

# WHAT AILS THE YOUNG? INSIGHTS INTO AFRICA'S YOUTH FROM THE AFRICAN PEER REVIEW MECHANISM

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*African perspectives.  
Global insights.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

Africa is a young continent, with a median age of some 19.3 years and 75% of its population aged 35 or younger. As the continent has long recognised – and as the so-called Arab Spring has confirmed – this large youth population presents many complex and important strategic challenges that must be met. For this reason, African's continental bodies have on several occasions committed themselves to fostering the wellbeing and development of the youth, most notably through the African Youth Charter, adopted in 2006.

Examining the state of Africa's youth primarily through the lens of the reports compiled through the African Peer Review Mechanism – Africa's innovative governance assessment system – this paper discusses two primary sets of challenges. The first of these is the state of education and training. The standard of education offered to Africa's youth, as well as the choice of subjects they follow, is not adequately preparing them for entry into the workforce. Students need to be better prepared, and more opportunities should be created for them to study scientific and technological fields.

The second is poverty and unemployment – the socio-economic exclusion of Africa's youth. An issue intimately bound to concerns about education and skills, many young people are unable to secure opportunities that make social mobility possible and provide an outlet for their energies. This underemployment creates fertile ground for drug abuse, gangsterism and participation in political conflict.

Attempting to address these problems, African countries have implemented a range of interventions to extend opportunities to the youth and integrate them into their socio-economic life. Perhaps more importantly, Africa's youth have responded to their challenges. Sometimes this takes the form of anti-social behaviour. In other instances, they have responded with considerable resourcefulness. Africa's youth display a great attraction to entrepreneurship, and have become involved in activism to challenge perceived injustices. Properly harnessed, these are great assets for the future.

The paper concludes with recommendations for policy proposals that recognise the limitations of Africa's states and seek partnerships with non-governmental bodies. Dealing with youth challenges is simply too large for African states to handle alone. Youth activism should be welcomed, but not uncritically. Above all, steering youthful energies into entrepreneurship and economic activities must be a priority.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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**ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

AfDB	African Development Bank
APRM	African Peer Review Mechanism
CRM	Country Review Mission
CRR	Country Review Report
CSAR	Country Self-Assessment Report
ICT	information and communications technology
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NPoA	National Programme of Action

## INTRODUCTION

'The creativity, energy and innovation of African youth will be the driving force behind the continent's political, social, cultural and economic transformation.'<sup>1</sup>

This bold, optimistic statement, taken from Agenda 2063 – the AU's development programme for the coming 50 years – highlights a keystone issue for Africa's future. Africa's prospects in the years ahead are inextricably linked to its youth. On the continent, as across the world, recent years have shown the profound impact young people can have on their societies, both positive and negative. Youthful entrepreneurs have shown their worth by pioneering new technologies, while young activists have challenged governance failings and pressed for greater political openness. But the idealism and energy of youth can also be a source of social strain, showing itself in crime and violent, debased politics. It is critical for Africa's overall success that its vast constituency of young people be provided with opportunities for fulfilling lives, and be integrated into public institutions and political processes.

Observers have long remarked on youth phenomena in Africa. Youth groups and youth-oriented political movements were prominent in the colonial era and in pushing for independence. Similar bodies have been a feature of the political landscape of most countries since independence. Indeed, the youth were viewed as the natural inheritors and beneficiaries of the continent's political emancipation – Africa's severe developmental crises having disappointed these hopes.<sup>2</sup>

Increasingly, however, the youth as a discrete social demographic have come to be seen as critical to Africa's aspirations. The 1980 Lagos Plan of Action, for example, included calls for the full involvement of the continent's youth in its development efforts and for enhanced training and opportunities to be created for them. The African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation – adopted at a major gathering of Africa's stakeholders in Arusha, Tanzania in 1991 – laid particular emphasis on involving young people and their organisations as full participants in the continent's development, arguing also for due recognition of the issues confronting them. The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) developed this further, launching several initiatives aimed at enhancing youth participation in Africa's economic development and governance reform.

For its part, the AU has shown a growing interest in youth matters. In 2006 it adopted the African Youth Charter. This attempts to set out a systematised view of the roles, rights and responsibilities of the youth in Africa. States would be required to have youth policies and to involve the youth in governance and development. The youth would have

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1 AU Commission, *Agenda 2063: The Africa we want* (Popular Version). Addis Ababa: AU Commission, 2014, p. 10.

2 For a broad discussion of this, see Klouwenberg FK & I Butter, "'African 'youth' since independence: Notes on a bibliographic overview, 1990–2006', *Africa Development*, XXXVI, 3 & 4, 2011, pp. 55–66.

corresponding duties to contribute to the continent's development, to promote its positive cultural traditions and generally to behave as good citizens. Specifically, the charter seeks to guarantee a comprehensive set of rights and duties to the continent's youth. These include:<sup>3</sup>

- freedoms of movement, expression, association, conscience and privacy;
- protection of family life;
- the right to hold property;
- the right to education and training;
- the right to health and healthcare; and
- the right to protection and due consideration of the law.

To support these rights, individual countries are enjoined to ratify and domesticate its provisions and to establish appropriate policies, making the charter a potentially powerful driver of youth interests – but one that would also require sustained and extensive public and official attention.

The AU has undertaken several further initiatives, symbolic and practical, geared at supporting the continent's youth. Growing out of the African Youth Charter, an African Youth Decade Plan of Action for 2009–2018 was launched. In seeking to find practical expression for the charter, it sets out lists of goals (albeit often vaguely formulated) and indicators for monitoring them. These include enhanced political commitment from AU states to the goals of the AU Youth Charter; a strengthened role for the AU Commission and the regional economic communities in youth development; and a commitment to the involvement of Africa's youth in development initiatives.<sup>4</sup>

In addition, an AU Youth Volunteer Corps has been established, sending skilled young volunteers to assist in development initiatives across the continent. The AU has also dedicated summits to youth issues – the theme chosen for the 17<sup>th</sup> Summit of the AU, in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea in June 2011, was 'Youth Empowerment for Sustainable Development' – and in 2006 it declared 1 November 'African Youth Day'.

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All of this has been informed by demographic realities. By all measures Africa has a young population. According to the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division, Africa's median age is 19.3 years, making it, by a considerable margin the youngest region on earth.<sup>5</sup> Of a total population of some 1.2 billion in 2015, some 892 million – or 75% of the population – are 34 years or younger. Some 716 million – or around 60% – are 24 or younger. Those within the age cohort 15–24 (the range most frequently associated with the idea of youth) number some 230 million, and account for around one in five people on the continent.<sup>6</sup>

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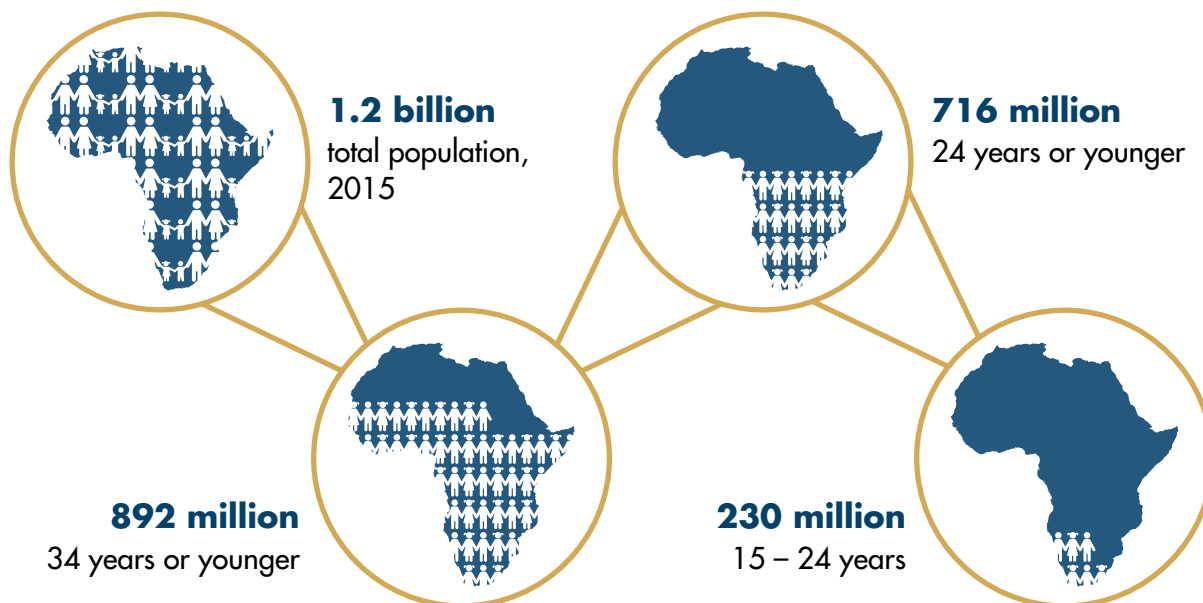
3 AU, African Youth Charter, adopted during the 7<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session of the Conference of Heads of State and Government, Banjul, The Gambia, 2 July 2006.

4 AU, *African Youth Decade 2009–2018, Accelerating Youth Empowerment for Sustainable Development*. Addis Ababa: AU, pp. 7–13.

5 UN, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 'World population prospects, the 2015 revision', <http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/DVD/>, accessed 13 December 2015.

6 *Ibid.*

**FIGURE 1** THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF AFRICA (2015)



Created by Angela Thomas, angelathomas68@gmail.com

For Africa, the recent experience of the so-called Arab Spring looms large. Sparked in Tunisia in December 2010, it came to engulf most of the world’s culturally Arab states. Several of these were members of the AU; for some, it had profound consequences. Governments were toppled in Egypt and Tunisia while Libya descended into civil war. Large protests took place in Algeria and Sudan, and smaller ones in Djibouti, Mauritania and Somalia. The widespread involvement of the youth of these countries was widely and correctly remarked upon: unfulfilled ambitions, unemployment, housing shortages and grievances at the authoritarian political systems produced intense frustrations.<sup>7</sup> As one analyst described it, the Arab Spring represented in large part the failure of a societal bargain: the inability to graduate to full adult citizenship:<sup>8</sup>

Arab Spring demonstrations were an opportunity for citizens to demand the fulfilment of the social contracts made with their autocratic leaders, and should be viewed as not only a political struggle, but also an economic and cultural struggle. The most basic of societal contracts – that children will one day grow up, begin to contribute productively to society,

7 Ansani A & V Daniele, ‘About a revolution: The economic motivations of the Arab Spring’, *International Journal of Development and Conflict*, 3, 3, 2012; Mulderig MC, ‘An uncertain future: Youth frustration and the Arab Spring’, *The Pardee Papers*, 16, April 2013.

8 Mulderig MC, *op. cit.*, pp. 3–4.



and then raise families of their own – has been broken for an entire generation of youth in the Arab world trapped in a liminal period often referred to as ‘waitthood’.



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*Flag waver, Tripoli, February 2012*

More so than any other region in the world, Africa's development and stability, as well as its prospects for progress, depend on the manner in which it is able to cater for the interests of its young people. The Arab Spring has provided a preview of the consequences of failing to meet this challenge. Indeed, sub-Saharan Africa may prove even more vulnerable than its North African counterparts. The age profile of sub-Saharan Africa is substantially lower than that of North Africa, its youth cohort larger, and its socio-economic challenges arguably more acute.

This paper examines the issues surrounding Africa's youth. As its primary source material, it uses the Country Review Reports (CRRs) of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). Near comprehensive in scope, these contain the findings of interrogations into the governance of participating countries. So far, 17 countries have been reviewed. This



paper analyses the CRRs of 16 of these:<sup>9</sup> Algeria, Benin, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Mauritius, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.

### **BOX 1: WHAT IS THE APRM?**

The APRM is a process encouraging African societies to analyse their problems, assess their progress towards improved governance and promote effective reform. As of January 2016, 35 countries have voluntarily joined.

To participate in the process, a country's government will sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the continental APRM authorities indicating its willingness to undergo review and its commitment to the process. Domestic institutions will be established to facilitate an assessment of governance in the country. The results of this review will be incorporated into a Country Self-Assessment Report (CSAR), along with a draft National Programme of Action (NPoA), the latter being a measure to remedy shortcomings. This is followed by a visit to the country by a Country Review Mission (CRM). This is a delegation of respected scholars and experts who will conduct an independent study of the country and produce their own report. They will be led by a member of the Panel of Eminent Persons, which is a small body of eminent Africans who are responsible for managing the process across the continent. A draft CRR is submitted to the country by the panel and its secretariat for comment, recommendations are put to the participating country, and the country is expected to amend its draft NPoA accordingly.

Important to note is that the APRM's inquiries are structured around adherence to a set of international and continental standards and codes, which in turn relate to a questionnaire. It demands an examination of the country's performance in four broad thematic areas: democracy and political governance; economic governance; corporate governance; and socio-economic development. (The original questionnaire, finalised in 2004, was revised and an updated version – incorporating several issues absent from its predecessor – was published in 2012.)

The final CRR will be produced by combining the previous reports – principally the CSAR and the results of the CRM's discussions and investigations. It will be presented to the Forum of the Heads of State for discussion and final review. This body consists of the leaders of all the participating countries. It tends to convene on the margins of AU summits (although not all AU members are participants in the APRM). Once the country has been reviewed by the forum, it must agree to deal with the various problems that have been identified. Other states undertake to assist the country in its efforts, and to take action if the country does not try to deal with these issues. Finally, the country reports annually on progress in implementing the NPoA, and prepares itself for subsequent reviews (which are meant to occur every two to four years).

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9 One CRR – that on Mali – was only available in French, and was excluded due to linguistic limitations on the part of the author.

It is intended to sketch the major contours of the issues that Africa must confront in respect of its youth, and is not intended as a comprehensive analysis of the situation in each of the countries. It proceeds from a brief discussion of the concept of youth to an examination of key issues germane to Africa's young people, and an overview of official interventions to deal with them. It continues to look at the responses of the continent's youth – their adaptation strategies and activism – and then concludes with a brief discussion of the implications of the foregoing to the continent's future.

## CONCEPTUALISING YOUTH

Before progressing to a substantive analysis of the youth issues confronting Africa, it is useful to examine what precisely is to be understood by 'youth'. According to the UN, 'youth' refers to those aged between 15 and 24 years, but it points out that it is less a clearly defined age than a stage of life:<sup>10</sup>

Youth is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood's independence. That's why, as a category, youth is more fluid than other fixed age-groups. Yet, age is the easiest way to define this group, particularly in relation to education and employment, because 'youth' is often referred to a person between the ages of leaving compulsory education, and finding their first job.

Seen from this angle, youth is a stage of life, signifying the end of childhood – and its associated dependency on parents and schools – and the transition to full adulthood. It denotes a move from a state of dependency (on the guidance and protection of parents, social and educational institutions) to one of independence and full participation as a member of society. The youth are those in the process of this transition who have not fully completed it. Conceptually, youth may be a highly individuated experience covering a wide range of actual ages, depending on individuals' contexts.

The African Youth Charter deals with this by defining the youth as those aged between 15 and 35 years. This spans a 20-year range of lifetime experiences. Indeed, the charter explicitly notes that those between 15 and 17 are 'minors' – a firmer legal concept denoting an inability to assume 'adult' responsibilities and needing guidance. At the other end of the scale, people in their mid-30s might be expected to have become fully responsible for themselves, to have founded families and established successful careers.

However, in the African context, neither the assumption of older teenagers as dependent minors nor that of tricenarians as independent adults is entirely accurate. Rapidly growing populations, urbanisation, the loss of family to disease or war, inadequate educational opportunities and changes to the continent's economies have thrust many of Africa's younger people into roles beyond their years, and prevented many of its older people

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10 UN, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Social Policy and Population Division, 'Definition of youth', Fact Sheet, undated, p. 1.

from taking up the role of full citizens. Reflecting on this (albeit in relation to children) in the context in Nigeria, its CRR notes:<sup>11</sup>

In situations of internal political violence and material poverty, Nigerian children, like their counterparts in other African countries, are no longer juveniles, but young adults. They are no longer underage persons requiring adult protection, but real and potential competitors for resources with adults. They are no longer mere consumers of resources, but must earn a living. They are no longer innocent bystanders in conflicts, but actual and potential combatants.

## AFRICA'S YOUTHFUL AMBIGUITY

In a wide-angle perspective, the CRRs depict the continent's youth as both an asset and a challenge. Consistent with the idealistic narrative propounded by the AU, they acknowledge – typically obliquely – the potential for the youth to play a developmental role in Africa. Most directly, the Burkina Faso CRR remarks: 'The youth component of the population is a force of hope for the future of the nation and for the transformation of existing structures.'<sup>12</sup> That the youth could make game-changing contributions to Africa's economy (in particular) is an assumption that permeates the reports – provided they are properly capacitated and facilitated to do so.

More prominently and directly, the CRRs emphasise the potential threats posed by Africa's youth if the current social trajectory continues. The Burkina Faso CRR qualifies its optimistic assessment by commenting that it 'will materialise only if the young identify themselves with the objectives of the society in place. If, on the other hand, they do not identify with the objectives, or see no prospects in social projects, they will become a destructive force at the first sign of discontent.'<sup>13</sup> The Benin CRR describes the youth as a 'virtual "time bomb"'.<sup>14</sup> The Kenya CRR comments that 'discontent among young urban dwellers now looms as potentially Kenya's biggest political risk, which could degenerate into social instability'.<sup>15</sup>

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What, then, are the problems confronting Africa's youth that have produced this state of affairs? The African Youth Charter and the Plan of Action for 2009–2018 identify a range of considerations with a bearing on youth empowerment and development. As pointed out, these are comprehensive in scope. In principle almost any social issue could be applied to the youth; this runs the risk of casting the analytical and policy net so wide as to undermine prospects of coming up with meaningful and prioritised

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11 Panel of Eminent Persons, APRM (African Peer Review Mechanism), *Country Review Report of the Federal Republic of Nigeria* (Nigeria CRR), APRM Secretariat, June 2009, pp. 127–128.

12 Panel of Eminent Persons, APRM, *Country Review Report of Burkina Faso* (Burkina Faso CRR), APRM Secretariat, May 2008, p. 60.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 60.

14 Panel of Eminent Persons, APRM, *Country Review Report of the Republic of Benin* (Benin CRR), APRM Secretariat, January 2008, p. 295.

15 Panel of Eminent Persons, APRM, *Country Review Report of the Republic of Kenya* (Kenya CRR), APRM Secretariat, May 2006, p. 249.

interventions to deal with issues that have a disproportionate relevance to Africa's youth. The CRRs, however, focus on a limited set of issues that have a special bearing on the youth – and in so doing, the reports demonstrate a remarkable degree of consistency with one another. They include education and training, poverty and unemployment, as well as analyses of the responses to them – both in policy and law and in the actions of the continent's youth themselves. These issues play a major role in the lives of the continent's young people and so provide an important window onto their condition at present and their prospects going forward.

## EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Education is universally recognised as an important facet of development – both as an outcome and as a driver. Overall, educational attainment in Africa has been associated statistically with higher income growth, better health, improved gender equality and greater political stability.<sup>16</sup> However, the impact of education on the life chances of Africa's youth has been rather more ambiguous. This requires further investigation.

The APRM devotes considerable attention to the education environments of the countries it has reviewed.<sup>17</sup> In keeping with best developmental practice and with the NEPAD vision, the APRM envisages education playing a key role in Africa's upliftment. The CRRs make clear, however, that it is doubtful that in their present incarnations the continent's education systems are capable of playing such a role.

Quantitatively, Africa can celebrate considerable achievements in the provision of education, particularly at the primary level but increasingly also at the secondary and tertiary levels. Thus the Burkina Faso CRR records a doubling of the number of primary schoolchildren between 1996/97 and 2006/07, with a rapidly accelerating rate of enrolment as that period progressed. Secondary school enrolment has experienced similar growth. Higher education has grown more than threefold over this period, 'which is spectacular'.<sup>18</sup>

However, various deficiencies affect the education afforded Africa's people. The Benin, Kenya and South Africa CRRs highlight a lack of access or barriers to education and training.<sup>19</sup> Despite the expansion of education on the continent, the opportunities that

16 Gyimah-Brempong K, 'Education and Economic Development in Africa', paper presented at the 4<sup>th</sup> African Economic Conference, Tunis, Tunisia, 27–29 October 2010, [http://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/uploaded-documents/AEC/2010/Papers/session\\_ii.2.1\\_2.\\_education\\_and\\_economic\\_development\\_in\\_africa.pdf](http://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/uploaded-documents/AEC/2010/Papers/session_ii.2.1_2._education_and_economic_development_in_africa.pdf), accessed 9 December 2015.

17 For a discussion of this in relation to the first six CRRs to have been produced, see Corrigan T, 'Socio-Economic Problems Facing Africa: Insights from Six APRM Country Review Reports', SAIIA (South African Institute of International Affairs) Occasional Paper, 34, May 2009, esp. pp. 18–21.

18 Burkina Faso CRR, *op. cit.*, pp. 314–316.

19 Benin CRR, *op. cit.*, pp. 27, 295; Kenya CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 219; Panel of Eminent Persons, APRM, *Country Review Report of the Republic of South Africa* (South Africa CRR), APRM Secretariat, May 2007, p. 250.

exist are limited in number. They may be distributed unevenly across countries – in Mozambique, for example, opportunities are far more extensive around Maputo and in the south of the country than in the north.<sup>20</sup> Economic imperatives may truncate opportunities for some young people, such as the need for labour on family farms,<sup>21</sup> while cultural or other barriers may restrict access for young women. Demands for school fees (or the costs of attending higher institutions) may further exclude many potential candidates.

Furthermore, a significant proportion of learners fail to complete their schooling,<sup>22</sup> depriving themselves of further education and skills acquisition and of the formal credentials that employers may demand. Remarks the Ethiopia CRR:<sup>23</sup>

With the considerable success in raising enrolment rates, however, it is becoming apparent that enrolling in school is not the end of the story. The dropout rate has increased significantly and has become a major challenge to policy makers, as they try to secure success in the sector. By the end of 2004/05, [the] primary school dropout rate for females stood at 13.6%.

A more widespread problem identified is the quality of education offered and its applicability to the needs of the economy. In various ways this emerges in the CRRs on Algeria, Benin, Burkina Faso, Kenya, Lesotho, Mauritius, Mozambique, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.<sup>24</sup>

The nature of the problems identified is varied. Resource constraints feature prominently, resulting in poor educational infrastructure, insufficient learning materials and high learner–teacher ratios. The teaching corps in many instances is underpaid and underqualified, and learners may be taught by teachers who are not proficient in their

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20 Panel of Eminent Persons, APRM, *Country Review Report of the Republic of Mozambique* (Mozambique CRR), APRM Secretariat, June 2009, p. 250.

21 Panel of Eminent Persons, APRM, *Country Review Report of the Kingdom of Lesotho* (Lesotho CRR), APRM Secretariat, June 2010, p. 197.

22 Panel of Eminent Persons, APRM, *Country Review Report of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria* (Algeria CRR), APRM Secretariat, July 2007, p. 117; Lesotho CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 195; APRM, *Country Review Report of the Republic of Tanzania* (Tanzania CRR), APRM Secretariat, January 2013, pp. 190–192.

23 Panel of Eminent Persons, APRM, *Country Review Report of the Republic of Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia* (Ethiopia CRR), APRM Secretariat, January 2011, pp. 237–238.

24 Algeria CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 256; Benin CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 233; Burkina Faso CRR, *op. cit.*, pp. 314–315; Kenya CRR, pp. 221–222; Lesotho CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 195; Panel of Eminent Persons, APRM, *Country Review Report of the Republic of Mauritius* (Mauritius CRR), APRM Secretariat, July 2010, p. 355; Mozambique CRR, *op. cit.*, pp. 139, 249; Nigeria CRR, *op. cit.*, pp. 288–289; Panel of Eminent Persons, APRM, *Country Review Report of the Republic of Sierra Leone* (Sierra Leone CRR), APRM Secretariat, January 2012, p. 348; South Africa CRR, *op. cit.*, pp. 92, 94, 193; Tanzania CRR, *op. cit.*, pp. 230–232; Panel of Eminent Persons, APRM, *Country Review Report of the Republic of Uganda* (Uganda CRR), APRM Secretariat, January 2009, pp. 171, 199; Panel of Eminent Persons, APRM, *Country Review Report of the Republic of Zambia* (Zambia CRR), APRM Secretariat, January 2013, pp. 105, 250.

subject areas. Comparative research elsewhere has identified the nature and perception of the teaching profession as a challenge in itself. Among other factors, poor pay, indifferent management, declining social regard for the profession and an inhospitable policy environment (difficult or changing policy demands) severely undermine the motivation of teachers, and as a result the education they deliver to their charges.<sup>25</sup>



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*Learners try to concentrate on what the teacher is saying in an overcrowded classroom in a secondary school in Naboomspruit, South Africa*

The Tanzania CRR records the view expressed by some stakeholders in that country:<sup>26</sup>

The teaching profession in Tanzania is no longer perceived as a worthwhile occupation because teachers are so poorly paid they spend only a fraction of their time in a day at school and use the rest of the time doing other activities outside schools to supplement their incomes. Therefore, many students take up teaching only as a last resort. This mentality has bred a lukewarm commitment to the teaching profession among many teachers, further contributing to the school drop-out rates.

More important for understanding the impact of education deficiencies on the youth is the issue of ‘mismatch’: the education received fails to prepare learners for the requirements of

25 Bennell P & K Akyeampong, ‘Teacher Motivation in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia’, Department for International Development, Educational Papers, 2007.

26 Tanzania CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 191.



the economy. Many of the reports identify this problem directly and forthrightly,<sup>27</sup> while others do so obliquely, noting that the education system must be reoriented so as to impart practical and marketable skills.<sup>28</sup> Examples from the CRRs illustrate the impact of the failure of educational relevance. For example, the Uganda CRR comments on the need for relevant technical and industrial skills, noting that foreigners are employed even in some relatively low-skill jobs.<sup>29</sup> The Benin CRR notes that some training institutes are not officially recognised and the qualifications they offer are consequently not officially accepted, making them of doubtful value.<sup>30</sup>

The mismatch between the skills imparted through Africa's education systems and Africa's economies – and therefore the ability of the continent's youth to take advantage of the opportunities that recent growth has provided – is also a well-acknowledged issue. An analysis by African Economic Outlook<sup>31</sup> shows that while education is indeed a means of mobility, graduates often endure long periods of unemployment while attempting to secure jobs. In other words, education is not adequately assisting the youth to make the transition to adulthood and secure participation in labour markets. This is particularly the case in middle-income countries such as South Africa – presumably a function of the demands of more sophisticated economies. University education in Africa, the analysis notes, has traditionally been directed at opening the way to employment in the public sector, with a degree serving as a credential for access rather than an affirmation of a skill set. It comments:<sup>32</sup>

At the tertiary level, young Africans are confronted with a university system which has traditionally been focused on educating for public sector employment, with little regard for the needs of the private sector. Often a degree from a tertiary institution is an entry requirement for government employment, with little attention paid to a specific skill set. At the same time tertiary education in technical fields tends to be significantly more expensive than in the social sciences, which makes expansion of such faculties more challenging for public education institutions.

Similarly, education in practical and industrial fields, and in such areas as information technology (where market demands are high) has been lacking. In the period 2008–2010 nearly two-thirds of African students graduated in the humanities, social sciences, education, business and law. Fewer than 20% graduated in science, engineering or technology. And, disturbingly, given the role played by agriculture in Africa's economy and the opportunities that it presents as a supplier to the global market, only 2% of graduates

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27 Algeria CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 221; Benin CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 233; Kenya CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 116; Lesotho CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 195; Sierra Leone CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 286; Tanzania CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 117; Uganda CRR, *op. cit.*, pp. 171, 199; Zambia CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 253.

28 Nigeria CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 283.

29 Uganda CRR, *op. cit.*, pp. 171, 199.

30 Benin CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

31 African Economic Outlook, 'Promoting youth employment: Education and skills mismatch', 2012, [http://www.africaneconomicoutlook.org/en/theme/youth\\_employment/education-skills-mismatch/](http://www.africaneconomicoutlook.org/en/theme/youth_employment/education-skills-mismatch/), accessed 13 December 2015.

32 *Ibid.*

in sub-Saharan Africa and 1% in North Africa specialised in agriculture. By comparison, some 26% of Asian students graduated in science, engineering and technology, and another 4% in agriculture.

	Sub-Saharan Africa	North Africa
<b>Education, humanities and the arts</b>	26%	22%
<b>Social sciences, business and law</b>	44%	51%
<b>Science</b>	12% (3% ICT *)	8% (1% ICT)
<b>Engineering, manufacturing and construction</b>	4%	10%
<b>Agriculture</b>	2%	1%
<b>Health and welfare</b>	5%	6%
<b>Services</b>	0%	1%
<b>Other</b>	7%	1%

\* Information and communications technology

Source: African Economic Outlook, 'Promoting youth employment: Education and skills mismatch', 2012, [http://www.africaneconomicoutlook.org/en/theme/youth\\_employment/education-skills-mismatch/](http://www.africaneconomicoutlook.org/en/theme/youth_employment/education-skills-mismatch/)

The various issues outlined above frequently intersect with and compound one another. The Mauritius CRR offers a concise description of this, as well as of the relationship between educational deficiencies and the society's developmental deficits.<sup>33</sup>

Rodrigues [one of the islands comprising the Republic of Mauritius] is plagued by high unemployment rates and low education incidence. The island has a young population, yet the capacities, skills and quality of education remain deficient, and the private sector remains underdeveloped. Most of the curricula are poor in quality. In addition, access to education is a problem owing to lack of finances to buy scholastic materials and to meet other educational needs. Lack of parental assistance to go to school is a problem, simply because parents often cannot afford to provide for their children's education.

## POVERTY AND UNEMPLOYMENT

No issue receives more consistent treatment in the CRRs than socio-economic exclusion, expressed through the intertwined combination of poverty and unemployment. This describes a situation in which a large proportion of the continent's youth find themselves confined to the peripheries of their societies, lacking the resources – economic, social and

33 Mauritius CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 355.

cultural – to seek and exploit the limited pool of opportunities that exist. The Zambia CRR sums this situation up: ‘High levels of poverty, increasing unemployment, poor access to services and weakening of family support systems have been pointed out as some of the threats to the survival and development of children and young people.’<sup>34</sup>

For the most part, the CRRs stress the dominant role of unemployment in holding much of the youth in poverty. This is highlighted in the CRRs on Mozambique, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Tanzania and Zambia.<sup>35</sup> It is not surprising; young people frequently enter the labour force competing for the limited pool of available opportunities with few marketable skills, without the networks that enable them to find suitable opportunities and without the proven experience that will make them attractive to employers – which is the central socio-economic relevance of the deficiencies in education and training discussed above.

It is important to note that youth unemployment is a complex phenomenon. Analysis conducted by the African Development Bank (AfDB) argues that unemployment – and youth unemployment – in Africa is not uniformly high by global standards. In sub-Saharan Africa (although not in North Africa) youth unemployment is actually below the global average, even though the overall unemployment rate is higher.<sup>36</sup> The youth unemployment rate in sub-Saharan Africa is, for example, noticeably lower than in the developed economies, as well as in South-East Asia and the Pacific, and in Latin America and the Caribbean. This is borne out by data from the International Labour Organisation.

Region	Unemployment rate, 2014 (%)	Youth unemployment rate (15–24), 2014 (%)
World	5.9	13.0
Sub-Saharan Africa	7.7	11.8
North Africa and Middle East	11.7	29.5

Source: ILO (International Labour Organisation), World Employment and Social Outlook Trends. Geneva: ILO, 2015, pp. 21, 52, 55

What is of particular concern is the prominence of young people among those who are unemployed, along with the rapid growth of the youth cohort of Africa’s population. In other words, the part of the population most likely to be unable to secure work is also that part of the population whose numbers are most rapidly increasing. The AfDB comments:<sup>37</sup>

34 Zambia CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

35 Mozambique CRR, *op. cit.*, pp. 229, 243, 245–246; Nigeria CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 83; Sierra Leone CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 348; Tanzania CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 103; Zambia CRR, *op. cit.*, pp. 232, 240.

36 Page J, ‘Youth, Jobs, and Structural Change: Confronting Africa’s “Employment Problem”’, African Development Bank Group Working Paper Series, 155, Tunis, Tunisia; October 2012.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 8.

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‘The population at the most risk of unemployment is the educated youth entering the labour market for the first time’

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Although the young constitute about two fifths of the continent’s working age population, they make up three fifths of the total unemployed. All of the African countries analysed by the AfDB had higher youth than adult unemployment rates. In most countries youth unemployment occurs at a rate more than twice that for adults. In Botswana, Congo, and South Africa the youth unemployment rate is alarmingly high: more than one in three young people are unemployed compared to the world average of 14 percent. The average unemployment rate for those between the ages of 15 and 24 is about 30 percent in North Africa. Nigeria stands out because the ratio of the youth unemployment rate to the adult unemployment rate exceeds five to one. Statistical analysis of the likelihood of unemployment in 12 countries indicates that the young are more likely to be unemployed than any other age group.

A complementary point emerging from the AfDB analysis is that unemployment is perhaps better understood as underemployment.<sup>38</sup> This is a critical distinction. Most of the continent’s economically active population – including its youth – are engaged in some form of income-generating activity, but this is frequently of a precarious and low-productivity nature. This dynamic manifests itself in the large informal sector. While the informal sector is a major contributor to the continent’s economies (it accounts for between a half and three-quarters of employment),<sup>39</sup> it is typically a means of survival rather than a vehicle for purposeful wealth and opportunity creation. It is also testament to the frustration experienced by graduates attempting to find work suited to their qualifications.

A failure to secure employment – or to secure employment consonant with education and expectations – is, in other words, not a problem confined to the uneducated and unskilled. This dynamic is captured in number of the CRRs. The Uganda CRR argues that ‘the population at the most risk of unemployment is the educated youth entering the labour market for the first time’,<sup>40</sup> while those of Ghana, Kenya and South Africa note the high rate of unemployment among graduates.<sup>41</sup> (Education is discussed in greater detail below.)

It is worth noting that the failure of education to provide social and economic mobility – as conventional wisdom held it would – was a contributing factor to the Arab Spring. According to M Chloe Mulderig, an anthropologist specialising in Arab societies, this movement resonated strongly with young people who had followed the social prescription

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38 Readers are encouraged to refer to the excellent recent analysis by Melanie Meirotti of the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA) on youth issues in the APRM, which discusses this point in some detail. See Meirotti M, ‘Africa’s Untapped Resource: Analysing Youth in the APRM’, EISA Occasional Paper AP5, June 2015, pp. 9–13.

39 Sparks DL & ST Barnett, ‘The informal sector in sub-Saharan Africa: Out of the shadows to foster sustainable development and equity’, *International Business and Economics Research Journal*, 9, 5, May 2010, pp. 1–2.

40 Uganda CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

41 Panel of Eminent Persons, APRM, *Country Review Report of the Republic of Ghana* (Ghana CRR), APRM Secretariat, June 2005, p. 124; Kenya CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 45; South Africa CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

of proceeding through advanced education but had nonetheless been unable to secure work with their qualifications. She argues that the evidence suggests that higher education attainment is in some cases inversely related to employment prospects. In a number of countries, such as Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia, organisations have been formed – predating the Arab Spring protests – geared specifically to voice the frustrations of young, unemployed and socially excluded graduates.<sup>42</sup> In an echo of this, the Sierra Leone CRR refers to a ‘revolution of expectations’, especially among young people who have undertaken tertiary studies, that they will have bright futures.<sup>43</sup> This is by no means guaranteed.

## POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL INTERVENTIONS

Across the continent – and coming through strongly in the CRRs – the importance of dealing with youth issues is recognised. According to the AfDB, this has not historically been the case, but has been gaining momentum in recent years.<sup>44</sup> The African Youth Charter and the AU’s 2009–2018 Plan of Action both stress the importance of instituting an appropriate policy framework (‘youth policies’) and supporting institutions to implement it. Underlining this recognition, all of these countries have established bodies to champion youth interests.<sup>45</sup> These bodies exist in varying forms and constellations and include ministries, commissions or dialogue forums, and funding agencies – these generally being intended to compile and implement youth policy and attendant legislation. Interestingly, as a ministerial responsibility ‘youth’ is frequently combined with other things. Thus in Sierra Leone, youth issues are dealt with by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. In Ghana, they fall under the Ministry of Youth and Sports. In Rwanda, they are dealt with by the Ministry of Youth and ICT – an intriguing combination, suggesting a faith in the youth to be at the forefront of innovation and new technology, which are in turn seen as key to Rwanda’s future.

The goals that these institutions and their policy frameworks seek to actualise are varied, although they all focus in some way on integrating the youth in their respective societies – once again, something which the African Youth Charter demands. One type of intervention stresses the importance of providing a voice for the youth of the country in policy and governance debates. In Burkina Faso a key innovation is the National Youth Forum, which

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42 Mulderig MC, ‘An uncertain future: Youth frustration and the Arab Spring’, *The Pardee Papers*, 16, April 2013, pp. 11–12.

43 Sierra Leone CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

44 Soucat A *et al.*, ‘Accelerating the AfDB’s response to the youth unemployment crisis in Africa’, *Africa Economic Brief*, 4, 1, 2013, pp. 8–9.

45 These are discussed unevenly across the various CRRs, sometimes with no more than a reference in the list of abbreviations. See Algeria CRR, *op. cit.*, pp. 24, 115; Benin CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 117; Burkina Faso CRR, *op. cit.*, pp. 157, 159; Ghana CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 39; Ethiopia CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 113; Lesotho CRR, *op. cit.*, pp. 89, 90; Mozambique CRR, *op. cit.*, pp. 40, 138; Nigeria CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 128; South Africa CRR, *op. cit.*, pp. 116–117, 178; Sierra Leone CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 348; Tanzania CRR, *op. cit.*, pp. 69, 105, 155; Zambia CRR, *op. cit.*, pp. 125, 126, 262.

brings together the head of state, representatives of youth groups and other stakeholders to discuss relevant issues and exchange experiences, with a view to informing policy (this initiative is commended as a ‘Good Practice’ by the CRR).<sup>46</sup> In Mozambique, national councils provide a structured forum for vulnerable or marginalised groups to contribute to development processes at the national, provincial and district level.<sup>47</sup> In Rwanda and Uganda seats are reserved in the legislature for representatives of the youth.<sup>48</sup>

However, in keeping with the dominant concerns about socio-economic exclusion, most interventions appear to focus on enhancing integration in their economies and cover a wide range of activities. For example, in Nigeria the National Directorate of Employment seeks to promote job creation through programmes for skills acquisition, rural development, public works and small enterprise creation. Nigeria’s Capacity Acquisition Programme (an initiative under the country’s National Agency for Poverty Eradication) focuses on imparting market-compatible skills to young people.<sup>49</sup> In Zambia the state procurement budget is used for youth empowerment.<sup>50</sup> In Benin the National Employment Promotion Agency attempts to assist young people to enter the labour market, either as employees or as entrepreneurs.<sup>51</sup> Countries such as Algeria, Lesotho, Mozambique and Zambia seek to promote youth entrepreneurship.<sup>52</sup> In the periods following their APRM processes (and thus not covered by their CRRs) various countries have launched initiatives geared at extending opportunities to their youth. Kenya has committed itself to reserving part of its procurement spend for the youth.<sup>53</sup> In South Africa, an initiative launched in 2013 (and thus not covered by the APRM CRR) is the youth wage subsidy, in terms of which the government will refund employers for a portion of the costs of employing young, low-wage workers, with a view to helping them enter the world of work.<sup>54</sup>

Intentions aside, the CRRs raise serious questions about how well these institutions and the initiatives they oversee are functioning. Sharing the capacity limitations that characterise many African state institutions, they lack the resources and expertise to fulfil their mandates optimally and to improve meaningfully the lot of their respective countries’ youth. The Mozambique CRR, for example, notes that the country’s efforts are compromised by an ‘unclear national policy and strategic framework’.<sup>55</sup> The Algeria CRR

46 Burkina Faso CRR, *op. cit.*, pp. 60, 68, 265–266.

47 Mozambique CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 273.

48 Panel of Eminent Persons, APRM, *Country Review Report of the Republic of Rwanda* (Rwanda CRR), APRM Secretariat, June 2006, p. 134; Uganda CRR, *op. cit.*, pp. 63, 103.

49 Nigeria CRR, *op. cit.*, pp. 259, 273.

50 Zambia CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

51 Benin CRR, *op. cit.*, pp. 222–223, 266.

52 Algeria CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 203; Lesotho CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 103; Mozambique CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 245; Zambia CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 262.

53 Government of Kenya, ‘Access to government procurement opportunities’, <http://agpo.go.ke/>, accessed 31 March 2016.

54 *Mail and Guardian*, ‘Zuma signs youth wage subsidy bill into law’, 19 December 2013, <http://mg.co.za/article/2013-12-19-zuma-signs-youth-wage-subsidy-into-law>, accessed 28 December 2015.

55 Mozambique CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 245.



comments that ‘the Ministry of Youth and Sports, which coordinates government actions targeted at young people, experiences serious human, technical and material constraints that prevent it from playing its role effectively’.<sup>56</sup>

It is unclear for the most part precisely what exact set of factors undermines a given initiative in a given context, although it is possible to sketch some general contours. Resource and capacity constraints are one.<sup>57</sup> Another is the scale of the problem. The Algeria CRR suggests that although the country has ploughed considerable resources into promoting youth employment, the sheer weight of the problem has outstripped the efforts; survey evidence suggests a rather minimal regard for its impact.<sup>58</sup> It is also necessary to remember that youth issues are intimately bound up with broader societal issues. Thus, for example, youth unemployment is unlikely to be resolved without job-creating economic growth in the wider society. Youth entrepreneurs will need a hospitable business climate to see their enterprises succeed – as well as the necessary inputs such as financing,<sup>59</sup> which is a challenge confronting entrepreneurs of all demographics, albeit to different degrees. All of this suggests that while youth-specific initiatives are important, they are likely to be part of a wider but no less difficult and complex set of socio-economic reforms.

Furthermore, poor management, programme design and implementation can undermine worthy objectives. The Zambia CRR notes that credit schemes targeting the youth have not performed to expectations, as a result of ‘poor selection of youth beneficiaries, lack of monitoring, lack of strong financial control systems and, oftentimes, political influence’.<sup>60</sup>

Finally, attempts at dealing with youth issues are dogged by a lack of reliable information. This is reflected in some of the CRRs, although perhaps without the emphasis that it deserves.<sup>61</sup> It is widely accepted that effective policy is best designed off a foundation of solid, empirical evidence. Too often, African countries lack this. As Agnes Soucat and Rosemond Offei-Awuku of the AfDB note:<sup>62</sup>

Available global data on (in)activity of young people is clearly inadequate, which makes it difficult to design evidence-based policies aimed at reducing youth inactivity. Another sad reality is that employment interventions and programs that are generally applicable and that can be scaled up sustainably and reliably are yet to be discovered. Youth employment interventions in Africa generally lack knowledge on what works well and what does not, which is closely linked to the extreme paucity of employment data availability. High quality data is therefore crucial to guide effective youth policies, strategies and programs.

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While youth-specific initiatives are important, they are likely to be part of a wider but no less difficult and complex set of socio-economic reforms

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56 Algeria CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

57 Tanzania CRR, *op. cit.*, pp. 101–102; Uganda CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 102; Zambia CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

58 Algeria CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

59 Ghana CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 131; Lesotho CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 103; Nigeria CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 302; South Africa CRR, *op. cit.*, pp. 179, 264; Zambia CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 261.

60 Zambia CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 262.

61 See, for example, Nigeria CRR, *op. cit.*, pp. 276, 276; Tanzania CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

62 Soucat A & R Offei-Awuku, ‘Africa’s youth goldmine: AfDB’s response to youth employment crisis in Africa’, *GREAT Insights*, 3, 2, February 2014.

## YOUTH RESPONSES

The dynamics outlined above – poverty, unemployment, underemployment and the frustrated expectations that emerge from having invested in education and training to little practical avail – need to be seen not merely as a socio-economic issue (although this is clearly a large part of what they are) but also as an issue with important political implications. This might be described as a political economy of youth poverty. How the youth themselves respond, by seeking avenues to escape their exclusion or merely to survive it, could prove to be either a source of destabilisation – as several of the CRRs fear – or help to provide solutions that will benefit not only themselves but also the continent as a whole.

Arguably the key issue is that Africa's youth find themselves without the ability to acquire the necessary economic resources to be reasonably secure and self-sufficient – to assume the mantle of adulthood. This condition has been alluded to above, and is well attested to in academic literature.<sup>63</sup> A study on student protests in Cameroon makes the following observation: 'Many of the graduates are finding themselves obliged to defer their entry into adulthood indefinitely as they are unable to achieve economic independence, marry and start a family of their own. They are also being forced to abandon their aspirations for elite status.'<sup>64</sup>

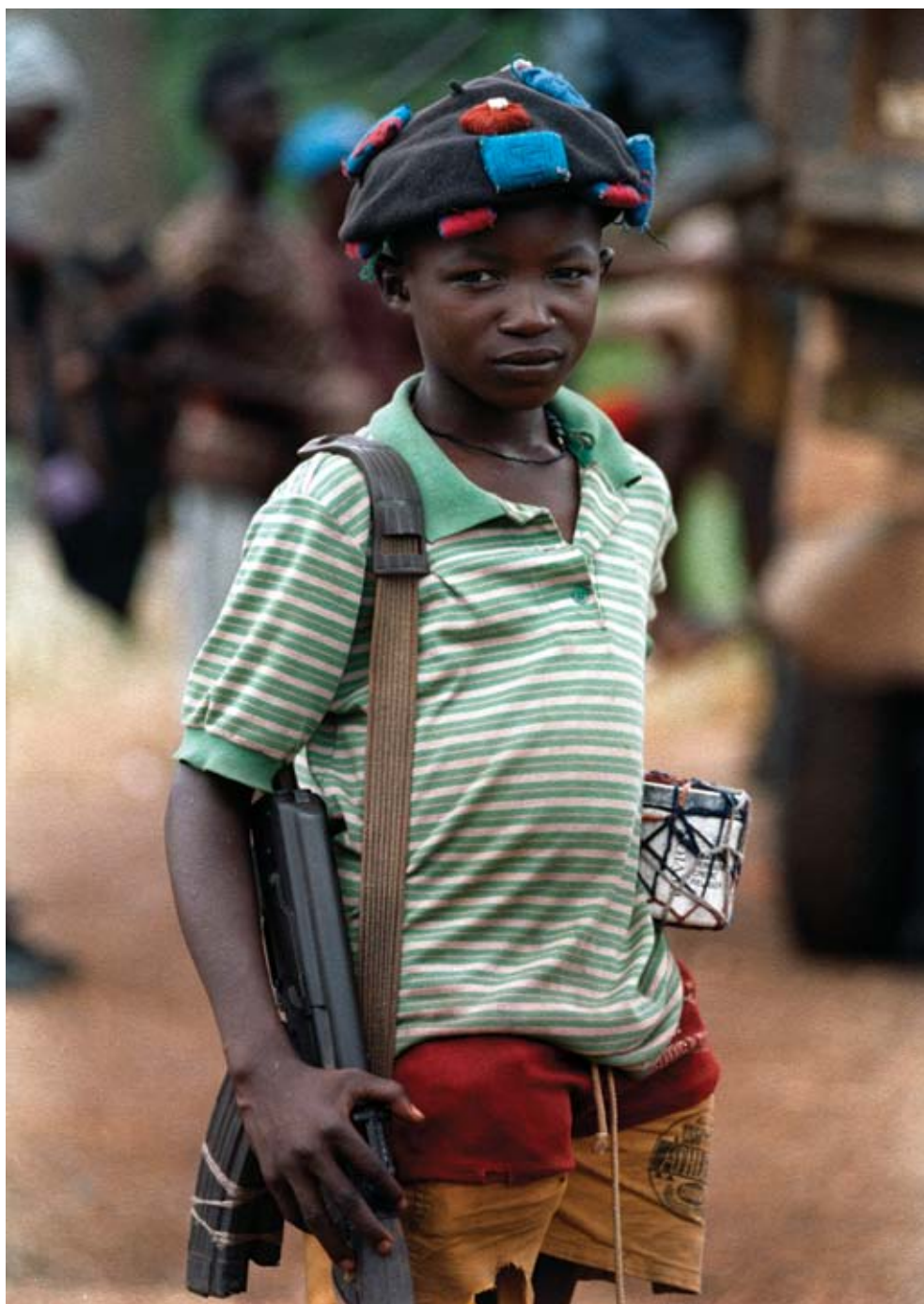
This protracted period of seeking entry to full adulthood is sometimes evocatively described as 'waithood'. This phase of life is likely to be marked by alienation from established political, economic and social structures. It is likely to prompt excluded young people to seek out anti-social and illegal avenues for advancement and survival, and is thus a potential breeding ground for pathologies. Expanding on this, a recurring theme across the CRRs is the perceived threat the continent's youth pose to stability. This is expressed in several ways.

Firstly – and in many respects, providing a context for the others – many young people have fallen victim to broader social ills. Several CRRs raise concerns about poor socialisation, delinquency and incivility,<sup>65</sup> pointing to a lack of proper integration

63 Agbu O, *Children and Youth in the Labour Process in Africa*. Dakar: Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, 2009; Honwana A, "'Waithood': Youth Transitions and Social Change', International Institute for Social Studies, University of Rotterdam, 2012, pp. 19–27, [http://www.iss.nl/fileadmin/ASSETS/iss/Documents/Academic\\_publications/2\\_honwana.pdf](http://www.iss.nl/fileadmin/ASSETS/iss/Documents/Academic_publications/2_honwana.pdf), accessed 28 December 2015; Strachan AL, 'Youth Transitions into Adulthood in Protracted Crises', GSCRC Applied Knowledge Services Helpdesk Research Report, 2015, <http://www.gsdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/1293-Youth-transitions-into-adulthood-in-protracted-crises.pdf>, accessed 28 December 2015.

64 Nyamnjoh FB, Nkwi WG & P Konings, *University Crisis and Student Protests in Africa: The 2005–2006 University Students' Strike in Cameroon*. Mankon, Bamenda: Langaa Research and Publishing Common Initiative Group, 2012, p. 2.

65 Algeria CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 123; Benin CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 118; Mauritius CRR, *op. cit.*, pp. 145–146; Nigeria CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 347; Sierra Leone CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 78; South Africa CRR, *op. cit.*, pp. 280–281.



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*A child soldier, bearing arms and wearing fetishes on his hat, is photographed at a checkpoint near Kenema, Sierra Leone*

into – and a sense of responsible ownership of – their respective societies. Faced with widespread poverty and limited means of escaping it, many choose, or are coerced to choose, options such as prostitution, early marriage or virtual indentured servitude

(particularly in domestic service) as strategies for survival.<sup>66</sup> Alternately, they may seek the favour of a patron to help them secure work or bursaries, thereby effectively joining and reinforcing extra-legal and sometimes corrupt relationships that stress Africa's institutions and encourage cynicism about the continent's governance.<sup>67</sup>

The second manifests itself in the political domain. In some instances – as is recorded in the Burkina Faso CRR – the youth may become disinterested in formal, electoral politics.<sup>68</sup> More ominously, there are reports of young people being enlisted as 'muscle' for political, economic or even criminal interests.<sup>69</sup> This risk is perhaps most acute where youths were actively and widely engaged in violent conflict. The most prominent case is Sierra Leone. Prior to the civil war (1991–2002) young people had been used as political enforcers; when fighting broke out it was a relatively simple task to adapt this pattern to the civil war.<sup>70</sup> Indeed, the Sierra Leone CRR cautions that youthful energy and frustration combined with other fault lines – such as politicised ethnicity and electoral conflicts – could be an especially volatile combination.<sup>71</sup> This is reflected in other research: for example, in Nigeria the depressed social context of much of the country's youth provides fertile ground for recruitment to the Boko Haram insurgent group.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, it has been argued that some 40% of recruits to rebel groups join as a result of unemployment.<sup>73</sup>

In a similar vein, the Mozambique CRR points out that the country's constitution contains a provision recognising the contribution of the youth to the country's struggle for liberation. On the face of it, this seems uncontroversial: it is a historical fact that the younger generation was prominent in challenging the colonial regimes (or in South Africa, apartheid). However, the CRR notes that this 'touches on the sensitive issue of children in armed conflicts'.<sup>74</sup> The political activism of the youth is an ambiguous legacy. Participation in political struggles disrupted schooling and socialisation; this being all the greater where it involved participation in armed conflict, and arguably even more so when undertaken outside formalised and organised control (for example, in informally organised militias – as opposed to structured military formations – or as part of mob confrontations). Those who emerge from these experiences stand to be disadvantaged by a lack of marketable skills – even their military skills might not be suitable for a career in the formal armed forces – and in some instances are psychologically scarred.

66 Kenya CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 108; Mozambique CRR, *op. cit.*, pp. 137, 140; Nigeria CRR, *op. cit.*, pp. 129, 308–309.

67 Ethiopia CRR, *op. cit.*, pp. 283–284; Kenya CRR, *op. cit.*, pp. 109–110; Nigeria CRR, *op. cit.*, pp. 128–129.

68 Burkina Faso CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

69 Nigeria CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 129; Tanzania CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

70 Sierra Leone CRR, *op. cit.*, pp. 79, 83.

71 *Ibid.*, pp. 83–84, 354.

72 Onuoha FC, 'Why Do Youth Join Boko Haram?', US Institute of Peace Special Report 348, June 2014.

73 Ighobor K, 'Africa's youth: A "ticking time bomb" or an opportunity?', *Africa Renewal*, May 2013, p. 10.

74 Mozambique CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

A third pathology is the prominent role played by young people in crime. The Algeria and Mozambique CRRs remark on the proliferation of drug trafficking,<sup>75</sup> while the Mozambique report points to the growth of criminal gangs.<sup>76</sup> The Nigeria CRR comments: 'The difficulties encountered by the millions of unemployed youth perpetuate poverty and exacerbate crime and violence in the country.'<sup>77</sup>

For the most part, the other CRRs do not deal explicitly with the relationship between youth and crime; this has, however, been widely recognised elsewhere. Research in South Africa, for example, demonstrates that young people are significantly more likely than the older strata of the population to be both perpetrators and victims of violent crime,<sup>78</sup> while statistics quoted in an AU report note that injuries through violence constituted the third most widespread cause of death among young males in Africa – after Aids and tuberculosis.<sup>79</sup>

Individually and cumulatively, these dynamics pose challenges for Africa's future and demand attention. The experience of Sierra Leone is a stark warning of the dangers of these dynamics being pushed to their extremes. As its CRR notes: 'In short, the Sierra Leonean civil war demonstrated that when youth become socially alienated and politically marginalised, they can – and do – unleash the worst forms of violence against the state, their communities and an entire population.'<sup>80</sup>

These pathologies do not, however, represent the totality of the youth's reaction to their circumstances. Although serious and threatening, there appears to be a far larger youth constituency that is eager to assume its place in society and is attempting to do so. Mirroring the situation across the continent, the Algeria CRR relates the extensive involvement of young people in the informal sector – a less secure alternative to the formal sector,<sup>81</sup> but a means of earning an income nonetheless.

In addition, there is clear evidence of an aspirational and entrepreneurial impulse on the part of the youth. In the Tanzania CRR, 'the youth claimed that their right to employment is compromised in the absence of an enabling environment for self-employment'.<sup>82</sup> This is encouraging and matches research conducted by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, which has found that youth attitudes to entrepreneurship are among the most positive in

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75 Algeria CRR, *op. cit.*, pp. 66–67; Mozambique CRR, *op. cit.*, pp. 102, 245.

76 Mozambique CRR, *op. cit.*, pp. 102, 245.

77 Nigeria CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 276.

78 Eric Pelsler, 'Learning to Be Lost: Youth Crime in South Africa', Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) Youth Policy Initiative Discussion Paper, Reserve Bank, Pretoria, 13 May 2008, [http://cjcp.skinthecat.co.za/articlesPDF/25/HSRC%20Youth%20Crime%20Discussion%20Paper\(2\).pdf](http://cjcp.skinthecat.co.za/articlesPDF/25/HSRC%20Youth%20Crime%20Discussion%20Paper(2).pdf), accessed 2 January 2016; Foster D, 'Gender, class, "race" and violence', in Ward CL, Van der Merwe A & A Dawes, *Youth Violence: Sources and Solutions in South Africa*. Claremont: UCT Press, 2012, pp. 23–51.

79 AU, 'State of the African Youth Report 2011'. Addis Ababa: AU Commission, 2011, p. 37.

80 Sierra Leone CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

81 Algeria CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

82 Tanzania CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 104.



the world,<sup>83</sup> a remarkable view given that many countries in Africa actively attempted to stifle private enterprise in the past. Properly harnessed – and this would imply improving the business environment in general in tandem with any youth-specific interventions – this could be a valuable social resource. Similarly, the Sierra Leone CRR notes that agriculture is a major economic opportunity, which could absorb large numbers of young people.<sup>84</sup> Other CRRs note that the youth lack access to land and that reforms should ensure that this is addressed<sup>85</sup> – a precondition for agricultural entrepreneurship.

Research conducted elsewhere affirms the entrepreneurial drive of Africa's youth identified in the CRRs. According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, Africa's youth – and in particular, the youth of sub-Saharan Africa – are by some margin the world's most favourably inclined towards entrepreneurship, and are most likely to seek an entrepreneurial career.<sup>86</sup> Provided this can be married with appropriate conditions for success in business (quality education, a supportive network of contacts, accessible capital and so on),<sup>87</sup> this is an asset that could yield enormous returns for the continent.

On the political terrain, a youth presence is increasingly felt. Indeed, Prof. Alicinda Honwana has argued that the 'waithood' period has an important positive side. It prompts reflection on the state of society, and generates demands for change that acknowledge youth preoccupations. 'This generation in waithood,' she says, 'appears to be losing fear and openly defying dictatorships, autocratic governments and political repression. These current youth social movements are still unfolding and it is anyone's guess where they will lead. But there is no doubt that this generation is fighting for freedom from want and freedom from fear and is taking [it] upon itself to redress the wrongs of contemporary society.'<sup>88</sup>

Certainly, youth activism has emerged as a force challenging what it perceives as injustice (perhaps more accurately, it has asserted the interests of the youth concerned). Prominent examples are the role played by young people in the Arab Spring and the student protests in South Africa in 2015.<sup>89</sup> Young people have also shown an aptitude for applying the

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83 Kew J, *Africa's Young Entrepreneurs: Unlocking the Potential for a Brighter Future*, Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, 2014.

84 Sierra Leone CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 286.

85 Uganda CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 290; Mozambique CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 246.

86 Schött T, Kew P & M Cheraghi, *Future Potential: A GEM Perspective on Youth Entrepreneurship 2015*, Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, 2015, pp. 27–31; Kew J, *Africa's Young Entrepreneurs: Unlocking the Potential for a Brighter Future*, Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, 2015.

87 De Gobbi MS, 'Making youth entrepreneurship work in Sub-Saharan Africa: Some factors of success', *Open Journal of Business and Management*, 2, 2014, pp. 305–313.

88 Honwana A, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

89 The widely read online South African news website, *Daily Maverick*, named 'The Student' as the '2015 South African Person of the Year'. See Munusamy R, '2015 South Africa Person of the Year: The Student', *Daily Maverick*, 14 December 2015, <http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2015-12-14-2015-south-african-person-of-the-year-the-student/#.VoI98hV97IU>, accessed 3 December 2016.



possibilities of cheap, accessible consumer technology and the social media tools it enables to their activism.

This clearly demonstrates that formidable potential for political activism exists among Africa's young people. That this frequently bypasses established structures and organisations is a clear statement that countries need to rethink their engagement with their societies' youth. All of this is potentially positive for the development of democracy and freedom in Africa. (Although it is equally prudent to take note of Honwana's qualification that 'it is anyone's guess where they will lead'. Certainly, aspects of the 2015 student protests were trenchantly criticised for allegedly rejecting debate, appealing to racial chauvinism and adopting intimidatory tactics.<sup>90</sup> Activism on these terms risks merely reproducing many of pathologies that have proven so destructive worldwide.)

This is not to say that the youth have no presence in formal politics. In Zambia, youth organisations have attempted to act as advocates for youth interests to political parties.<sup>91</sup> In the Benin CRR an engagement with youth representatives revealed a picture of idealism and civic mindedness; wanting to be included in the structures of society rather than seeing them abolished. As reported in the CRR:<sup>92</sup>

With regard to good political governance, they hoped for the reduction in the number of political parties, demanded that the High Court become operational and for magistrates to be elected rather than appointed. Their demands also dealt with the development of African and Benin culture. They called for the reform of the Constitution in order to take better account of these values, and introduce national languages in the education system. Considering that education in citizenship and democracy is a priority, they demanded the integration of civic education in schools. This education promotes the learning of human rights and democratic values, such as dialogue, pluralism, tolerance, and the respect of others. They hoped that education, which provides the means to gain knowledge, [and] acquire necessary skills and qualifications for future life, can train citizens who can have their say as far as their present and their future are concerned.

## CONCLUSION

The importance of finding a solution to the problems confronting Africa's youth has never been more starkly necessary than it is now. In highlighting the nature of the problem and emphasising the need for solutions, the APRM's enquiries are of great value. The continent would do well to take these insights to heart.

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90 See Warwick R, 'The fall of Rhodes or the fall of UCT?', *Politicsweb*, 24 March 2015, <http://www.politicsweb.co.za/news-and-analysis/the-fall-of-rhodes-or-the-fall-of-uct>, accessed 3 December 2016; Warwick R, 'Rhodes Must Fall: A rag-tag Hitler Youth', *Politicsweb*, 22 June 2015, <http://www.politicsweb.co.za/opinion/rhodes-must-fall-a-ragtag-hitler-youth>, accessed 3 December 2016.

91 Zambia CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

92 Benin CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

A comment on the role of the APRM itself is in order. As has been pointed out, the bulk of its analysis of the youth has focused on a relatively small clutch of issues. While there is little argument that these are the key issues confronting Africa's youth, future CRRs could benefit from a greater and more varied analysis of youth issues. Given the importance of youth development to Africa's future there is a solid case to be made for doing so. The African Youth Charter and the Plan of Action for 2009–2018 provide an excellent framework for this analysis.

Africa's youth face what might broadly be described as a crisis of integration. The APRM presents a picture of a large and growing community of young people with frustrated aspirations, and lacking the means to advance themselves. The consequences of this manifest themselves in immediate and long-term threats to Africa's societies. Both the symptoms of youth exclusion – such as delinquent behaviour – and the causes – notably unemployment – need to be addressed.

An understandable urgency might be accorded to dealing with the symptomatic issues. Better law enforcement and youth-focused social programmes might have an impact, although capacity constraints in African states limit the potential for these to be a complete solution.

A more promising avenue would be to redouble efforts to integrate the youth into non-governmental social structures. At least two of the CRRs – on Mozambique<sup>93</sup> and Zambia<sup>94</sup> – note presciently that a durable solution to the continent's youth challenges must be based on a broad partnership across society. Notes the Mozambique CRR: 'The role to be played by the community in addressing many of the problems confronting the youth remains paramount. Consequently, the communities should be recognised as an indispensable partner and greater efforts should be directed towards sensitizing and supporting them in this regard.'<sup>95</sup>

This echoes the views of a distinguished South African sociologist, the late Lawrence Schlemmer, who – in discussing social pathologies in his country – argued for much the same thing: a conscious attempt to re-establish communal norms and values.<sup>96</sup> 'Politicians', he said, 'may not wish to admit it, but governments are not very effective agents of change in these complex social dynamics.'<sup>97</sup>

Concurrently, the pressing problem of youth unemployment must be dealt with. More so than the social dimension, this is susceptible to official intervention, provided such interventions are appropriately conceived and competently executed. Following from this, three things stand out.

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93 Mozambique CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 246.

94 Zambia CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

95 Mozambique CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 246.

96 Schlemmer L, 'Lives at risk: The need for a conservative moral revolution', in Erkens R & J Kane-Berman (eds), *Political Correctness in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Friedrich Naumann Foundation & South African Institute of Race Relations, 2000, pp. 73–89.

97 *Ibid.*, p. 75.

Firstly, the information base on which policy is formulated needs to be upgraded. While the problems afflicting Africa's youth are well known, they need to be better understood. More research needs to be conducted on – among other things – youth unemployment, youth aspirations and potential employment opportunities. Crucially, the precise nature of barriers to youth employment needs to be understood.

Secondly, dealing with the problems facing Africa's youth cannot be divorced from the broader problems facing the continent and its societies. A general improvement in the quality of governance and state services – education, healthcare, regulatory administration – would arguably be of greater value to the youth than specific measures taken for their benefit.

Thirdly, any policy solutions need to take into account what is possible with the available capacities and resources. In many instances, it may be unrealistic to expect African states to undertake larger and more complex programmes for the youth. Smaller, targeted, high-value interventions that are manageable and achievable probably present better options.

Within these overall considerations, Africa needs to upgrade the quality and relevance of the education provided to its young people. A greater stress on vocational and industrial skills is needed to take advantage of the growth it is experiencing – it is emblematic of the problem that large investments in the extractives industry often depend heavily on expatriate staff at the 'blue collar' technical level. Along with this, training in technology and the sciences is crucial, especially since the evidence suggests that it is in these fields that the greatest labour market demand lies.

Concurrently, steps must be taken to direct the continent's youthful energy towards economic activity. Entrepreneurship is a vital part of this, but one that must be properly understood. The greater part of this is likely to be in the informal sector for the foreseeable future. This has inherent limitations, but is by no means peripheral to Africa's economic future. Appropriate policy steps – such as removing burdensome regulations, reducing harassment and extortion by corrupt officials, and providing elementary business training and micro-finance – can help to grant young people a foothold in informal business and achieve the modest growth of which it is capable. A more growth-focused cadre of young entrepreneurs in the formal sector is another goal. A first step must be to reduce encumbrances to entrepreneurship – something eminently within the purview of governments. (Indeed, the Algeria CRR makes this observation, with specific reference to encouraging entrepreneurship among groups such as women and the youth.)<sup>98</sup> However, evidence suggests that successful entrepreneurs are the products of good training, work experience and a positive personal attitude. They are made rather than born. It is not apparent how this constellation of factors can be arranged with a specific view to producing more entrepreneurs. Policy experimentation in this respect should be undertaken, bearing in mind that there appears to be a considerable pool of enthusiasm for entrepreneurship to be tapped.

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98 Algeria CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

Meanwhile, youth activism should be welcomed, though not uncritically. It should not be romanticised. It would be mistaken to conclude that youthful idealism will always manifest itself in favour of a ‘common good’, or that youth interests deserve priority over others. The greater, if imperfect, openness that has developed on the continent over the past three decades has led to innumerable calls on the often very meagre resources available. Just as youthful activists have performed a service by reminding societies of their interests, it may also be important at times for other interests to counter youth demands, to insist that they be carefully argued to demonstrate their merits in relation to competing claims. Ultimately, the continent’s political culture can only benefit from a political conversation articulating dialogue rather than demands.

Finally, a point from the Mauritius CRR should be noted: many ambitious Mauritians seek higher education abroad and do not return.<sup>99</sup> This drain of skills and initiative imperils the country’s prospects for the future. This is a phenomenon common to Africa, and will likely continue until young people’s native countries can provide them with the opportunity to attain the future they deserve.

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99 Mauritius CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 323.

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