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Youth unemployment and the role of regional organisations

THE CASE OF THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY (SADC)

POLITICAL ECONOMY DYNAMICS OF REGIONAL ORGANISATIONS IN AFRICA

PEDRO

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Youth unemployment is one of the biggest challenges facing the African continent. This paper explores the drivers and blockages to addressing youth unemployment through regional frameworks such as the 2016 SADC Youth Employment Promotion Policy Framework (YEPPF) and the Labour Migration Action Plan (2016 -2019). The paradox in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region is its high levels of youth unemployment despite high literacy rates.

By looking at these, the paper discusses the implementation gap of these frameworks and the reasons behind it. Although all countries in the SADC region face a similar challenge and have adopted frameworks at a regional level, member states tend to focus on domestic priorities at the expense of regional commitments, raising questions about the relevance or specific value added of a regional youth agenda.

Moreover, regional organisations might also learn from national initiatives and programmes developed by member states, such as disbursement of youth funds to promote youth businesses, though this raises questions about the value added of operating regionally. The paper suggests ways in which SADC and the African Union (AU) might address the youth unemployment challenge. These include:

- a clear working modality between the AU and Regional Economic Communities to avoid duplication of efforts through frameworks and policies that aim to achieve similar outcomes;
- a focus on genuinely regional areas like the implementation of the SADC National Qualifications Framework to ease labour mobility of its youth;
- promotion industrialisation, potentially through regional value chains that can create jobs as well as ensuring young citizens are given a platform to engage with formal regional and national structures.

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Acronyms

ACBF	African Capacity Building Foundation
AfDB	African Development Bank
AU	African Union
AYC	African Youth Charter
BMTHS	Botswana Multi-Topic Household Survey
CEDA	Citizen Entrepreneurship Development Authority
DPoA	Decade Plan of Action
EAC	East African Community
ECDPM	European Centre for Development Policy Management
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EIP	External Investment Plan
ESPJ	Education and Skills for Productive Jobs project
FANRPAN	Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network
GEP	Graduates Enterprise Program
ICT	Information and communication technology
HOSG	Heads of States and Government
J4Y	Jobs for Youth project
LMAP	Labour Migration Action Plan
MINDS	Mandela Institute for Development Studies
MP	Member of the Parliament
MSME	Micro, small and medium enterprise
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NYDA	National Youth Development Agency
PEDRO	Political Economy Dynamics of Regional Organisations in Africa
REC	Regional Economic Community
RISDP	Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan
RQF	Regional Qualifications Framework
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SEDCO	Small Enterprises Development Company
TFCA	Transfrontier conservation area
TVET	Technical Vocational Education and Training
UN	United Nations
YDF	Youth Development Fund
YEPPF	Youth Employment Promotion Policy Framework
YES	Youth Employment Service

Executive Summary

African youth unemployment rate from 2015 to 2017 stood at an average of 13.3%¹. Figures clearly vary across countries and regions - in 2017 Southern Africa had a youth unemployment rate of over 50%. Though subject to doubt given the notorious difficulty of recording accurate employment data when informal activity is so high, contributing factors to this high rate include an education system that is either unable to provide access to education for many, or when it does, is misaligned to the needs of the formal labour market, producing graduates who do not possess the skills required by employers and the lack of integration of Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in the schooling system. Informal activity in African countries has absorbed a significant proportion of the low-skilled and less educated youth in the labour force. But the great paradox in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region is its high levels of youth unemployment despite high literacy rates.

Given that the problem is common to all countries in the SADC region, this paper explores the drivers and blockages to addressing the youth unemployment through regional frameworks such as the 2016 SADC [Youth Employment Promotion Policy Framework](#) (YEPPF) and the Labour Migration Action Plan (2016 - 2019). Both of these feed into the broader SADC Employment and Labour Protocol and aim to curb unemployment through regional harmonisation of employment and labour standards in the region.

By looking at these, the paper shows the gap in implementation of these frameworks and outlines why this is the case. Although all countries in the SADC region face a similar challenge and have adopted frameworks at a regional level, Member States tend to focus on domestic priorities at the expense of regional commitments, raising questions about the relevance or specific value added of a regional youth agenda². Given the importance of national initiatives from which the region might learn, the paper also discusses Member state initiatives and programmes such as disbursement of youth funds to promote youth businesses. The role of other actors is also highlighted, such as international development partners who have shown commitment to cooperate with Africa in dealing with this challenge.

The paper concludes by suggesting ways that SADC (and the AU in certain instances) might effectively address the youth unemployment challenge. These include: having a clear working modality between the AU and RECs to avoid duplication of efforts through various frameworks and policies that aim to achieve similar outcomes; focusing on genuinely regional areas like the implementation of the SADC National Qualifications Framework to ease labour mobility of its youth; promoting the SADC industrialisation strategy and roadmap to encourage regional value chains that can create the needed jobs for youth; and ensuring youth are given a platform to engage with formal regional and national structures to ensure that their voices are heard and they are seen as a political priority. SADC has an opportunity to be an agenda-setter for youth and play the role of watchdog to monitor and evaluate the progress of implementation of adopted regional frameworks and policies domestically at member states level to achieve their intended impact but focusing on where there is regional traction will be key.³

¹ 15-24-year-old age group as defined by the United Nations (UN).

² Putnam 2 level game theory explained more [here](#). Also discussed in prior ECDPM PEDRO papers.

³ This will depend on human resource capacity within the SADC secretariat and political will of Member states.

1. Introduction

Though Sub Saharan Africa has been growing at an average of 4% for more than a decade, this has not translated into broad-based inclusive job creation. Meanwhile the youth population continues to expand.⁴ The African Development Bank (AfDB) estimates that of Africa's nearly 420 million youth aged between 15 and 35, one-third are unemployed and discouraged, one-third are vulnerably employed, and only one in six are in wage employment.⁵

Despite political statements on the need to address this challenge and invest in the development of youth in Africa, little has so far taken place. In most African countries, informal activity has become the last resort for a large proportion of the labour force. In Southern Africa, the informal sector is not as vibrant or dominant as in some of the other low-income countries of Africa, pushing up the unemployment rate. This is especially the case in a country like South Africa, where there is a lower demand for low-skilled and least educated workers and where recent GDP growth has been low, even if the continent has been growing fast.⁶ A number of countries are overly dependent on the extractives sector and have a limited private sector - although mining contributes significantly to Botswana's GDP for example, the sector does not contribute much to employment.⁷ But even for a country like South Africa which has a large private sector economy, generating the much-needed employment has been elusive.⁸

This paper analyses the role of regional organisations and other stakeholders/actors in tackling youth unemployment in Africa, primarily with a focus on the SADC region. Given youth unemployment is common to all SADC countries, this paper explores the drivers and blockages to the challenge through regional frameworks. It looks at the 2016 SADC [Youth Employment Promotion Policy Framework](#) (YEPPF) and the Labour Migration Action Plan (2016 -2019). Both of these feed into the broader SADC Employment and Labour Protocol with the objective of curbing unemployment through regional harmonisation of employment and labour standards in the region. Lessons are also drawn from other Regional Economic Communities (REC's) and member states that have achieved some success in the economic, political or social advancement of youth. The study looks at the current problem, gives a snapshot of who currently does what, identifies the gaps and proposes recommendations of what could practically and realistically be done (and by whom) to effectively tackle this challenge.

However, as the paper discusses, some of the issues affecting youth unemployment are hard to address regionally. Although Heads of States and Government (HOSG) for Member States make commitments at the regional level, domestication⁹ and implementation at national level is often a challenge, either because Member States tend to prioritise domestic needs at the expense of regional commitments,¹⁰ or sometimes because of limited awareness of the existence of such regional frameworks and how they might be implemented and enforced.

⁴ Mo Ibrahim Foundation Forum Report, 2017. [Africa at a tipping point.](#)

⁵ African Development Bank, 2016. Jobs for Youth in Africa.

⁶ Fox, L., Senbet, L. W. & Simbanegavi, W., 2016. Youth Employment in Sub-Saharan Africa: Challenges, Constraints and Opportunities, Journal of African Economies, Vol. 25, AERC Supplement 1, pp. i3-i15.

⁷ (a) African Capacity Building Foundation, 2016. The Challenge of African Youth Unemployment, 26th Occasional Paper (b); [According to Statistics Botswana, by the end of quarter 1 of 2018, Mining contributed 16.6% to Botswana's - second only to Trade, Hotels and Restaurants](#)

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Aligning regional agreements/frameworks with national laws and policies.

¹⁰ As per footnote 2.

The paper also finds that the unemployment challenge is exacerbated by rural-urban migration of youth in search for better opportunities due to the lack of infrastructure and opportunities in the rural areas¹¹ which combines with non-implementation of regional policies intended to support cross border labour migration. Other underlying factors include the education system that is misaligned with the needs of the labour market, as evidenced by the number of unfilled employment openings despite high youth unemployment rates. This has led to calls to revisit the educational systems and integrate technical vocational education and training (TVET) in the curricula to meet the gaps and demands of the African economy. But in spite of these and a lot of talk on developing the required employable skills in youth, even when the skills are relevant, there are institutional and cultural constraining issues¹² that face a young person when entering the labour market that need to be addressed by employers at national level to ease the transition of young people as new entrants to the formal labour market.

Beyond the realms of youth unemployment specifically, there is broad agreement on the need in Africa for economic transformation, especially in agriculture and manufacturing. Even if not targeted at youth, this might create the much-needed jobs for youth, not least given the high labour intensity of these two sectors¹³. This might be done through promoting regional value chains and industries that will lead to the exportation of finished goods instead of raw minerals and goods. But these also face policy implementation challenges, raising further questions about the role and added value of regional organisations in helping address the youth unemployment challenge.

Although the general definition of “youth” is considered as the stage of transition from childhood to adulthood, different international organisations have placed an age range to define youth.¹⁴ The paper uses the African Union (AU) definition of a young person, which is *any individual between the ages of 15 -35*, although where such data is unavailable, the United Nations definition will be used (15-24). The paper also uses ILO’s definition of unemployment i.e. any person that is currently not in any paid or self employment, but currently available for and actively seeking work. This research study is based on a desk review of existing literature on the subject and remote interviews with relevant stakeholders.¹⁵

The paper is organised as follows: Section 2 provides some of the context around youth unemployment in Africa and Southern Africa in particular. Section 3 then discusses some of the regional policies in place before Section 4 provides examples from individual states. Section 4 concludes.

2. Youth unemployment - a multifaceted, multi-layered problem

According to the ILO, between 2015 and 2017 Africa’s average youth unemployment rate was estimated at 13.3%, just above the global rate of 12.5%.¹⁶ On the other hand, in Southern Africa, the youth unemployment rate was estimated at over 50%.¹⁷

¹¹ *ibid*

¹² These include poor employer perception that often cite [lack of expertise and personal/professional maturity](#).

¹³ Interview, 2018. Robert Nantchouang, African Capacity Building Foundation.

¹⁴ The United Nations (UN) considers youth as anyone between the ages of 15 - 24 years old whilst the African Union (AU) categorises it as any persons between the ages of 15 - 35 years old.

¹⁵ Although the response rate was low.

¹⁶ 15-24-year-old age group as defined by the United Nations (UN).

¹⁷ It could also be argued that the higher figure in Southern Africa could be as a result of better reporting of figures rather than a worse functioning labour market.

The official statistics below show that in 2017, South Africa had the highest youth unemployment rate (53.6%) followed closely by Namibia (43.9%) and eSwatini (formerly Swaziland) with 43%. At first glance, these statistics beg the question of how one of the biggest economies in Africa (South Africa) can have such high levels of youth unemployment whilst a country like Zimbabwe records much smaller percentages, especially given the country's economic crisis in the past years. Though partly to do with how unemployment data is recorded, it also reflects the spillover of labour migration - both skilled and unskilled workers crossing the nearby borders (legally and illegally) into neighbouring SADC countries such as Botswana and South Africa in search of better livelihoods and economic opportunities.

Table 1: Youth unemployment rate in SADC countries (2015-2017) ¹⁸

Country	2017	2016	2015
<i>Angola</i>	16.7	17	16.9
<i>Botswana</i>	36.6	36.8	36.8
<i>DRC</i>	7.7	8.1	7.8
<i>eSwatini</i>	43	43.3	44.7
<i>Lesotho</i>	33.2	34	34.2
<i>Malawi</i>	7.82	7.6	7.7
<i>Madagascar</i>	2.7	2.9	2.9
<i>Mauritius</i>	23.7	22.4	25
<i>Mozambique</i>	6.7	7.1	7.2
<i>Namibia</i>	43.9	44.2	41.3
<i>Seychelles</i>	-	-	-
<i>South Africa</i>	53.6	53.4	50.2
<i>Tanzania</i>	3.4	3.7	3.7
<i>Zambia</i>	16.1	16.4	16.5
<i>Zimbabwe</i>	8.2	8.6	8.8

Source: *International Labour Organisation*

¹⁸ (a) Comoros is not included as it only joined SADC in 2018; (b) This data represents the UN's definition of youth - 15-24;

There is of course controversy concerning how unemployment figures are captured - specifically the methodology used and the definition of "employment" when collecting such data. Critics have disputed that the numbers do not reflect the reality on the ground. Labour market surveys do not consider whether respondents who categorise as "employed" are engaged in decent work that is regular, remunerated and regulated. Most young people who graduate with formal qualifications and fail to secure formal employment, resort to "self-employment", or informal employment as an alternative (which is irregular and sometimes does not generate any income for extended periods of time). Some have given up on finding a job altogether and stopped searching but the unemployment data tends not to capture this cluster.¹⁹

In 2017 the Mo Ibrahim Foundation released its annual Forum Report titled "Africa at a tipping point", and listed 6 SADC countries amongst the top 12 with the highest youth unemployment rates (eSwatini, South Africa, Namibia, Mozambique, Lesotho and Botswana).²⁰ Most striking was the absence of a country like Zimbabwe in this ranking. Whilst international institutions such as the World Bank pinned Zimbabwe's youth unemployment rate at 16.4% (officially), the non-official data was estimated to be as high as 80%-90%.²¹

Even if accurate data is hard to find, the magnitudes illustrate the scales involved. This is a grim reality for a country that boasts one of the highest literacy rates in the region,²² showing that its young people find it difficult to be absorbed in the formal sector to secure decent employment opportunities.

Given the lack of formal employment opportunities, the informal sector is one of the largest sources of income in Africa, especially for the youth, primarily for the low skilled and less educated. However, there are increasing numbers of educated youth also entering into informal activities due to a lack of opportunities. That is the case in Zimbabwe.

In other countries with a smaller informal economy like South Africa, the absence of opportunities has resulted in high youth unemployment. As one article put it "*It is not a question of lack of skills. They have nowhere to practice the skills that they learned*".²³ In 2017, for example, Adcorp Employment Index, showed an availability of more than 800 000 vacant positions across numerous industries in South Africa despite high unemployment rates.²⁴ Difficulty in filling these positions can be explained by a survey on talent shortage by Manpower South Africa which concluded that more than 30% of companies attributed the lack of candidate experience, industry specific qualifications and hard skills as the top reasons for these unfilled vacancies. Although the 2016 Manpower shortage group index shows that the most sought after skills by employers in South Africa were for trades such as electricians, welders, mechanics, engineers etc., top graduates qualifications produced by South African universities in the same year were in arts, communications and journalism as well as information technology (for young people aged between 25-34),²⁵ explaining the misalignment between what is needed by the labour market and what is produced by higher learning

¹⁹ To give an example, the 2015/2016 Botswana Multi-Topic Household Survey (BMTHS) conducted by the national statistics office (Statistics Botswana) faced controversy as citizens questioned its credibility. The labour market survey used, defined employment among others, as "individuals who did not do any work in the past seven (7) days" prior to commencement of data collection and treated beneficiaries engaged in employment programmes such as "Ipelegeng" as employed, opposed to being in a temporary livelihood stress relief initiative or safety net. The controversial government program which is rotational, focuses on menial tasks and remunerates around \$40 a month and capturing the program beneficiaries as employed led to under reporting of the overall unemployment rate in the country. Gobotswamang, K., [Stats Botswana unemployment figures questionable](#), Mmegi Online, 1 September 2017.

²⁰ The report's data was sourced from ILO, UNDESA and AfDB.

²¹ BBC News. [Reality Check: Are 90% of Zimbabweans unemployed?](#), 3 December 2017.

²² Around 90% according to the World Bank.

²³ Dube, G., [College, University Graduates Struggling to Get Jobs](#), VOA, 3 November 2014.

²⁴ Top performing companies & public sector. [SA's most wanted profession: engineering](#), 2 August 2017.

²⁵ Statistics South Africa. 2016. Education Series Volume III: Educational Enrolment and Achievement, Report 92-01-03. <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/Report%2092-01-03/Report%2092-01-032016.pdf>

institutions. This is just one example illustrating the mismatch in skills acquired by the youth and those required by employers.

With such a common problem being faced by governments across African countries it seems logical that regional bodies have taken the youth unemployment challenge to heart and developed strategies and approaches to assist their member states.

3. Looking regionally

3.1. Lots of rhetoric and policies on youth... everyone is talking the talk

African Union approaches

Multiple policies and frameworks have been adopted at the continental and regional levels as a response to youth exclusion on the continent, reflecting the risks of continuously ignoring the surge in youth unemployment on the continent. At the AU, Heads of States and Government (HOSG) have made commitments to addressing youth unemployment including;

- a) The 2004 Ouagadougou Declaration in which the HOSG of the African Union committed themselves to placing employment promotion and poverty alleviation at the core of national and regional plans, economic and social policies and development strategies.
- b) The 2011 Malabo Declaration where AU HOSG committed to creating “safe, decent and competitive employment opportunities” for youth.
- c) The 2015 Ouagadougou 10+ Declaration where HOSG of the AU committed themselves to eliminating youth unemployment and empowering young men and women.

Encompassing all of these is the African Youth Charter (AYC) which was adopted in 2010 by the AU as a legal and political framework to mainstream youth development. It specifically lays out the rights and responsibilities of both African countries and youth through 31 articles. As of 2016, it had been signed by 42 Member States and ratified by 38. The AU also declared the period 2009-2018 as the decade of youth development on the continent with an accompanying decade plan of Action (DPoA). The DPoA acts as a roadmap for achieving the AYC. It identifies five key priority areas which include: 1. Education and Skills development; 2. Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship; 3. Governance, Peace and Security; 4. Youth Health and Sexual Reproductive Health Rights; 5. Agriculture, Climate Change and Environment.

The AU HOSG designated the theme for 2017 as “Harnessing the Demographic Dividend through investments in Youth” and subsequently the AU released a [roadmap](#) towards the achievement of the theme. That listed nine key areas for the promotion of employment and entrepreneurship through a matrix of key activities. The roadmap and DPoA emphasise plans towards the achievement of the AYC.

Beyond these, in 2013, the African Union also launched its ambitious vision for the continent - Agenda 2063. Aspiration 6 of this vision speaks of an Africa whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children - testifying to the need for the continent to pursue inclusive growth and prosperity by mainstreaming youth in the development process thus effectively addressing the current problem.

More narrowly, the AU has also included a quota of 35% of youth employment across its institutions by 2025. This is part of the ongoing AU reform process and is accompanied by the recently appointed an AU Youth

Envoy²⁶ to lead advocacy and champion the prioritisation of youth issues within continental and other decision-making spaces, achieving one of the key deliverables of the 2017 theme roadmap.

However, in spite of the statements and strategies, 2018 has come and gone without any progress report,²⁷ it is difficult to ascertain what has been achieved and whether significant impact has been made towards the youth agenda on the continent during these past 10 years. At the level of the African Union, it is difficult to come across a budget or trail of resources that show whether or not the DPoA was fully budgeted for. Without a 10-year budget for the implementation of the DPoA a proper assessment of progress cannot be made. It is also unclear if there has been any monitoring and evaluation reports/assessments on the implementation of the DPoA. African governments have not released progress reports on the status of youth development (specifically in the area of employment) in their respective countries - although the commitment was made, underlining the clear gap between well written policies with good intentions and actual implementation.

Of course, this may not only be about the youth agenda, but the wider challenges facing the AU as a continental body that can set agendas but where implementation is always at the national level.²⁸ In theory, a Regional Economic Community (REC) such as SADC is closer to the reality of its member states, so may be able to more effectively encourage implementation around the youth agenda than the AU.

SADC youth policies

In 2016, SADC put in place the [Youth Employment Promotion Policy Framework](#) (YEPPF). The aim of the YEPPF is to guide SADC Member States on a harmonised, integrated and coherent approach to realising decent, secure and sustainable employment (including entrepreneurship) for youth with some of the following specific objectives:

- a) To **improve employment opportunities** for young women and men in the region; including encouraging labour intensive employment industries that can absorb many young people; promoting value addition, beneficiation and industrial diversification as well as creating an enabling environment for youth to acquire decent employment.
- b) To **improve entrepreneurship capabilities** among youth in the region; including supporting youth Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME's); promoting youth entrepreneurship by streamlining regulations that impede young people from starting and running sustainable enterprises; establishing a SADC Youth Empowerment Fund and programmes to assist in identifying youth innovators: encouraging regional youth innovation competitions and; promoting youth exchange/learning/networking programmes in the SADC region and internationally.
- c) To **incentivising private sector to impart skills to youth** through on-the-job training programmes, attachments, mentoring and apprenticeships /learnership/ internship.
- d) To **increase the participation of young people in the labour market** in the region; through encouraging the formation of national and regional youth forums on decent employment;
- e) To **promote effective management of youth labour migration** in the region through providing for the portability of skills in the region by aligning national qualifications frameworks to the SADC regional qualifications framework; facilitating the integration of labour migrants in destination countries and encouraging bilateral agreements where skill deficient countries can access abundant skills in other Member States and minimising loss of skilled labour from the region.

²⁶ Ms. Aya Chebbi of Tunisia was officially appointed in November 2018.

²⁷ Although the AU released the [State of the African Youth Report](#) in 2011, it mainly covers the period between 1998 - 2009.

²⁸ See Vanheukelom, J. 2017. The African Union: How to become fit for purpose? ECDPM policy brief, December 2017. <https://ecdpm.org/publications/african-union-become-fit-purpose/>

- f) To **strengthen youth labour market information systems** in the region by strengthening statistical offices to collect, analyse, store data, and report on youth labour market information that is disaggregated by age, gender, race, disability, worker education, formal-informal and urban-rural divides.

The YEPPF was developed building on existing frameworks within SADC including: the SADC Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) 2015-2020; the SADC Industrialisation Strategy and Road Map (2015-2063); the SADC Strategy and Business Plan on Youth Empowerment and Participation for Sustainable Development (2015-2020); and the SADC Decent Work program 2013-2019.

There is also a broader SADC Employment and Labour Protocol with an objective to curb unemployment through regional harmonisation of employment and labour standards as well as the Labour Migration Action Plan (LMAP) (2016 -2019) which aims at “promoting labour migration to advance regional integration and development in the region”. Both these frameworks, including the YEPPF are intended to work side by side. However, their objectives have been undermined by a lack of implementation and xenophobic incidents that have been experienced in the region, most notably in South Africa in recent years. This suggests that in addition to policies, there is a need for Member states to invest in sensitisation campaigns against xenophobia, often triggered by fear of jobs being taken by other Africans. Indeed, the LMAP aims to safeguard youth who may want to cross over regional borders in search of better economic opportunities but this is hard to implement if the individuals themselves are at risk.

Beyond policies, since 2013 there is also a recognised SADC Youth Forum which periodically engages on youth matters with Member States’ National Youth Councils as well as with development partners. In its last convening, there was an agreement to transform the Forum into a SADC Youth Union as an official institutional structure to coordinate regional efforts towards youth empowerment, with the final decision on its transformation to be made at the next SADC Youth Ministers meeting.²⁹ This decision came as an acknowledgement that youth involvement still lags behind in regional structures of decision making, policy design and implementation processes. Since SADC has been mandated to promote participatory democracy by including both women and youth at higher levels such as political and parliamentary platforms,³⁰ this is an area where a REC like SADC can potentially lead its Member states on institutionalising similar youth structures at higher decision making levels, though as discussed below, the difficulty of working regionally on national and local issues is a recurrent challenge. The scale of the youth unemployment challenges does not make it easier to address at a regional level.

3.2. Why regional organisations?

The policy environment

Although REC’s are seen as the building blocks of the AU and in theory must function based on the principle of subsidiarity (areas where RECs do not have competence should be led by the AU on behalf of the REC’s) and complementarity (division of labour on what the AU and the RECs should do), in reality the working modality between the AU and the REC’s is unclear.³¹ This then is one factor in the poor REC implementation of policies developed at the AU.³² Some suggest that countries are more likely to listen to the REC’s than to

²⁹ Interview. 2018. Willys Simfukwe, Southern African Development Community (SADC).

³⁰ As per footnote 9.

³¹ There is however some coordination that exists through liaison offices but it needs to be strengthened.

³² See more on ECDPM’s Political Economy Dynamics of Regional Organisations in Africa (PEDRO) dossier <https://ecdpm.org/dossiers/political-institutional-dynamics-regional-organisations-africa/>.

the AU (i.e. it is more likely that SADC member states would implement the YEPPF than AYC/DPoA) even though in context, they all want to achieve the same thing.

Further, the available frameworks are often not well publicised at the national level, resulting in Members of Parliament being unaware of these regional frameworks hence making ratification and implementation of them at national level a challenge. Even the intended target group of the frameworks (youth) at times, do not know of their existence. Cooperation and communication between regional organisations, youth and government in this regard is essential to tackle this challenge. Youth organisations also struggle to come on board around academic issues and discussions around youth unemployment, tending instead to focus solely on the role of the government due to the lack of dialogue/ formalised multi stakeholder engagement between government, private sector, youth and other relevant actors on this matter.

Ministries of Youth that are mandated to promote active participation of youth in the socio-economic development of their respective countries, in most cases, are small and underfunded, resulting in different youth development/employment initiatives being championed by other Ministries other than those of Youth - without any central coordination.³³ The ability to achieve the objectives of the YEPPF will depend on each Member State making the necessary budgetary allocation for domesticating, mainstreaming and implementing this framework, but Ministries of Finance who are responsible for government expenditure are missing from this discussion. All these make national monitoring and evaluation of progress and what works or does not work difficult to ascertain.

In the YEPPF for example, the SADC secretariat is mandated with; (1) developing a regional implementation plan to guide Member States in the implementation of the framework; (2) facilitating and coordinating the implementation of the framework; and (3) coordinating periodic review meetings with relevant stakeholders to assess progress. In this instance, a REC like SADC is ostensibly given the role of being a watchdog and ensuring that the policies, plans and frameworks of individual member states are aligned and harmonised with the regional frameworks and that countries implement them - offering assistance when and where needs arise. SADC can potentially also offer a unique platform to create transboundary opportunities that will generate the much-needed jobs for its youth. The SADC industrialisation Strategy and Roadmap prioritises for example agro processing, mineral beneficiation and industry and service driven value chains as the region's potential growth path that includes the participation of both women and youth through formal education and targeted training to contribute to this new modernised and industrialised regional economy. But like the regional industrialisation strategy itself, these regional approaches all face implementation challenges with other areas seen as priority, or national interests undermining regional commitments.³⁴

All this raises the question about the value added of operating regionally on the youth agenda. One area that might merit regional cooperation beyond existing strategies is in the harmonisation of educational qualifications. The East African Community (EAC) has made significant progress in this area to facilitate compatibility of higher education quality standards and to allow mobility of students in the region. This will ensure that qualifications attained in one-member state, are mutually recognizable among the rest of the EAC partner states, therefore promoting labour mobility within the region. Should this be successful, it means that with the support of adequate soft infrastructure in place such as up-to-date regional job databases, an over-supply of one skill can be balanced out by a shortage of the same in a neighbouring country, hence tackling within and between country unemployment within the EAC region. SADC has embarked on a similar undertaking through the Regional Qualifications Framework (SADC RQF) but has not made as much

³³ Interview. 2018. Willys Simfukwe, Southern African Development Community (SADC).

³⁴ Bruce Byiers, Karim Karaki and Sean Woolfrey, ECDPM discussion paper 237, December 2018. <http://www.ecdpm.org/dp237>.

progress. This could be attributed to what seems like a certain degree of political unwillingness to fully integrate by the regions' member states - although SADC put in place a draft Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons in 1996, which was later replaced by a more restrictive Protocol on the Facilitation of Movement of Persons in 1997,³⁵ the Protocol is still not operational due to inadequate ratifications by member States. Politics drives implementation of regional agendas. SADC still lags behind other RECs on reciprocal open visa policies with only 56%, compared to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) (100%), EAC (90%) and the Arab Maghreb Union - UMA (60%) according to the 2018 visa openness index.³⁶

Beyond how regional bodies engage with the youth agenda, it is important to understand how *youth are engaging with the regional agendas*. In this light, institutions such as regional youth parliaments also offer potential to provide youth with the wherewithal to participate in decision-making processes and add their voice to discussions among policy makers, elected officials and government leaders. For example, the Economic Community for West African States (ECOWAS) has created a Youth Parliament while the [East African Community \(EAC\) also recently launched a Youth Parliament](#) that can feed into policies aimed for youth and hold the REC and its Member States accountable. Though the degree to which these manage to play a genuine role in bringing youth into regional processes remains an open question, even this first step has not yet happened in the SADC region.

Nonetheless, in the SADC region, with the assistance of the Commonwealth Foundation, the Southern African Alliance for Youth Employment was established in February 2016. This is made up of representatives from trade unions, church councils, student unions and civil society organisations across nine Southern African Nations. Trade unions, churches, and CSO's cumulatively have considerable power to shape of the youth employment policy in Southern Africa.³⁷ Though this initiative seems promising, no information is available on what milestones the alliance has achieved so far. Furthermore, it is not formally recognised or institutionalised under the SADC secretariat and therefore cannot drive change or lobby for youth from within. The pending creation of the SADC Youth Union in this case may be a development in the right direction.

Beyond the challenges of youth organisations engaging with decision-makers, regional youth organisations at times face internal challenges. These include in-fighting for leadership positions, lack of financial resourcing and difficulty to maintain good governance systems. At the national level, youth coordinating bodies also lack adequate resources and more importantly, the power to independently administer and rally behind core youth concerns.³⁸ Government interference and the politicisation of national youth councils has weakened their appeal to many young people and youth organisations.³⁹ If there is an institutionalised youth body under a REC (like the proposed SADC Youth Union) this may offer a way to overcome more local member state rivalries and challenges, like the milestones achieved by the Pan African Youth Union (especially on creating dialogue between the continent's youth and their leaders) before it's unfortunate disassociation from the AU amid accusations of a non-transparent election process held in Khartoum, Sudan in 2018.

REC's efforts could also be guided by efforts taken by individual member states to scale these efforts, discussed in the next section.

³⁵ United Nations Economic Commission for Africa Website. [SADC - Free Movement of Persons](#).

³⁶ Visa openness index. 2018. [Regional mobility across Africa](#).

³⁷ Commonwealth Foundation. [Southern African Alliance of Youth Employment](#).

³⁸ As per footnote 6.

³⁹ *ibid*.

4. Lessons from looking nationally?

In addition to continental and regional policies, 32 of the 55 African countries have a youth policy in place. All these propose solutions to successfully develop and mainstream African youth in the economies of their respective countries and continent and show a commitment to achieving the overall objective of the Sustainable Development Goals “leave no one behind”. Though most suffer from poor implementation and at minimum from poor monitoring of impacts, some initiatives may offer opportunities for learning among member states within regions.

4.1. A snapshot of Member States initiatives in the SADC region

A number of countries in SADC are actively involved in the youth development agenda although not always specifically targeting unemployment and entrepreneurship. It is unclear how many of these are aware of the YEPPF as the regional roadmap for tackling youth unemployment and if their activities are aligned towards its achievement.

The following is a snapshot of some of the country initiatives to tackle youth unemployment in SADC;

Botswana

In 2008, Botswana set up a National Internship Programme to address the problem of unemployed tertiary graduates. Through this programme, graduates are placed in either government, parastatals, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), or the private sector, for up to 2 years to develop work skills that enhance their employability. The country also has a Youth Development Fund (YDF) which was established in 2009 to promote entrepreneurship among unemployed youth aged 18–35 by providing the combination of a grant and interest free loan. The Youth Empowerment Scheme was set up as an umbrella programme in 2012 to support a wide range of initiatives aiming to support employment, entrepreneurialism, and skill development among youth. There is also a young farmers fund administered by the Citizen Entrepreneurship Development Authority (CEDA) aimed at encouraging and supporting young people in pursuing sustainable farming businesses⁴⁰. The Botswana Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Culture Development has also made efforts through seconding principal youth focal points across Ministries who are representing the youth voice, to identify where there can be special dispensations within the Ministries. Because of this, they managed to convince the government to set aside 15% of its tender allocation for youth and hold quarterly inter-Ministerial meetings to evaluate how many government institutions have actually bought youth products.

These programmes demonstrate the country’s well intended efforts to solve its youth unemployment challenge and empower its youth. However, according to a study conducted by Professor Rodreck Mupedziswa on “*Youth Employment and Skills Development in Africa: Lessons from Botswana’s Experience*”, both the National Internship Program and Youth Development Fund have had problems. Some critics have referred to the internship programme as a failed initiative on the basis that it was politically motivated and hence, was doomed from the beginning.⁴¹ It has also been accused of providing temporary exploitative employment for very few young people who eventually do not gain sufficient professional training and skills due to weak monitoring and job shadowing arrangements. On the other hand, the study also argues that such arguments and criticisms fail to appreciate the bigger picture because the positives of the programme - many young people have benefited by being absorbed into long term sustainable employment through their placements.

⁴⁰ Sechele, L., 2015. [In their own words: Unemployed young people on tackling youth labour market constraints in Botswana](#), University of Botswana, accessed 14 October 2018.

⁴¹ The programme was launched ahead of crucial national elections that occurred in 2009.

The study further analyses the challenges faced by the YDF including accusations of intellectual property violations, with complaints by potential youth grantees alleging that ideas that they had submitted have ended up in the wrong hands, while the red tape involved in funds disbursement results in important implementation delays. Other challenges include lack of ownership for projects resulting in failure and inability to repay the loans (same challenge faced by CEDA) but, in the same light, numerous success stories of the fund have also been documented.

The government of Zimbabwe also has a similar youth fund set up to provide loans for income-generating projects, with a focus on manufacturing and agricultural projects. However, the fund has also been accused of not being effective and faces similar challenges as Botswana with the majority of beneficiaries defaulting on their loans and project failures due to (apparently) lack of requisite skills.⁴²

South Africa

In South Africa, The National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) was established in 2008 to address youth development issues at National, Provincial and Local government level.⁴³ The NYDA provides grant funding to both formal and informal youth businesses. In 2018, President Cyril Ramaphosa launched the Youth Employment Service (YES) as a social compact between government, business and labour to give 1 million youth 1 million opportunities. Over the next three years, YES which is led and supported by the private sector aims to incentivise businesses to employ young people, providing them with first work experience.⁴⁴ Since the YES initiative is still new, it is difficult to ascertain if indeed it will achieve its intended objectives but by the end of 2018, a total of 248 companies in South Africa had joined YES and 4600 youth had already found job placements through the initiative.⁴⁵

eSwatini

The Kingdom of eSwatini introduced the Graduates Enterprise Program (GEP), an initiative by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry & Trade, facilitated by the Small Enterprises Development Company (SEDCO) which aims at creating job opportunities for graduates from institutions of higher learning who have not been absorbed by the formal job market. The programme tries to assist graduates through capacity development, provision of loan deposits and linkages with development finance institution. The GEP targets graduates between the ages of 18-35 years and supports businesses formed or owned by graduates either individually or in groups in their area of study or in any area of interest.⁴⁶ However, there is no available information on the outcomes or milestones achieved through this initiative since it was introduced so it is unclear what impact it has had.

Malawi

In 2016, the AfDB approved funding to implement the Jobs for Youth (J4Y) project in Malawi which hoped to create 17 000 jobs for the youth in Malawi, targeting economic sectors such as agriculture, small-scale mining and information and communication technology (ICT). Project activities aimed to inculcate an entrepreneurship mindset in the youth, address the weakness in technical and business skills, ensure there is access to markets, information and finance. The initiative was part of the continental Jobs for Youth in Africa Strategy adopted by the AfDB in 2016, aimed at creating 25 million jobs in Africa by 2025.⁴⁷ By the

⁴² Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2015. [Youth, Regioness and SADC: Action for and by youth to build a brighter future](#).

⁴³ See more on the [National Youth Development Agency](#) Website.

⁴⁴ See more on the [YES4Youth](#) Website.

⁴⁵ Javan, M. Here's the Plans for the 2019 Youth Employment Service (YES) Initiative <https://www.smesouthafrica.co.za/2019-plans-youth-employment-service>, SME South Africa. 15 January 2019.

⁴⁶ Small Enterprise Development Company, [Graduates Enterprise Program](#).

⁴⁷ Mwachande, H. [Glimmer of Hope on Youth Employment](#), The Nation, 7 September 2017.

end of 2018, the first phase of the project was implemented through the recruitment and placement of 2000 young interns in various organisations in the country, suggesting some degree of implementation success.⁴⁸

Tanzania

In 2016, the World Bank approved the Tanzania Education and Skills for Productive Jobs (ESPJ) project in line with the government's five-year Development Plan (2016–2021) which centers on industrialisation and addressing the skills gaps as a critical lever to achieving its goal. The project seeks to increase the supply of skills for industries with high potential for growth and job creation in the country. The project targets 30,000 beneficiaries including trainees enrolled in university, technical, vocational and alternative training programmes in six key economic sectors; tourism and hospitality; agriculture, agribusiness and agro-processing; transport and logistics; construction; information and communications technology and energy⁴⁹.

In addition, in an effort to encourage and support more youth in agribusiness, in 2011 the University of Agriculture (SUA) in Tanzania through its Department of Agricultural Economics and Agribusiness launched the University Graduates Cooperative (SUGCO) which aims at enabling SUA graduates to engage in Agribusiness as their full-time job soon after graduation. SUGCO supports its members through capacity building programmes that include trainings on agricultural entrepreneurship and equip its members with skills to write feasible business plans on agribusiness projects to access loans and credit available in local banks and microfinance institutions in Tanzania. The association has a formal agreement with the CRDB Bank, a local commercial Bank in Tanzania to offer loans valued between US\$10,000 to US\$130,000 (with an interest rate of 14 percent for SUGCO members to start an agribusiness project).⁵⁰ The initiative, if properly supported, has the potential to have a positive impact on the way young people perceive agriculture and attract youth into farming as a full-time job for their livelihoods.

Overall, though Member States appear to have set initiatives in place to support youth in finding jobs, the wider challenge of employment creation remains important, while the results of most programmes are either mixed or hard to come by. Nonetheless, some targeted initiatives have been met with some success in other regions.

4.2. Learning from other regions?

Regarding youth entrepreneurship, the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) highlights some programmes and policies that aim to improve the chances of self-employment for youths. These include business planning and mentoring, leadership training, and access to credit. Additional approaches include youth enterprise funds, procurement quotas for youth enterprises, market access, increasing the productivity of the informal sector and vocational training. According to ACBF, these interventions have been implemented and were successful in countries like Algeria (Youth Employment Support), Burkina Faso (Youth Employment and Skills Development Project), Kenya (Youth Enterprise Development Fund), Nigeria (The TEF Entrepreneurship Programme and The Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria programme), Senegal (recognition of skills acquired in informal training) and Uganda (The Youth Venture Capital Fund)⁵¹. These have reportedly worked due to a comprehensive and supportive legal and policy framework in

⁴⁸ Malawi Ministry of Labour, Youth, Sports and Manpower Development. First Phase Recruitment of Interns Under The Jobs for Youth (J4Y) Project. [Press Release](#), 26 October 2018.

⁴⁹ World Bank, [New skills Development Program to Improve Employment Prospects for 30,000 Tanzanian Youth](#), 16 June 2016.

⁵⁰ Food Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network, 2012. [Current and Emerging Youth Policies and Initiatives with a Special Focus and Links to Agriculture](#), Tanzania (Mainland) Case Study and Draft Report.

⁵¹ As per footnote 7(a).

countries where they were successful through fully implemented national youth policies and supportive laws. SADC countries might learn from these successes and see potential areas for replication.

A further interesting initiative being implemented by the Catholic University in Yaounde, Cameroon could address the education skills mismatch challenge on the continent. The university has a partnership with the private sector who are involved in shaping the curriculum being taught in the school. This has resulted in an absorption rate of almost 80% of its graduates in the labour market, with graduates emerging from the higher learning institution already possessing appropriate skills required by employers. African countries could look to the University as a benchmark on how they can transform their education curricula to solve the challenge of schools churning out graduates with misaligned skills.

Another good example is the emergence of Nairobi as one of Africa's leading technology hubs which has been as a result of the cooperation between a strong private sector, government, and foreign investment. As a result of embracing technological innovation in 2007, the country birthed the now popular money-transferring app M-PESA and is also home to the crowdsourcing platform Ushahidi; the latter, launched to track election violence, has since been used to monitor disasters and conflicts globally⁵². This revolution has inspired many young people to be technology entrepreneurs and proactively launch startups in the country, leading to the launch of iHub in 2010, an open space for startups that use technology to solve local problems. One of the mobile apps operating from the iHub is [M-Farm](#), which allows farmers to get wholesale market information and sell their products through a basic mobile phone. Young students in Kenya also developed a similar app, Mkulima, providing agricultural product prices through cell phones which has helped farmers in rural areas make connections with buyers of their produce.

These examples demonstrate how young people can use technology to modernise and transform the agriculture sector in Africa and that young people are pushing innovations in ICT. Given an enabling environment, they have the potential to not only create employment for themselves and their peers but also solve local problems that prove challenging and/or expensive for governments - using technology. In the SADC region, Cape Town has emerged as a technology hub, being home to many startups and employing over 50 000 people.⁵³

4.3. Youth advocacy, movements and change

African young people can be praised for their resilience and the strides they have made in claiming space and starting movements and protests to show disapproval of the current status quo that has left them disenfranchised and excluded. Although some have been successful in bringing major socio-economic or political change in their countries, others have not been successful in ensuring youth inclusion once a new political settlement is ushered in. As Alcinda Honwana argues in her lecture *Youth, Waithood, and Protest Movements in Africa*:

“While these social movements have been able to overthrow regimes, systemic transformation takes time and requires more than a mere change in leadership. Major challenges arise in the process of transition as a new political order is being established. Young activists appear to be struggling to translate the political grievances of the protest movement into a broader political agenda. Clearly, they seem to be more united in defining what they don't want and fighting it, and much less so in articulating what they collectively want”.

⁵² Mallonee, L. 2018. The Techies Turning Kenya into Silicon Valley, WIRED.

⁵³ Mzekandaba, S., [Cape Town tops as tech employment hub](#), ITweb. 1 August 2018.

Examples of these include the popular Arab Spring movement that started in Tunisia in 2011, ousting the regime of Ben Ali, and inspiring similar activism within the continent, in the Middle East, and globally. After forcing out the regime, formal party politics took over and there is a sense that the young activists and protesters that drove this change have been marginalised.⁵⁴ A lesson however, can be learned from the #NotTooYoungToRun campaign in Nigeria which seems to be changing this. Through their mobilisation and advocacy efforts, they managed to get the Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari to sign into law a bill to reduce the age limit to run for political office in the country. The presidential age limit has now been reduced from 40 to 35 years and from 35 to 30 years for positions of Governor. The campaign has also been endorsed by ECOWAS,⁵⁵ urging member states to reduce age limits for elected officials in their respective countries.

The #FeesMustFall movement in South Africa was also successful in achieving its intended outcome. Having started online through Twitter, the movement quickly translated offline as students protested against the increasingly expensive tertiary education fees which they could not afford to get access to higher education. In December 2017, the then President Jacob Zuma announced the introduction of free higher education for students coming from households with an annual income of up to US\$24,422 (R350 000), essentially providing access to education for the financially poor but academically eligible students. The 2018 South African national budget also made provision for this, as a signal of its urgency and priority.⁵⁶

In 2012, Proscovia Alengot Oromait of Uganda made headlines when she became the youngest elected Member of Parliament at 19 years old. Recently, there has been a growing trend of African governments appointing young people (especially women) into positions of leadership which could be a signal recognising the need to act and pursue a developmental model that is inclusive of the continent's largest demographic at highest governance and decision making levels. Mali appointed 35-year old Kamissa Camara as its Minister of Foreign Affairs and recently, Botswana also appointed 31-year old Bogolo Kenewendo as its Minister of Trade and Investment. Although more still needs to be done, these are all positive steps in the right direction and need to be commended.

This could also offer opportunities for the ruling parties to capture the youth vote since they recognise the growing frustration of young people who want to see a change in the status quo by signalling that their needs and current challenges are an urgent priority for the leaders they have elected into power. 2018/2019 is national election season in SADC, 4 Member States held their elections in 2018 (Zimbabwe, Madagascar, Swaziland and the DRC). Of these, only Zimbabwe's president, Emmerson Mnangagwa appointed a young person, 34-year-old Kirsty Coventry, a former swimming Olympic gold medalist as its Minister for Youth, Sports, Art and Recreation. In 2019, 6 more countries (Botswana, Mozambique, South Africa, Namibia, Mauritius, and Malawi) will also go to the polls and it remains to be seen if indeed there will be some youth representation in their election outcomes or at least, in the announcements of their new cabinets.

Beyond governments, as the next section shows, some others actors have taken it upon themselves to also play a role in addressing youth unemployment.

4.4. The role of other actors and sectors

In addition to the countries themselves, external partners clearly also have a potential role. The European Commission has voiced commitment to supporting Africa in dealing with the youth unemployment challenge

⁵⁴ African Arguments, [Youth, Waithood, and Protest Movements in Africa – By Alcinda Honwana](#), 12 August 2013.

⁵⁵ Economic Community for West African States, [West and Central African youth endorse campaign for greater participation in the political process](#), 18 September 2017.

⁵⁶ De La Rey, C., [Public support crucial if free higher education is to succeed](#), News24, 9 March 2018.

through various initiatives - arguably as a way to mitigate the spillover effects of illegal migrations due to push factors on the continent that end up at its shores. In 2017, the European Commission launched the European External Investment Plan (EIP) which aims to mobilise €44 billion worth of investments in Africa to address the root causes of migration by promoting investment and job creation (specifically for young people and women) in a conducive way to achieving the sustainable development goals (SDGs).⁵⁷ In 2018 the European Commission President, Jean-Claude Juncker proposed a new Africa – Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs which aims to help create up to 10 million jobs in Africa in the next 5 years.⁵⁸ Recognising the importance of including youth in the decision making process for initiatives in which they are the main benefactors, 2018 also saw the call for applications for a new AU-EU Youth Cooperation Hub which is a multi-stakeholder initiative placing youth at its core, seeking to test new approaches to common challenges facing the AU and the EU. The Hub aims to enable 42 selected young Africans, Europeans and Diaspora to work with these 2 continental institutions and other relevant stakeholders in developing new approaches, defining the scope of pilot projects and monitoring their implementation in 6 areas which among others, include; business, job creation and entrepreneurship as well as governance, political inclusion and activism.⁵⁹

Specifically for SADC, the German Government has placed regional economic integration as a focal point in the development cooperation between Germany and SADC. Their goal is to mobilise the great economic potential of the region by promoting SADC's industrialisation efforts as well as intra-regional trade for the benefit of the people. One of the intended benefits include a reduction in unemployment. Their engagement is through capacity building at the regional and national level in order to strengthen the coordination mechanisms and thereby foster the implementation of SADC's regional integration agenda, which will ultimately create the much needed jobs for youth.⁶⁰

The Mandela Institute for Development Studies (MINDS), an African think tank based in South Africa, have a youth programme designed to strengthen the quality of youth engagement in the electoral and political governance processes in Africa. The aim is to get youth perspectives from their annual dialogues and take emerging recommendations to high level engagements with African leaders and policymakers during their forums. MINDS also has a fully funded scholarship which was launched in 2017 and supports African students to pursue post-graduate studies in an African country other than their home country. This aims to nurture leaders who have a continental development mindset who will facilitate greater cohesion and cooperation between African countries⁶¹ leading to regional integration and economic growth that will provide opportunities for its youth.

The ACBF does not have a specific work stream on youth but regularly brings together relevant stakeholders and other African think tanks to discuss the challenge of youth unemployment on the continent.⁶² Customised job fairs for youth will be a key feature of ACBF's approach to capacity building in the next five years. Entrepreneurial clinics will be organised during the fairs to provide technical guidance on proposal writing, loan options, interview skills, and job creation. Leveraging its experience in youth employment research and programmes, ACBF will cover at least 25 countries over the period. According to ACBF, building the capacity

⁵⁷ Große-Puppenthal, S., Bilal, S., 2018. [What is the European External Investment Plan Really About?](#), Briefing Note No. 101, ECDPM.

⁵⁸ The Africa-EU Partnership, [State of the Union address](#), 12 September 2018.

⁵⁹ European Union External Action, [Call for applications for the AU-EU youth cooperation hub](#), 13 September 2018.

⁶⁰ Interview, 2018, Steffen Webber, BMZ.

⁶¹ See more at: [MINDS Scholarship Programme](#)

⁶² They have been releasing Africa capacity reports since 2007 but there is no policy/strategy to ensure uptake of recommendations by its intended audience. ACBF also has a 5-year Strategy (2017 – 2021) to produce skilled people and strong institutions to transform Africa. The Strategy also emphasises that special attention will be given to youth on capacity development.

of youth through strategies that encourage entrepreneurship will unlock the potential for inclusive development of youth in Africa.⁶³

The Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network (FANRPAN), an autonomous, non-profit, scientific organisation operational in Member States of Africa with a mandate to coordinate policy research, dialogue and recommend strategies for promoting food, agriculture and natural resources sectors in Africa does not have a standalone youth programme. FANRPAN considers youth as a cross cutting issue.⁶⁴

Finally, a sector that has been ignored but has proved to be a significant contributor to African economies and provide employment, especially for youth, is the performing arts and creative industries. Between 2013 - 2014, South Africa's creative economy contributed over US\$6.34bn (R90.5bn) to the national economy or 2.9% of the GDP, exceeding the contribution of agriculture at 2.2%.⁶⁵ (In Nigeria, Nollywood film production generates between \$500m and \$800m annually and the industry directly employs 300,000 people and indirectly [more than a million](#)).⁶⁶ Africa's creative economy can trigger a value chain between artists, entrepreneurs, distributors and support services across multiple sectors and countries to provide modern jobs especially for the youth.⁶⁷ Unfortunately in many African countries this sector is not given attention and its potential to significantly contribute to youth employment and national economies is curtailed by challenges of piracy and intellectual property theft especially since laws and regulations governing this sector are either non-existent, poor or not properly enforced.

5. Conclusions/recommendations

As discussed throughout this paper, the youth unemployment challenge in Africa, specifically SADC, is complex. Although there is a stated desire and logic to address this problem and create sustainable youth employment opportunities as evidenced by the adoption of policies, programmes and frameworks at the national and regional levels, the current focus is having limited traction. Additionally, as a result of poor data and controversial methodologies used to capture the unemployment rate in some countries, the magnitude of the problem may be bigger than what is currently being reported. There is also a misalignment between the skills acquired by youth and those required by the labour market.

The following implications have been derived for addressing youth unemployment at the regional level:

- An emerging finding from this paper is that a REC like SADC should place more effort on addressing areas where there is a genuine value added to countries cooperating regionally, such as ensuring the recognition and compatibility of higher education qualifications that will facilitate cross border labour mobility, especially of its youth through the adoption of the SADC National Qualifications Framework.

⁶³ African Capacity Building Foundation, [Capacity Building In Entrepreneurship Is Key To Tackling Youth Unemployment In Africa](#), Harare, Zimbabwe, 4 October 2017.

⁶⁴ They previously had 2 programmes to get youth more involved in the agriculture sector, and make an effort to integrate youth in all their programmes. They engage in capacity building through mentorship and exposing young people to dialogues and platforms with relevant stakeholders and have also undertaken studies on youth engagement in agriculture policies. Although they engage in policy advocacy through evidence-based research they face challenges in monitoring of uptake due to lack of funds. Interview (2018).

⁶⁵ Snowball, J., How to grow SA's R90bn economy?, Fin24, 10 March 2017.

⁶⁶ Financial Times. 2018. Tap creative industries to boost Africa's economic growth.

⁶⁷ Lopes, C., How can Africa profit from its creative industries?, World Economic Forum, 3 September 2015.

- SADC might usefully benchmark and share lessons with other RECs and their member states who have managed to achieve some success in reducing youth unemployment and broaden the scope of focus for its members states to include sectors such as the performing arts and creative industry which has proven to be a significant contributor to African economies and alternative provider of employment, especially for the youth.
- One major challenge is potentially the lack of youth involvement in the design and formulation of policies and frameworks intended for them at both national and regional level. The ability of the AU, SADC and member states to successfully tackle youth unemployment largely depends on youth being given the platform to engage with the formal regional and national structures to ensure that their voices are heard, but also that they are seen as a political priority.
- Implementation of programmes *not* focused on youth are also important - the SADC industrialisation Strategy and Roadmap in theory could be used to help promote regional value chains and transform industries such as agriculture and manufacturing which are labour intensive and have the potential to provide the much-needed jobs for the youth - however, as previous ECDPM studies have shown, this has its own challenges and can only be achieved with the right political will from member states.
- Though again going beyond the youth agenda only, SADC might usefully monitor whether or not adopted regional frameworks are actually implemented by member states at domestic level.

For all the talk and summity on the importance of youth and the risk of youth unemployment, policies and programmes have so far only scratched the surface of the topic. Given that short-sighted politics surely play a role in maintaining the protecting markets and poor business environments that limit needed investment to create jobs, the solution must also take account of politics. Though that means accepting that national interests trump regional commitments, and perhaps revising ambitions on what regional organisations can do to address youth unemployment, regional organisations can nonetheless find ways to focus on areas where there is a specific regional dimension to member state interests in relation to youth unemployment. Engaging with youth representatives on a more structural basis may also be a positive path, but the real challenge comes in convincing the existing political and economic elites, that policies focused on promoting youth employment are in their interest in the long-run whether at the national, regional or continental level.

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