

Highlights from the British Council market research

African Youth Insights: Top Concerns Post-Covid and the many opportunities available to access UK Education

JOHANNESBURG, GAUTENG, SOUTH AFRICA , December 2, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- As the youngest continent in the world, Africa is expected to double its youth demographic to nearly one billion people in the coming few decades. This enormous group of young people holds great potential for a rapidly aging world. And yet before COVID-19, only 1 in 6 African youth were in a stable wage-earning job, and over a third were fully unemployed. It is expected that the African continent will be the slowest to be vaccinated against the disease, further hindering its ability to recover as quickly as others economically. A large population of dissatisfied young people can be a threat as much as it is an opportunity. "Understanding the youths' priorities and aspirations is the first step in ensuring their potential is realised for both themselves and a better world", says Andrew Zerzan, Director of Education, Arts & Society for British Council in Africa.



Andrew Zerzan, Director of Education, Arts & Society & Deputy Director for Africa at the British Council

But what are African youths' top issues, and what can education do to support them? Over the past year, the British Council conducted market research across six countries (Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, and Sudan), hearing the voices of nearly five thousand young people through surveys and in-depth interviews. This article highlights what they say about their aspirations in the face of the pandemic and how collaboration with the UK education sector can support them. "People are not concerned about the outbreak. They believe their means of livelihood have been taken away."- Male, 31-35-year-old, Nigeria
Securing livelihood is the top concern of African youth

Our market insight shows that the youth are more anxious about their livelihood prospects since the pandemic started across all market segments and sampled geographies. It is particularly striking in the face of a worldwide pandemic that youth repeatedly flag economics as a far bigger concern than their or their family members' health and mental wellbeing. For example, in Kenya, two out of three youths identified job opportunities as the biggest challenge facing them and their peers. Chart: [Biggest worries of African youth during COVID-19 \(Pg.7\)](#)

Starting a business – not finding a job – is preferred:

Youth recognised the negative impact the pandemic is likely to have on their employment prospects, that the economic effects will upset people early in their careers and limit which opportunities are available to those entering the job market. Significantly, more young people identified self-employment or entrepreneurship as their priority over finding a job. This is also the case of those youth enrolled in university or college: over 50% of this African demographic said their preference would be to start their own business over employment.

Across all six countries, more youth said entrepreneurship was their priority over employment, which was more pronounced in some countries. For instance, while 60% of Zimbabweans want to start a business during the pandemic, only 42% of Ethiopians felt the same. It is notable that those youth who had already started a business before the pandemic plan to continue a career of entrepreneurship or employment by a large 2 to 1 margin. Chart: [Top priorities of African youth during COVID-19, Future Goals \(Pg.11\)](#)

Youth are dissatisfied with the education offer:

A large group of youth in each country confirmed that building skills were a big priority for them than before COVID-19. This included people currently enrolled in college or university. Separate research by the British Council has found that young people are often frustrated with the quality of education they receive. Of the Kenyan youth who were already employed, just over half confirmed that education “did not match at all” the skills required for their job.

How deeply entrepreneurship is embedded in education varies depending on location, institution, and resources. However, there is a disconnect between the curriculum and the market's needs across most African countries. Indeed, most universities have not integrated entrepreneurial skills into non-business-themed courses but as stand-alone courses in themselves. The result is that the young graduates have technical skills like pharmacology or information technology but lack entrepreneurial skills to launch a sustainable business.

Opportunity to collaborate with the UK to improve entrepreneurship:

Africans in our pandemic research identified UK education as more attractive over other countries, including countries with strong reputations for quality education such as the USA, Canada, China, and Germany. This should not be surprising. The UK higher education sector is world-leading in graduate employability, with two of the top five global universities in recent graduate employment rankings. The past decade has seen a huge focus in the UK education sector on improving students' employability and entrepreneurial skills. The UK is also amongst

the most internationalised HE sectors globally, making it an experienced partner to collaborate with overseas universities and learners. The UK sector thrives on international partnerships and has identified several markets in Africa as strategic priorities for future growth. Chart: African Youth Who Say They're Attracted to Selected Countries' Education (Pg.19)

At the same time, there are several leading African universities in entrepreneurial skills development with experience partnering internationally as well. We believe there is a great opportunity to harness and showcase the experience of these topmost institutions across the UK and Africa, creating a network for sharing their learnings on developing Africa's next generation of entrepreneurs and piloting the innovative ideas that are bound to come from such a network. Already there is a rich history of partnership between UK and African higher education institutions on which such a network could be built. COVID-19 has increased the aspiration of African youth to be entrepreneurs, and collaboration between the UK and leading African institutions can make a real difference to support them.

Author: This paper was written by Andrew Zerzan, the Director of Education, Arts & Society for the British Council in Africa. Andrew previously led the British Council's global education work and has extensive experience managing programmes related to technological innovation and international partnerships such as World Bank, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

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