

Bertelsmann Stiftung (ed.)

Work in the Developing World

Future Challenges Reader Volume 1



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Bertelsmann Stiftung
Future Challenges

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Foreword

Future Challenges is a project of the Bertelsmann Stiftung in Gütersloh, Germany and the Bertelsmann Foundation in Washington, DC, with the support of the Rockefeller Foundation. We are a global network of young authors, activists, academics and observers who work to illustrate how complex our modern world really is.

Creating a sustainable future for as many of the world's inhabitants as possible is an admirable goal, but this goal will slip ever farther out of reach if we do not learn to embrace the complexity of the challenges ahead. We must ask ourselves not simply: What the best way is to ensure our safety? Instead, we must begin to ask: What is the best way to ensure our safety while managing changing population trends, providing high-quality education to as many people as possible, and ensuring that the benefits of economic globalization reach deep into our societies? We must demand that our political leadership takes the same approach. If we attempt to tackle our most difficult challenges alone, independent of one another, any solution that we devise will be unsustainable, sabotaged in the long term by unintended consequences that spill over from other issue areas. On the other hand, if we learn to think about our greatest challenges as part of a connected web of issues, all of which have meaningful impact on one another, we may begin to identify solutions that are robust and long-lasting.

This first Future Challenges Reader covers the topic of employment in the developing world, a subject that requires us to think about demographic change, education and economic globalization. It is no easy subject. The co-authors of our lead article, Arrianna Coleman and Intellectap, a consulting firm in Mumbai, India, advocate a multi-layer policy framework to support increased employment in the developing world. Our network of authors shares responses to these ideas from Pakistan, China, the United States, Germany and sub-Saharan Africa.

We hope you'll enjoy this first in a series of Future Challenges Readers. To get involved with the program or to give feedback on what's written here, please visit our website (futurechallenges.org) or contact us directly.

Enjoy!

Work in the Developing World

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The need for quality employment in the developing world underlies the success of almost every other development initiative. Job creation has become one of the most pressing issues on the road towards fueling the economic engine and impacting complex and intertwined poverty issues such as education, nutrition, health care and housing. Without the possibility of a stable, reliable income, there is little chance for the poor to engage in sustained solutions that will improve their circumstances.

A million per month

Job creation, however, is only one side of the equation. **A report** released in December by the World Bank (WB), entitled ‘More and Better Jobs in South Asia’, says that a comprehensive and multi-sectoral policy framework will need to be implemented in order to meet the “demographic dividend” opportunity. This “dividend” is the return on the region’s swelling youth population and the opening labor market for women – South Asia has the second-lowest female participation rate in the world – that will continue to enter the workforce until 2040. The challenge will be to engage these new employees in “rising levels of productivity”, and the report warns that, “an estimated 1–1.2 million new workers will join the labor market in South Asia every month over the next few decades – an increase of 25–50% over the historical average.” This means that a million new jobs need to be added each month in order to “sustain economic growth and reduce poverty in South Asia,” says **an article in The Hindu**.

This chronic need for employment opportunities is seen throughout the developing world. In 2005, **Africa’s youth unemployment reached 21%**, higher than the world average of 14.4% and second only to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region’s 25.6%. Youth unemployment in Africa is a problem of alarming proportions precisely because 65% of the continent’s population is under the age of 24, with over 40% of the total population below the age of 16, and about 25% aged 15–24. According to the **International Labor Organization (ILO)**, young people make up approximately **36.9% of the total working-age population**, and three in five of Africa’s unemployed are young people.

Rujak Juhi Ragusa.

Photo by Tommy N. Armansyah
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While many developing nations have enjoyed economic growth, the benefits of that growth have not been distributed evenly and the high proportion of unemployed young people undermines further economic growth. In addition to the economic costs of youth unemployment there is also the social cost – as young people face long-term or cyclical unemployment they can become disaffected and alienated from their own communities. This can lead to higher crime rates and greater involvement in underground economic activity, as well as social unrest.

A multi-layered policy framework

The governments of the developing world are faced with the task of creating an environment where the labor force can be expanded, upgraded and ‘modernized’ at the same time that new employment opportunities are developed. In order for this to happen, the comprehensive framework will need to address a range of issues, from infrastructure deficits to nutrition shortfalls and education gaps. “In the absence of such a framework, productivity will grow slowly or remain stagnant and the dividend will go uncashed,” says the WB report.

Nutrition, for example, is highlighted by the WB study as a major obstacle to a healthy and productive labor force. Pakistan has lower rates of stunting, underweight and wasting than India and Bangladesh, but its numbers are still higher than in sub-Saharan Africa: In Pakistan, 31% of children under five are underweight; in Bangladesh, the number jumps to 40%; and in India, it is 44%. A comprehensive nutrition program often goes hand-in-hand with an increase in school attendance and performance, and this at a time when the education system must step up to prepare students to think critically, analytically and creatively to fill spots in an upgraded job market. Moreover, given that people between the ages of 15–34 have an average of only 7.1 years of education, “There is a stark contrast between increasing demand for higher levels of education and the educational attainment of the workforce.”



School children in Uganda.
 Photo by Commonwealth Secretariat
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It can seem all but impossible to tackle such large-scale problems, but by breaking them down into their constituent parts a real change can be made. For example, a 2008 **WB report** entitled ‘Youth and Employment in Africa: The Potential, the Problem, the Promise’ indicated that access to education was still a major hurdle. Looking closer it was found that school fees in Kenya and Uganda were too costly for poor families, and as a result enrolment rates were low. By eliminating school fees Kenya and Uganda were able to increase completion rates for fourth and fifth graders from impoverished families.

Another factor – particularly in rural areas – is the the proximity of schools. The cost (especially in terms of fuel use) of getting to and from school is prohibitive to many parents, but local community transport initiatives can help to overcome this problem. In short, it is possible to take small steps that help to make education accessible in the short term, and in the longer term improve the quality of the developing world’s workforce.

The skills of work

But even if children can get to school and are in a condition to learn once there, the developing world’s enormous jobs challenge will require an additional layer of training beyond foundational education. Skills training programs can provide tailored, specified classes to enhance the qualifications and preparedness of the workforce, particularly for the informal sector, where women and poor youth are in great demand.

While the government of Pakistan has included skills training in a number of different policy initiatives recently – casting vocational skilling as a political priority – there is a “very large gap between the government’s aspirations and the current realities,” says a **UNESCO report** on

Blanket factory, Grazalema, Andalusia, Spain.

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boosting enrollment in technical and vocational training (TVET) in Pakistan. “The TVET sector across Pakistan faces many challenges, spanning issues to do with the quality, quantity and relevance of TVET.”

In Bangladesh, while the need is imminent for a national initiative to meet the massive demand for training the poor to move them into the formal labor market, there is a need for an alternative platform for bringing together the public and private sectors, as well as NGOs, working on training initiatives. Major donor institutions such as the Asian Development Bank, WB and European Union have entered the skills training arena in Bangladesh. But they’re far from finding a satisfactory solution; “lack of adequate human resources, coupled with fragmented institutional structure, is a major hindrance in articulating consistent and cohesive policies in the domain of skills development. As a consequence, the NGOs and private sector initiatives have also become disjointed and dispersed, and lack synergies of impact.”

Initiatives such as that launched by a Swiss-based organization, **Swisscontact**, which aims to contribute to poverty alleviation by promoting economic and social development in Bangladesh, have been working on research and testing an enabling environment that would bring greater scale potential to the sector. One of the organization’s projects, **SkillMark**, focuses on developing and strengthening the market for skills development for unemployed or underemployed poor youth by piloting different business models that demonstrate market-based skills training solutions. The project was launched in January 2009 and will run through December 2013. Swisscontact says that despite a youth population (age 18–35) of 49.5 million, only 3% of the entire population in Bangladesh is enrolled in vocational training. Clearly, we have only begun to scratch the surface of this problem.

Meeting the challenge

The challenge over the next few decades for developing nations is vast and complex. However, population demographics are working in favor of a successful outcome if a coordinated, sustainable and, most importantly, cross-sectoral approach is hastily implemented. As nations across the Global South grow economically we must be mindful of the fact that growing GDPs are not synonymous with shrinking levels of socioeconomic inequality. In fact, John Githongo, chief executive of Inuka Kenya Trust and chairman of the Africa Institute for Governing With Integrity and Kenya's former secretary for governance and ethics, points out that **as growth speeds up, so does inequality.**

So it's not enough for jobs to be created – they must be the right type of jobs, filled by the right type of workers. And for that to happen we need to start now, because as the WB's report remarks, "The policy reforms required to boost job quality are desirable irrespective of the demographic transition. But the window of demographic opportunity lends urgency to the agenda, especially given that policies take time to bear fruit."

Job Creation Must Tap the Potential of the South Asian Youth Bulge

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As the most populated region in the world, South Asia can also boast the highest number of young people per world region as well, and this trend continues to grow driven by high birth rates. This means that in the near future there will be increasing numbers of young people looking for jobs, and whether they gain employment or not has a direct correlation with stability and peace in the region. Not to mention that a livelihood is a basic human right as all human beings deserve a minimal income to support and sustain themselves and their dependants.

According to the **World Bank**, one fifth of the population of South Asia is between the ages of 15 and 20, and young adults account for half of all unemployed. On average, 62% of young women in South Asia can read and write, compared to 77% of young men.

The largest employment sector for South Asians has long been agriculture, but a rapid rise in population coupled with new technologies aiding agricultural production has meant a shift from the primary to the secondary sector of the economy.

Industrialization and urbanization have been rampant. According to **estimates**, the annual urban population growth rate in South Asia is 2.5% while the annual rural population growth rate stands at 1%. The **Planning Commission of Pakistan projects** that by 2030 the urban population of Pakistan will rise by nearly two-thirds of the total population. South Asia is also home to some of the largest and most populous of the world's cities – including Calcutta, Delhi, Dhaka, Karachi, and Mumbai, – and living conditions here are also a matter of grave concern.

Bearing all these factors in mind, it is imperative that governments, development organisations, and international institutions come together and map out plans and policies that offer a sustainable future to a booming and energetic young population.

Firstly, considering the huge youth bulge in this region, it is imperative to focus on literacy and education without which employment prospects are grim and restricted. Education, however, does not always start when you are two years old: there have been several **literacy programmes for adults** that have imparted basic literacy skills for economic survival, and such endeavours should be encouraged as there is a large section of the population that has not had access to formal education during childhood. Such education is also important as it keeps vulnerable minds away from



Muhammad Jameel manages to sell 3-4 pair of jeans everyday and earns around Rs. 250 (Approx 3 U.S. dollars) everyday.

Photo by Shahzeb Younis

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I don't have time – Ajmal said with a big smile when asked to pose for a portrait.

Photo by Shahzeb Younis

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the evils of extremism that can be seen growing in the region and threatening international peace and human security.

Secondly, there is great scope in the region for large infrastructural and development projects which would be a major source of employment for those looking to earn a living. Such projects are comparable to the Tennessee Valley Association (TVA) from the 1930s during Roosevelt's tenure in the USA and include large dams, road networks, construction, etc.

Thirdly, an ever-growing population also means a huge demand for energy, yet the region is increasingly energy-starved, and many rural areas across South Asia still **lack any form of electricity**. Keeping this need in mind, and given the availability of both renewable and non-renewable resources in the region, the energy sector could be a major source of more and better jobs for South Asians. The region's vast sunny plains are perfect for the generation of solar and wind energy, and a huge agricultural sector means that renewable green energy sources such as bio-fuels are a reality waiting to be exploited on a grand scale. This could be an important distraction from the much more dangerous nuclear energy ambitions of both Pakistan and India, especially following the **nuclear disaster in Fukushima** after the earthquake and tsunami in Japan earlier last year.

Fourthly, South Asia has also been a major hub of information technology related investments, with Bangalore famously celebrated as the Silicon Valley of India. This has meant a huge influx of jobs outsourced to South Asia from Europe and North America, and these jobs have been hugely popular especially among new graduates who speak fluent English. This sector needs to be further formalized, streamlined, and encouraged in line with the growing needs of the West for services from this region, and vice versa.

Lastly, and most importantly, it is imperative that deserving young people in South Asia be motivated, trained, and given the resources they need to become entrepreneurs. There are numerous

Akbar is 9 and sell balloons on the road from the morning till late night. His dad is suffering from HIV and Mom from breast cancer. He earns for a family of five.

Photo by Shahzeb Younis

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fresh ideas coming out of the region, and all that young people need is some guidance and a platform on which to launch their own businesses. For instance, Muhammad Khalid from snowy Chitral in northern Pakistan recently **invented an avalanche warning** device. Young South Asians need to be empowered to create more jobs rather than merely seeking work. It is equally important for both the government, and the private sector to divert some funding to this sector, and in particular the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) ventures of private firms. Universities should encourage and facilitate the practical realization of students' ideas, and a public-private partnership in this respect could be instrumental in the success of fresh initiatives. This instrument needs to be implemented throughout the region for greater prosperity and more jobs.

To conclude, governments, development agencies, and the private sector acting in solidarity need to take greater measures to provide opportunities to young people from South Asia for more and better jobs in the region – jobs which, as mentioned above, are fundamental to regional stability. What is needed are large-scale development projects with a special focus on energy and education, coupled with outsourced employment, and, most importantly of all, encouragement of entrepreneurial skills.

The Difficulties of Students in China on the Employment Market

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Students in China have their fate determined at a really early age. At the end of their high school, the National Higher Education Entrance Examination – also called “gaokao” – decides the universities students can apply to. Their scores determine whether or not they will be able to enter into higher education. The course of their future academic and professional life will be set by this score obtained at the age of 17. That’s an awful lot of pressure for a child to bear!

High school students are under immense pressure and the “gaokao” period is for sure the most **stressful** time for families in China today. In June every year more than six million students go through it. The entire family’s time is mobilized around their son or daughter who has to work every single day. Anxious mothers come to school daily bringing food to their children, some of them **almost going crazy** from pushing their children up the road to success. From one-child policy to Confucian obligations for children to **support their parents**, there is a lot of pressure for both overworked children and over anxious parents during this time. To cope with the stress families resort to cheating and giving **bribes** to teachers. Some companies have even developed IT cheating solutions such as **miniaturized radio equipment** that delivers answers during the test. There’s also a tradition of students **throwing away their books** after exams.

The exam papers

Stemming from the tradition of **imperial examinations**, the “gaokao” includes questions on technical and theoretical knowledge in many different fields like mathematics, physics, geography, history, Chinese writing, English, etc. But if the imperial test was **based on Confucian literature**, the Gaokao deals directly with Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Marxist-Leninist rhetoric. Here’s Question 23 of the 2011 exam, for instance:

Which sentence best describes China’s current government system:

- A. The CCP’s great creation of combining Marxism and China’s reality
- B. The CCP’s achievement of leading Chinese people through a long struggle
- C. A reflection of the common interests and aspirations of all ethnic groups in China
- D. The inevitable choice in the social development of modern China



Assembly line- China factory workers

Photo by Stichting Onderzoek

Multinationale Ondernemingen

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Students in the cafeteria in Thailand

Photo by flickr user veer66
www.flickr.com/photos/vscript/
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Of course, the correct answer is: “All choices are correct”. Dr Wang Ji, who has a Ph.D. in Marxism at Beijing University **says** “[The ministry of education] is testing the candidate’s ability to recognize the correct opinion.” So it’s pretty evident that access to a top-university starts with due and proper acceptance of the CCP’s principles of politics!

Universities – the best and the rest

Indeed, the **university ranking system** pretty quickly fills you in on the kind of diploma programmes you can choose. All students have to choose several universities before the examination, using their own estimation of what kind of education they deserve. The final score obtained at the “gaokao” will influence the final decision. The “top-universities” (10 to 20 altogether) are very selective and offer international courses with good jobs at the end. But for most of the students it will be some local college in their own province. Most of these institutions deliver grades easily but their diplomas aren’t really worth much on the labour market. In any case, **endemic corruption** amongst high-ranking officials translates as the worst kind of living conditions for students – as the student budgets mysteriously vanish!

The fight to get into administration

After spending a few years at university, the freshers are out with their fresh diplomas and start looking for jobs. The lucky ones use the “guanxi” (or network) of their parents to get a good position. The closer you are to a CCP head, the easier it is. Everyone’s first choice is a job in a state-owned administration like the railways or education sector. These sectors offer perks-retirement



Students hard at work

Photo by Shannon Shue

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allowances, health insurance, schools for the kids and regulated work shifts like no other private company in China does (including foreign companies).

Most graduate students will give up their own profession for such opportunities. The situation is different in the private sector where employees are overworked. In Chinese companies and factories, the word “guolaosi” which means “work to death” is a standard joke doing the rounds but also a very real threat as **600,000 people die from overwork each year** in the country.

The **classical Chinese gift economy** is the best way to get an interview with the Human Resource Department -some nice presents to the boss will do the trick! But getting a job in the public sector can become a very expensive undertaking. I remember hearing about a young girl who paid 170,000 RMB (or 5 years of her salary) for her position as a university teacher. I guess we aren't talking about ritual gifts anymore as this is just blatant corruption. Still, many families are ready and willing to pay such amounts to secure the living their only child is entitled to as a trade-off for security in their old age.

For those whose family won't or can't pay, the labour market is **ferociously competitive**. Many will **spend months** before they find their first job. They'll have to accept any type of work plus a wage lower than 900/1,000 RMB (150USD), even in a city as expensive as Shanghai. The **failure of higher education** to give students the skills and creativity that companies are looking for is a real issue for China.

“College essentially provides them with nothing,” **say Zhang Ming**, professor at Peking University. “For many young graduates, it's all about survival”. To launch their own business, many will become street vendors first hawking **noodles, fried rice or DVDs** to gain the start-up capital that can be invested in their own shop or company. So, in the light of relative failure of higher education, is there really any justification for all the woes high school students go through?

Jobs, Jobs, Jobs: It's the Fundamentals

Joshua Grundleger

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It is clear, to even the most casual observers of American politics, that one of the most pressing problems of the past several years and a poignant issue in the 2012 election cycle is jobs. With unemployment rates at dismal levels – 8.5% as of December 2011 – and not having fallen below 8.0% since January 2009,¹ Democrats and Republicans have been slogging it out over who is to blame and what steps need to be taken to ameliorate the situation.

This marks a significant change in the focus of the American electorate. Following 9/11, security and terrorism were, for at least a decade, the primary issues on most Americans' minds. However, as **Eurasia Group**, a political risk consultancy, argues, the 9/11 era is over. Over the next few years, economics – especially jobs – will be the driving force behind politics, both in the United States and abroad.

But while politics shift to an economic focus and politicians and pundits began to scrutinize, bolster, and tear-down each others' and their own job-creating records, many gloss over the fact that governments are rarely *directly* responsible for creating actual jobs. This is particularly true in free-market systems with relatively small public sectors such as the United States. Instead, governments can indirectly facilitate job creation by generating a favorable economic environment, thus establishing the foundational prerequisites needed for the private sector to flourish.

While grandiose claims of successful records of job creation can help win elections, politicians need to focus on what the government can realistically accomplish. By concentrating on the fundamentals, policymakers can promote the optimal economic environment that will allow the private sector to effectively create jobs.

First, the rule-of-law has to be established in a clear and cogent manner. This is largely a settled matter in the United States, yet there is still work to be done. Businesses need to be able to fairly reap the benefits of risks they take while also suffering the costs of bad outcomes. This implies disallowing graft, abuse, corruption or cronyism. It also implies treating all equally and fairly. The government should not, to use a tired phrase, pick winners and losers. It should not bolster some who are failing nor give others a head start. Government should not show preference to certain industries, sector, or firms; companies should succeed or fail on their own merits. Instead it should play

¹ Bureau of Labor Statistics <http://data.bls.gov/timeseries/lms14000000>



*Protesting Scott Walker,
Wisconsin, USA*

Photo by Dave Hoefler

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Occupy Wall Street, 118,
Zuccotti Park, 1 Liberty Plaza,
New York, New York, USA

Photo by Flickr user lumierefl
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/sminor/>
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Skyscrapers in New York

Photo by Natasja Valentijn
www.flickr.com/photos/9061377@N05/
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referee, defining the rules of the game – rules that are the same for everyone – and then ensure that all players behave accordingly.

A second step is to diminish legal and regulatory uncertainty. This will help provide much needed market confidence, a prerequisite for successful business investment and job creation. When there is considerable uncertainty in legal and regulatory worlds, businesses are often hesitant to invest in expanding their operations. When businesses cannot predict the regulatory environment that they will face, whether there will be costly environmental or labor obligations or if complexities will be introduced to hiring and firing processes, they will tend to become more cautious in their business decisions. By providing clear and largely stable laws and regulations, businesses will be more confident in their operations and act in a manner that will be beneficial to all. In this regard, it is not important whether corporate tax rates are high or low, or whether regulations are onerous or lax. What is important is constancy. Businesses must be confident that there will not be wild swings in laws and regulations from year to year.

A third point is to create legal incentives for entrepreneurship, investment, and economic activity. Laws and regulations must not simply be stable and consistent but also must be competitive, in order to better attract investment. Corporate taxes should be low and efficient. Regulations are important, but should be smart and focused on narrowly protecting abuse, not social engineering. The system should be just and encourage the efficient use of capital. Laws and regulations that incentivize businesses to take reasonable, but responsible, risks while preventing undue harm from befalling unwilling counterparties are a necessity.

These tools are not only employable in established, Western, free-market systems, but are essential for developing states as well – if not at times more important in emerging economies. These policy tools will need to be employed in diverse combinations as the situation in individual countries varies. After all, there is no single program, no unique foundation that will move a state into prospere

rity and economic growth. Development and economic growth is not a linear path, where one causal factor will immediately spur a country forward, but a cyclical one, where the right foundations will advance an economy, which will in turn strengthen the foundations. Nevertheless, by focusing on the means, by working to establish the right system and environment, instead of fixating on end results, governments can begin the upward spiral to more robust economies.

In developing countries, establishing these foundational prerequisites is essential to beginning (or continuing) the march forward. In developed countries, particularly the United States, a renewed focus on these aspects is equally important. While arguably somewhat esoteric in nature, and thus less amenable to snazzy primetime sound bites, such issues are truly the core of any successful government policy to ameliorate employment problems. Fancy plans to bolster specific sectors or aid crony industries will not do nearly enough, if anything, to create jobs. In fact, such policies will often undermine the very foundations that are essential to healthy economic growth. Only by focusing on the fundamentals can the government and policymakers truly help their economies.

From Endangered to Engendered Development Path: Employment and Gender in Sub-Saharan Africa

Monika Sztajerowska

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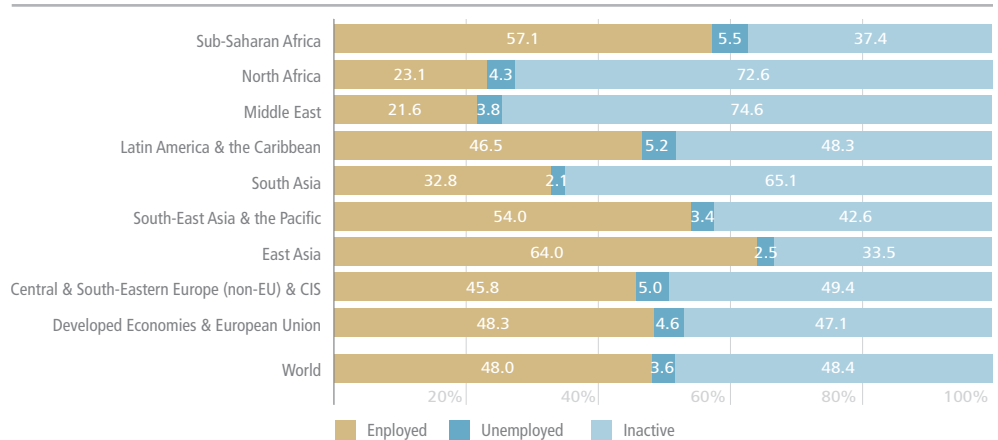
Monika Sztajerowska is an ex-ballroom dancer and a current economic development geek; consultant at the OECD; lived in Poland, UK, Germany, Italy, U.S. and now France; easily excitable.

Female employment in Sub-Saharan Africa: what are the challenges?

Female **labour force participation** rate, or the percentage of women active in the **labour market**, is often relied on when assessing the access to labour markets for females in comparison to males. Looking at this metric we find, possibly somewhat surprised, that around 57% of women are employed in Sub-Saharan Africa, compared to 48% in developed economies (Figure 1). These percentages, however, do not reflect choices and opportunities of women in the region, nor the precarity and quality of their employment.

If not captured in general statistics, what is then the nature of challenges facing working women in Sub-Saharan Africa?

Regional distribution of female and male working-age populations by main economic status, 2009



Source: ILO, Trends Econometric Models, November 2009.

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Field workers at Njoro, Kenya

Photo by IMWIC

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/cimmyt/>

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Low-pay, low-skill, but high precarity

First of all, women in the region are heavily concentrated in low-productivity low-pay agricultural sector (61%), subsistence agricultural activities, the informal sector and unpaid household work. Apart from low pay, these sectors are also characterized by poor working conditions and high precarity of employment. This highlights the need for assisting women in moving into higher-productivity sectors. One of the ways to achieve this has been the so-called **export processing zones** (EPZs) that mushroomed across Africa. However, employment in EPZs is also precarious – as seen after the demise of the **Multi Fibre Arrangement** (MFA) when textile industries collapsed in a number of African countries – and working conditions are often dismal.

Occupational segregation and limited bargaining power

Cultural norms, sex-based discrimination or simply undeveloped legal regulation often mean that women suffer from unequal access to productive assets in Sub-Saharan Africa. For instance, undeveloped land ownership rights and land rental markets or unequal access to finance have been found to reduce women bargaining power and negatively impact their employment opportunities. Moreover, once having found gainful employment, women often do not have a *de facto* control of their earnings, exercised by their husbands instead. For instance, only about half of married women in Uganda solely control how their earnings are used, which has been found to negatively impact their willingness to engage in production in the first place.¹

¹ Udry, C. (1996). Gender, agricultural production, and the theory of the household. *Journal of Political Economy* 104(5): 1010–1046.

Sorting nuts at Mim

Photo by Terrie Schweitzer

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/terriem/>

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“Time poverty” or development tax

Undeveloped infrastructure, still an acute problem in sub-Saharan Africa, may be also disproportionately impacting women employment opportunities through the so-called “time poverty”. Namely, since women are in charge of the household and household tasks take longer due to lacking infrastructure, it leaves less amount of time in the day available for education and work. For instance, if it takes 5 hours to go to and from the nearest source of water, this is an indirect “tax” on time available to women for other activities. By the same token, high child mortality, high fertility rates and lacking childcare support mean that women often have to combine raising children with their employment activities, which further restricts a potential jobs spectrum.

Educational gaps

While there are no significant gender gaps in educational attainment or academic performance among OECD countries anymore, gender gaps still persist at the level of education in Sub-Saharan Africa, which in turn impacts women’s ability to find well-paid employment. While cultural norms play a role, it is often lack of security on transport routes to schools and at school that also play a role. Economic growth and rising productivity in economy will mean an increased demand for skilled labour, which will put women lacking education at a further disadvantage, unless significant efforts are placed on facilitating access to post-primary education for women, in particular those coming from poor rural households.



Tea factory Tanzania, Tea Estate 25

*Photo by flickr user naeem.ebrahimjee
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From endangered to engendered development path

Female discrimination in the labour market is a complex problem dependent on an interaction of social and cultural norms, country-specific development challenges, quality of labour market policies and other factors. Complex problems admittedly require complex and comprehensive solutions.

There is, moreover, a latent trade-off between short-term fixes and long-term solutions to the female unemployment problem, which is rarely acknowledged. Increasing female employment in low-skilled low-pay manufacturing sector, for instance through so-called export processing zones (EPZs), does increase female employment in the short run, often with non-negligible income effects. However, it also makes the *status quo* – in which women are shut off from other higher-productivity higher-wage economic sectors – more acceptable and “workable”.

A long-term solution requires dismantling of legislative, social, cultural and logistical barriers preventing women from taking full advantage of available educational and economic opportunities. In order to have genuine impact on female employment, and thus income, such “dismantling” would have to take place across the whole “employment chain”, starting with better access to education and productive assets (pre-employment) and ending with secured control of one’s own earnings (post-employment). However, considering governance and societal barriers to change, sheer growth and development may perhaps be the most direct route for improving economic and job opportunities for women in Africa.

Is There a “Home” to Return to?

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Migrants who come back home can return with valuable new skills and contacts that can positively affect their home countries' job market. But matters of identity, questions of belonging and shame at returning empty-handed can overwhelm purely economic concerns. This year's Berlin Film Festival showed two films dealing with characters stuck between two worlds, trying to find “home”.

When Fatima came back, her family expected her, even more than she thought. After living 16 years abroad in Spain, she was for the first time since childhood in the Algerian desert, to bury her mother. What was meant to be a short stay stretched longer.

To the contrary, when Satché came back, nobody expected him. He left Senegal to study in the U.S., where he didn't achieve and came back with no degree. Now, some acquaintances disrespect him for this choice. One year later he comes to know dreadful news about his future.

Two destinies in-between worlds

Fatima (Nadhira Mohamed) and Satché (Saul Williams) are the main characters respectively of two films with European and African ties, *Wilaya* by Spanish director Pedro Pérez Rosado and *Aujourd'hui* (Today) by French-Senegalese director Alain Gomis. Both films handle in different ways of the feelings of people whose destiny has pushed them to cross continents for a better life but who incidentally returned voluntarily.

In *Wilaya*, Fatima left very young the Algerian refuge camp of Sahrawi people, where she was born. But has this place ever been home? Her parents arrived there at the end of the 70s as Western Sahara was abandoned by Spain and invaded by Morocco. Since then, Sahrawis have waited for the international community find a solution to return to Western Sahara. Up to the present they have stayed in political limbo.

Fatima's parents sent her to an adoptive family in Spain, so that she could have a better future. As she came back to bury her biological mother, her brother Said asks her to stay and to take over the role of her mother as a pillar of the family. She doubts. Does she really belong here? Even if



The Berlinale 2010

Photo by Flickr user Blogging Dagger
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her brother Said and sister Hayat still live in the camp, isn't she meant to stay in Spain? Fatima is not like other Sahrawi women. She speaks more Spanish than Arabic, wears European clothes and doesn't pray. A feeling of despair invades her. Even if she just broke up with her Spanish boyfriend, she keeps trying to reach him on the phone. He doesn't answer.

In *Aujourd'hui*, the audience never directly experiences what pushed Satché, who was bound for a great future in the U.S., to come back to his native Dakar, Senegal. Did he experience a setback? "No, I don't think so", opines Alain Gomis, the director:

Being abroad is a wonderful experience. You feel free from social pressure. If you wish, you can be someone else than you normally are. But at one point, you have to come back to a place you can call home. It doesn't have to be like this for everybody, it's just a personal observation. And this place can be where your grandfather has been buried, but it can also be the place where your family actually is. It doesn't have to be geographical. Satché felt the need to sense his roots. Perhaps he discovered in the U.S. who he really is.

"At one moment in life, you realise that you can sit, and travel even more"

Surely, this question follows also Gomis' path, as he is born in Paris from Senegalese parents, who themselves came initially from Guinea-Bissau. "When you're young, you're always on the run, you want to see how big the world is. But at one point, you realize that you can sit, and travel even more."

In his hometown Dakar, Satché is repeatedly asked why he didn't stay in the U.S. He doesn't answer to the provocation, but the audience feels it disturbs him. His American past is just a part of the film's structure, Satché has to endure other difficult tests, and he finds finally peace.

Girl at the hostel sink

Photo by Flickr user Parisa

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/asirap/>

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But the negative reactions towards somebody who came back home from a place, where a better future was possible, aren't so common anymore in Senegal. Gomis clarifies: "With the economic crisis in Europe, people are asking themselves if they should move to Europe or not. The answer is not so clear for them." With recession in many European countries, it is getting more difficult to start a business or find work. "To launch a business in Europe, you have to find an idea inside another idea!" And prices are rising. "Take a look at Paris. There, people are ready to take a loan for 30 years in order to afford a 60m² flat, which is the minimum space you need for a small family. It doesn't make sense anymore."

"If you have a little capital and some experience, you can easily start a small business in Senegal with simple activities, and make a living. I don't want to give a false impression, life is still very difficult in Senegal, and a lot still depends on your social origin, but there are solutions if you work hard. People start to feel that the future is brighter in Africa than it is in Europe."

Unlike Satché who has to accept a dreadful destiny outlined in the film, Fatima still has the choice between staying with her biological family in the Sahara or going back to Spain. Acknowledging that her family and the refugees of the camp need help and that she could make a change, her long equivocation ends with the decision to stay and help.

"Women are the ones who are in touch with reality"

Fatima buys a van and is the first woman in the camp doing business. She becomes transport contractor. An unusual role for women, but even if her brother criticises her for "not having even founded a family in Spain" and just being able of "doing men's work" he begins to respect her for her business acumen. Furthermore, her van changes the daily life of her disabled sister Hayat, whom



*Young Migrant in Bandanna,
Roquetas, de Mar, Almeria,
Spain, 2004*

*Photo by Flickr user John Perivolaris
[http://www.flickr.com/photos/
dr_john2005/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/dr_john2005/) (CC BY-NC-SA)*

she takes on her trips and incidentally teaches how to drive. As Hayat says, “to have a car is to be free”, a unquestionable truth in this remote place.

In her very soft, quiet and confident way, Fatima brings new habits to the camp and especially to women. In an interview, the director Pérez Rosado described this process as “cultural crossbreeding” and noted that women are the ones able to introduce changes, because “women create so much light that it projects shadows on men. Women are the ones who are in touch with reality”.

Wilaya and *Aujourd'hui* show us the most important aspect of skills transfer: the human factor. Both films tell us that the decision to stay or leave is often the result of unpredictable circumstances, a mix of personal, cultural and economic reasons, from which skills transfer is just one side effect. One million Africans live in the US, about 3 million in Europe, how many of them will decide to go back to Africa, if the future gets brighter there? Or will they stay where they are, having taken new roots? As the Berber saying goes: “The tree follows the roots”. But which ones?

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“When developing future-challenges.org, I became more and more aware of what an amazing environment the Internet is. With its decentralized structure and self-organizing capability, it poses an ongoing challenge to existing processes, eternal truths and well-defined structures.”



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My interest in futures lies in the space in-between. Many of the big issues of today and tomorrow are being studied independent of one another. As none of us live in a vacuum, nothing doesn't in some way depend on (many) other forces and trends. I am most pleased at how fc.org delves into that space in-between the megatrends to shine a light on what really might be our future.



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Hi! I help Future Challenges to produce content more efficiently and expand the network. Our writers always impress me, and I think they'll impress you, too.



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By understanding the dynamic interactions of the megatrends, we can better predict and prepare for the future. As the world becomes more interconnected, it is important for individuals to learn and engage in a collective dialogue in order to shape our shared future.



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“Working for Futurechallenges for me personally is a very exciting experience. I love our international outlook with the stream of different insights and viewpoints from all four corners of the world that reach us through our steadily growing network of bloggers.”



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Getting insights from FutureChallenges’ worldwide blogger network with local perspectives on global issues is extraordinary. I’m happy to be in contact with dedicated people from all over the world!

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