

Research calls for new approach to youth strategies in Africa

KIGALI, Rwanda - Innovative research released by The MasterCard Foundation is making the case for a new approach to youth employment training strategies in Africa, as the research reveals the extraordinary lengths young people take to make a living.



Ugandan youth researcher Sarah Bafumda (right) shares information from the research with Hamidah Nyanzi, a respondent in the study.

'Invisible Lives: Understanding Youth Livelihoods in Ghana and Uganda', released at the [Young Africa Works Summit](#) in Kigali, Rwanda, sheds light on the working lives of African youth. The report, produced in collaboration with [Low-Income Financial Transformation \(L-IFT\)](#), argues that international development programs favour skills training for formal sector careers over training that can be applied to multiple jobs in the informal sector. The result is that their efforts fall short of reaching the millions of unreached youth on the continent who engage in mixed livelihoods.

"To reach a critical mass of young people, fundamental shifts in our approach to skills-building, access to finance and entrepreneurship support are necessary," says Lindsay Wallace, director of Learning and Strategy, The MasterCard Foundation. "Development efforts must strengthen social, education and economic systems, and promote inclusive growth that will provide the most vulnerable and marginalised young people with opportunities to improve their lives."

Invisible Lives set out to explore how young people integrate mixed livelihoods into their working lives, what challenges this approach poses, and how best to design interventions for young people in the informal sector.

The research used a diaries methodology to document the working lives of 246 youth, ages 18-24 years from Ghana and Uganda over a one-year period, honing in on questions around behaviour, income, economic activities, and time management. While these data speak to the realities of employment in Ghana and Uganda, the research suggests that these also reflect emerging trends across Africa.

Invisible Lives highlights the extraordinary lengths that young people go to in order to achieve sustainable livelihoods. Findings of the Invisible Lives research indicate that:

- Young people in Africa diversify their livelihoods, undertaking a mix of informal sector employment, self-employment, and agriculture-related activities to sustain their livelihood.
- Agricultural production is central to young people's livelihoods, but agricultural incomes were meagre. Many young people run small enterprises that can be easily started, stopped, and restarted as needed. The most successful young people in both Ghana and Uganda, diversified their income and risk by growing multiple crops, raising a variety of livestock, and pursuing a wide range of additional activities.
- Both formal and informal wage employment is rare and sporadic, or elusive. While the informal sector, which constitutes about 80% of Africa's labour force, provided more wage employment opportunities for young people, they were by no means abundant.
- Support networks are critical for young people and they play an extensive role in their lives, not only providing support in the form of advice regarding where to look for and how to find employment, skills development, and business guidance, but also proving instrumental in accessing financial resources needed.

"Respondents who participated in this study generously shared experiences from their lives over the course of a full year," explained Anne Marie van Swinderen, lead researcher on 'Invisible Lives from Low-Income Financial Transformation (L-IFT)'. "Data from the study shows us that these young people readily take up all opportunities that come their way, with enormous energy and positive spirit. Through the L-IFT diaries methodology, these young respondents and the young researchers who interviewed them, also grew a great deal, simply through the act of asking and answering questions about their diversified livelihoods."

In addition to providing new information on the employment and risk-mitigation strategies of young working Africans, the research maintains that youth who participated in this study were largely invisible to both development organisations and their own governments, and did not have any access to support services, training or finance capital.

The full [Young Africa Works Summit](#) agenda and list of speakers can be found [here](#).

Source: African Media Agency

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