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# OPINION

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One way of investing  
in young people is  
by providing quality  
education and skills



Raphael Obonyo | Education

## Invest in youth to guarantee Africa's future

As the race for the African Union Commission's chair gathers pace, there is widespread acknowledgment that discussions around the continent's future must place youth at the heart of the conversation.

In just a decade from now, young Africans will represent the largest share of the global population entering the workforce – within the next 25 years, one in three young people globally will be African. This demographic shift will redefine the future of labour, innovation, and economic potential. Africa cannot let this opportunity go to waste. This generation has the potential to become a powerful engine for growth and prosperity, not just for Africa, but for the rest of the world. Undoubtedly, looking at their dynamism and innovation, Africa's youth are the continent's biggest asset, not just for Africa, but for the whole world.

Yet, significant barriers remain. Many young people face immense challenges, some of which limit their ability to access opportunities. These challenges must be addressed through policy reforms that remove barriers to skills development. Efforts should be made to invest in the continent's demographic dividend to avoid turning it into a demographic burden. The biggest risk in Africa is not investing in youth. Failing to invest in the youth will hurt Africa; failure is not an option. Action is required to create opportunities at home for African youth, to halt their migration abroad, which is causing a surge in both legal and illegal migration. Today, many young Africans are putting their lives in danger to find better opportunities abroad. This is a sign that more needs to be done to empower African youth. There is more to do, and more that can be done.

One way of investing in young people is by providing quality education and skills to help them tackle present and future challenges. There is a need to equip young people in Africa with the skills and expertise to meet the demands of the labour market.

According to the Accra-based African Centre for Economic Transformation, a policy think tank, almost 50 per cent of current university graduates in Africa do not get jobs. The root cause of the problem is a mismatch between the education they are receiving and labour market needs. African countries must invest in building stronger education systems, train and hire better-qualified teachers, modernise the curriculum and encourage critical thinking.

There is no exaggeration in saying that education can transform lives. One of the biggest challenges Africa faces today is the shortfall in education funding. To close the gap, African governments should explore innovative solutions.

The private sector and government should work together to expand educational and employment opportunities for young people. The private sector, in particular, has a critical role to play. By partnering with educational institutions, businesses can help equip young people with the skills they need to thrive.

Mr Obonyo is a Public Policy Analyst. raphojuma@hotmail.com

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