Contributing Solutions to Youth Unemployment

Perspectives from a Skills to Succeed Insight to Action Virtual Event
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Unemployment among young people endangers entire economies and societies. It undercuts productivity, spending and investment—stunting national growth. It spawns inequality and spurs social tension. And it leads to social exclusion and deterioration of youth’s emotional, mental and physical health. What can we do? The good news is that we already have program responses available to tackle the problem now—by removing current constraints on youth employment.

In January 2016, Accenture held an interactive Insight to Action virtual event attended by more than 120 workforce development professionals from the Skills to Succeed practitioner network. In this session, we shared the recently released 2015 Baseline Report published by the Solutions for Youth Employment (S4YE) Coalition, and, building on the report findings, we explored ideas for addressing youth unemployment. In particular, discussion centered on a set of questions raised in the report:

- How can training more effectively prepare young people for work?
- What roles do expectations, perceptions and aspirations play in young people’s access to employment?
- Can entrepreneurship promotion deliver scaled impacts on youth employment?
- How can job-search and recruiting processes be made more effective?

In this paper, we present the insights on these questions offered by event panelists from three members of the Skills to Succeed practitioner network: Save the Children (Bangladesh), Per Scholas, Youth Business International (YBI) as well as Accenture’s Health and Public Service practitioners. These practitioners have achieved impressive results by designing and implementing innovative ideas and programs. We hope that their experiences and insights prove useful for other workforce development practitioners seeking to help young job seekers.

About Accenture Skills to Succeed

Having the right skills to open doors to meaningful, lasting employment or business ownership is critical. Accenture launched Skills to Succeed in 2009 to address this need and to advance employment and entrepreneurship opportunities in markets around the world. By mobilizing our people, partners, clients and others, we strive to make a measurable and sustainable difference in the economic vitality and resilience of individuals, families and communities.

By the end of fiscal 2020, together with our strategic partners, we will pursue the following targets:

- **Demand-Led Skilling:** Equip more than three million people with the skills to get a job or build a business.

- **Employment and Entrepreneurship Outcomes:** Increase our focus on the successful transition from skill-building programs to sustainable jobs and businesses and improve our collective ability to measure and report on these outcomes.

- **Collaboration for Systemic Change:** Bring together organizations across sectors to create large-scale, lasting solutions aimed at closing global employment gaps.
Contributors & Webinar Event Panelists

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Dr Nicole Goldin is the lead author of the Solutions for Youth Employment baseline report. She is an economist and expert on development and international affairs, especially well known for her pioneering work on youth, young women and girls. Nicole is the creator of the Global Youth Wellbeing Index for the Centre of Strategic and International Studies and the principal architect of USAID’s first ever Policy on Youth in Development.

Shahida Begum serves as the Director for the youth livelihoods programs at Save the Children Bangladesh. She has 25 years of working experience in the field of development in various positions, ten years of which are in managerial positions, serving partners, projects and professionals in both the Save the Children & Plan International, Bangladesh.

Angie Kamath is the national Executive Director for Social Ventures and Innovation at Per Scholas. In this role, Angie is responsible to launch social ventures with employers and nonprofits to raise 30% of the organization’s budget from earned revenue that will be reinvested into its job training programs. Prior to this role, Angie was the Executive Director of the New York site of Per Scholas, training over 500 students and Alumni each year in entry and mid level IT positions.

Rohati Chapman is YBI’s Director of YBI’s Partnership and Programs Team, which manages YBI’s global portfolio of youth entrepreneurship program funded by corporate and institutional partners. Rohati and her team work with YBI members to achieve global impact for young entrepreneurs. Rohati brings 15 years’ experience of Strategy development and program implementation across the public, private and note for profit sector.
I. What does the Solutions for Youth Employment (S4YE) baseline report reveal about youth employment today?

The world now has a record number of young people—as many as 1.8 billion and hundreds of millions of them are unable to find meaningful work that enables them to support themselves and their families or to contribute to their nation’s prosperity. Over the next decade, a billion more young people will enter the job market. As many as 600 million new jobs (about 5 million per month) will have to be created just to stay current with today’s youth employment rates, never mind improve those rates.

Persistent youth unemployment comes with high social costs, including heavy financial pressures on individuals as well as entire families, communities and governments. And while many organizations have invested in developing initiatives aimed at improving youth employment, these efforts haven’t yet “moved the needle” far or fast enough.¹

In this context, S4YE has defined a bold mission: to provide leadership and catalytic action to significantly increase the number of young people engaged in productive work by 2030. It seeks to develop innovative solutions through research and engagement with public, private and civil stakeholders—with the goal of crafting youth-employment solutions that can be scaled to maximize impact.

"The Impact of Interventions on Youth Unemployment"
Nicole Goldin
What effect will the changes have?

A key finding in the report is that current responses to youth unemployment are all too often uncoordinated and ill informed, making scaling difficult. However, according to S4YE analysis, we now have clear evidence that certain investments in youth employment do pay off. For example, interventions aimed at fostering entrepreneurship among young people improve probability of employment and number of hours worked, though the magnitude of these impacts remains modest. Impact increases when entrepreneurship interventions are combined with mechanisms that give young entrepreneurs access to financing for their ventures.

Such evidence provides valuable guidance on how to tackle some aspects of the youth unemployment challenge. But as with all major social and economic challenges, just as we resolve some questions about youth unemployment, new questions crop up. In that spirit, we share insights offered by Skills to Succeed practitioners on several vital questions explored at our recent event. While their insights draw from these practitioners’ country-specific experiences, they provide valuable lessons for all practitioners invested in workforce development programs.
II. Evidence-based, scalable solutions to outstanding questions around youth employment

How can training for young people more effectively prepare them for work?²

Young people’s experiences in the world of work vary considerably across geographies. For instance, in some countries, many youth work in the economy’s informal sector because there are not enough jobs available in the formal sector. The informal sector may be characterized by more insecure, unpaid or low-wage jobs as well as dangerous or exploitive work—yet it can also create markets of opportunity where youth may be uniquely positioned to thrive.

To address the challenges of employment in the informal sector, Save the Children in Bangladesh took an innovative approach to preparing young people for work while also preparing the workplace for young people, by collaborating with employers to provide decent work conditions. The organization focused its efforts on two global industries that depend heavily on the informal sector and that employ a large proportion of young people: the ready-made garment industry, and the consumer electronics industry. Save the Children’s Skills to Succeed program in Bangladesh has proved that jobs in the informal sector—under the right conditions—can offer young people opportunities to thrive. The strategies that they implemented helped improve the skills and working conditions of nearly 13,000 youth, and offer lessons valuable to other workforce development practitioners operating in economies with a large informal sector.

“ In Save the Children’s Skills to Succeed program in Bangladesh, we not only had to focus on preparing young people for work, but also on preparing the workplace for young people.”

Shahida Begum, Save the Children

From Insight to Action

Engage informal-sector employers in skills provision and workplace improvement

• Partner with formal-sector employers and help the informal sector learn from the formal sector’s corporate social responsibility (CSR) experience

Have formal-sector business leaders explain to informal-sector companies the benefits of helping young people build the skills needed to find and keep decent jobs. Employers in an economy’s formal sector have deep knowledge of national employment laws and policies as well as familiarity with international standards regarding decent workplace conditions.
To meet operational standards and maintain their global brands’ reputations, many such businesses are committed to promoting social responsibility in their hiring and workplace practices. Moreover, they are often the primary customers of suppliers operating in the informal economy; thus, they are in a position to influence those suppliers. Representatives from businesses in the formal sector can therefore serve as valuable role models for informal-sector employers and representatives from formal-sector businesses can explain how they upskill youth by providing apprenticeships and developing relevant, up-to-date training curricula that help young people acquire the skills that businesses need. With this in mind, consider establishing a forum for business leaders from both the formal and informal sectors to come together and discuss ways to improve workplace conditions together. Such gatherings enable employers from the informal sector to learn more about their country’s employment laws as well as global supply chain standards governing matters such as workplace safety and the business benefits of improving workplace conditions—which can include improved productivity of the young people they employ, which can in turn enhance profitability.

- **Educate informal-sector employers about industry standards and regulations**
  Just as formal-sector business leaders have much to teach informal-sector businesses, workforce development practitioners have much to teach on this subject as well. With that in mind, consider meeting one-on-one with employers from the informal sector to explain the supply chain standards in their industry as well as national employment laws and policies that, when followed, help to create safer and more productive workplaces. Such regulations may govern everything from drinking-water and sanitation-facility quality to lighting and ventilation requirements for a safe workplace. Help these companies develop workplace-improvement plans to more rigorously comply with national laws and policies. Set up a “Positive Employer” forum, at which representatives from informal-sector businesses that have introduced workplace codes of conduct can explain how they did so and how they benefited and are recognized for their positive practices for youth workers. Suggest that these companies establish accountability for meeting codes of conduct by providing managers and employees with anonymous ways of documenting code violations, such as information boxes. Then set up community-based CSR groups in close proximity to these workplaces. Group members can monitor the information boxes or other code-violation documentation mechanisms and respond to any concerns that arise.

**Use non-traditional mechanisms to reach remote or vulnerable youth**

- **Help employers provide training for remote young people**
  Identify remote areas characterized by high concentrations of unemployed youth. Cluster these young people into categories based on their work interests and their availability to fill local job openings. Then persuade local informal-sector employers to set up a mobile training center in a specific location for three to six months. To reach remote youth, deploy well-trained instructors from one location to another to provide training.

By taking action on these fronts, Save the Children in Bangladesh partnered with 200 informal sector employers and 20 formal sector employers and global buyers and improved 300 workplaces and placed 80% of *Skills to Succeed* graduates in decent jobs. They also helped 500 youth who were living in remote areas receive training. Informal-sector employers who hired these young people saw a measurable reduction in absences and employee turnover, received more supply orders from their formal-sector customers, and improved their reputations in the communities as well as with purchasers at upper tiers of the value chain.
What roles do expectations, perceptions and aspirations play in young people's access to employment?3

Expectations, perceptions and aspirations—those of youth as well as employer partners and workforce development practitioners—make a big difference when it comes to youth's access to employment opportunities. Per Scholas (USA) recognizes and addresses this head on in its technical and IT skills training, as well as training for employability skills such as communication, task prioritization and conflict resolution to its youth. Although the training runs full-time over several months, the organization invests equally in providing support long after students graduate from the program. Per Scholas has also clarified its own aspirations, drawing on perceptions and expectations of an outside specialist. Specifically, it invited the Youth Development Institute to assess how well the organization been serving young people, and it used feedback from the assessment to strengthen its program and operating model.

From Insight to Action

Develop interventions to help youth be more forward-looking

• Plant seeds of awareness in high schools
  Help high-school-age young people gain awareness of the range of valuable options that will be open to them upon graduation. For instance, Per Scholas visits high schools to let students know about the career vocational training opportunities available to them in addition to getting a college education. The objective is to help young people enter adulthood knowing the full array of possibilities they can choose from.

• Prepare youth for training
  Accept the fact that young people who might benefit most from the program may not have the skills needed to successfully complete it. Create programs to help them prepare. Per Scholas experienced this issue, with young people expressing interest in its offerings who didn’t meet admissions criteria. The organization developed a five-week-long “bridge” program that concentrated on helping applicants build the academic capabilities (such as basic study and literacy skills) required to successfully complete the training program.

• Keep providing support after training
  Reinforce the training program with ongoing support for alumni for a specified time period after they graduate. Youth will face challenges at work once they’ve been placed in jobs, and lack of follow-on support could lead to their losing a job or failing to earn promotions and wage increases. With this in mind, Per Scholas commits to working with young alumni for two years after they graduate. During those years, the organization uses a case management model to help alumni address on-the-job challenges before they can turn into crises. It also helps them build second and third skill sets by taking part in training opportunities in their off hours, with the goal of gaining access to second and third jobs. The ultimate aim is to help youth build the habit of self-education and advanced training.

Incentivize employers to hire young people who are inherently riskier to hire

• Convince employers of the benefits of hiring target beneficiaries
  Owing to labor-market volatility, some industries will find it more challenging than others to recruit and hire the talent they need. The high-tech industry is one example. If companies are interested in hiring young program beneficiaries, point out that, owing to the sharp increase in the need for technical skills, relying solely on college and university talent pipelines won't be enough to build an exceptional workforce. In fact, labor-market data shows that 40-50 percent of such jobs will remain open unless companies can tap into non-traditional labor-supply pipelines.
With tech companies that have offshored numerous positions, explain that this approach no longer delivers the cost savings it used to and that it can present quality concerns and logistics challenges. Talk with companies to understand their skill needs and cost concerns. And explain the business case for reshoring some of those jobs by hiring program alumni. The upshot: hiring young people who have completed technical skilling programs can equip companies with the talent they need to succeed in a fast-changing, highly competitive industry.

Craft and execute a value-driven corporate-engagement strategy

Employers can play a vital role in ensuring ongoing support for young people who have completed the program and are now working. But to do so, they need to perceive the value of the program as well as understand young people’s career expectations and aspirations. So find multiple ways to engage employers beyond just filling jobs. For instance, invite them to volunteer with the organization. The experience will demystify what it’s like to work with young adults and people who come from non-traditional backgrounds or who come with some risks. Persuade employers to hire program alumni into internships, apprenticeships and full-time jobs. Ask major employer partners to take on leadership roles in the organization; for example, by joining an advisory board. In addition, get feedback from them on the program; for instance, by asking them to review alumni’s resumes or take part in mock job interviews with students. Suggest that employers invite students to visit their company to learn more about the jobs available there. During these visits, employers could observe the students’ behavior, looking for evidence of strong employability skills or the need for improvement on such skills. Finally, ask employers to put some financial “skin in the game,” by investing monetary resources in the program.

Engaging with employer partners in a disciplined manner helps them embrace the notion that young people come to training and employment opportunities with their own career expectations and aspirations, and their own perceptions of what their opportunities are.

Getting to know these youth as individuals, through ongoing, close engagement, helps companies more easily accept and manage the inevitable situations in which a new hire doesn’t work out.

Per Scholas’s effort to improve its offerings and approaches has paid big dividends. After making these changes, the organization has developed a system for tracking its impact in meaningful terms and quantifying the value it generates for beneficiaries. The results showed evidence of a deeper impact thanks to the modifications it had made. For example, Per Scholas has been able to demonstrate how taking part in its program increases income for beneficiaries: typical Per Scholas grads have a pre-training income of $7,000 and a post-training income of $35,000 and often much more. Moreover, 80 percent of Per Scholas graduates land jobs.

"Incentivizing Employers to Hire Young People"
Angie Kamath
Can entrepreneurship promotion deliver scaled impacts on youth employment?4

As the S4YE baseline report noted, workforce development practitioners have now clear evidence proving that certain types of youth employment interventions work. This is particularly true regarding promotion of entrepreneurship among young people. Youth Business International (YBI) is a global network of local NGOs which, together with their Ugandan Member, Enterprise Uganda, co-delivered the Northern Uganda Youth Entrepreneurship Program (NUYEP) set out to improve the livelihoods of 10,800 youth and their households. As part of mobilisation, NUYEP set out to understand the bigger picture of entrepreneurship efforts targeted toward young people. Its experiences implementing NUYEP have revealed that when youth entrepreneurship programs are tailored to local conditions, they can deliver a scaled impact.

From Insight to Action

Decide what type of entrepreneurship support young people need

- **Diagnose the local context where the program is planned to operate**

  To develop entrepreneurship programs that deliver long-lasting change for young people, it’s key to understand what kind of support they need. Start building that understanding by diagnosing the local context in which the program will be delivered. That means identifying the economic, political, social and psychological challenges facing young people living in target geographies and communities. There are many tools that can be chosen from to diagnose context. But whichever tools will be used, make sure they have credibility with the local communities. To find out if a tool has local credibility, check with in country colleagues whether it is fit for purpose - e.g. does it ask the right questions? Does it complement or complicate any tools used previously? Tools can also be adapted to reflect international best practice around research method and ethics considerations (e.g. length of interviews to avoid fatigue; research ethics to protect interviewees - particularly young people and vulnerable groups). But if a tool lacks local credibility, it is unlikely to offer the data needed to tailor programs to local conditions.

"Deciding the Type of Entrepreneurship Promotion Support Needed by Youth"
Rohati Chapman
• **Provide contextually relevant support**
  When it comes to youth employment, the national picture is just one version of the truth. Challenges and opportunities related to youth employment may differ markedly across regions and sub-regions within a country. To ensure that youth entrepreneurship support is relevant in specific regions and sub-regions where the program will operate, get a granular understanding of the entrepreneurial culture in those settings. YBI and Enterprise Uganda did this by conducting a market assessment led by young people from the five northern regions of Uganda. Under the guidance of professional researchers, the youth held focus-group discussions, met one-on-one with stakeholders (such local business owners, local government officials and micro finance institutions) in their communities and documented their observations of market dynamics in those locations. The result was contextually rich data that YBI used to design NUYEP.

• **Foster an entrepreneurial mindset**
  Fostering an entrepreneurial culture requires encouraging an entrepreneurial mindset. In a post conflict setting there are further considerations. In the case of NUYEP, this translated into combating the aid dependency that had emerged from a long civil war in Northern Uganda. Instead of giving money out, NUYEP charged young people a nominal fee to participate in the program. This tactic strengthened participants’ commitment to extracting maximum value from the program. Indeed, 93 percent of participants said that they paid more attention to the training precisely because they had invested personally in it.

• **Focus on empowering aspiring entrepreneurs**
  Remember that while financial support matters, a sense of personal empowerment and belief in one’s self is an even more potent source of entrepreneurial success for young people. With this in mind, Enterprise Uganda, developed the Business Enterprise Startup Tool (BEST)—an initiative aimed at economically empowering aspiring young entrepreneurs by blending multiple approaches. The initiative’s key message is that young people can—and should—make maximum use of idle resources (i.e. existing assets; non-financial sources of support, including mentors, business counselors and local businesses who can provide advice; and pooled resources such as village savings and loans committees. Indeed, NUYEP provides no access to finance for program participants.

**Use entrepreneurship training to teach general business skills**

• **Prepare program participants for “mixed livelihoods”**
  Teaching young people the skills needed to build or grow their own businesses, includes teaching more generalized business and transferrable employability skills, such as financial literacy, communication and task prioritization. Strengthening life skills can prepare young people to take on wage or salaried work in the future, giving them even more employment options. This is particularly relevant in Africa where young people hold salaried positions as well as starting and growing their own business.

By applying these practices, YBI have achieved important successes to date with its NUYEP program, which at the time of this writing had three months left in its implementation. For instance, as much as 40 percent of participation has been female, a particularly impressive rate for Northern Uganda. 10,000 youth completed the training and more than 7,000 businesses were started or grown, and around 1,100 wage-paying jobs were created which exceeded YBI’s initial targets. Participants who received mentoring reported a 206 percent increase in their average monthly income. Equally important, beneficiaries reported a greater feeling of empowerment: Before the program, 71 percent said they didn’t think they could start their own business without an NGO loan. Afterwards, the number plummeted to 18 percent. What’s more, young peoples’ commitment to saving increased. Within a one-year period, the existing 25 Savings and Investment clubs have managed to accumulate a total savings from UGX 6,255,500 (~$1845) to UGX 152,117,000 (~$44872) by the end of March 2015.

Note - The statistics mentioned in this webinar were correct at the time of webinar broadcast. The NUYEP program has now ended and the final results are available from YBI upon request.
How can job-search and recruiting processes be made more effective?5

When considering how job-search and recruiting processes can be made more effective, many workforce development practitioners focused on youth employment may wonder how technology might help. They’re not alone. Indeed, use of technology is increasing in public employment agencies, as well as other workforce development organizations around the world. Accenture, for example, is working with governments who are investing in a number of technology solutions to boost effectiveness and efficiency of employment-related activities such as job matching, career counseling and competency assessment. Yet technology is only a tool – and workforce development practitioners must embed technology into their operating model and use it to support program design and implementation.

From Insight to Action

Use technology to scale up interventions and understand “social users”

- Understand beneficiaries and differentiate services to meet users’ distinct needs

When considering how technology might be used in workforce development programs, start by clarifying the type of services that will be provided and how technology can help to develop and deliver them. Then use digital tools to get a deeper understanding of beneficiaries. For instance, find out how long they’ve been unemployed, and how far they have to travel to find and hold down a job. Assess their technical and employability skills, and use the results to create individual competency profiles. Identify gaps between beneficiaries’ existing competencies and the skills employers need most. Young job seekers are not all the same, so be sure to gather enough of the right data, segment it and perform statistical analysis on it to understand who the target beneficiaries are and which kinds of interventions will prove most helpful to them. Customize service offerings and delivery approaches to young job seekers’ different profiles. For example, if a Virtual Labor Market tool was used to segment target beneficiaries, it may be that a self-service channel would be most effective and efficient for helping short-term unemployed youth to find out about and apply for available jobs. But those furthest from the labor market might benefit from more in-depth, face-to-face counseling aimed at helping them learn new skills or strengthen their existing skills.

“Using Technology in Workforce Development Programs”
Manuel Torres
Monitor labor-market trends
Use IT tools to examine trends unfolding in the labor market. These findings can help to gauge what kinds of jobs will likely become available in the future and which skills will be in high demand. In addition, use technology to foster transparency in the labor market—that is, visibility into what transactions are happening, such as which people are being hired and what kinds of offers are being extended.

Use insights from data to inform program design and implementation
Draw on a deeper understanding of target beneficiaries and the labor market to design the right youth employment programs and implement them effectively. For example, Germany, has used an integrated virtual labor market (LMI) tool to provide employment services to their customers and businesses. The tool includes a platform used by recruitment officers, and has helped lower the unemployment rate and increase the number of available apprenticeships. Meanwhile, the Singapore Employment Agency has used technology to provide job seekers with lifelong learning opportunities and maintain an active connection with jobseekers (features include interactive online career-path coaching).

Free up valuable resources
Let technology help liberate valuable resources so their expertise can be deployed more effectively. For instance, tools such as digital self-services for activation as the one provided by the German Labor Agency can free up orientation and counseling professionals so they can spend more time interacting face-to-face with job seekers who need closer attention and support to find employment and succeed in new jobs.

Evaluate the programs’ effectiveness
Use technology to gather longitudinal data on employment outcomes after the programs’ implementation. Analyze the data to evaluate the programs’ effectiveness and to identify and execute needed improvement efforts.
III. Conclusion

Without any doubt, the Solutions for Youth Employment Baseline Report provides valuable evidence to practitioners invested in workforce development programs. Through this research, a concerted “call for action” has been triggered – and a sense of urgency has been added to the issue of youth unemployment. In the spirit of the S4YE coalition’s approach of link, learn and leverage, we hope that the insights and best practices presented in this paper will further inspire practitioners to change the way they work in order to find sustainable solutions for young people in their local communities – today and tomorrow.
References


2 The insights in this section are drawn from Save the Children’s experience in Bangladesh, described by Moshammet Shahida Begum during the virtual network event.

3 The insights in this section are drawn from Per Scholas’s experience, described by Angie Kamath during the virtual network event.

4 The insights in this section are drawn from Youth Business International’s experience, described by Rohati Chapman during the virtual network event.

5 The insights in this section are drawn from Accenture Strategy’s experience, described by Manuel Torres during the virtual network event.

About Accenture

Accenture is a leading global professional services company, providing a broad range of services and solutions in strategy, consulting, digital, technology and operations. Combining unmatched experience and specialized skills across more than 40 industries and all business functions—underpinned by the world’s largest delivery network—Accenture works at the intersection of business and technology to help clients improve their performance and create sustainable value for their stakeholders. With approximately 373,000 people serving clients in more than 120 countries, Accenture drives innovation to improve the way the world works and lives. Visit us at www.accenture.com.

About the Organizations

**Solutions for Youth Employment (S4YE)** is a coalition of key stakeholder groups working on youth employment. Its mission is to identify and promote the adoption of transformative, scalable youth employment solutions.

**Save the Children** is the world’s leading independent organization for children. Save the Children works in about 120 countries, saving children’s lives, fighting for their rights and helping them fulfill their potential.

**Per Scholas** is a United States-based non-profit committed to breaking the cycle of poverty by creating technology education, training and career opportunities for low-income individuals.

**Youth Business International (YBI)** is a global network of organizations dedicated to helping young people to start and grow their own business and create employment. YBI operates in more than 45 countries.