The Global Youth Unemployment Crisis:
Exploring Successful Initiatives and Partnering with Youths

Andrew Leon Hanna
Honors Thesis
Sanford School of Public Policy
Duke University, Durham, NC
Abstract

This study analyzes the problem of youth unemployment at the global level. After a review of successful programs that have been implemented in different countries, this study presents the result of interviews with 50 global youth leaders from 30 countries. On the basis of this analysis and survey, it identifies innovative solutions to tackle the youth unemployment problem, with a particular emphasis on partnerships between institutions and youths.

Labeled the “global youth unemployment disaster” by world leaders, the issue of youth unemployment is one that demands the attention of governments, businesses, and NGOs in developing and developed economies alike. Globally, youths are three times more likely than adults to be unemployed, and over 350 million young people are not engaged in education, employment, or training (NEET). With a demographic bulge that means about 3.5 billion global citizens are below the age of 25, there is a high level of urgency in addressing this concern.

This study first conducts a region-by-region analysis of five areas affected greatly by youth unemployment, analyzing factors unique to particular areas and common aspects of the problem. There are many issues of the global youth unemployment problem that are shared around the world. In exploring four of these issues – a skills gap between students and employers, a lack of skills among NEETs, a lack of awareness of job opportunities, and a lack of support for youth-led entrepreneurship – this study identifies five groups of corresponding initiatives and policies that have had success and can potentially be scaled. These solutions include apprenticeship programs for students, skills-building initiatives for unengaged youths, more prevalent vocational schooling, job awareness-raising initiatives, and programs to invest in and incentivize youth-led entrepreneurship. Despite some successful programs, a study by the ILO suggests that only few national governments are prioritizing the youth unemployment challenge in their agendas and budgets.

The study then analyzes the perspective of young people themselves regarding these problems and solutions, and asks for their own ideas. The “Global Youth Leader Questionnaire,” a web-based survey taken by 50 global youth leaders from 30 nations, gathered results that include young leaders’ perspectives on the realities of life as an unemployed youth, evaluations of the potential solutions discussed, ideas for other solutions, accounts of youth-led development initiatives that are working in their countries, and views on the state of youth involvement in decision-making. The results – with all the limits of a small sample – include telling images of the psychological detriments of unemployment to young people, strong support for apprenticeship and skills-building programs, several references to youth-led projects making an impact in communities around the world, and a serious dissatisfaction with the present state of youth involvement in decision-making.

Finally, the study proposes that the best way for institutions – governments, businesses, educational institutions, and NGOs – to go about designing, scaling up, and driving impactful initiatives is to partner with youths, harnessing their ideas and abilities. Equipped with this study’s information about program models that are effectively tackling youth unemployment in different parts of the world, governments and other institutions can engage local young people in a variety of ways to hear their all-valuable perspective from the ground level, to gain their buy-in, and – crucially – to hear about their own ideas and proven youth-led successes. This combination of adopting proven initiatives and tailoring them to young people in a given community will result in youths who are more empowered and less frustrated with institutions. This will then translate into more productive and sustainable solutions.
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I thank God for my advisors and my family, and I pray that my work adds value to the discussion of how to make sure young people around the world are actively employed, empowered, and successful in reaching their potential and developing their communities.
Contents

I. Introduction: The global youth unemployment crisis .......................................................... 5
   i. An overview of youth unemployment among the global Millennial Generation ............ 5
   ii. Beyond the surface of “unemployment” ..................................................................... 7
   iii. The consequences of the problem ........................................................................... 7
   iv. Setting the stage .................................................................................................. 8

II. A current analysis of challenges and successful initiatives ............................................ 10
   i. Regional snapshots ................................................................................................. 10
      1. United States ...................................................................................................... 10
      2. European Union ................................................................................................. 12
      3. Sub-Saharan Africa ............................................................................................ 15
      4. Middle East / North Africa .................................................................................. 16
      5. South Asia .......................................................................................................... 18
   ii. Analyzing four challenges tied to youth unemployment, and five potential solutions ... 19
      1A. Challenge #1: A skills gap between students and employers .............................. 20
      1B. Potential solution: Apprenticeship programs ...................................................... 21
      2A. Challenge #2: Lack of skills among poor, uneducated NEETs ............................ 23
      2B. Potential solution: Skills-training programs tailored for NEETs ......................... 23
      2C. Potential solution: Vocational schools as an alternative to universities ............... 25
      3A. Challenge #3: A lack of awareness of job opportunities ..................................... 25
      3B. Potential solution: Improving career information accessibility ............................ 26
      4A. Challenge #4 Lack of investment in youth-led entrepreneurship ......................... 28
      4B. Potential solution: programs to invest in/ incentivize youth business ideas ......... 29
   iii. The lack of urgency in addressing this issue ............................................................. 30

III. Youth leaders’ perspectives and youth-led initiatives ..................................................... 32
   i. The Millennials’ relentless energy ............................................................................. 32
   ii. Introducing the “Global Youth Leader Questionnaire” ............................................ 33
      1. Goals .................................................................................................................. 33
      2. Methodology ...................................................................................................... 33
      3. Diversity of responses ......................................................................................... 35
   iii. Restless energy and psychological blows: A picture of life as an unemployed youth .. 36
   iv. How do young leaders from around the world analyze the current problem? ......... 39
      1. Common ideas across nations and regions ............................................................ 40
      2. Notable differences of opinion ........................................................................... 43
      3. Key differences based on country-specific factors ................................................. 43
   v. Global youth leaders’ evaluations of existing proposed solutions ......................... 44
      1. Exploring confidence levels in each of the four interventions .............................. 44
      2. Comparing levels of confidence across the different interventions ....................... 47
   vi. Youth-led development solutions with economic and social benefits ................... 47
      1. Questionnaire respondents’ accounts of successful youth-led initiatives ............... 49
      2. Wider base of evidence for the success of youth-led development ......................... 50
   vii. Lack of youth involvement in decision-making ...................................................... 51

IV. Conclusion: Partnering with youths to effectively tackle global youth unemployment .... 54

Bibliography .................................................................................................................. 56
Appendix .......................................................................................................................... 61
I. Introduction: The global youth unemployment crisis

i. An overview of youth unemployment among the global Millennial Generation

Today’s generation of young people – the Millennial Generation – is the largest cohort of youths the world has ever seen. Over 3.5 billion people – about half of the world’s population – are under the age of 25. 1.2 billion of this younger half fits the most common definition of “youth” – people between the ages of 15 and 24 (“Global Agenda Councils,” 2013). Given the magnitude of the problem, it is of critical importance to ensure that these youths are engaged in employment, actively contributing to the development of their local communities and nations. This study will explore four particular problems associated with youth unemployment across the globe, and five corresponding groups of solutions. It will then present the experiences and ideas, collected through a web-based questionnaire, of 50 global youth leaders from 30 countries around the globe. Ultimately, its goal is to provide both an account of successful youth employment initiatives that can potentially be scaled and a view of the perspectives and ideas of global youth leaders; together, these two insights will lead to recommendations for partnerships between youths and institutions that have the potential to tackle the youth unemployment challenge in a more effective manner.

Empowering young people with the capabilities to tackle our world’s largest social, political, and economic problems starts with ensuring that they are actively engaged in employment. This problem has become particularly relevant in both developing and developed nations after the collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008 and the ensuing global recession. The Millennial youth cohort makes up 17 percent of the world’s population, yet it accounts for a
severely disproportional 40 percent of global unemployment. As shown in Figure 1.1, young people worldwide are almost three times more likely than their parents to be out of work today. Further, in 2010, 357.7 million young people were not active in education, employment, or training (a metric called NEET – Not in Education, Employment, or Training), and this number has been growing rapidly ever since (“Global Agenda Councils,” 2013).

Figure 1.1 (World Economic Forum – Goodman, Kirkham, and Kraland, 2013)
ii. Beyond the surface of “unemployment”

The group of young people who are not fully engaged in employment unfortunately includes more than the traditionally defined “unemployed” youths that most official statistics report. For instance, it includes youths who have stopped searching for a job altogether, those who can only obtain part-time work, and those working in informal, very low-paying positions. Millions of young people – often with high levels of education – are withdrawing from the workforce. At the International Labour Organization’s (ILO) 2012 Conference in Geneva, world diplomats heavily discussed the fact that more than six million youths globally have simply given up looking for a job (United Nations, 2012). Further, young people are often unable to find stable work; the ILO notes that 77 percent of total employment growth this year has consisted of part-time work. To make matters worse, half of the youth populations in developing countries are “vulnerable” workers who must find employment in the informal sector, where there is a lack of regulation and often overworking of employees (“Chronically High Unemployment,” 2013). About 152 million young workers (around 28 percent of working youths) live on less than $1.25 a day due to meager wages. For those who stay removed from work, training, or education (NEETs), continued workforce and social exclusion is an all-too-real consequence (“Working with Youth,” 2012). These young people are usually passed over when jobs do become more readily available, and they often must deal with the debilitating psychological blow of being unproductive for a long-term period of time (Coy, 2011).

iii. The consequences of the problem

The consequences of this problem are severe to the point that world leaders have labeled the ‘youth unemployment disaster’ as a ‘cancer in society’ (World Economic Forum –
The lack of opportunity for youths today will have a direct impact on the future strength of the global economy and the resources available to support society, including people both young and old. Government leaders are increasingly recognizing that social support programs meant for the elderly will need continued investment from a productive youth generation. Business leaders are realizing that their companies’ futures are dependent on a youth workforce that has the necessary skills. Solving this problem is “critical to all of our futures,” as one World Economic Forum (WEF) chief executive put it (Weber, 2012).

The Arab Spring is just a recent example of the explosive impact of youth unemployment on societies that have not tackled this issue. Mohammed Bouazizi, the young man who ignited the Arab Spring after setting himself on fire in Tunisia in 2011, was protesting due to a lack of meaningful work. As a Pakistani WEF delegate articulated, “He killed himself not because he wanted to make a political protest, he killed himself because he didn’t have a job” (Weber, 2012). The subsequent uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa, frequently organized and led by discontent young people, have led to deep social, political, and economic unrest in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, and Syria. Furthermore, youth protests related to unemployment have been erupting in advanced economies, from the US to Britain to Greece.

iv. Setting the stage

The second chapter of this paper will analyze five regions of the world affected greatly by youth unemployment. It will consider these regions’ common as well as locale-specific challenges. It will then explore four key, common challenges and five groups of solutions that have been implemented with success – and are potentially scalable – around the world.
The third chapter will focus on young people’s own views of the problem. Too often, youths are considered a burden that must be provided for rather than an autonomous, innovative, and highly competent group of individuals who have both valuable insight into the dynamics of societal problems and the proven potential to lead change in their communities. This part of the paper will utilize results from a questionnaire surveying 50 youth leaders in 31 nations around the globe. It emphasizes their views of the problem, their ideas about how to move forward, and their accounts of youth-led programs that have been implemented with success in their communities.

The fourth and final chapter explores how current knowledge of youth unemployment challenges and effective initiatives can be combined with the perspectives and ideas of young people to create future progress in tackling the issue. It provides ideas to enhance the partnership between young people and institutions in creating and implementing these solutions more effectively and sustainably.
II. A current analysis of challenges and successful initiatives

i. Regional snapshots

Many of the obstacles tied to youth unemployment are similar across the globe, but there are also specific underlying causes in each nation and region that contribute to the problem. In focusing mainly on the nuances of youth unemployment by locale, this section will explore the problem in five nations/regions: the United States, the European Union, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, and South Asia.

1. United States

According to a study released by the Pew Research Center, only 54 percent of American youths are employed; this is the lowest youth employment rate since the US government began recording these statistics in 1948 (Taylor, Parker, Kochhar, Fry, Funk, Pattern, & Motel, 2012). A recent report by the Center for American Progress revealed that 10.6 million American youths—a population larger than that of New York City—are currently without a job (Podesta, 2013). As shown in Figure 2.1, America’s young workers are twice as likely as their older peers to be unemployed. Long-term economic costs are enormous; the almost one million American youths who experienced long-term unemployment due to the recession will lose over $20 billion in earnings over the next decade (Ayres, 2013).
One major component of the problem in the United States is the need for more college graduates. A study by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) revealed that less-educated American youths are 4.6 times more likely to be unemployed when compared to their more educated counterparts. In the wake of the recession, the decline in employment and wages among 21 to 24 year olds was much more severe for those without an associate or bachelor’s degree; employment declines for those with only a high school degree was 16 percent (from 55 percent pre-recession to 39 percent post-recession) compared with a 7 percent decline for those with a bachelor’s degree (from 69 percent pre-recession to 62 percent post-recession) (“How Much Protection,” 2013). Unfortunately, in 2008 only 60 percent of American students in four-year college programs graduated within six years, a graduation rate that is historically very low (Coy, 2011). Research also indicates that success while in college, as measured by graduation rate, tends to be much lower for low-income students. 59 percent of low-income students who began college in 1998 obtained a degree or
were still in school three years later as compared to a 75 percent figure for high-income students, and the gap has been widening recently (Haverman & Smeeding, 2006: 126-127).

College education itself is becoming more expensive and enormous student debts stifle graduates. In the US, the price of higher education has increased at two or three times the rate of inflation each year since the early 1980s. To put the cost of elite universities in perspective, their average weekly cost ($1,000) is more than the weekly income of about 70 percent of American households (Stern, 2011). The average student loan debt in the US has increased by more than 500 percent since just 1999 (Robinson, 2012), and conservative estimates indicate that the average American student who takes out college loans owes $25,250 at graduation (Stern, 2011). Student loan debt falls under a special class of bankruptcy law in the US, Britain, and elsewhere; it is non-dischargeable, meaning that it cannot be removed from one’s record (“Student loans,” 2011). Thus, this is a stifling burden that persists and shackles youths often for many years past graduation, and sometimes for the rest of their lives.

2. European Union

In July 2013, Germany’s chancellor Angela Merkel declared youth unemployment to be “Europe’s most pressing problem.” Her statement may at first seem bold, however the reality of the situation defends her words. Almost eight million European youths – one out of seven European young people – are not currently in education, training, or employment (“Generation Jobless,” 2013).

Youth unemployment rates in the European Union vary quite widely, as shown in Figure 2.2. Germany enjoys among the lowest youth jobless rates at around 8 percent. Meanwhile, Spain reached its record high rate of 56.1 percent in August 2013, while Greece retained the
worst rate among EU member states (Burgen, 2013). One commonality, however, is that almost all EU nations are experiencing an upward trend in youth unemployment.

Figure 2.2 (Thompson, 2013)

Some economists and business leaders have argued that one differentiating factor between European nations with low youth unemployment rates compared to those with high youth unemployment rates could be apprenticeship programs and vocational schools. For example, between 50 and 70 percent of youths in Germany participate in apprenticeship programs (Spiegel, 2013) and the majority of Germany’s secondary school graduates are from vocational schools (“Youth Unemployment Challenges,” 2012). However, critics point out that Germany has had apprenticeship programs and high levels of vocational schooling even when it had a jobless rate of over 15 percent in 2005 (“Europe’s Lack of Higher Education,” 2013). The
deep recession in southern Europe is the more immediate cause of the entrenched youth joblessness in nations like Greece and Spain, though apprenticeship programs and vocational schooling – as will be discussed later – are a proven and valuable means to alleviate youth unemployment in Europe and around the world.

As in the US and other developed nations, education is a particularly critical determinant of young people’s success in the economies of the European Union. This is consistent with research results, as the highest unemployment rate in 25 of 27 developed countries was among people with primary education or less (“Global Agenda Councils,” 2013). Because many European youths are speculating that higher education is no longer worth the cost, there are institutions in Europe that are now reporting failing attendance rates. This is counterproductive, however, as the fact remains that those who have a lower level of education are less likely to be employed (“Europe’s Lack of Higher Education,” 2013).

The shock of unforeseen trials is one factor unique to youths in the developing economies of the EU that were hit hard by youth unemployment. On my recent trip to Spain in August of 2013, the majority of the unemployed youths I spoke with were university graduates who did not see a crisis coming. One college-educated youth, who works in a technical support job for which he is far overqualified, spoke of how many Spanish youths grew up and enrolled in college expecting the economic growth of their parents’ generation to continue. Now, they are struggling to deal with the reality of unemployment or underemployment. As some Spanish youths pointed out, another demoralizing aspect of the problem is the instability young people feel as a result of easily terminated, non-committal short-term work contracts. Perhaps the most depressing thought for many was the acknowledgement that they may have to leave their families and travel to other nations to find work.
3. Sub-Saharan Africa

In shifting perspective from developed economies to developing economies, fast population growth in Sub-Saharan Africa makes the challenge of youth unemployment even greater as the demand on labor markets grows quickly. Today, almost one in three people living in the region – a population of 297 million – is between the ages of 10 and 24. This age cohort is expected to nearly double to about 561 million by the year 2050 (“The World's Youth,” 2013).

As the population of educated Sub-Saharan African youths grows – estimations are that the proportion of 20 to 24 year olds with completed secondary education will increase from 42 percent to 59 percent in the next 20 years – its economies’ demands for labor are not keeping up with the increasingly viable workforce. Of 74 million jobs created between the years of 2000 and 2008, only about one-third was for youths (Devlin, 2013).

A challenge that is particularly difficult in this region is the fact that large numbers of young people still have extremely little education or training. At least half of young people between the ages of 15 and 19 lack basic, foundational skills like literacy and numeracy, often because they have never attended school or dropped out very early (Devlin, 2013). For these youths, there are currently very limited options to gain skills to match what the job market is searching for.

Two additional major problems in developing nations in Sub-Saharan Africa and around the world are “underemployment” and employment in vulnerable environments. Underemployment is a statistic that measures situations in which a person is in a job below his/her qualifications or in a part-time job when desiring a full-time job. In 2010, 536 million employed youths in developing nations were underemployed; this figure becomes particularly
salient when compared with the fact that only 1.5 million employed youths in the European Union were underemployed. Additionally, in 2011, an estimated 1.52 billion people in the developing world were engaged in vulnerable employment; this is seven times more than the population of unemployed people (“Global Agenda Councils,” 2013).

4. Middle East / North Africa

As in Sub-Saharan Africa, rapid population growth in Arab nations compounds the youth unemployment problem. Between 1970 and 2010, the populations in these states almost tripled, and current trends lead to the projection of a population 598 million by 2050. This means, again, larger child and youth cohorts (“Global Agenda Councils,” 2013). The 2009 United Nations (UN) Arab Human Development Report revealed that young people are the fastest growing age group in the region, and children and youths under the age of 25 currently make up 60 percent of the total population. The Arab population’s median age is 22 years, whereas the global average is 28 (“Arab Countries Youth Population Projection”). In Jordan, as an example, a dramatic 70 percent of the population is under the age of 30 (Weber, 2012). In Egypt, perhaps the most influential nation in the region, more than a quarter of people are within the youth age range.

This means that the size of the youth employment challenge is only growing. As shown in Figure 1.1, the youth unemployment rate in the Middle East / North Africa (MENA) region is the highest in the world. At least 90 percent of unemployed Egyptians, for example, are under 30 years of age. In a region that once seemed ripe for dramatic economic growth, this type of youth joblessness is stifling. Estimates suggest that the annual economic hit on Arab nations caused by youth unemployment is between $40 billion and $50 billion (Sophia, 2013).
Unfortunately, at a time in which Arab states need strong leadership and stable institutions to promote economic growth and secure work environments, so many states are in political turmoil. After Zine El Abedine Ben Ali controlled Tunisia for 23 years, Hosni Mubarak ran Egypt for nearly 30 years, and Muammar Gaddafi ruled Libya for 42 years, these authoritarian governments were toppled over the span of only a few months. The corruption of these and other rulers has contributed to the region’s private sector remaining very uncompetitive globally. Now, the lack of organization and regulatory environment is preventing investment, damaging the tourism industry, and creating even greater angst and uncertainty among youths seeking work (“Youth Unemployment in Arab Region”). Young people were often heavily involved and even leaders in the movements that launched the Arab Spring; Arab youths’ lack of a voice in government combined with dissatisfaction with their personal opportunities led to an overwhelming revolutionary spirit.

A lack of education may not be as much of the problem in the case of the MENA region when compared to the US and Europe. Conversely, the problem is often one of over-education. In Tunisia, for example, 40 percent of university graduates are unemployed as compared to 24 percent of those who have not graduated from university (“Global Agenda Councils,” 2013). In Egypt, years and years of Mubarak-era policies that expanded college enrollments have now led to an educated young population with too-few options to put their education to use. Part of the issue, too, is that the education itself is not tailored to match the needs of employers (Coy, 2011). This is a common problem around the world, and will be discussed further in Section ii.

One particular group that deals with unequal and daunting odds in finding work is young women in the MENA region. University-educated young women in Turkey, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Iran have an unemployment rate about three times higher than that of
university-educated men. Saudi Arabian young women with university education are a staggering 8 times more likely to be unemployed than their male peers (“Global Agenda Councils,” 2013). This is due to cultural norms that often favor men over women when it comes to education and employment opportunities.

5. South Asia

In South Asia, the combined problem of youth unemployment and youth “inactivity” – meaning young people not in education – is among the greatest in the world. As seen in Figure 2.3 below, about 31 percent of South Asian youths fit one of these two descriptions, meaning an enormous group of the South Asian Millennial Generation remains inactive. By sheer numbers, South Asian nations have by far the largest number of idle young people when compared to other regions; their potential remains untapped.

![Image](image.png)

Figure 2.3 (“Generation Jobless,” 2013)
The discussion of gender norms, touched upon in the previous section on the MENA region, again plays a large role here in keeping young women from the workforce and education. South Asian women make up over 25 percent of the entire world’s inactive youth cohort. This is especially disappointing considering that young women are fairing even better than young men in the workforce of more affluent nations (“Generation Jobless,” 2013).

Another challenge particular to the region is tight and many times unnecessarily cumbersome formal employment regulation. Laws are often restrictive and complicated, and they generally have weak measures of enforcement. As an example, the Indian government requires employers to work through about 200 laws related to work and wages. Severance pay for large businesses seeking governmental approval for dismissals is substantial in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Nepal. What the World Bank argues, though, is that even with all of these regulations, the majority of South Asian workers, especially youths, remain vulnerable and unprotected. Formal employment regulation only covers less than 10 percent of the labor force in most of these countries. The World Bank purports that addressing the “bottlenecks” facing businesses, including tackling corruption and streamlining registration, will contribute to lessening youth unemployment (Kabir, 2013).

ii. Analyzing four key challenges tied to youth unemployment, and five potential solutions

While there are some deep structural problems related to youth unemployment that differ across regions of the world – including demographics, stage of economic and institutional development, labor demand, and cultural norms – there are also several common challenges that can potentially be tackled more immediately. Four such issues that reveal themselves in nations across the globe are a skills gap between students and employers, a lack of awareness of
job opportunities, a lack of skills among poor and uneducated NEETs, and a lack of investment in youth-led entrepreneurship for job creation and community development. This section will explore these four international challenges and five groups of corresponding solutions, with specific examples of successful models that can potentially be scaled.

1a. Challenge #1: A skills gap between students and employers

One challenge that crosses national and regional boundaries is the marked mismatch of the skills possessed by young people graduating from education institutions and the skills sought by employers. In a survey of youths, education providers, and employers in nine diverse countries – Brazil, Germany, India, Mexico, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States – the McKinsey Center for Government found that only 55 percent of youths managed to find a job that is relevant to their field of study. At the same time – and indicating a clear lack of coordination between schools and employers – nearly 40 percent of employers surveyed by McKinsey stated that a lack of skills is the main reason for entry-level vacancies (Mourshed, 40). An annual study of 40,000 employers across 39 countries by Manpower Group discovered that about one in three employers (34 percent) were having problems finding appropriately qualified staff, the highest proportion since 2007 (“Youth Unemployment Challenges,” 2012). Ultimately, the problematic mismatch is that youths are looking for employment and cannot find it, while employers are looking for qualified employees and cannot find them.

The root of the problem is a lack of communication between educators, employers, and young people. McKinsey's studies indicate that about one-third of employers globally have absolutely no communication with education providers. Only about 15 percent of employers
communicate with education providers on a monthly basis (Mourshed, 2013). Higher education, with its lack of data on its graduates’ career paths, has not shown the ability to bridge the gap, and both McKinsey and ManPower share the responsibility among the three groups – employers, educators, and youth – for the lack of effective communication.

There is evidence that it is not just that a high proportion of youths globally are graduating with skills that do not match employers’ needs, but that they are graduating without any practical skills at all. The opinions of youths surveyed by McKinsey show that 58 percent believe that practical, hands-on learning is an effective approach to training and learning, however only 24 percent of academic program graduates said they spent most of their time like that. This may not be especially surprising given that many students graduate with liberal arts educational degrees; more of an eyebrow-raiser, then, is that only 37 percent of vocational graduates said that they spent most of their engaged in hands-on learning (Mourshed, 2012: 36).

Ib. Potential solution: Connecting students to employers directly through apprenticeship programs

A potential solution to the skills gap that has gained support from a variety of notable leaders in academia and business, including economist Robert Lerman and former Siemens CEO Eric Spiegel, is the apprenticeship model. In the apprenticeship model, employers invest in the education and training of students whom they want to work for them after graduation. Apprenticeship programs generally sponsor students financially through college, pay them to do internships, train them in the skills necessary for full-time employment, and then hire them full-time immediately after graduation. Apprenticeships, then, are a way for employers to ensure that they are getting the type of workers they need and for youths to go to college without the burden of cost and uncertainty of future employment. Germany and Denmark are two nations
that have formal apprenticeship programs, and they have low youth unemployment rates of 7.5 percent and 14 percent respectively. When this is compared to the 24 percent average across Europe, it makes a compelling case for the use of apprenticeships to create skills matches between employers and students (Spiegel, 2013).

This type of sponsorship model has demonstrated real success in locations all over the world. Siemens, for example, is a company that has 10,000 paid apprenticeships in Germany. Each year, the organization offers jobs to 2,500 graduates, and approximately 84 percent of apprentices find a job within the larger Siemens network. This model has been exported successfully in some parts of the US, where only 0.3 percent of youths participate in apprenticeship programs (Spiegel, 2013). In Egypt, a company called the Americana Group linked up with the Ministries of Education and Higher Education in order to train people to work in their restaurants and food businesses. These students spend up to half of their time working and earning wages at the company; in turn, the company pays for tuition and guarantees a full-time position after graduation. For the student, this is a way to study in college without worrying about a debt burden or about having to be unemployed for any period of time after the graduation ceremonies end. On the company’s end, this is a sure-fire way to recruit and train skilled labor that fits its needs and to prevent high turnover that plagues other companies, particularly in the food industry in which Americana operates. As a third specific example, News Shipbuilding in the US has a similar program called “The Apprentice School” that invests up front in its students. It has had historically very high and long-term retention rates. Students become full-time employees and often emerge into key leaders of the company in the long-term (Mourshed, 2012: 65). Finally, India’s Pratham Institute has a model of “learn now, pay later” in which students pay 30 percent of tuition during their studies and then pay back what they owe in increments after they have secured a job. Pratham provides skills
tutoring for youths who then tutor and mentor primary school students; thus this model offers a cycle of skills training and crucial youth-led peer mentoring and support at the same time (Mourshed, 2012: 64).

2a. Challenge #2: Lack of skills among poor, uneducated young people not in education, training, or work (NEETs)

Looking beyond students, there are also young people not in education, employment, or training who are lacking skills needed to acquire work. Particularly in but not limited to developing nations, there are high populations of youths who do not currently have any skills that can be utilized in the workforce. In fact, 11 percent of youths globally are non-literate and, in 2008, almost 74 million adolescents (defined here as young people of ages 10 to 19) were not enrolled in any type of school or educational institution. That is equivalent to one in five adolescents (“Fact Sheet: Youth and Education”). For youths who drop out of school early, likelihood of unemployment, poverty, teen pregnancy, crime, and partaking in other risky behaviors is far greater than for those who graduate from secondary school. In the case of young people who have already dropped out or never attended school, there is an enormous challenge in engaging them and providing them with the opportunities to develop basic skills to increase employability (“Fact Sheet: Youth and Education”).

2b. Potential solution: Skills-training programs tailored for NEETs

Skills-training programs serve as particularly useful in training youths who are out of school and work in basic, job market-based skills. Studies of youth job training programs show that they are most effective in their long-term impact by emphasizing goals like staying employed, advancing in the workforce, and other strong values. The programs are less effective
in the short-term and do require a time commitment and much patience on the part of both the youths and the organizations running the initiatives. However, long-term benefits often outweigh these short-term challenges.

Studies show that effective skill-training programs have certain things in common, including recruiting excellent staff with experience working with youths, an understanding of the employment landscape, and follow-up mechanisms after a young person is matched with a job. Recently, individuals and organizations have led academic research to explore what makes a successful skills-training program for youths. Catherine Dun Rappaport and JoAnn Jastrzab created a guide called “Promising Practices for Helping Low-Income Youth Obtain and Retain Jobs: A Guide for Practitioners” that evaluates the US Department of Labor’s Welfare to Work Project. Importantly, it includes a "how-to" section to help skills-training programs’ organizational staffs incorporate proven successful practices (Rappaport & Jastrzab, 2013: 1-51).

Examples of successful skills-training programs tailored to NEET youths exist all over the world. Often, skills-training programs tied directly to particular employers are the most successful because – as in the case of apprenticeship programs – the employers can specifically tailor curriculums to their needs. One of the most compelling skills-training programs in the world – called Jóvenes (meaning youths in Spanish) – operates on this model. This organization requires the employers it partners with, which range widely in industry and function, to sign contracts promising internships to its graduates. In its teaching, Jóvenes focuses on both technical skills and life skills. It has been successful in scaling to several Latin American nations already, and it may have potential to grow even further (Coy, 2011). Two other organizations called INJAZ and Junior Achievement, which will be considered more closely in section 3b for their role in raising awareness about job opportunities, also serve as effective skills trainers in many nations (“Youth Unemployment Challenges,” 2012).
2c. Potential solution: Vocational schools as an alternative to universities

Filling many of the positions that have the most skills shortages around the globe will require an increase in vocational schooling. Both McKinsey and Manpower indicate that a major roadblock for youth enrolling in vocational schools is the perceived lack of prestige and respectability. High percentages of youths in all nations surveyed by McKinsey, aside from Germany, indicated that vocational school is appealing but chose not to attend because of its lesser prestige when compared to academic institutions (Mourshed, 2012: 31). One way to change the mood surrounding vocational schools and thus increase enrollment is for employers to take a more proactive approach in working with primary and secondary schools to put its impressive vocational school graduates in front of students. Employers could also potentially create more sought-after professional development programs for vocational school graduates to help emphasize the potential to enter employment after vocational school and then advance beyond traditional conceptions. As noted, vocational school students make up a majority of secondary school students in Germany as well as in Australia. These nations may have a model from which others should learn, as they are among the most successful in moving young people from school to work and have curriculum offerings aligned well with the needs of the business community ("Youth Unemployment Challenges," 2012).

3a. Challenge #3: Lack of knowledge/awareness about job and career opportunities among youths

Too many youths are uninformed about job and career choices and thus make undirected decisions during and after schooling. 60 percent of young people surveyed by McKinsey do not know the job openings or wages associated with different professions, even
including the ones that they have chosen (Mourshed, 2013). Sometimes, young people believe that they know workforce options and how they related to their studies but are actually misguided (Mourshed, 2012: 31). As a result of this lack of correct information and awareness, students choose their courses more or less blindly when it comes to future employment options, not knowing if there will be demand for their skills or qualifications when they graduate.

3b. Potential solution #3: Improving job and career information accessibility

To give prospective college students key information to evaluate their decision of whether or not to enroll and to give current students key information to decide what to study, institutions must make available detailed information about opportunities in the workforce. As discussed, the decision to attend higher education is one that is by no means cheap, especially in the US. There is the cost of attending as well as the opportunity cost of what one could have done – in terms of earnings, on-the-job skills development, and promotion within an organization – during the time he/she spends taking classes and studying for exams. Young people prior to deciding about college should have full information about employment options for those without college degrees. Meanwhile, those who do enroll need to know how their decision of what to study will impact them when it comes time to find a job. A series of studies by the OECD emphasizes that high-quality career guidance has proven to be effective in helping youths make better-informed decisions about their future (“OECD G20 Labour,” 2012). However, existing career guidance programs often suffer from poor funding, under-qualified instructors, and lack of access to timely and relevant labor market information. Additionally,
they often start too late in the development of a young person ("Youth Unemployment Challenges," 2012).

The first step in overcoming this obstacle is the creation of a base of information, and the second step is distributing this information in a way that ensures all youths know that there are resources available to help them make key decisions. One example of an organization that effectively fills both of these roles is the United Kingdom’s National Career Service. The UK’s initiative is a web-based program that provides detailed information about jobs and offers career counseling over the phone. From its inception in April 2012 until June 2012, the website has received over one million visits, has enabled 270,000 face-to-face sessions, and has led to 50,000 phone conversations. This is all with an 85 percent average user satisfaction rate (Mourshed, 2012: 59-60).

As Internet job sites are now the source of about 25 percent of new hires according to CareerXroads, online matching organizations are becoming increasingly vital to solving the job awareness problem. INJAZ al-Arab, the Arab-world affiliate of Junior Achievement that operates in 14 nations, is currently working on developing an online platform – Arab Youth Portal (AYP) – dedicated to job matching for youths. This group appears to be poised for success in connecting businesses to young people, as it currently reaches 200,000 Arab youths annually and has thousands of private sector volunteers. Organizations like INJAZ and Junior Achievement also partner with schools and vocational institutions to increase young people’s exposure to the labor market at an early age, helping them to understand the different job and career opportunities available. Junior Achievement has reached more than four million students in the US ("Youth Unemployment Challenges," 2012).
4a. Challenge: #4 Lack of investment in youth-led entrepreneurship

There is growing momentum towards the idea that greater investment in youth entrepreneurship can help stimulate employment among the group, but there are presently many obstacles preventing young people from designing new organizations and thus creating new jobs. One such obstacle is a lack of access to micro-credit for youths. There are already relatively few microfinance organizations in many countries and regions of the world, but the ones targeted at young people are especially few and far between. A study by Francis Chigunta shows that of 902 organizations in 96 countries listed under the Microcredit Summit’s Council of Practitioners, just 21 organizations had the word “youth” in its title. Because young people often have a lack of collateral and experience, many organizations are reluctant to invest in their ideas or – worse – even hear out their ideas. Because of the success of many youth-led initiatives (as will be discussed in section 4b as well as in Chapter III), this unwillingness to invest in young people’s ideas may mean foregoing the opportunity to support many innovative and impactful initiatives (Chigunta, 2002).

Financial investment is critical, but another impediment to youth-led entrepreneurship is a lack of training and business development services; personal investment in youths is crucial. Young people often have promising ideas but lack the necessary skills to properly undertake an venture. So, programs to help young people develop a business plan, reduce costs, and budget are essential. These could take the form of skills-training programs, business counseling, mentor support, access to working space, and/or business expansion support (Chigunta, 2002).

Finally, as we will explore in Section iii, governments are often reluctant to invest in young people. National and local governments frequently lack youth-focused policies and
initiatives geared towards encouraging and investing in young people’s ideas or creating the incentives and economic environment conducive to other organizations investing in them (Chigunta, 2002).

4b. Potential solution #4: Programs to invest in and incentivize youth-led business ideas

With the unprecedented interconnectivity and of today’s young people and the proven innovative abilities of this generation, youth-led entrepreneurship could be one of the most promising routes to creating jobs. One program that is providing greater opportunities for youths to engage in entrepreneurship and create their own businesses is Youth Business International (YBI). YBI provides young people with a range of services, including business mentoring, provision of start-up capital, and facilitation of the exchange of ideas among young entrepreneurs. YBI operates in over 20 nations and has had demonstrated success in assisting more than 50,000 youths in starting their own businesses (Chambers & Lake). Another initiative reaching across national boundaries is Business Owners for Peace, or BPeace. BPeace helps connect aspiring entrepreneurs to professionals who commit to being mentors; the program has catalyzed the creation of many successful companies in Afghanistan and El Salvador. One example is DSOTI, a female-run company in Afghanistan that produces soccer balls and now employs over 400 people (“Chronically High Unemployment,” 2013). In the US, the University of Miami created an entrepreneurship program called Launch Pad in 2008 that emphasizes entrepreneurship as a post-graduate career path that deserves serious consideration. In four years, LaunchPad has supported recent graduates in starting 45 companies. Additionally, President Obama announced the White House’s Startup America initiative towards the end of January 2013 to promote the means for young people to start their own ventures (Coy, 2011).
Simply because one does not have extensive business training does not mean that he/she cannot develop an idea with potential to help his or her local community. Indeed, there are young people all over the world who understand their communities at a deep level and can describe what is needed or could be used to improve their communities. This is the mentality of organizations like the Awethu Project in Johannesburg, South Africa. The organization conducts thorough analyses in different low-income communities throughout South Africa to identify people who have business ideas that have the potential to succeed. The organization then matches these people with business leaders from around the region as mentors. The Awethu Project invests its own funds in each business it decides to accept into its incubator program; consequently, the success of the Awethu Project as a business model is directly tied to the success of the businesses it supports (“Awethu Project,” 2013). Though it is relatively young, the organization has had several early success stories and the South African government has invested in its goal to identify and develop at least 1,000 high-potential entrepreneurs, as well as to reach 13,000 entrepreneurs through free basic business courses, in a less-than two-year period (Ho, 2012).

iii. The lack of urgency in addressing the issue

While there are many initiatives and policies around the globe aimed at reducing youth unemployment, the question remains: given the severity of the issue in terms of current and future economic and social prosperity, are nations prioritizing the issue of youth unemployment to the extent that is appropriate? The ILO reviewed 138 countries’ policy frameworks in 2012 to comb for inclusion of measures targeted at youth employment. It found that only about 30 percent of countries have explicit strategies aimed at youth employment. Only 35 of these 138
nations – about 25 percent – have “formally adopted action plans with specific targets, indicators, and monitoring and evaluation systems.” Furthermore, only 13 percent of the national employment policies that exist have any sort of identified budget directed towards youth unemployment priorities (“The Youth Unemployment Crisis”). Finally, most policies do not emphasize improving the quality of jobs and reducing vulnerabilities. Overall, it appears that the majority of governments are not seriously acknowledging the severity of the youth unemployment issue, and most of even those that do acknowledge it are not directing real investment or strategic emphasis towards tackling the problem.

One direct cause of this is a lack of a youth voice in decision-making in most nations around the world. Rightfully, then, the next portion of this paper will shift perspectives from what we already know and what is already being done – or not being done – to what is studied less: young people’s perspective and ideas related to this major challenge that is, after all, most directly affecting them and their peers.
III. Youth leaders’ perspectives and youth-led initiatives

i. The Millennials’ relentless energy

Ignited by many of the challenges discussed, the Millennial Generation has shown an ability to organize, unite, and stand against injustice and dissatisfaction. The student protests at Tehran University, the British student protests, the youth movements of the Arab Spring, the Chilean student protests, the Greek youth demonstrations against austerity cuts, and many other examples illustrate that the last two or three years in particular have seen a firestorm of youth-led social movements (Shenker, 2011). With the proliferation of social media and youth-led protests utilizing its connective abilities, some argue that there is a modern “change in consciousness” that brings young people together across borders under a shared narrative and “intuition that something big is possible” (Mason, 2013). With this type of energy, interconnectedness, and idealism, it may be due time to listen more carefully to what the youths of the Millennial Generation see as the state of the youth unemployment problem, and what ideas they have to tackle the problem. Towards that end, this study incorporates a primary research component in order to better understand the perspective of young people, especially youth leaders involved in tackling social challenges, regarding the unemployment problems facing their generation in their respective countries.
ii. Introducing the “Global Youth Leader Questionnaire”, including 50 youths from 30 countries

1. Goals

In understanding the problem and in searching for solutions to the global youth unemployment challenge, there has been growing academic and policy focus on young people’s inclusion in decision-making and in youth-partnered and youth-led initiatives for development. Evidence of this can be found both in academia, including studies like those by the ILO and McKinsey, and in practice, including the inclusion of youth participants in the UN High Level Panel’s meetings on the global development agenda for the first time in history.

To build on this realization of the importance of providing a voice to young people, the second key goal of this study is to better understand the perspective of youths around the world regarding the dynamics of the problem and potential solutions. By asking youth leaders around the world for their insight, this study will reveal more knowledge of what it is like for young people who are unemployed, what opinions young leaders have regarding the potential effectiveness of Chapter II’s proposed solutions, and what experiences young leaders have in witnessing and driving youth-led initiatives for development.

2. Methodology

The “Global Youth Leader Questionnaire” is a survey that was conducted over the span of just over one month between October 30, 2013 and December 4, 2013. This study leveraged the aforementioned power of the Millennial Generation’s connectivity via the Internet and social media by maintaining a web-based and web-delivered survey. Participants were contacted via email or Facebook and asked to complete a survey of two preliminary required
questions (age range and country), four required short-answer questions, five required multiple-choice questions, and one more optional short-answer question. The survey, which was generated using Google Documents, was estimated to take about 10 to 15 minutes of time for the participant and could be completed on his/her own time in whatever location he/she preferred. For a copy of the questionnaire, see Appendix A, or follow the link in Appendix B.

The core group and majority of participants in the study were youth leaders (ages 16 to 29) who have been representatives at international conferences that I have attended – including the 2010 Global Changemakers Global Youth Summit, the 2011 UNESCO Youth Forum, and the 2012-2013 meetings of the UN High Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. In addition, these representatives recommended some other young leaders – mainly co-workers and fellow youth representatives – to complete the questionnaire. Ultimately, all respondents work for organizations focused on tackling social problems in their countries.

Because of the nature of the selection of respondents, these young people will generally not be the most vulnerable or excluded people in their communities, as they speak English at least relatively well and mostly have some level of university experience. However, their work experience often puts them in interaction with these communities. Additionally, as we have seen, the youth unemployment problem is not one that is limited to those without degrees or those in the lowest socioeconomic segments.

Finally, the opinions of the young leaders surveyed certainly will not represent those of the entire youth cohorts of their countries. This small sample size does, however, provide stories, ideas, and reports about the current situation on the basis of the real experiences of young people in their countries. The responses form a valuable exploration into a diverse array of young leader’s opinions on the current state of unemployment and ideas for potential ways forward.
3. Diversity of responses

The respondents are 50 youths from 30 different nations around the world: Australia, Canada, China, Denmark, Egypt, Finland, Georgia, Germany, India, Israel, Indonesia, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Liberia, Mexico, Moldova, Morocco, Myanmar, Nepal, New Zealand, Nigeria, Pakistan, Russia, Singapore, South Korea, Sudan, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Vanuatu. 20 of the 30 nations were represented by one youth leader. The other ten nations were represented by two or more: Canada (5), United States (4), Australia (3), Germany (3), Morocco (3), Nepal (3), Finland (2), Indonesia (2), Israel (2), and Nigeria (2). With the exception of South America, all major continents were represented by at least four young leaders. The distribution of respondents by geographical region is shown in table and map form in Figures 3.1 and 3.2 below. The questionnaire response rate was about 80 percent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Countries Represented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>China, India, Indonesia (2), Myanmar, Nepal (3), Russia, Singapore, South Korea, Vanuatu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Denmark, Finland (2), Georgia, Germany (3), Moldova, Switzerland, UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East / North Africa</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Egypt, Israel (2), Morocco (3), Pakistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Canada (5), Mexico, US (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oceania</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Australia (3), New Zealand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Ivory Coast, Kenya, Liberia, Nigeria (2), Sudan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>50</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.1
iii. Restless energy and psychological blows: Painting a picture of life as an unemployed young person

When asked to “describe the life of an unemployed youth” in their respective communities, this diverse group of young leaders from around the world made remarkably similar observations. A web-generated word cloud of the most commonly appearing words used in respondents’ descriptions is shown in Figure 3.3 below.

One major common idea that emerged from the responses was the restlessness of unemployed youths; the energy of young people that is not put towards work is directed in an alternative direction, whether positive or negative. Some respondents focused on the positive direction in which some unemployed youths utilize their energy, including on volunteer efforts, unpaid internships to gain experience, studies for exams that will allow for better employment
options, or odd jobs to keep being productive. Most respondents also discussed the instances in which young people direct their energies in harmful, counterproductive activities for oneself and/or one’s community. Several respondents mentioned that life as an unemployed young person often includes crime, the abuse of drugs and/or alcohol, unprotected sex, and other injurious activities. An Australian respondent noted that “negative feelings” associated with unemployment “frequently lead to serious alcohol and drug abuse, and also crime.” The Sudanese respondent described young people going to the streets near the Nile River every night in order to smoke and drink with other similarly situated friends. This respondent, as well as the Kenyan respondent, went on to discuss the high dowry costs that often cannot be met by unemployed youths, leading to a lack of marriage and unprotected sex that can result in higher rates of HIV. Many of the surveyed youth leaders also described the tendency to get involved in politically and/or religiously motivated protests as an unemployed young person; this helps to explain some of the youth involvement in Arab Spring protests. As one American respondent put it, there are “mixed feelings of hope and despair.”

The psychological effect of extended unemployment is one aspect that stood out sharply from the respondents’ depictions, and this is one aspect that may be lost in the conversations of policymakers unless they include the voices of young people in them. As one Australian respondent explained it, “I think it becomes a cycle of being demoralised and feeling out of control of their life. A lack of direction and purpose pushes anyone to be idle and to feel lost.” One Canadian described an abandonment of hope for the future: “Stressful, hopeless. You have your whole life ahead of you and nothing tangible to look forward to.” A Nigerian youth leader summarized the situation in one word: “confused.” Many respondents discussed the stresses related to familial relationships. Many unemployed young people will move back in with their parents rather than living independently, and these young people tend to feel as though they
have not progressed because they are still financially dependent. Additionally, it can mean letting down one’s family if they are depending on him or her for income. This is especially true in cultures that have stronger family structures. The Indian representative, for example, stated, “There is always a burden to take care of the family and earn [a] living for yourself and family.” The Pakistani delegate shared this sentiment, “[It is a] kind of depressed life, not just for the young person [him/herself] but for the whole family.”

Figure 3.3

While there were overwhelming similarities, one key difference across nations is the availability of social support and welfare. For example, respondents in Australia, Finland, and New Zealand mentioned social welfare as a strong safety net for unemployed youths.
Meanwhile, respondents in India and Russia explicitly discussed the weak welfare system for unemployed people, particularly young people. The respondent from the Ivory Coast discussed the vulnerability of being unable to provide for basic needs as a young person, specifically mentioning access to food and the treatment of disease.

iv. How do young leaders from around the world analyze the current problem?

In dissecting the problem itself, the 50 youth leaders surveyed often had a great deal to say, as indicated by lengthy responses even with the short 100-word limit. Many trends emerged that were common across nations and continents, as shown in Figure 3.4. Some issues, of course, were more particular to specific countries or types of countries, specifically in relation to their current stage of development.

**Most common issues referenced as tied to the youth unemployment challenge (response to Question 1)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Number of Respondents Who Referenced This in Response to Question 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skills gap/ skills mismatch</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inequality among different segments of youths</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaining experience in order to become viable candidates for jobs</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job vulnerability (part-time work, overwork)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration/ emigration of young workers</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed youths’ engagement in harmful/ counterproductive activities</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of awareness/ knowledge of job opportunities</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for improved government initiatives</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.4
I. Common ideas across nations and regions

The most commonly cited component of the youth unemployment problem – mentioned by ten of the respondents – was the idea of a skills gap and a mismatch of skills taught compared to skills required in the job market. Respondents noted that part of this problem, as discussed in Chapter II, has to do with schools and universities not providing curriculums that match the needs of the job market. The respondent from Myanmar lamented the fact that the educational system does not provide “practical lessons,” leading to a lack of confidence among youths in the job market. As the UK respondent stated, “An estimated 400 students graduate in Law from each university – this totals around 50,000 with the job market of around 1,000. Subjects which are needed in the current age are rarely studies or at least limited.” As one German respondent acknowledged, this mismatch of school curriculum and what is demanded from the labor market occurs even in Germany, where youth unemployment hovers at only 8 percent. Some respondents mentioned that those studying humanities and liberal arts face a particularly difficult time finding work. This emphasis on the skills gap correlates with the findings discussed in Chapter II.

Nine of the youth leaders raised the issue of high levels of inequality among different cohorts of youths within the same country. Many youth leaders expressed concern for certain groups of young people, especially rural and minority youths, referencing the imbalance in opportunity, knowledge of job opportunities, and connections with people of power or influence. Low-income youths are another group that tends to struggle at disproportionate levels; as one Australian representative put it, “even vocational training is too significant of a jump for [low-income youths] and frequently they don’t really understand what their best post-school option is.” The fact that the topic of inequality among different segments of youths
registered so highly in frequency indicates a deep desire among these young people to support the most disadvantaged people in their nations. Of course, there is selection bias in that these young people are all working towards tackling social problems and thus are likely to have a passion for helping those in need. Still, that youth leaders around the globe have concern for their most underprivileged peers is a cause for encouragement and – some argue – a distinctive mark of the Millennial Generation as a whole.

Another crosscutting concern was the problem of how to gain experience in order to become more employable. From the Ivory Coast to Russia to Moldova to the United States, youth leaders of a wide variety of nations heavily stressed the issue. The gist of the employment problem is this: employers highly value work experience in searching for viable candidates for their positions, however young people cannot gain experience without first being given an opportunity. Looked at the other way, young people are unable to find work to gain the experience that is needed to – paradoxically – find work. A youth leader from Moldova stated, “Employers require work experience, but youths cannot provide it to get employed” and one from Georgia said, “This [experience] requirement is not met by young people and as a result they are not accepted even for the interview stage[s].” The Mexican youth representative left the all-important question: “who will give [youths] the first job?” Meanwhile, the respondent from Russia argued that the only way to gain experience during college is through internships, which are not offered by many companies in her country. An Egyptian responder lamented that these internships that are needed for future employment are mostly unpaid. This experience predicament helps to further support apprenticeship and skills-training programs as favored models for addressing the needs of young people on the ground.

Several young leaders expressed unease about the vulnerability of working youths. Here, again, representatives from both developed countries and developing countries in both
hemispheres agreed on an issue. The most common point made was that part-time work is often easier to obtain than full-time work, but it is unpredictable. A respondent from Australia wrote, “Many students, graduates and young workers suffer from the instability that can come from casual and part-time work.” The lack of job availability also creates conditions that leave working youths vulnerable in another way; they are often worked in below acceptable conditions. “Many times young people work too many hours and get paid less than the minimum wage, and they can’t do anything about it because there are not better jobs,” stated a respondent from Israel. Similarly, a Finnish youth leader mentioned that “young people are often the first ones to be laid off from companies.”

Five respondents also discussed the issues related to emigration and immigration. According to one Nepalese respondent, “much of the skilled sector seeks employment abroad,” meaning young talent is drained from Nepal. Meanwhile, respondents from more economically strong nations like Germany discuss the influx of immigrants into their nations, which can be a concern when the labor supply exceeds demand. The challenges facing immigrants in these nations can be great. One German respondent stated that the German-born youths in his/her community are all employed, but that “it’s a totally different thing if you come… from a migrant background… then it is very hard.”

A few respondents explored the lack of awareness of job opportunities as well. As one representative from Indonesia says, “Basically we don’t have any employment hub to connect youth[s] with work. Youth[s] have to randomly find the job by themselves.” Another respondent stated that “many of the jobs out there aren’t actually publicized.” The other major concern was unemployed youths engaging in harmful activities in the time they should be spending at work; this was explored in Section iii of this chapter.
2. Notable differences of opinion

Not surprisingly given the diversity of respondents, there were some instances of conflicting viewpoints. While some youths argued that a part of the problem is a lack of governmental intervention in tackling the youth unemployment challenge, another contended that the government is expected to do too much. Still others, particularly in Morocco, pointed out that the availability of government jobs is actually an obstacle because too many youths settle for these positions without striving for anything more. The responder from Switzerland, while a firm believer in the success of apprenticeship programs, did bring up a counterpoint to temper the group’s firm confidence in the model. He/she points out that apprenticeship programs drive young people to choose paths of specialty very early (“around 14 years old you need to know where, what, how”), leading to “a lot of people changing their path, and to periods of transitions” that cause stages of unemployment for youths. The South Korean respondent echoed the discomfort with early selection of career paths, arguing that it does not allow for young people to “explore [their] potential.”

3. Key differences based on country-specific factors

Beyond differences of opinion, some of the young leaders discussed dimensions of the youth unemployment problem that are unique to their particular country or region. One particular group of challenges faced by a select group of nations is post-conflict reconstruction, war, and/or political transition. The Liberian respondent explained the immense obstacles facing today’s generation of Liberian youths in making up for lost time during the war, “Liberia is recovering from a 14-year civil war. Consequently, we have a generation of young people who missed out on a decent education. Youth[s] who returned to school after the war entered a
broken system with poor infrastructure and unskilled teachers.” The Pakistani respondent discussed the strains that its “war on terror” places on foreign investment and the consequences of unstable institutions. One of the Nepalese respondents echoed the dissatisfaction with shaky institutions, stating that the “political turmoil” in Nepal is a main factor in the lack of job opportunities and the aforementioned emigration of skilled youths.

Other national differences include levels of education among populaces and different labor demand realities, which lead to dissimilar ideas for interventions. For example, an American respondent discussed the pressure to continue onto post-graduate (quaternary) education in order to secure a job, while an Indonesian respondent stressed the importance of ensuring that a higher percentage of young people have basic levels of education; there are different priorities. The immigration point discussed earlier, as well, is a clear differentiator, as some countries find themselves on the receiving end of immigrant youths while others find themselves as the suppliers.

v. Global youth leaders’ evaluations of existing proposed solutions

1. Exploring confidence levels in each of the four interventions

Moving towards solutions, the questionnaire then asked the 50 youth leaders to evaluate to what degree they believe four interventions discussed in this study – vocational schooling, skills-training programs, apprenticeship programs, and job awareness initiatives1 – would be successful in reducing youth unemployment in their nations. It provides respondents with a scale of 1 to 5, with “1” meaning the initiative will be “not effective at all” and “5”

1 This questionnaire did not evaluate opinions on entrepreneurship programs because they belong to a slightly different category than the other four solutions (they are more focused on job creating than on matching with existing jobs). Entrepreneurship programs can be analyzed more thoroughly in a future study.
meaning the initiative will be “very effective” in tackling the youth unemployment issue. The exact questions and results are shown in Figures 3.5, 3.6, 3.7, and 3.8 below. As shown below the questions, common definitions were given for each initiative so as to minimize the variance in interpretation.

Figure 3.5

Figure 3.6
On a scale of 1 to 5, how successful do you believe apprenticeship programs can be in reducing youth unemployment in your country?

*Apprenticeship programs are defined as: programs that pair students with employers during schooling, allowing the student to work for that employer after graduating, the employer often helps pay for the student’s schooling as well.*

Figure 3.7

On a scale of 1 to 5, how successful do you believe job awareness programs can be in reducing youth unemployment in your country?

*Job awareness programs are defined as: programs that inform young people more effectively about job opportunities. (for example: this can be a marketing campaign, a phone hotline, or a website)*

Figure 3.8
2. Comparing levels of confidence across the different interventions

The four figures above show some significant variation in the confidence of our respondents in each of the proposed youth employment initiatives. In considering vocational schooling, 66 percent of respondents felt that it to be an effective means towards tackling youth unemployment (as indicated by a score of “4” or “5”), while 16 percent did not (as indicated by a score of “1” or “2”). 74 percent of respondents believe skills-training programs will be effective, while 12 percent did not. As we will see more clearly in our comparison in Figure 3.9, apprenticeship programs received the most support. 74 percent of respondents believe apprenticeship programs are an effective means to solving youth unemployment in their countries, while only 4 percent disagreed. Finally, a low of 46 percent felt that job awareness programs would be effective, while a high of 16 percent did not. In summary, aside from job awareness programs, each of the initiatives received support from a strong majority of young leaders surveyed across geographic distances.

Figure 3.9
Figure 3.9 above shows the four initiatives compared against one another in terms of the support received by the young leaders surveyed. As referenced, apprenticeship programs fared the best among these 50 youth leaders, receiving an average mark of 4.16 on the scale of 1 to 5. Skills-training programs came in second, receiving an average score of 3.96. Vocational schooling came next with an average of 3.66, and job awareness programs received an average score of 3.38.

The enthusiasm for apprenticeship programs and skills-training programs among this group of youth leaders makes sense in light of research discussed in Chapter II Section 1B, as well in light of the responses of these youth leaders in analyzing the problem. There is much agreement that there are skills mismatches and skills gaps, and apprenticeship programs and skills-training programs are a viable two-pronged approach towards tackling these problems. Apprenticeship programs reach out to students currently in school to ensure that they are on track for employment. Meanwhile, skills-training programs are generally aimed at teaching crucial skills to young people who are not in school and/or do not have much education. Vocational schooling attempts to tackle the skills gap problem as well, however – as discussed – youths often consider it to be less worthwhile or valuable when compared to university education. In this way, the fact that an apprenticeship model provides the opportunity to learn practical skills while also attending university may make it a more desirable intervention in the eyes of many young people.
vi. Youth-led development solutions with economic and social benefits

I. Questionnaire respondents’ accounts of successful youth-led initiatives

Beyond existing ideas for solutions, the questionnaire yielded accounts of fresh and innovative youth-led solutions in response to the question. A few examples are included here.

Many of the youth leaders gave examples of how young people in their countries are working to leverage their unique understanding of the education system and life as a young person to collaborate with schools and to mentor young people in need of support. The respondent from Liberia discussed the creation of the Liberia Institute for the Promotion of Academic Excellence, in which young people partner with administrators on ideas to improve academic achievement of under-performing students. One of the UK respondents discussed the Mosaic Initiative, in which Muslim young people in Britain create and lead workshops to mentor younger Muslim youths. One of the Australian respondents leads a peer-mentoring program called IGNITE. IGNITE also leverages the power of mentorship, providing minority, indigenous Australian students – who often do not know anyone who has attended college – with college mentors who encourage them and guide them through the application process and beyond. Each of these initiatives is aimed at helping younger students to succeed personally and academically and thus to increase their chances of gaining employment and reaching their potential. More immediately connected to employment, the idea of mentorship has also led to skills training in Israel, where one of our respondents describes the creation of youth-led computer training courses for graduates without the technical skills needed for many jobs. These peer-to-peer examples specifically highlight the impact of peer education and mentoring; young people place a higher weight on the actions and influences of peers than on any other group of people (Simons-Morton, 2009). Thus, youths have potentially the greatest ability to
impact the lives of other youths; this is but one specific area in which young people can uniquely be engaged to tackle the youth unemployment problem.

Other youth leaders discussed how youths in their countries have created jobs directly through entrepreneurship. The respondent from Liberia himself recently developed a vegetable oils processing company; it has employed 20 youths already and has set a goal to create jobs for at least 100 youths in the next four to six months. One of our Kenyan respondents discussed the Youth Enterprise Development Fund (YEDF), which has provided young people with startup capital to create their own businesses. Respondents referenced other youth-led companies as well, ranging widely in industry and type.

2. Wider base of evidence for the success of youth-led development

These examples are not anomalies; all over the world, there is evidence of the success of youth-led development initiatives that are contributing to both employment and the solving of serious community problems. Organizations like Restless Development and Global Changemakers serve as hubs for youths around the world who are managing community impact initiatives and creatively addressing social issues. Restless Development's Youth Empowerment Programme in India, for example, engages peer educators to provide life-changing education to over 36,000 young people a year; this same youth-led project is making similar impacts in Nepal, Zimbabwe, and South Africa as well (Restless Development, 2013).

A snapshot of Global Changemakers, a network of 750 youths from 121 countries, reveals hundreds of examples of youth-led development projects. These young people design and execute Community Action Projects (CAPs) using only a relatively small amount of grant money. There have been 250 of these projects in 86 countries over only the past three years,
and they have reached over four million people (British Council Global Changemakers Annual Report, 2012 and Jaeger, 2013). As a specific example, 18-year-old Kaushik Tiwari noticed that handicraft production is the main source of income for many Indian families, but that intermediaries control a great deal of the market and thus much of the profit share. In response to this challenge and with limited seed money, Tiwari created Illuminate, Inc, an organization based on a website that allows customers to buy handicraft products directly from the Indian community members who produce them. This project aids in general economic development as more community members have access to greater profits. It also directly attacks youth unemployment through the creation of jobs. Finally, the venture has the social and cultural benefit of helping to preserve traditional forms of Indian art (Jaeger, 2013).

Other Global Changemakers-funded life and community changing initiatives include projects such as HIV/AIDS education programs around the world, an initiative that brings sustainable energy to remote areas of Sri Lanka, an online tool for fighting corruption in schools in the Philippines, education programs for marginalized girls in Jordan, a music school for kids in Haiti, a youth entrepreneurship program in Brazil, and much more (British Council Global Changemakers Annual Report, 2012). What is perhaps the most compelling fact is that none of these 250 projects received more than $3,000 in funding (Jaeger, 2013); this is a very cost-effective approach. These youths are utilizing their intimate understanding of their communities and their creative ideas to positively change people’s lives in efficient ways.

vii. Lack of youth involvement in decision-making

One thing this study’s questionnaire results, specifically the in-depth answers given by the 50 youth leaders, indicates is that young people have a knowledge of the youth
unemployment problem from the ground level, an understanding of various dynamics of the problem that may not be obvious to policymakers, opinions and ideas for improvement, and accounts of youth-led ideas that have made progress and could potentially be scaled. With this richness of valuable material and with the understanding that the buy-in of young people is critical for policies directed towards youths to succeed, it is critical that policymakers partner with youths in their communities and nations when designing and implementing interventions.

The overwhelming majority of the global youth leaders surveyed do not feel that this type of partnership currently exists. As shown in Figure 3.10 below, only 18 percent of these youth leaders stated that young people are either very involved or involved in decision-making in their countries, with an extremely low 4 percent stating that young people are very involved. Meanwhile, 56 percent of the respondents believe that young people are not involved in their nations’ decision-making, with 14 percent stating that young people are “not involved at all.”

![Figure 3.10](image-url)
In evaluating potential biases, one could argue in two different directions. On one hand, these young people are more involved in decision-making than most because of the nature of their roles as representatives and their work on social issues, which may lead to an inflated idea of young people’s involvement in decision-making processes. One the other hand, however, their role as advocates may cause them to actually overstress the lack of involvement of youths, as this helps to make their push for greater youth involvement more legitimate.

Whatever the case, the evidence backs up this sentiment, as few existing nations involve youth councils or youth representatives in their governmental decision-making processes. As referenced earlier, the ILO found that only about 30 percent of countries have explicit strategies aimed at youth employment, with less than half of those including explicit budgets towards the cause. Without youths representing the voices of their age cohort in meetings and congresses that are deciding national agendas, policies, and investments, it is difficult for these agendas to include a strong focus on the needs of young people. Just as importantly, by not meaningfully partnering with youths, nations are wasting the fresh and innovative ideas of young people regarding how to best tackle the youth unemployment problem as well as a variety of other social issues.
IV. Conclusion: Partnering with youths to effectively tackle global youth unemployment

Ultimately, this study provides two key components of information: there is a set of models and examples of potentially scalable initiatives that have worked in tackling youth unemployment, and there is a view of the insight and potential of young people in analyzing and developing solutions to the problem. As the first component shows, the youth unemployment challenge is comprised of a wide set of determinants and effects, some of which are unique to particular regions but many of which are common across the world. Chapter II shows that there have been recent strides in literature to help dissect the problem and offer solutions. Because there are several common issues around the globe – including a skills gaps, NEETs without a path towards employment, a lack of awareness of job opportunities, and a lack of micro-credit for youths – particular models of apprenticeship programs, skills-training programs, vocational schooling, entrepreneurship investment programs, and job awareness initiatives around the world provide examples of successful interventions that have the potential to be scaled across borders to reach more young people. Even with the success, the ILO’s study on governmental agendas shows that there is still not the type of commitment to tackling the youth unemployment “crisis” as is warranted by the severity of the problem.

The second component – the research introduced and analyzed in Chapter III – then helps to look beyond the facts, figures, and policy analyses towards the perspectives of young people themselves. In asking 50 youth leaders from 30 countries for their views on the topic, it garnered rich feedback that paints a picture of life as an unemployed youth, analyzes the problem from the lens of a young person, evaluates ideas, and cites successful youth-led initiatives. While this small sample size cannot provide decisive evidence, it reveals the insight
and ideas that can be gained by partnering with youths. The research is also an example of the type of work that can and must be done to understand the perspectives of youths globally.

For greater success in tackling youth unemployment in the future, institutions will have to unite together both components of this study. A partnership model that brings together institutions – governments, businesses, NGOs, and educational organizations – and youths is necessary for the proven employment initiatives to be implemented in a way that will most effectively reach young people in the given community. This partnership model allows institutions to take initiatives that have worked in other places, bring them to the table for youths to dissect and analyze in light of their experiences and the realities on the ground, and tailor these initiatives to suit the needs of the local youth community. Further, the model allows for the sharing of youth-led ideas for development initiatives, many of which have had proven, cost-effective success globally. This partnership can be achieved through youth leaders’ representation in local and national governments, more far-reaching academic research to understand the youth perspective, financial investment in young people’s ideas, consistent evaluation of youth-focused programs by surveying young people, and the use of social media to create discussions between representatives and young people about social issues.

Initiatives like apprenticeship programs and skills-training programs have proven success and promising potential. Provided that these initiatives are brought from community-to-community and country-to-country with youths as active and invested partners in their development, there can be real hope in efforts to tackle today’s global youth unemployment crisis. Above all, this is a more sustainable approach; beyond more effective initiatives and policies, this will create a more empowered and engaged generation of youths who use their energy to work with existing institutions rather than to repel them. Ultimately, the result can be a youth generation that is more productive economically, socially, and politically.
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Appendix A: Global Youth Leader Questionnaire

Preliminary Questions
In which country is what you consider your primary community located?
Are you between 18 and 29 years of age? Circle one: Yes No

Short Answer Questions (Please keep responses to about 100 words or less.)

1. Describe the challenge, or lack of challenge, that youth unemployment presents in your country.

2. On a scale of 1 to 5, how successful do you believe vocational schooling can be in reducing youth unemployment in your country? *Vocational schools are defined as: schools in which students are taught the skills needed to perform a particular job. (this is considered an alternative to university education)*

3. On a scale of 1 to 5, how successful do you believe skills-training programs can be in reducing youth unemployment in your country? *Skills-training programs are defined as: short-term programs that train young people in skills needed in today's jobs.*

4. On a scale of 1 to 5, how successful do you believe apprenticeship programs can be in reducing youth unemployment in your country? *Apprenticeship programs are defined as: programs that pair students with employers during schooling, allowing the student to work for that employer after graduating. (the employer often helps pay for the student's schooling as well)*

5. On a scale of 1 to 5, how successful do you believe job awareness programs can be in reducing youth unemployment in your country? *Job awareness programs are defined as: programs that inform young people more effectively about job opportunities. (for example: this can be a marketing campaign, a phone hotline, or a website)*

6. What are your ideas for tackling the youth unemployment challenges in your country?

7. Have you seen youth-led development projects work in your community? If so, describe.

8. On a scale of 1 to 5, to what degree do you feel as though young people are included in decision-making in your country? (5 = very included, 1 = not included) __

9. Describe the life of an unemployed youth in your community.

OPTIONAL: 10. Is there anything else you think is important to mention about youth unemployment in your country or community?
Appendix B: Questionnaire Recruitment Email

Global Youth Leader Questionnaire
Invitation/ Recruitment Email

Subject Line: Global Youth Unemployment Study – Brief, 15-Minute Survey

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Hello ______,

I hope you are doing well! My name is Andrew Leon Hanna and I am a senior Public Policy student at Duke University in the United States. I am currently working on a research study of the youth unemployment challenges facing communities and nations around the world. I am reaching out to you because, given your background and experience working to make change against social challenges, you are an ideal person to help inform my paper regarding the youth challenges and potential youth-led solutions in your community and nation. It would be a privilege for me to be able to hear your thoughts if you are willing!

The survey is only 4 questions long and will take probably around 15 minutes to complete. You can find the survey at the following link: http://tinyurl.com/GlobalYouthSurvey2013

Your participation is voluntary. It is important to note that your answers will be recorded without any information that will identify you. When I report the results of my survey I may use individual responses to illustrate a point but without any information to identify the person who provided it. I will keep the survey data (again, without identifiers) for future research.

Additionally, it would be greatly appreciated if you could send me the email addresses of __ co-workers in your county (age 18-29) who may be interested in contributing as well.

Ultimately, the hope is that this project will provide a greater youth voice in the discussion about global development challenges, particularly the enormous obstacle of youth unemployment.

Thank you so much and please feel free to reach out to me at andrewleonhanna@gmail.com with any questions! You may also write to my faculty advisor, Dr. Giovanni Zanalda, at giovanni.zanalda@duke.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in a research study, you may contact the Human Subjects Committee at ors-info@duke.edu.

Andrew Leon Hanna
Senior Class President
Duke University