few and far between.

There are many examples of promising current work in the field of youth policy and practice on job creation and decent work, such as the work by Youth Business International (YBI), Ashoka Youth Venture, Spark, the Youth to Youth Fund and Edgeryders³ (a European Union-funded initiative), to name a few. Furthermore, various United Nations entities, including the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT), the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) are all engaged in important work on

¹ International Labour Organization, *Communication and Public Information*, 2000

² De Boeck, Filip, and Alcinda Honwana (2005). *Makers and Breakers: Children and Youth in Postcolonial Africa*. London: James Currey.

³ To read a spontaneous blog about the United Nations e-discussion from Edgeryders, see: <http://edgeryders.ppa.coe.int/blog/2011/11/young-people-talk-employment-at-un-online-forum/>

youth development in general, with a major focus on employment, in close collaboration with other United Nations entities as well as youth-led organizations.

Challenges remain, however, especially real inclusivity and scale. But more than that, how we perceive new ways of working and living must be confronted collaboratively – through youth-adult partnerships and open minds. One such example on new ways of living and working was broadcast on the BBC World Service in November 2011: “The Great Reset.” This programme addressed the view that opportunity, creativity and innovation arise from great economic crashes/depressions. Indeed, a comforting perspective in times of great changes.

Unemployment yes – but what about underemployment?

From 1 to 7 November 2011, week IV, the e-discussion platform was open to all to discuss their experiences at work. The e-discussion invited the views of young people aged 15 to 30,⁴ as well as representatives of youth-led organizations. More than 180 comments were posted by young people from more than 76 countries across the globe. There were at least 690 people who accessed and viewed the e-discussion during the week. In addition to the e-discussion platform, there were also postings/uploads onto the United Nations International Year of Youth Facebook page, and a live question and answer Twitter session with United Nations Youth Champion, Monique Coleman, and Special Adviser to the United States Secretary of State on Global Youth Affairs, Ronan Farrow.

This chapter explores the quality and conditions of jobs held by youth, and how young people’s working situation interacts with their family and home lives. While many examples were shared of young people pursuing entrepreneurial endeavours, the overall consensus was that there is a growing frustration: not only with a lack of jobs, but also a lack of engagement. The fact is that many young people need to be both listened to and collaborated with by governments and the private sector regarding job creation and workers’ rights. Participants were asked, “Have you influenced any educational or employment policy forums? If so, how did you go about this and what were your successes?” The response to this question was a resounding silence. Discussion and debate with constituents on matters that affect them, such as decent work, is a constitutional obligation for many Member States which have adopted the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. But more than that – it is effective policymaking.

⁴ This takes into account both the United Nations definition of youth (15- to 24-year-olds) and many local cultural contexts and understandings.

Some of the most insightful posts on the e-discussion platform follow.

In your country, can you provide any current examples of how young people are approaching – and faring in – entrepreneurial activities?

- Several participants from Europe and Africa commented that they are currently self-employed and running their own businesses. According to Solomon in Ghana, *“lots of young graduates are starting their own companies, especially in [information and communication technologies] ICT and are making great strides.”* This trend seems to be increasing among urban youth who are graduating from colleges and universities and finding it hard to secure permanent employment. Dirk from the Netherlands told us that, *“website development, as well as social businesses in Middle Eastern countries, are creating employment”* for young entrepreneurs.
- In the Dominican Republic, Maria painted a complex picture: *“Many of the private universities in the Dominican Republic offer programmes within their curricula through which students receive sponsorship to begin their business. Such new businesses fall into the categories of restaurants, entertainment, retail and technology. Since such youth are exposed to a higher level of education, they are better prepared to approach entrepreneurial activities than youth in the lower-income class.”* However, she goes on to say: *“for youth in lower income classes [...] microfinance organizations have been increasing rapidly, and they facilitate the process of borrowing money to these [...] classes, allowing them to develop their business ideas. Many businesses such as small convenience stores, hair salons, drug stores and art shops have been able to develop due to the loans received from microfinance institutions.”* Indeed, it is often the young men and women who have left school in order to generate extra income (to help their parents) who run most of these businesses.

ON THE UPSIDE

- Pooja from India informed us that young people in the tribal area of Chindwara are finding employment through silk production:

“Silk production is a new way for them to be employed. Tribal young farmers are earning a huge amount of money through silk production. The plan was started in villages in the year 2007 and it has changed the lives of farmers. They are getting Rs. 50,000-60,000 per acre. The Silk Department is providing free plants and financial support to tribal farmers.”

- There is some degree of policy and programme support from governments: one of the examples quoted by Rachelle, 23, with Taking It Global in Canada, is the Canadian Youth Business Foundation, which *“offers young entrepreneurs aged 18-34 mentorship, learning resources and start-up financing. Since 2002, the Foundation has helped young Canadians start more than 4,000 businesses and created 18,000 jobs.”*

- With regard to policy development, Hira, 22, from Pakistan highlighted the Government of Pakistan’s recent development strategy, the New Growth Strategy. She informed us that:

“This strategy talks about productivity, market reforms, creative cities, connectivity and infrastructure and youth engagement as essential pillars of a new growth model. Youth entrepreneurship is a major pillar in the framework and an implementation plan is currently being developed.”

- Sergio Iriarte Quezada, week I’s moderator and Knowledge Management Officer for the International Labour Organization’s (ILO) Programme on Youth Employment, reminded participants this week of the ILO’s Know about Business (KAB) initiative. Sergio informed us that:

“It aims to foster positive attitudes among young people towards enterprise development and self-employment. It also creates awareness of enterprises and self-employment as a career option for young people in secondary and vocational education, and provides knowledge and information to start and operate a successful enterprise. KAB is a training programme for trainers and teachers in vocational education, secondary education and also higher education for young students between ages 15 and 18.”

- According to Evona from Cameroon, *“the only way to solve the unemployment problem [...] is the creation of small and medium enterprises.”*

ON THE DOWNSIDE

- Several young participants expressed concern about their government’s commitment to providing opportunities for both rural and urban youth in terms of trainings, education and employment. Indeed, several young people suggested that governments should act proactively to ensure that young people are given the opportunity to be hired by private companies. Alejandro, 22, from Mexico believes that, *“[The United States and] U.S./Mexico can help by facilitating [...] youth participation [in the job market], because most of the youth are not given the right opportunities to express their skills, knowledge, talents and creative skills.”*

- Participants shared the view that there are bottlenecks associated with starting one's own business. According to Solomon from Ghana, these include *“finances, office space, and tax requirements, which should be addressed proactively. If this is done, a lot more young men and women will strive to be innovative and generate incomes for themselves!”* Other challenges experienced were limited access to information, funding and support from donor agencies, international development organizations, governments and academic institutions.
- Ayshah, 26, from Kenya was keen to tell us that many young people are embracing the issue of self-employability and entrepreneurship, but:

“The major issue is lack of capital to expand their business or even start their business due to high interest rates offered by the banks here in Kenya. As far as microfinance is concerned, the intake of loans by young people is low compared to adults, [who] repay their loans more quickly than young people, despite [...] the government’s [...] youth fund. [...] The terms and conditions [associated with the fund] scare us away - like collateral. Surely, where else - but from our parents - can we get [collateral]?”

Tweet Corner

Selection of some of the tweets from week IV

RT @UNpYouth: [In Ghana, lots of graduate youths r starting their own companies, especially within ICT] /Solomon <http://t.co/jTufqfgG> #youthjobs

RT @UNpYouth: [In Senegal, young people without higher education r more involved in entrepreneurial activities] says Amadou <http://t.co/Y5IHHqhp>

In your view, when it comes to gaps in decent work for young people, what are some of the major issues facing them - is it working conditions, worker rights and/or income concerns, or perhaps something else?

- The clear message from young participants was this: job conditions for young people are difficult due to the economic crisis and, as Hasan from the Maldives said, *“political chaos makes it hard for youth to be independent and live their dreams!”* One of the main concerns that Rachelle, 23, from Canada highlighted was, *“for young graduates coming out of university*

or college [...] the large amount of debt due to student loans. While they are eager to enter the workforce, concerns of paying off their debts may force them to take on jobs that are either outside of their field or do not pay as much as they should.” In addition, participants also pointed towards the lack of information and resources available for young people about starting up businesses/organizations, including information on business development loan schemes.

- Ayshah, 26, from Kenya raised these concerns: *“Young people work tirelessly and the pay they get for their work is little compared to those permanently employed. These days, many organizations and institutions are using internships to fill gaps that are void, thus saving resources. Very few young people are satisfied with their careers because of high competition and lack of suitable jobs in the country.”*
- Maria from the Dominican Republic, believed that: *“Income concerns are what create one of the major gaps in youth employment in the Dominican Republic. Since the economic condition of the country remains unstable, young men and women worry about the salary they will receive when they start working, and mostly, will this be enough for them to sustain themselves. According to the Labour Ministry and different labour unions, the minimum wage is set in three stages, ranging between approximately US\$150 to US\$350, which is not enough to cover the basic needs of a household. A large number of the youth in the Dominican Republic have to use their income either to cover their expenses or to partially pay for their education. It is worthy of mention that most youth enter the job industry in the middle years of their education in order to be able to pay for it. Dominican youth are worried about being able to grow economically in the country, and also worried about how they will be able to keep up with the country’s high cost of living.”*

In your current job, what are the opportunities for advancement (including recognizing leadership and innovation)?

ON THE UPSIDE

- Enock, 28, from Uganda is currently working as a volunteer with the Uganda Red Cross as a peer educator. He is unpaid, but he does believe that his efforts have helped him *“learn new skills and make new friends.”* He has been given on-the-job training, which is enhancing his skills and enabling him to take on more responsibilities.
- For Maria from the Dominican Republic, most of her work experiences have been in her area of interest – marketing and public relations. Although she has not secured a long-term job, she says *“internship experiences have allowed me to observe and learn about the opportunities in the market.”* Currently, Maria works for the non-profit sector, conducting marketing through social media, and she believes there are many opportunities in this sector for young people.

- Rachelle, 23, from Canada is working part-time as a publicist/marketing lead for a mobile advertising company and interning as a communications coordinator at a Toronto non-profit organization. According to her, she has *“learnt a lot from these two positions and [...] been given ample opportunity to take on more responsibilities. While the wages aren’t the best, I am ready to take pay cuts since I don’t have responsibilities such as family or mortgage, etc.”* Rachelle has received on-the-job training, which has enhanced her skill set, and she tells us her *“work in both jobs has been recognized on a regular basis.”*

ON THE DOWNSIDE

- Erasmus, 23, from Zambia said that his current job does not provide any opportunities for advancement because it is in the informal sector. He cannot advance in his position, *“because the money I get is minimal, and with that money I can hardly save up for college education.”* He went on to say that, *“the management in the office does not listen to my ideas because of my lesser experience and qualifications as compared to the permanent staff in the office.”*

Share with us your personal experiences of working in the informal economy. What have been the benefits and the challenges?

- Precious, 26, from Nigeria said that although she does not have personal experience working in the informal sector, she does work with youth both in school and out of school who do have such experience. *“Some youth are doing well, depending on their location and the amount of resources invested in the business they are working in. While for others the benefits they acquire are helping them build their own skills.”*

Precious went on to say: *“Some of the challenges they are facing include: 1) For one domestic worker, lack of trust by the owner (of the place), which hinders a proper relationship; 2) Lack of funds to equip the informal [business], thereby making the work hectic and cumbersome; 3) Over-use [exploitation] of youth working in this area, because there are few benefits; 4) For street vendors, one of the major challenges is the [...risk of falling] sick, because of the working environment [and the lack of safeguards].”*

- Lody, 25, from Cambodia reminded us of the gender inequalities that persist, commenting that: *“Young women are doubly affected as they face not only lack of opportunities, but poor quality of work, especially in the informal [sector] – characterized by low wages, less secure employment, and [often limited] representation.”*

Vote Corner

If you were the Chief Executive of a large foundation, where would you spend your money in order to increase and improve youth employment, both within and beyond your organization?

The top three recommendations selected from the e-discussion platform and voted on by participants on the International Year of the Youth Facebook page were:

- 1) Open up vocational training institutes for both rural and urban youth (64 per cent of votes)
- 2) Focus on empowering youth through small grants (19 per cent of votes)
- 3) Sponsor secondary education for marginalized young people (17 per cent of votes)

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE SAY

- Shruti, 24, from Mumbai, India, said that if she was a Chief Executive, she would invest within her organization *“in building youth ambassadors [...] who have been-there-done-that and can prove a good role model for the students/youth outside my organization. [Each of] these youth ambassadors would be responsible for mentoring at least one underprivileged young person.”*
- Karuna, 23, also from India said that she would create a paid internship programme for fresh graduates within her organization. *“Paid internships can help with both a decent income and experience. Outside the organization, I would promote corporate social responsibility strategies and create capacity-building and skills development courses and workshops for young people.”*

Several of the other recommendations included:

- Invest in social businesses led by and focused on employing young people
- Invest money in improving community relations and employment opportunities for young graduates
- Provide field-specific scholarships for college and university students

- Invest in a strong internship programme that would recruit new graduates to work for my company for an extended period of time; for example, the Ontario government has a highly selective and popular two-year internship programme, after which young people get to work with Ontario ministries (Canada)
- Create a pool of funds to invest in young entrepreneurs
- Align scholarship opportunities to communities; decentralize opportunities to universities or private businesses and allow them to select the candidates
- Invest in information and communication technologies and provide leadership opportunities to young people through trainings in the private and non-profit sectors

How have your job and working conditions affected your family life and well-being? Including your relationships with parents and siblings and/or your own children and spouse; age of marriage and starting a family; living arrangements; etc.?

- Karuna, 23, from India focused on her relationship with her parents, telling us, *“it has changed”* since she finished her studies and started working. *“It’s now awkward to ask for money from my parents. While I am earning, some of my friends are not, and they are graduates. They face the same problem with their parents and minor discussions on money do crop up.”* According to Karuna, joblessness implies *“a lack of financial resources - which implies stress. And speaking of health, my job has provided me with a good health insurance package that has helped me a great deal! I feel more secure about my health.”*
- Rachelle, 23, from Toronto, Canada said that her work has *“not really impacted”* her family life. Yet, for the most part, her work means that she *“is rarely home and, at times when I am at home, I am doing work.”* Ideally, she would prefer not to take her work home. She feels lucky to be living with her parents since she is not paying any rent, and because of this she has been able to save money to further her education. Prior to her current two part-time jobs, she was working full-time in a work environment that she found stressful and did not like. *“I would much [...] prefer working in my field in various capacities than staying at one job that I hated for the rest of my life.”*

How are you promoting and raising awareness about green jobs?

- Enass, 25, from Jordan emphasized that the profile and potential of green jobs needs to be raised:

“We can ensure that graduates and other job seekers will be looking for environmental sustainability courses and trainings in order to be able to meet new job demands. At the same time, training centres and other educational institutions will provide this instruction and, as a result, this will increase the awareness about green jobs.”

- Several participants also recalled the importance of advocacy, such as creating online blogs to discuss and highlight development issues related to the June 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio+20. In addition, in October 2011, the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) held a workshop to showcase the green projects of young environmental leaders from 18 developing countries, thus contributing towards raising the profile of young activists.
- Michael, 23, from Italy commented that, *“in relation to Rio+20, the World Esperanto Youth Organization co-authored a document to help guide the compilation of the zero-draft of the final outcome document, as [the Organization is] convinced that social equity is a key part of sustainable development.”*
- Dirk, Youth Delegate of the Netherlands to the United Nations, shared: *“I am part of the global youth movement that is trying to push the Dutch ministry and opinion leaders towards progressive, ambitious, just and socially sustainable goals at the Rio+20 summit. Let’s see what this youth movement can achieve!”*
- Esther also informed us on the Facebook page of the 6th annual African Economic Conference on the theme, Green Economy and Structural Transformation. Esther posted that *“African youth call for the development of green job opportunities within the African green economy agenda and the promotion of African youth entrepreneurship. Youths insist that the jobs created remain with indigenous African youth.”*
- Sarah, 24, from Kenya provided some examples, commenting that she has been involved in the Youth Agency for Development of Science, Technology & Innovation (YADSTI) and Rotaract, whereby she is giving back to her community through tree planting. *“At a time when the Mau forest [...] was almost destroyed due to massive deforestation, under YADSTI we went to the forest and planted more than eleven hectares of trees!”* There are several green entrepreneurial activities in Kenya at present, including by the Youth Entrepreneurship Facility, a partnership among the Africa Commission, the Youth Employment Network and the International Labour Organization.

- Participants also discussed other activities that bring in income through green jobs, such as mushroom farming, bee keeping and fruit harvesting. For example, there is an emerging market in Nepal's farming sector for medicinal herbs and trees.

Are you involved in any philanthropic work?

The posts received on the e-discussion platform focused on personal stories of philanthropy. They included:

- Kayode from Nigeria, who leads a team of young people between the ages of 18 and 35 at the organization, Joint Initiative for Development, expressed concern that:

“Nigeria’s unemployment figure stands at 21 per cent, with youths forming the largest percentage. Nigeria stands to benefit from a huge number of young [people in the] workforce in the next 30 years if, and only if, these youths are engaged effectively and given opportunities. Currently, the number of graduates turned out from our institution is growing [in] negative proportion to the number of available jobs. The private sector is unsatisfied with the quality of graduates.”

- Nanteza, 26, from Uganda is with the National Youth Empowerment Network. She works with young people to help them *“sustain themselves and [emerge from] poverty.”* Among the various undertakings of the network are the Wagari Girls project, Kakunyu brick making project, a nursery and primary school and a football academy. Nanteza told us:

“The Wagari Girls project was started to empower the girl child [through developing] various skills such as making tablecloths, mats, beads, cards, polythene bags, baskets, necklaces and bangles. And the Kakunyu brick making project was started to help the young men and boys in this village. This project has taught the boys various skills such as making bricks, tiles and ventilators out of clay. The project involved 15 boys, [who] sold 20,000 bricks [...] One of the young boys of this project, Richard [...] has started making his own bricks and he is in the final stages of the process.”

- Amadou, 24, from Senegal shared that he has co-created – with a group of students – an association called *“Action-Etudiant pour la petite enfance”* (Student Action for Early Childhood). The main objective of this association is to support a rural nursery school near the university. Amadou collects money to buy notebooks, books and pencils for the children. He also organizes entertainment activities for the children such as the annual *“Holiday for Hope,”* and, in 2010, he organized a medical visit for rural children who lacked medical care. Through collaboration with the university hospital, these children are now being treated at no cost.

Twitterview with

United Nations Youth Champion, Monique Coleman, and Special Advisor on Global Youth Issues to the United States Secretary of State, Ronan Farrow

United Nations Youth Champion, Monique Coleman (@gimmemotalk), and Special Advisor on Global Youth Issues to the United States Secretary of State, Ronan Farrow (@RonanFarrow), were hosted by the United Nations Focal Point on Youth for a one-hour Twitter interview on: twitter.com/UNpYouth. Youth from around the world posed questions to the special guests about various aspects of youth employment. Monique and Ronan both encouraged decision-makers to “do more” and “partner with youth!” Some of the notable quotes from Ronan and Monique included:

Ronan Farrow on disability

@amdia More countries must adopt legislation protecting disabled. @StateDept has office on this issue. Check @Disabilitygov too. #youthjobs — @RonanFarrow

@amdia Grew up w/ disabled siblings & disabled joblessness is key concern for me. It should be for world too; untapped workforce. #youthjobs — @RonanFarrow

On strengthening the youth agendas of donors

@nicolashepherd Need strong message from key donors to partner w/ youth, respond to youth populations. Current action not enough. #youthjobs — @RonanFarrow

On youth engagement

Great to hear twittocracy out on #youthjobs. More work needs to be done – but clearly we have tremendous energy in this community to do it. — @RonanFarrow

Monique Coleman on livelihoods

@gimmemotalk what are the baby steps to recognize our own value and potential? #youthjobs — @sanrarefira

@sanrarefira 1st discover your passions! Your true interests always lead to a positive outcome #youthjobs — @gimmemotalk

@sanrarefira 2nd figure out what you’re good at & work to get even better #youthjobs — @gimmemotalk

@sanrarefira Lastly, marry the two. See how your passions and skills can be applied toward social change #youthjobs — @gimmemotalk

Some of the notable comments sent to Monique and Ronan by young people included:

@gimmemotalk I totally agree. we have to 'demonstrate' and not 'talk' that investing in girls pays #youthjobs — @ESTHERCLIMATE

@Karanja_Anthony @gimmemotalk many economists & philosophers agree that work is one way we naturally express our inherent value. —@ LEROYLAMAR

@UNpYouth @gimmemotalk @ronanfarrow @GirlUp low self esteem of the youth undermines their potential mentorship can help overcome #youthjobs —@NICOLEMWAYNE

@rajneeshb MDGs will address the illiteracy part, but we need to factor individual gov't participation in ensuring quality edu #youthjobs — @ KARANJA_ANTHONY

We as #youth have opp to effect positive #change... so let's shake up status quo. I think the world will listen! Eh @RonanFarrow? #youthjobs — @ ERINSCHRODE

CHAPTER CONCLUSIONS

Despite the global financial turmoil, and the huge concerns many young people have regarding their future job opportunities, many youth out there are makers – not breakers. This is evident on many social networking sites, such as Youth Partnership, One Young World Chad and Africa Youth Day 2011. While it is difficult to ascertain the level of impact, there is hope.

According to the majority of participants on the e-discussion platform, there is a growing swell of young entrepreneurs starting small businesses; some out of choice and others out of necessity. Maria from the Dominican Republic reminded us that youth “*exposed to a higher level of education [...] are [more likely to be] better prepared to approach entrepreneurial activities than youth in the lower-income class.*”

One such young entrepreneur is Awa from Cameroon, who shared with us his vision:

“I created a social enterprise in 2009, Impact Creators, and I have been delivering trainings on personal development in different institutes of higher learning. One of the recent programmes we want to implement is called Career Orientation and Development + Skills (CODES). The general objective of the programme is to train (coach) the students and young professionals on personal and professional development. Using the career development cycle, we have identified different training topics that will be developed and delivered, as we contribute to bridging the gap between school and the world of work. Impact Creator’s SHINE (Share Information Network) platform will then serve as an interface between the beneficiaries and career-related scholarships, fellowships and job opportunities, inter alia, at the national and international levels.”

Having said this, times are very tough: participants expressed concerns over job insecurity, lack of engagement with policymakers, rising living and business costs, and paying off student debts – to name but a few. The clear message from young participants was this: job conditions for young people are difficult due to the economic crisis and, as Hasan from the Maldives said, *“political chaos makes it hard for youth to be independent and live their dreams!”*

Indeed, Juan Somavia, the International Labour Organization’s Director-General, reminded us at the beginning of this chapter: employment is the source of social inclusion in all sorts of ways, providing not just income, but security, self-realization and self-esteem. This decent work agenda has all sorts of wider implications for society. Its antithesis – a lack of meaningful job opportunities – is potentially very destructive; at both a personal and a societal level. Hence, a lack of decent jobs is currently contributing towards stagnation in the transition for young people from youth to adulthood. Having a decent job is one significant milestone towards enabling a young person to become an adult change agent and an active citizen in their community.

@netalejandro reminds us of the potential of young philanthropists and entrepreneurs, and leaves us with this thought:

“Just as business entrepreneurs create and transform whole industries, social entrepreneurs act as the change agents for society, seizing opportunities others miss in order to improve systems, invent and disseminate new approaches and advance sustainable solutions that create social value in different kinds of services or products.”

CASE STUDY

Hira, 23-year-old woman from Pakistan

Spending my adolescent years in rural Balochistan, and my adulthood in urban Lahore, opened my eyes to new insights about attitudes and living styles of my people.

My father, a civil servant, was required to move around different areas of Pakistan as part of his job, which led to frequent changes of educational institutes at a young age, which was difficult for me to get accustomed to. This shifting between locations did, however, allow me to observe cultural differences between urban and rural places in my country. These differences were sometimes quite significant; in Balochistan, women would hide themselves at the slightest breach of privacy, whereas in Lahore, they would confidently fight to gain the space to be heard.

This experience exposed me to problems that were common in the transition from adolescence to youth, which was often associated with emotional stress. For example, I was unable to focus on my

studies due to the frequent change of learning environments. As a 9th grader, my anxiety found a vent in an internship at a local hospital in Lahore, where I met women and children deprived of their basic needs. Deeply grieved, and although I could do little to change their situation, I felt overwhelmingly thankful for being born in a more progressive family, where women are allowed to study and work.

Nevertheless, six months later, I started volunteering in development work for children in Pakistan, which eventually opened a great opportunity for me to intern with an international development organization in New York. There, I became inspired by the potential of leadership. When I returned home, I continued to volunteer with a youth programme there in addition to working in my first paying job. This made me feel empowered and trusted by my colleagues at the programme, as I introduced activities and projects for young people. Through this voluntary work, I realized that empowerment is necessary for young Pakistani women and men to progress in life.

I travelled the world and met similar young people who were doing greater things and making a greater impact. This inspired me, at the age of 21, to co-found a non-governmental organization (NGO) called Youth Dividend. The NGO was created with the idea to embrace youth empowerment and participation in formulating policies that define their future.

Establishing Youth Dividend and getting it running was not easy. I was introduced to hundreds of hurdles in registering the NGO, so the processes took a long time. No work could be done without sitting for ridiculously long hours in registration offices, and having to establish contacts with big bosses. Added to this were issues around the induction of volunteers, who did not agree to work without monetary compensation, as well as challenges related to mobilizing funding and managing operations while also working full time.

During the first few months, I ran the organization's operations through savings I had made from my salary. I connected with NGO partners through online blogs, and created a pool of advisors for the NGO through networking while participating in conferences.

All of these experiences taught me that nothing in life comes easy - where there is passion, there is struggle, and where there is struggle, there are great results!

After more than 4 years working in the development field, I am now pursuing a graduate degree at Cornell University. I felt the need to attain higher education to access good academic mentoring and to expand my horizons, and eventually to make a difference in the lives of people at the policy level.

Additional resources

International Labour Organization (2007). Toolkit for mainstreaming employment and decent work. Geneva: International Labour Organization. Available from http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/pardev/download/toolkit_en.pdf

Network for Youth in Transitions: current resources on youth and livelihoods. For more information <http://networkforyouthintransition.org/forum/categories/youth-and-livelihood/listForCategory>

Road to Rio plus 20: global youth mobilization initiative working towards the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Brazil in June 2012, Rio+20. For more information www.roadtorioplus20.org

The 5th Global YES Summit (Rework the World): focus on youth entrepreneurship. For more information <http://www.reworktheworld.org/Projects/tabid/595/Default.aspx>

Van der Geest, Kees (2010). Rural youth employment in developing countries: a global view. Rural Employment - Overview/Synthesis, #1 (March). Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Available from http://www.fao-ilo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/fao_ilo/pdf/Vandergeest_2010_RurYouthEmpl_150_ppi.pdf

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