



**Tackling Youth Unemployment  
in the Regions and Districts**

**A Report on  
The 2005 Governance  
Issues Forum**

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**1. Background**

Ghana's population is relatively young. The youth make up 33.0 percent of the total population of Ghana, according to the 2000 census. Unemployment, especially among the youth, is one of the biggest challenges facing Ghana today, both at the national and regional levels. According to the Institute of Statistical Social and Economic Research (ISSER) of the University of Ghana, some 230,000 people join the nation's labour force every year; but only 2.0 per cent (about 5,000) of them find employment in the formal sector. Although some of the remaining entrants do find work in the informal sector, usually as self-employed traders or small-scale business operators, large numbers of them remain unemployed.

Data available from the 2000 census also reveals that the youth unemployment rate in Ghana is 16.55 percent. Some contend that these figures are an underestimation, since they present a blurred snapshot that does not adequately portray the visible and invisible underemployment, especially in the districts. Local-level statistics on youth employment and unemployment have been inadequate, which has meant that programmes at the districts level have often been based on general assumptions about the capabilities and needs of the youth in the labour market. However, there is widespread recognition that youth employment is and should be a priority in Ghana.

The employment prospects of Ghana's youth are seriously hampered by the already high rate of unemployment and underemployment in both the formal and informal sectors in Ghana.

In addition, this strategic group is, on the one hand, the key to the future development of the country and, on the other hand, represents an extremely vulnerable group because they are more likely to engage in unproductive and risky behaviours, as a result of diminished employment opportunities. Since the youth constitute a significant portion of the productive population, youth unemployment becomes an important policy variable in determining the development strategies of the country.

### 1.1 Youth Employment Policies and Programmes

Historically, state policies to address youth unemployment were framed within a political philosophy that aimed at directing the energies of the youth towards civic, political and economic activities. For instance, the CPP government's Youth League was transformed into the Ghana Young Pioneers (GYP) that had the objective to foster physical fitness, respect for manual work, self-discipline, sense of duty and responsibility and above all the love for and strong desire to serve the country.

In 1969, the Progress Party government formed the national Youth Service Corps (NYSC) to get young people to contribute to national development by working on community-improvement projects, particularly in the rural areas. Twenty (20) years later the government registered the unemployed youth and engaged them around the country in development projects such as public works programmes and the cultivation of farms.

Overtime, the government of Ghana, through the Ministry of Manpower, Youth and Employment and in partnership with the Integrated Community Centres for Employable Skills (ICES)

provided courses in various trades to 11,800 trainees in 91 centres throughout the country. In 2001, for instance, this exercise produced 2,833 graduates some of whom are now self-employed.

By 2005, the government of Ghana had also introduced a coordinated national youth employment policy to address critical job requirements of the youth. Government continues to recognize the problems associated with youth employment and has targeted policies to reduce the phenomenon. Past and ongoing policies have taken primarily the form of skills training, in order to address the skills-employment mismatch problem. The education reform programme was perhaps the most fundamental move towards producing the relevant skills.

The most notable Skills Training and Employment Placement (STEP) programme, which was designed to run from 2003 to 2005, was also aimed at updating the skills of the youth. It was meant to be eventually integrated into the mainstream of vocational education, drawing upon lessons learned over the previous three years. However, adequate placement was difficult to realize. Yet, another policy effort was to offer all Junior Secondary School (JSS) 3 candidates, who are not able to pursue further education, two years of apprenticeship. Complementing the skills training programme is a job creation component, through the offer of financial support to youth who want to start self-employment schemes.