



DESIGNING AFRICA'S FUTURE OF WORK

Unveiling Opportunities in Africa's Evolving Economy





ABSTRACT

*Unveiling Opportunities in
Africa's Evolving Economy*

In view of the increasing rates of unemployment, continental priorities and technological advancements that are disrupting the realm of work, Africa – continent with the highest number of young people - is on the cusp of a significant transformation whose direction will be determined by how Africa designs its Future of Work (FoW). Extant literature on the FoW in Africa focus on the opportunities inherent in the digital revolution. This report argues that technological advancements should not be the sole determinant of Africa's FoW. Focusing on the Nigerian perspective while attempting to analyse the situation in Sub Saharan Africa, this report unveils specific opportunities within Africa's evolving economy using qualitative research methods.

Every minute in Africa, at least 35 people come into the labour market with their bucket of dreams and no job to live out those aspirations. Before you're done reading this overview, another 35 people will join that number. By the end of today, we will be looking at 50,000 newly-minted unemployed Africans. In Nigeria and across the continent, unemployment is a big problem -- and even bigger is youth unemployment. By the end of 2022, one in two young people in Nigeria were unemployed.

To join forward-thinking institutions and individuals in solving this problem, three Nigerian Goalkeepers -- Uche Pedro, 'Mayowa Tijani and Azeez Salawu -- set up an initiative called Future Work Africa. The project, born at a Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation Goalkeepers accelerator in 2022, sought to understand the jobs of the future, and the skills needed by young people in Africa to effectively match those jobs. We commissioned this research to better understand the needs of the continent, the skills we can export to the world, and how to adapt to a rapidly changing future.

It is our hope that the insights we offer, coupled with the right resources, will help millions of young people across the continent take up skills relevant to the future of work -- not just in Africa but across the post-COVID world.

'Mayowa Tijani

*For: **Future Work Africa.***

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▲ **Background and Context**

Six years from 2030 and at the midpoint of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it is evident that Africa stands at a crucial point in its quest to achieve the global goals. While Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) has made strides on certain points of the SDGs, substantial challenges persist, particularly in ensuring decent work and sustainable employment (SDG 8) and eradicating poverty (SDG 1). This underscores the importance of initiatives like the 'Future Work Africa' project, which seek to advance and promote policies and interventions that ensure Africa's teeming youth population is prepared for impending workplace transformations.

This report delves deep into the intricacies of the future of work in Africa, examining both global influences such as technological evolution and the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as local dynamics like the migration of skilled professionals and Africa's unique priorities. With a primary lens on Sub-Saharan Africa and drawing key insights from Nigeria, this report aims to chart a data-driven trajectory to counteract the persistent issue of youth unemployment and underemployment, pinpointing prospective job roles and industries poised for growth in the future. The study, conducted against a backdrop of a weak economy, high unemployment, and low industrialization, reveals that the continent is at a pivotal moment where significant opportunities and challenges in the realm of work coexist. In this Executive Summary, we present the key findings, while underlining the implications and recommendations from the study.

▲ **Key Findings**

- Unemployment in Sub Saharan Africa remains a prevailing challenge that requires holistic and multi-sectoral attention.
- The Essential Role of SDG8 and SDG4: This research reveals that slow progress on goals like SDG8 and SDG4 will hamper the accelerated attainment of the other 16 SDGs on the continent. A skilled and competitive workforce is the cornerstone of a country's development.



- **Excessive Tech Focus:** Reviewing the literature on the Future of Work and employability initiatives in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) evidence an overwhelming focus on the role of digital technology. Despite technology's growing importance, there's a discernible need to also prioritize areas like agriculture and manufacturing which are equally vital for economic sustainability in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA).
- **Tech Sector Vulnerability:** The tech sector in SSA, despite its growth, remains vulnerable to external factors such as investor actions and global trends. Thanks to its growing youth population, Sub-Saharan Africa has the potential to become the world's talent bank and outsourcing headquarters for both technology and non-technology related job roles.
- **Increasing Adoption of Technology:** The rapid rise of digital technology, especially generative AI, is streamlining routine functions within corporate structures, leading to reduced manual employment.
- **Talent Drain:** The migration of skilled workers to Europe and North America is predicted to continue unless structural issues such as quality of life and security are addressed.
- **Increasing Demand for Flexibility:** The demand for flexible work patterns and contracts, accelerated by the pandemic and technological advancements, is rising, especially in tech sectors and multinational corporations.
- **Sectoral Disparities:** There's an observed disproportionate focus and investment in the ICT sector over areas like agriculture, wholesales, and manufacturing.

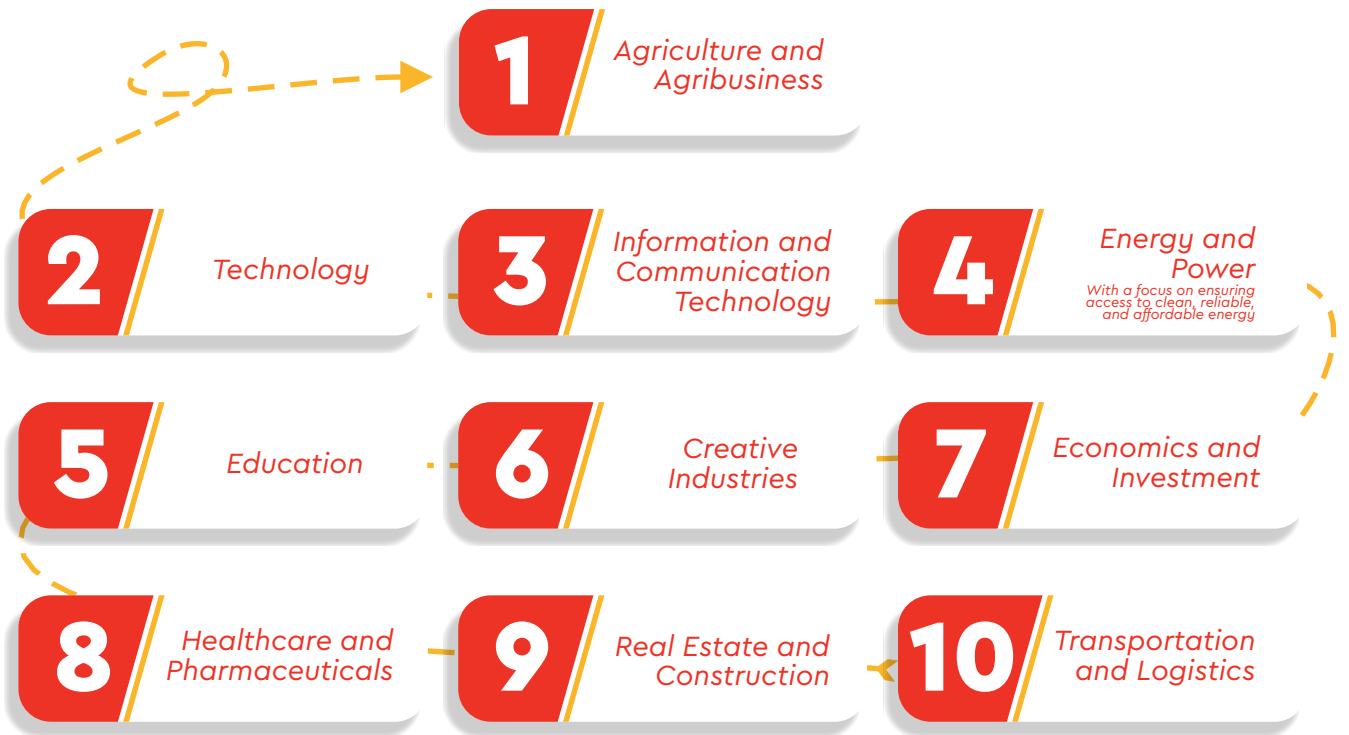
▲ **SSA's Top 10 Industries of the Future**

In no order, the following are the industries of the future that governments, policy makers and investors should pay attention to over the course of the next 10 years in Sub Saharan Africa. This listing includes industries that are currently showing strong potential for growth and industries that are necessary for Africa's sustainable development.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Unveiling Opportunities in Africa's Evolving Economy



SSA's Top 10 Industries of the future

▲ SSA's Top 10 Jobs of the Future ^{*1}

There is a flurry of roles that were inexistent a decade ago but have become highly demanded within and outside the continent in the past few years. The research reveals that the demand for the following job roles will continue to grow:

- 1 Software Engineers.
- 2 Product Managers, UI/UX Designers, Developers, and User Researchers
- 3 Cybersecurity experts
- 4 Data scientists, analysts, and visualisers:
In this big data era, the relevance of data analysts will continue to increase, and it is a job that cuts across all industries.
- 5 Behavioural Economics and Engineering

¹This list is one that needs to be constantly reviewed, revised, and updated

- 6 Healthcare Professionals
- 7 Agricultural Engineers and Agri-tech.
- 8 Creative professionals
- 9 Teachers and Educationists
- 10 Cloud Computing

SSA's Top 10 Jobs of the future

▲ **Implications and Recommendations**

For Africa to harness the potential of its future workforce effectively, it must:

1. Work towards ensuring that Africa has the infrastructure to sustain and support the impending future of work.
2. Define Economic Trajectory: Establish a clear economic identity, aligning with its global economic contributions. A clear understanding and articulation of SSA's economic contributions to the global landscape will pave the way for sustainable FoW strategies.
3. Revamp Employment Policies: Undertake a holistic review of employment policies, ensuring collaborations between various stakeholders, from industry leaders to job seekers. Nigeria's National Employment Policy requires an urgent review in collaboration with all stakeholders, including job seekers and industry leaders.
4. Revamp the educational sector, equipping it to produce future-ready talents. The government and industries need to collaboratively reform the education sector to align it with future job requirements. It is also essential to align curricula with the skills needed for the 21st-century labor market.
5. Enhance social protection frameworks and strengthen labour laws, ensuring improved quality of life and deterring talent migration. Enhance Quality of Life:



Beyond competitive salaries, improving social amenities is essential to retain talent within the continent.

6. Strengthen labour laws: Advocate for equitable treatment of Nigerian talents by multinationals and startups alike.
7. Boost investment and engagement in non-tech sectors to diversify the economic base and provide resilience against tech sector vulnerabilities.
8. Enhance Quality of Life: Beyond competitive salaries, improving social amenities is essential to retain talent within the continent.
9. Facilitate Early Industry Exposure and Engagement: Increased industry exposure for high school students and clear industry entry pathways post-high school will bridge the gap between education and employment.
10. The Ministry of Labour should encourage and, where possible, mandate flexible recruitment and working practices and patterns in non-tech sectors to reduce the burden on job seekers and create a more inclusive job market.

The future of work in Africa is uncertain, but full of potential. With sound policies and investments, Africa can create a more inclusive and thriving workforce and reduce. In designing Africa's FoW, it is therefore important to adopt a unique approach that considers, not only global technological trends but also the specific needs, challenges, and priorities of the continent. This is especially because for an inclusive FoW, SSA needs to bridge infrastructural and development gaps that today prevents the deployment of technological solutions to traditional industries like agriculture and manufacturing. To design a FoW that works for young African, we encourage stakeholders, including governments, industries, and educational institutions, to take a collaborative approach towards ensuring a sustainable and inclusive future of work in Africa.

▴ **Background and Context**

In recent years, the world has witnessed an immense disruption in the world of work due to the COVID-19 pandemic and significant technological advancements. Though analysts believe the disruption will not be as rapid or radical in Africa due to the continent's low level of industrialization and the slower rate of technology adoption among other reasons, the massive adoption of generative AI tools is putting Africa at the forefront of this transformative shift. Africa, with its youthful, diverse, and dynamic workforce, and its growing technological infrastructure, is simultaneously on the cusp of exciting opportunities and unprecedented challenges in the realm of work. This report attempts to design what that future should look like by identifying the jobs of the future, the skills needed to access them and how to bridge the gap between the skills needed and the skills available on the market.

Analysis and policies on Africa's future of work are necessary for the continent's sustainable development. Without reflections of this nature and deliberate attempts to bridge observed gaps, Africa's march towards 2030 will not only be decelerated but almost impossible. This is because the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on the continent depends on Africa's capacity to train and deploy a competitive workforce to implement all other points of the global goals. Studies and initiatives around the future of work in Africa are not novel. Different international and regional organisations have expounded analyses and designed initiatives to prepare Africa and her youths for the future of work. The African Development Bank, the World Bank, non-profits, national governments, and individuals have lent their voice to the analysis of what the future of work will look like in Africa. However, there are no comprehensive studies to help young unemployed Africans understand what this means for them and their prospects of finding a job in the shifting work landscape. This report aims to address that gap.

The urgent need to understand and design the future of work in Africa has been made more prominent by the following issues: I, COVID-19 induced changes to the labour



landscape, II, the persistent problem of unemployment on the continent, III, the increasing adoption of new technologies like Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning and the Internet of things into the world of work, IV, the mass immigration of young African talents to Europe and North America and V, Increasing Continental Efforts at Economic Integration – the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the Free Movement Protocol (FMP). The foregoing factors impact the African market and the future of work.

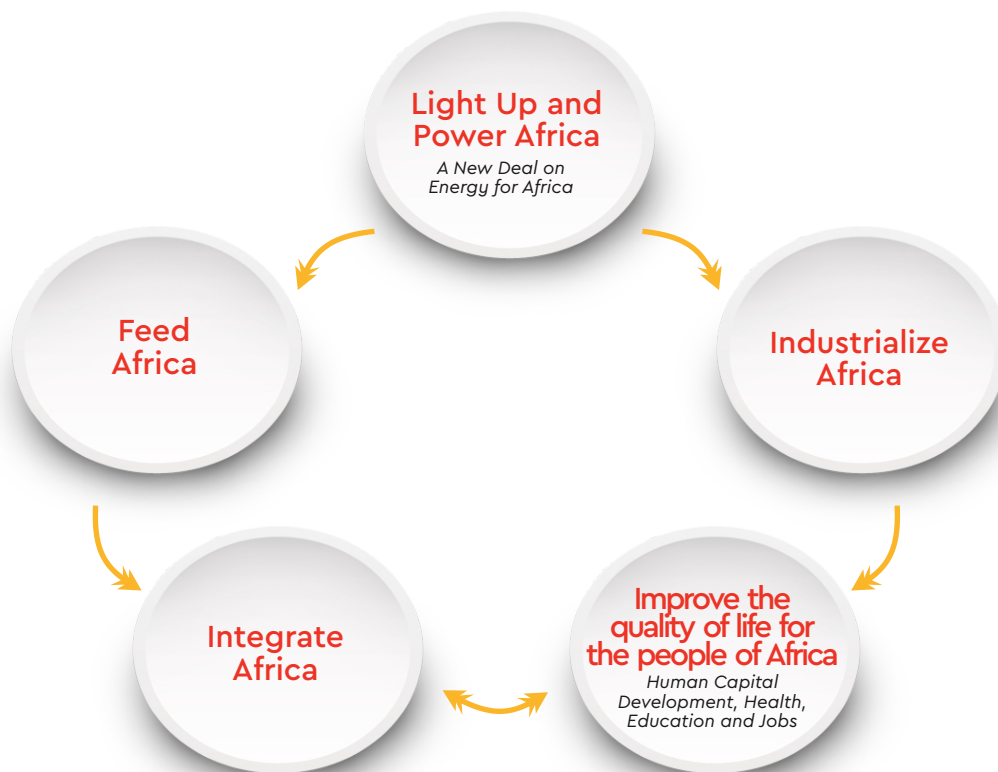
The future of work in Africa is uncertain, but full of potential. With sound policies and investments, Africa can create a more inclusive and thriving workforce and reduce. Existing studies are unanimous in their findings that the FoW in Africa is uncertain, and we have confirmed through key stakeholders' interviews, that it is indeed shifting. This malleability of FoW however presents the continent with an opportunity; an opportunity to determine what the future of work should and would look like on the continent. This report is an attempt at providing a framework to design Africa's Future of work. It has been established that new technologies and automation are unlikely to immediately displace as many jobs in Africa as it has in more industrialised parts of the world². This conclusion is owing to Africa's relatively smaller manufacturing economy base which accounts for less than 10% of GDP.

The data suggests that Africa needs to trace its own path towards the sustainable employment of its youth. The focal point of FoW conversations in the Global North centres on job loss and the net job creation effect due to automation and artificially intelligent systems, and work patterns e.g., 4-day work weeks and remote – hybrid working³. The FoW conversations in Africa around FoW do not uniformly imply the same things. While in tech driven sectors, the conversation that obtains is similar to what obtains in the Global North, in non-tech-sectors, the focus is on upskilling the workforce for relevance and competitiveness in the 21st century labour market.

²Jieun Choi, Mark A. Dutz, and Zainab Usman – [Future of Work in Africa: Harnessing the Potential of Digital Technologies for All, World Bank. Retrieved July 21, 2023](#)

³McKinsey & Company, (2019, July 11), [The future of work in America: People and places, today and tomorrow. Retrieved August 18 2023](#)

It is necessary to ask: Whose future are we preparing for? What informs our analysis? Since the concern of this report and the Future Work Africa project is preparing for Africa's FoW, the needs and priorities of the continent should inform any sustainable analysis. While it is undeniable that global trends in the world of work impact upon the FoW in Africa, they should not be the sole factors considered when attempting to address unemployment. Most analyses around the FoW in Africa are solely based on the occurrences developing outside the continent with a focus on technology. Africa's sustainable development and identified needs should inform any FoW discussions. The need to accelerate the attainment of the SDGs and a transformation of Africa led to the conception of the High 5s by the African Development Bank (AfDB) in 2015. Besides the global trends in technology, these evidence-backed identified continent-wide needs should inform analysis and policy on the FoW in Africa. The five priority areas:



Five Priority areas

In view of the foregoing, this report's analysis and findings will be primarily based on the continent's needs while being cognizant of the global trends in technology. Against the background that African economies are not homogenous in their



strength, scope or offering, it would be presumptuous to claim that this report represents an accurate assessment of the picture on the continent. With a leaning towards the experience in Nigeria, this report will focus on Sub-Saharan Africa. Despite their differences in population strength and economic base, SSA countries have common developmental challenges and some of the poorest ratings for decent work and employment in the world.

By carrying out a comprehensive needs assessment, this report aims to identify the in-demand jobs in Nigeria and Africa, the skills necessary for such jobs and present recommendations that can culminate in matching unemployed and underemployed youths with such jobs. The report will identify ten in-demand future jobs in Nigeria and Africa over the next ten years.

▲ *Research Objective and Scope*

The Future Work Africa Project aims to address youth unemployment in Africa by identifying new-generation jobs and linking young people to training and job opportunities. To achieve this goal, this report will identify the types of jobs that are in demand in the region and the skills needed to succeed in those jobs and the availability of training and job opportunities. There is an insurmountable complexity of attempting to speak of the future of work in Africa given the continent's diversity along economic, regional, cultural, and historical lines. The geographical focus of this report is Sub Saharan Africa with a leaning towards the Nigerian perspective. This research was also carried out with a recognition of the difference in economic and industrial compositions, varying levels of technology adoption and adaptation, and the difference in Labour Force Survey methodologies used to arrive at statistics on unemployment in different countries. Despite the trend towards globalisation, local realities still exist, and this report is resolute in its determination not to use a lens that applies a one size fits all approach to tackling unemployment and underemployment.

Methodology

With a specific geographical focus on Nigeria, with allowance for broader observations in Sub-Saharan Africa, this report on the future of work in Africa was carried out in the context of a flailing economy, high rates of unemployment, low industrialization, flawed education systems and an increasingly competitive job landscape given the global advancements in automation and the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI). With 4 to 5 million new workers entering the Nigerian labour market annually, unemployment is predicted to remain a significant problem in the coming years (KPMG 2023)⁴. This reality is not exclusive to Nigeria. It is a persistent challenge in the wider SSA.

Extant literature on the future of work in Africa discusses the tension between the impact of technology on the labour force on a global scale and the uniqueness of Africa vis-à-vis the digital revolution and the automation of jobs. It has been established that the impact of the introduction of AI, ML and other technological advancement on the work scene will not simply be an issue of replacing the old with the new as it is in the global North. For an exhaustive analysis on the impact of the digital revolution on Africa and African jobs, see *The Future of Work in Africa: Harnessing the Potential of Digital Technologies for All* (2020), Jieun Choi, Mark A. Dutz, and Zainab Usman (eds.)⁵

Given the context that obtains in Sub Saharan Africa, the continent has an opportunity to determine what should constitute the new. It would therefore be an error to solely rely on global statistics, and trends to determine Africa's path regarding the future of work. Therefore, the methodology adopted in this report though takes a cue from existing data sets on employment in Africa relies on empirical evidence.

Given the varying levels of development on the continent, the cultural differences, the level of industrialization, the different Labour Force Survey (LFS) methodologies used

⁴Usen T.J, (April 11, 2023), '*Nigerias Unemployment Rate To Rise To 41% In 2023- KPMG, Channels Nigeria.* Retrieved July 21, 2023

⁵Jieun Choi, Mark A. Dutz, and Zainab Usman (2020), *Future of Work in Africa: Harnessing the Potential of Digital Technologies for All, World Bank.* Retrieved July 21, 2023



on the continent, being able to pin-point 10 jobs of the future are a complex endeavour requiring futuristic thinking. This complexity informed the methodology used.

▴ **Research Method**

This report adopts qualitative methods of data collection. The use of mixed qualitative and quantitative research methods was briefly contemplated because of the desire to arrive at an objective identification of the top ten jobs of the future in SSA. That prospect however proved challenging for many reasons including the scope of the research, the level of understanding among the general population, and the challenge of the difference in economies and structures across Sub Saharan Africa.

■ **Qualitative Methods**

Desktop Review, Semi Structured Interviews and Focus Group Discussions

The report was informed by data collected through different qualitative research methods. Primary data was sourced through semi-structured in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with key stakeholders in Sub-Saharan Africa including employers, employed staff and current job seekers. However, more input was gotten from the Nigerian context while secondary data was sourced through a review of existing literature. This method focused more on describing the issues qualitatively to allow for donors and decision makers to act on it.⁶

■ **Desktop Review**

This was the first point of review and analysis. Through a review of extant literature on the future of work and trends of unemployment on the continent, the report identified emerging trends and themes on the future of work in Africa over the next 10-year period. Among others, key documents that informed the report include the annual World Economic Forum reports on the FoW, the 2019 World Bank World Development Report on the changing nature of work⁷ and the 2019 World Bank report on the Future of work in Africa,⁸ Nigeria's National

⁶Alexander Kjærøum (February 23, 2023) [Opinion: UN is wrong to say 700 million will be displaced by drought, Devex. Retrieved July 25, 2023](#)

⁷World Bank (2019) [World Development Report 2019: The Changing Nature of Work. Washington, DC: World Bank. Retrieved July 21, 2023](#)

⁸Choi, Jieun; Dutz, Mark; Usman, Zainab. 2020. [The Future of Work in Africa: Harnessing the Potential of Digital Technologies for All, Africa Development Forum.](#)



Economic Policy, reports, and briefs from the African Development Bank. To identify the skills needed to work in those roles, the Sub Saharan section of Coursera's 2023 Global Skills Report was an invaluable resource.⁹

■ *Semi Structured In-depth Interviews*

For this research, we had a total of fifteen interviews. The interviews were designed to verify the data and trends identified from the secondary data from the literature review. Respondents included employees, job seekers, employers, HR professionals and different individuals and organisations working in the space of youth employability and employment. The priority in this regard was to source reliable, primary data on emerging trends from respondents in Nigeria and, across sub-Saharan Africa. The questionnaires that served as the basis for interviews with company CEOs and Human Resources professionals across different industries across Nigeria were identical. There were also specific questionnaires designed for employees, job seekers and training / job readiness organizations. The respondents were asked to respond to a series of questions relating to their work, their experiences, and perspectives of the FoW in SSA post COVID-19 and in the face of technological advancements. In addition, respondents were asked a series of general concluding questions, and were asked to provide their list of the top 10 industries and top 10 jobs of the future in Sub Saharan Africa. Adopting a semi-structured format also allows the collection of open-ended data by allowing research to veer off designed questionnaires where necessary. All interviews were conducted online. List of respondents will be provided in an annex.

In addition to this and as part of our methodology to confirm our list of top 10 jobs of the future, the research cross referenced our list with the list provided by the Executive Director of Tech4Dev, a non-profit working to provide access to opportunities for decent work and entrepreneurship to underserved and under resourced communities across the world through digital skills empowerment

⁹ https://pages.coursera-for-business.org/rs/748-MIV-116/images/Coursera_Global_Skills_Report_2023.pdf



INTRODUCTION

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and advocacy. Tech4Dev's list is sourced from quarterly interaction with their job partner network of over 80 technology-oriented companies in six countries – 5 of which are in Africa.

■ *Focus Group Discussion*

The Future Work Africa group also held a focus group discussion with stakeholders across different sectors and industries working actively in organizations and projects with national or regional coverage. The industries represented include Technology and Innovation, Creative Industry, Employability, Agriculture, Technology Training, Journalism and Copywriting and Non-profit/ Development. The varying perspectives and information from this discussion also went on to confirm already sourced data.

Sub Saharan Africa's labour market is complex and dynamic, encompassing a wide range of economies, industries, and workforce characteristics. In the past decade, and especially since the COVID-19 pandemic, the region's labour market has undergone significant changes owing to technological advancements and demographic shifts. The latter brought forth a series of labour market trends that are shaping the current employment landscape albeit not entirely in progressive ways. In this section, the report explores the contemporary developments in Sub Saharan Africa's labour market, highlighting the opportunities and challenges they present for the region's workforce. It is however noteworthy that there are complexities and specificities to each country within the region that will not make a generic analysis useful or valuable for any real impact or intervention. Though there is a lack of intentional design of economies across board, economies in SSA countries exhibit a broad spectrum, ranging from service-oriented economies to those driven by manufacturing and natural resources. Countries like Nigeria and Kenya have flourishing service sectors, with significant contributions from industries such as telecommunications, finance, and hospitality. On the other hand, economies like Ethiopia and South Africa have substantial manufacturing sectors, contributing to their economic growth. Some of the fastest-growing industries in Sub Saharan Africa include information technology and telecommunications, renewable energy, agribusiness, and e-commerce. These industries hold promise for generating employment opportunities and fostering economic development in the region.

Overview of Sub-Saharan Africa's Labour Market

1. Youth Unemployment: A Persistent Challenge

With 70% of the SSA population being under the age of 30¹⁰, the region holds great potential for a dynamic workforce. However, limited job opportunities and a mismatch between available skills and employers' expectations has resulted in high rates of youth unemployment across the region. At an average of 12.7% in 2022, the unemployment rate in Sub-Saharan Africa is high with significant variation across countries¹¹. While the unemployment rate in some countries, like

¹⁰United Nations, "[Young Peoples Potential, the Key to Africas Sustainable Development](#)

¹¹https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/-ed_emp/documents/briefingnote/wcms_853322.pdf

Nigeria and South Africa, is above 30%, it is as low as 5% in some other countries. It is essential to note that these figures may not present a comprehensive picture due to the increasing politicisation of the unemployment question and the differences in Labor Force Survey (LFS) methodologies used across different countries. Some countries, for example, adopt a broader definition of unemployment that includes active job seekers who have not found work in the last four weeks while others adopt a stricter definition for job seekers who are unable to find work after a one-week period.

2. Uneven Adoption of Technology Across Countries and Sectors

The level of technology adoption and adaptability in Sub-Saharan Africa is also uneven. Some countries, such as Kenya and South Africa, are making significant progress in adopting new technologies while others like Mali and Niger lag. This uneven adoption of technology has had a significant impact on the labour market. In countries where technology has been adopted, it has led to the creation of new jobs in the technology sector. However, in countries where technology has not been adopted, it has led to the loss of jobs in traditional sectors, such as agriculture and manufacturing.

3. A growing dichotomy between the specialised and traditional sectors

The impact of technological advancements and the digital revolution is creating an increasing dichotomy between specialised industries and the traditional sectors. The growing adoption of mobile technology and the internet across the region has facilitated the rise of digital entrepreneurship and tech start-ups. While this digital transformation opens doors to new and unprecedented job growth and opportunities, it also alienates a part of the population. As employees in the tech-oriented industries and multinationals get access to better contracts and remuneration packages due to high demand and skill shortage, there is an increasing alienation with traditional sectors and an increasing fear of job displacement due to the lack of skills to meet evolving job demands. It gives the impression of two co-existing parallel job markets. This reality is more evident in some countries than some others.

4. The Dominance of the Informal Sector

Despite the progress in technology adoption, the informal sector remains a significant

component of Sub-Saharan Africa's labour market. Due to the limited size of the formal economy, many individuals find employment in activities such as street vending, small scale agriculture, and other unregistered businesses. While the informal sector provides vital income opportunities it also poses challenges related to job insecurity and a lack of social protection. With the size of the informal economy ranging from a low of 20% to 25% percent in Mauritius, South Africa, and Namibia to a high of 50% to 65% percent in Benin, Tanzania, and Nigeria, it varies across the region.

5. Talent Migration en Masse

In 2018, the African Union estimated that about 70,000 skilled professionals emigrate from the continent annually.¹² The COVID-19 pandemic, the deteriorating lived experiences of Africans and introduction of new technologies have significantly increased emigration since then. Only 3 million jobs are created annually yet ten to twelve million people join the labour force every year. For many reasons including the search for more rewarding economic opportunities, better infrastructure and security, there has been a massive outflux of some of the best and brightest Africans to Europe and North America. Among other things, this has led to an increasing competition among companies for the remaining skilled workforce.¹³

6. The Rise of the Gig Economy

The gig economy is gaining popularity in Sub Saharan Africa's urban centres, offering flexible and short-term job opportunities through digital platforms. This emerging work model caters to the preferences of many young individuals and informal sector workers seeking supplementary income. Closely related to workers in the gig economy are workers in the creative industry who make a living creating content on YouTube and Instagram etc. Nevertheless, the gig economy raises questions about labour rights, social protections, and job stability. Policymakers should devise regulations that strike a balance between flexibility and protection for gig workers.

¹²African Union, (2018), [The Revised Migration Policy Framework for Africa. Retrieved July 24, 2023](#)

¹³Interview with HR Partner in a leading Energy firm in Lagos Nigeria

7. Gender Disparity in the Labor Market

Gender disparities persist in the region's labour market. When women participate in the skilled workforce, they are often limited in access to leadership positions, and they encounter wage gaps. To unlock the full potential of the workforce, efforts should focus on empowering women through education, training, and supportive policies that ensure equal opportunities and representation in all sectors. The minimal representation of women in STEM training reflects in their absence in the labour market.¹⁴

The state of work in sub-Saharan Africa as described above is one that simultaneously gives cause for urgent concern and hope. While there is a growing middle class, there is also an increasing number of people that live in multidimensional poverty. Addressing youth unemployment, promoting formalisation of the informal sector, embracing technology, and bridging skill gaps are key to unlocking the region's economic potential.

Impact of Technological Advancements on Jobs in Africa

The impact of the digital revolution and technological advancements have been two-fold. While there has been an increase in job creation through the introduction of technological innovation in traditional sectors and the creation of new startups, there has also been a considerable loss of jobs due to automation. Drawing on examples in Nigeria and Kenya, a World Bank study revealed that the number of jobs that have been lost to technology are significantly lower than those that have been created. One such example is the quick adoption of M-Pesa, a mobile payment system, which resulted in the loss of over 6,000 bank jobs in Kenya between 2014 and 2017. However, during the same time, the number of mobile payment agents increased by nearly 70,000, resulting in a direct net positive job effect. However, it must be noted that most of the jobs created by digital payment solutions like M-Pesa and Paga are often low-skill jobs.

¹⁴Ibid

The rise of big data and AI also led to more significant adoption of technology skills on a higher skill point. Though many jobs have been created at higher skill levels in the tech industry, there have also been a wave of job losses in the tech industry. In Nigeria and the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa, most of these job losses were credited to the negative effect of COVID-19 on capital markets which saw many investors withdraw or reduce investments. While many global firms like Twitter reneged on their entrance into new market frontiers in Africa, firms based in Africa like Vezeta, Kuda Bank and 54gene,¹⁵ ¹⁶ also laid off a record number of staff. Wave,¹⁷ an African fintech company that offers mobile money services in Senegal and Ivory Coast, laid off about 15% of its workforce in June 2022.

Thus, the layoffs affected almost 300 employees, most of whom worked in Wave's new markets: Burkina Faso, Mali, and Uganda.

The vulnerability of the technology sector and digital startups to external financial and capital pressures is mirrored in the recent mass layoffs in the industry due to investors cutting back in fears of recession. This reflects the fault lines of heavy reliance on technology to bridge the unemployment gap in Africa. Expressions like "tech is the new oil"¹⁸ is indicative of the fact that many are convinced that tech-related careers are the most lucrative. The experience with the tech sector in Sub Saharan Africa is showing, however, that we are gradually slipping into the trough of disillusionment in the Gartner Hype Cycle of technological adoption. See details in the graphic below.

¹⁵Tage Kene-Okafor, (September 2, 2022). [Nigerian digital bank Kuda is the latest African startup to lay off employees](#). *Tech Crunch*. Retrieved July 20, 2023

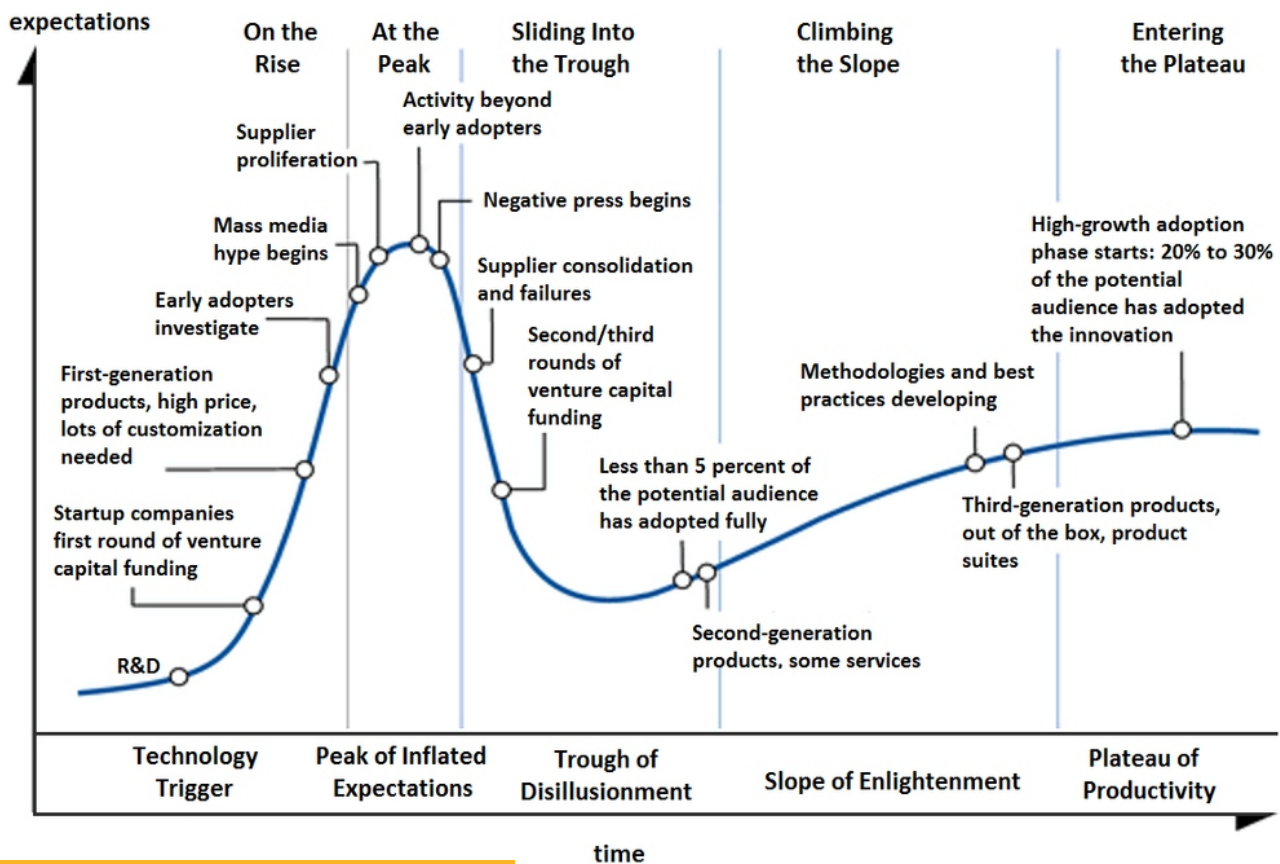
¹⁶Ope Adetayo, (March 15, 2023). [Nigerias tech workers got used to good salaries and high demand. then came the crash](#). *Rest of the World*. Retrieved 25 July 2023

¹⁷Tage Kene-Okafor, (July 13, 2022). [Wave, a Stripe-backed African fintech valued at \\$1.7 billion, cut 15% of its staff in June](#). *Tech Crunch*. Retrieved July 20, 2023

¹⁸Referencing the oil boom that Nigeria witnessed in the 1970s.

CURRENT LABOUR MARKET TRENDS IN SUB SAHARAN AFRICA

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The Gartner Hype Cycle

Besides the job gains and job losses, technological advancements are also impacting Africa in the following ways:

The Changing Landscape of Work in Africa

As AI and ML continue to advance, businesses and industries across Africa are experiencing a paradigm shift in their operations. Automation and generative AI tools are becoming integral to enhancing efficiency, streamlining processes, and maximising productivity. Incubator and accelerator programs for entrepreneurs now include technology advocacy and utilisation workshops.¹⁹ In these workshops, senior management and staff are encouraged to use tools like Chat GPT. They are also taught how to use Chat GPT as an assistant to analyse financial statements, write captions for social media and write case studies. Organisations in traditional sectors are also becoming increasingly receptive to the use of generative AI products. While these developments may promise increased competitiveness, they also raise concerns about potential job displacement and the need for upskilling the workforce.

¹⁹Interview with a staff of an incubator program for women entrepreneurs in Africa - African Women Entrepreneurship Cooperative

and lacked a critical deep dive into practicable solutions to the challenges encountered in the Nigerian job market. The data, however, suggest that the outlook has somehow become grimmer since then. At the policy's launch, the rate of unemployment stood at 14%. Five years later, the figure now stands at 33.3%. Despite the pandemic and other changes to the capital market that the world has witnessed since 2018, the policy has not been reviewed and there is little to no proof of its implementation.

The data suggests that the situation in Nigeria is grim for all stakeholders: job seekers, entry level staff, human resource personnel, employers, and trainers. It is nonetheless particularly grim for young graduates and job seekers whose diligence does not always translate into success on the job market. In the words of one respondent, you have to be "exceptional and lucky" to get into decent employment if you come from a non-privileged background. Young unprivileged Nigerians are rigged out of decent work for many reasons including their education, age and location. Foreign trained students are preferred candidates by Nigerian companies, and they contend with Nigeria-educated job seekers for the limited graduate entry roles. Even before getting on the market, many young Nigerians become redundant due to hurdles with nationwide strikes and entrance examinations. Less than 5% of annual entrants into the Nigerian job market succeed on the Nigerian job market and job seekers, without the necessary people network, spend an average of two years looking for their first job. According to our data, the jobs available on the market are disproportionate with the number of candidates available. In 2018, 20,000 persons applied to fill 86 spots in PWC's entry level program.²²

Candidates who, either by being "lucky" or exceptional, get jobs within the system often have jobs that fall below the ILO criteria for decent work.²³ More than 42% of Nigerian bank staff are on precarious contracts and they have no real connection to the bank or any social protection.²⁴ To have a sustainable career in Nigeria, one of the respondents noted that "you must get into the elite group early on". Information flow is

²²Interview with PWC employee who was recruited with that batch.

²³<https://businessday.ng/uncategorized/article/ilo-tasks-nigeria-implementation-national-employment-policy/>

²⁴Ope Adetayo, (July 1, 2021) 'No career path, no raise for Nigerias contract bank workers, Aljazeera. Retrieved July 26, 2023

Revolutionising Traditional Brick-and-Mortar Sectors

As governments and private enterprises integrate AI-driven solutions into their operations, sectors like agriculture, healthcare, finance, and manufacturing are expected to experience significant transformations. This digital leap could foster innovation, create new markets, and bolster economic resilience.

As AI and ML technologies permeate African markets, it is critical to take a cautious approach to their adoption. Ensuring ethical norms, data privacy, minimising digital manipulation, and correcting biases in AI algorithms will be critical in garnering public trust and long-term use of AI.

▲ The Future of Work in Sub Saharan Africa: Insights from Nigeria

Understanding and designing the economy is a prerequisite to understanding the direction for a sustainable future of work in Sub-Saharan Africa. Given the different economies within the SSA and the specificities of each country within the region, this report focuses on the Nigerian experience. Currently, a middle income, mixed economy (primary, secondary, and tertiary), the Nigerian economy is an emerging market with an increasingly expanding base in manufacturing, financial technology, communications, and creative industries. It is noteworthy that the mixed nature of Nigeria's economy is not indicative of strategy and intentionality on the part of policy makers but rather the people's attempts to make the most out of the economy.

The system, in its current state, does not have the capacity to manage the future of work. Employment generation has been and remains one of the most complex aspects of social and economic policymaking in Nigeria.²⁰ There is also a growing link between unemployment and criminality. In 2017, in the face of increasing unemployment, Nigeria's National Employment Policy was reviewed and launched by the then Minister of Labour with immense support from the International Labour Organization. The latter launched a 22-member National Employment Council in 2018 to implement the policy without success.²¹ The policy seemed to adopt a copy and paste approach

²⁰Medina, L. et al (2017), [The Informal Economy in Sub-Saharan Africa: Size and Determinants](#), IMF. Retrieved July 25, 2023

²¹Federal Ministry of Labour, 2017, [Federal Republic of Nigeria - National Employment Strategy](#)

in Nigeria could be very bleak owing to increasing criminality and insecurity among others. We may in fact see an outflux of new generation companies or multinational companies could stop hiring from the country.

▲ *The Changing Nature of Work in Nigeria*

Though unemployment remains a huge challenge, technology is already shaping the Nigerian job market and labour force in many ways. As technology adoption advances, it is transforming sectors, job roles, and the skills required by businesses. Data from interviews with employers, Human Resource professionals, employees, job seekers and trainers reveal some of the important ways that technology is shaping the labour market:

- **Digital Entrepreneurship:** Technology has opened avenues for digital entrepreneurship in Nigeria. Start-ups and small businesses are leveraging technology to offer innovative products and services, thereby creating new economic opportunities. These platforms are contributing to job creation in the country.
- **Quick and Expanding Adoption of Technology:** Big industry players are fully embracing the use of generative AI and other forms of technology powered intelligent working. Thereby creating a clear path to adoption for the rest of the industry. The utility value of new technologies like Chat GPT and Bard will further increase the uptake. According to one of our employer respondents, "up to 80% of our staff use Chat GPT in one way or the other to support their work including writing software testing codes".²⁷ There are nonetheless challenges regarding data protection and reliability. There is a lot more adoption within the corporates and startups than the traditional sectors. Adoption is expected to increase as the workforce starts to get through a much more defined usage of technology.

²⁷Interview with Co-Founder, www.quals.tech, Akinola Odunlade

almost zero outside central urban areas like Lagos and Abuja. Writing professional exams and certifications.

"My experience with the Nigerian job market was very painful and relatively abnormal. For a young graduate, the system is not designed to help you grow and become sustainable. Despite the hyperinflation in the economy, average monthly salaries for new entries range from 60,000 to 80,000. You will most likely be unable to save or invest. There is no social security system in case you fall ill neither are there opportunities for continuous learning. If you stay in the system and your salary grows, you are still very limited..."

Tade, Respondent

To escape this cycle, many resort to seeking jobs with multinational corporations in the extractive industry or in energy. However, innovative, and new technologies soon created new pathways in existing industries. A boom also started in the fashion and creative industries that absorbed skilled Nigerian talents. This led many young Nigerians to seek alternate employment through the study route in Europe and North America. This exit trend worsened with the two economic recessions, the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2020 #EndSARS protests.

In the past eight years, fiscal policies have continued to devalue the naira heightening inflation to record levels and weakening the Nigerian economy.²⁵ The prevalence of corruption, insecurity and the lack of basic social amenities also contribute to the undesirability of Nigeria for an employee seeking sustainable career growth. Against this background, many members of the viable workforce continue to relocate from Nigeria.²⁶ Unfortunately, they move out of the country to do menial jobs or upskill themselves for the economy they relocated to. The negative effect of the country's fiscal policies also took a toll on the ease of doing business in Nigeria.

Our findings revealed that if Nigeria continues its current trajectory, the future of work

²⁵Ronald Adamolekun, (May 31, 2023), '[SCORECARD: Buhari's eight-year fiscal, monetary performance left much to be desired](#), *Premium Times*, Retrieved 14 July 2023

²⁶DW News, [Germany eases immigration laws to lure young professionals](#), Jun 25, 2023. Retrieved on June 29, 2023

- **Emergence of New Job Roles:** Technology has given rise to new job roles that were virtually inexistent a decade ago. Positions such as data analysts, artificial intelligence specialists, cybersecurity experts, and digital marketers are now in high demand.
- **Automation and Job Displacement:** Routine tasks and repetitive jobs are being automated, leading to some job displacement. Industries like manufacturing, customer service, and data entry have witnessed the implementation of automation technologies, which has implications for the workforce that previously performed these tasks.
- **Flexible Working Patterns:** With the adoption of technology, remote work and telecommuting have become feasible options for many Nigerians. The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated this trend, as organisations adapted to remote work arrangements. This trend is however more prevalent in tech. In other traditional industries, little to nothing has changed. While Akinola Odunlade says "since COVID-19, Quailes has adopted a 100% remote working model. And I don't believe we are going back to the full boots-on-ground model soon,"²⁸ Mr. Dele Olomide, HR Business Partner in an Energy firm notes that "we cannot have engineers working remotely. However, we are tending towards an increasingly hybrid model and contract customization for top talents."

It should be noted that many people seeking training to be competitive in the 21st century in Nigeria aim to emigrate. If this trend of mass emigration continues, nothing will change in Africa despite increased investment in training. For example, out of the 65 young graduates who were admitted to PWC's entry level programme in 2018, only 3 of them are still working in Nigeria at the time of writing.²⁹ All 62 others now highly skilled accounting professionals work in Europe or North America. This paints a grim picture for the future of work in Nigeria.

²⁸Ibid

²⁹ Interview with a member of PWC's 2018 set who all still have one WhatsApp group.

▲ *Getting Ahead of the Uncertainty: Designing the Future*

Intentionality about a country's economic base and primary offering is the first step to becoming an economy of the future and preparing a viable workforce. China, for example, was an isolated socialist state that has become one of the world's strongest economies through economic reforms. China strategically positioned itself as a manufacturing industry. Today, China exports its manufacturing capabilities. In a similar vein, Switzerland, a landlocked country, boasts of its service industry and has become the world's banking hub. India - one of the world's biggest populations styled itself into a service economy and today, it is the world's Business Process Outsourcing headquarters.

Understanding your unique place in the world economy and consciously determining your contribution is the first step to designing a sustainable future of work in Nigeria and the wider sub-Saharan Africa. The uniqueness of a country should define what informs its FoW strategy. In addition to this, the direction of Nigeria's National Employment Strategy for example must be determined by both the impact of ongoing local economic occurrences and the impact of global technological advancements. Ongoing discussions around the FoW are skewed towards technology. That line of action could lead to a mismatch between the skills available on the continent and its development needs. For example, while education can benefit a lot from Artificial Intelligence and Virtual Reality, there are still basic literacy problems on the continent with millions of children still out of school. A viable FoW strategy for education is therefore one that is at the intersection of both issues.

It is noteworthy that there have been initiatives to increase employability, increase entrepreneurship on the continent. From the African Union's Youth Decade Plan of Action (2009 -2018), the African Development Bank's Jobs for Youth in Africa Strategy (2016 - 2025),³⁰ Master Card Foundation's Young Africa Works Strategy³¹ - to enable 30

³⁰The strategy's aim is to create 25 million jobs and reach over 50 million Africans by driving inclusive growth across the continent and equipping youth to realize their full economic potential.

³¹Mastercard, (July 1, 2021), [The Mastercard Foundation Signs Host Country Agreement in Nigeria to Enable 10 Million Young People Access Dignified and Fulfilling Jobs by 2030. Retrieved 25 July 2023](#)

million young people across Africa, particularly young women, to access dignified and fulfilling work by 2030. In Liberia, the African Development Fund recently approved a \$16million fund for youth entrepreneurship. At national levels like in Nigeria, there have been different government schemes including N-Power designed to tackle youth unemployment and re-energize³² public service delivery in Education, Agriculture, Health, and Vocational Training. At the state level,³³ states have also taken on upskilling and empowerment responsibilities. In Lagos state, for example, the Lagos State Employment Trust Fund (LSETF) works to create an enabling environment for job and wealth creation while Edo state is creating an Inclusive Digital Economy Strategy with support from the FCDO and other technical partners.

As the finish line draws near for many of these long-term schemes, it would seem like there has been little to no impact considering the worsening statistics on unemployment. Some of the challenges to effective implementation include inadequate coordination and a lack of program continuity, among other problems, these attempts have resulted in significant duplication and waste. However, it should be underlined that the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic set the continent back some years of progress.

According to the International Finance Corporation (IFC), digital skills would be required for around 230 million jobs in Sub-Saharan Africa by 2030. To prepare young Africans for this eventuality, there has been considerable investment in training and upskilling efforts led by non-profits like Tech4Dev through the Women Techsters programme aimed at bridging the digital and technology knowledge divide between men and women across sub-Saharan Africa. By 2030, the fellowship's aim is to have trained 5 million women on the continent. SheCodes and CodeLab are also Lagos-based technology training opportunities for young Nigerians with no pre-existing qualification in under-resourced communities. Besides these competitive free training programs, there are also many paid training programs. These trainings have helped many young people switch career paths successfully and get decent employment in

³²[African Development Fund approves \\$16 million for Youth Entrepreneurship Investment Bank in Liberia](#)

³³<https://ssp.nasims.gov.ng/programs/npower>

the technology industry. There is also an increasing number of incubators and accelerators supporting young Africans to roll out innovative sector-agnostic start-ups.³⁴

▲ *SSA's Top 10 Industries of the Future*

Based on this research, the following are the industries of the future that governments, policy makers and investors should pay attention to over the course of the next 10 years in Sub Saharan Africa. They appear in no order. This listing includes industries that are currently showing strong potential for growth and industries that are necessary for Africa's sustainable development.

Agriculture and Agribusiness: Across Africa, food insecurity is becoming a real challenge. Despite having 60% of the world's arable land³⁵ Africa remains a net importer of food. In the Horn of Africa (Kenya, Somali and Ethiopia), with 36.4 million people suffering from hunger across the region, experts say a famine is imminent.³⁶ In Nigeria, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu recently declared a state of emergency on food security in the country.³⁷ Beyond the need for more mechanised farming and food storage infrastructure, at the root of the Nigerian challenge is insecurity which has stopped many farmers from being able to cultivate their farmlands across the country. This is a priority sector upon which economic development policies should be based now and in the future.

Technology: For its potential to enable economic growth and job creation across other industries, technology as an industry is of immense significance for the future. Embracing technological advancements, addressing its challenges, and promoting its responsible and inclusive use will shape how Africa progresses and adapts in the coming years.

Information and Communication Technology: Africa's youthful population and increasing connectivity makes it a high-potential ground for the expansion of ICT. Its potential to drive economic growth, enhance service delivery, and improve the overall quality of life on the continent makes it of immense significance to Africa's future of

³⁴<https://sharpsheets.io/blog/africa-top-startup-accelerators/>

³⁵FAO

³⁶[Horn of Africa: Projections of a famine in 2023.](https://www.fao.org/news/story/en/detail/country/Horn%20of%20Africa%3A%20Projections%20of%20a%20famine%20in%202023)

³⁷<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-66199237>

work. Stakeholders must collaborate to ensure digital inclusion, foster digital entrepreneurship, and build robust ICT infrastructure to create a thriving digital ecosystem in the region.

Energy and Power: With a focus on ensuring access to clean, reliable, and affordable energy for communities across SSA, energy and power are industries of the future. There will also be high demand for renewable energy in line with COP 27's³⁸ net zero objective, this will be an requires technical expertise in the energy sector, the definition of algorithm,

Education: As the vehicle through which the skills and knowledge of the jobs of the future will be transmitted, education is a vital industry that will remain relevant in the future. In Nigeria like in most parts of SSA, the sector leaves much to be desired. If SSA will play on its own terms in the future world of work, more attention needs to be paid to this sector across all levels with a significant emphasis on achieving equitable access to quality education at the basic level.

Creative Industries: An emerging and promising industry of the future, creative industries in SSA are poised to be a thriving industry of the future, catalysing economic growth, promoting cultural diversity, and fostering social development. As the global spotlight on African creativity intensifies, this industry has the potential to create employment opportunities, and contribute significantly to the region's overall sustainable development.

Economics and Investment: While economics and investment are not industries themselves, their impact on the future of industries and sectors cannot be understated. The integration of economic analysis, technology, sustainable practices, and inclusive growth principles is shaping the future landscape of businesses, economies, and societies, ultimately driving progress and prosperity.

Healthcare and Pharmaceuticals: As the population grows, Africa needs to invest more in this industry to stem the tide of medical tourism and unnecessary deaths. As evidenced by the COVID-19 pandemic, Africa's inability to make its own vaccines increased the continent's vulnerability to the pandemic.

³⁸The 2022 United Nations Climate Change Conference

Real Estate and Construction: Nigeria's rapid urbanisation and population growth create demand for affordable housing and modern infrastructure. The real estate and construction industries offer opportunities for development projects.

Transportation and Logistics: This sector presents opportunities in e-commerce delivery, supply chain management, and last-mile solutions. There are already several start-ups within the African continent taking advantage of the opportunities the industry presents.

▲ **SSA's Top 10 Jobs of the Future**

Intersection of global trends with continental emergencies informs this listing on Africa's jobs of the future. On the one hand, this paper has expounded on the technology trends within the African market and on the other hand, the African Development Bank has provided a blueprint to identify the priorities of the African economy through the High 5's. To determine the answers to this question, the list will need to answer the question: "what are the specific job needs within SSA's industries of the future?" In addition to these guiding points, this list is also informed by research with organizations involved in training young Africans on tech skills based on demand from employers. This list does not portend to be final or exhaustive. There is a flurry of roles that were inexistent a decade ago but have become highly demanded within and outside the continent. It is expected that the demand for the following job roles will continue to grow. However, as the realities on the market evolve and as Nigeria designs the main offering of its economy beyond crude oil, there will be need to constantly modify the list.

1. Software Engineers
2. Product Managers, UI/UX Designers, Developers, and User Researchers.
3. Cybersecurity experts: Given the mass adoption of Chat GPT and other generative AI tools, data has become more vulnerable to digital manipulation. Organisations, governments, and other entities will need to have fully equipped cybersecurity departments to prevent falling casualties of AI.

4. Data scientists, analysts, and visualisers: In this big data era, the relevance of data scientists and analysts will continue to increase, and it is a job that cuts across all industries.
5. Behavioural Economics and Engineering: As most companies now develop digital products and services, to improve profitability and maximise profit, there will be more investment into understanding behavioural science and how prospective customers are likely to interact with their offerings.
6. Healthcare Professionals: There is a dire need of medical professionals in SSA. Nigeria, for example, needs 363,000 doctors but only has 22,000 according to a 2022 report³⁹ and in 2017, a survey report revealed that 88% of Nigerian doctors were seeking work opportunities abroad.⁴⁰ Consequently, healthcare professionals will hardly be out of work in the foreseeable future.
7. Agricultural Engineers and Agri-tech: The need for agricultural productivity has already been expressed above. More young graduates should be encouraged to specialise in agricultural engineering, agri-business, and agricultural technology. This sector should also be prioritised in the future across SSA.
8. Creative Professionals: As the creative industries grow and expand and in view of SSA's young population, interest will continue to grow in the sector.
9. Teachers and Educationists: As Africa positions itself for the future, the role of teachers and educationists will remain pivotal in shaping the continent's human capital and driving socio-economic progress. Investments in education and the professional development of educators will be crucial for building a knowledge-based society and achieving sustainable development goals in Africa.
10. Cloud Computing: The technology of delivering computing services—including servers, storage, databases, networking, software, analytics, and intelligence—over the Internet (“the cloud”), Cloud computing in Africa is still in its early stages, but it is growing rapidly. As the availability of high-speed internet increases and the demand for affordable and scalable IT solutions grows on the continent, we are bound to see an increase in demand for this job. For example, in South Africa, where some of the prerequisite conditions have been met, cloud computing is already becoming increasingly relevant.

³⁹ *Brain Drain: Nigeria needs 363,000 doctors but has only 24,000.*

⁴⁰ Jhwa B, Nsofor I. Emigration of Nigerian medical doctor's survey report. <https://noi-polls.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Emigration-of-Doctors-Press-Release-July-2018-Survey-Report.pdf>. Accessed 27 July 2023

▲ *Skills for the Future of Work in SSA*

As the job market changes, so is the skills landscape. Recruiters are becoming less stringent in their educational requirements for talents and placing more emphasis on technical, vocational, and interpersonal skills. However, recruiters in Africa still have a considerable distance to cover in that regard. To thrive in future job markets, young Africans need to develop a diverse set of skills that align with the continent's specific economic, social, and technological context.

Below is a non-exhaustive list:

- ***Digital Literacy and Technology Skills:*** This is fast becoming a non-negotiable. Entrance into the workforce is determined by young graduates' ability to succeed at computer-based tests. These tests also evaluate the candidates' digital literacy by administering Microsoft Excel tests among others. All employees that were a part of this research noted that they had to participate in a similar test before being admitted into the workforce.
- ***In-depth industry capabilities and niche knowledge:*** As already noted in this paper, to excel on the job market, young Africans need to be exceptional and stand out. One of the things that guarantee exceptionality is niche knowledge which can be demonstrated by taking certification exams in your preferred niche.⁴¹ In addition to qualifications, demonstrable niche knowledge can be a game changer for African youths.
- ***Relationship Building and Networking Abilities:*** Without the ability to create and maintain relationships, progressing along the corporate ladder in SSA will be an uphill battle. 70% of our respondents maintained that, in addition to their diligence on the job, their networking and relationship building skills can be credited for their progress. In fact, one of our respondents, a former staff at PWC Nigeria, maintained that meaningful progress was impossible without relationship building.
- ***Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving:*** These are already valued skills on the job market. Despite the impressive abilities of generative AI in solving organisational problems, there are nonetheless some challenges beyond the scope of AI that will require critical thinking and problem-solving skills that are unique to the time and space contexts.

⁴¹Interview with Mastercard staff

- **Curiosity, Creativity, and Innovation**
- **Adaptability and Resilience:** This ensures that members of the workforce can adapt themselves and their work to changing conditions. This means staff will recognize when they require upskilling and ensure they stay up to date with changes within the industry. This came to the fore with the COVID-19 pandemic and continues to remain relevant.
- **Emotional Intelligence, Interpersonal and Multicultural Skills:** Talent sourcing is becoming more cross-border and the need to hire staff who can relate well with others regardless of their nationality, race or gender is becoming more critical.⁴²

▲ **Preparing the Workforce: Education and Training Initiatives**

Having established the changing contours of the world of work in Sub-Saharan Africa, the next challenge that comes to fore is preparing the workforce for the inevitable future. To do this, emphasis has been placed on training pre-entrants and upskilling existing members of the workforce. Consequently, there has been a proliferation of training programs designed to help young talents access the new generation jobs. According to Coursera's 2023 Global Skills Report, SSA has the highest regional average year-on-year growth rate in Professional Certificates enrolments.⁴³ This indicates that the region is a rising hub of digital talent. However, a training deficit still exists as our data reveals that employers and business owners in Nigeria still feel dissatisfied with the skill level of young graduates and recent recruits. Data from Coursera further corroborates that skills in technology and data science represent the most significant areas for improvement across SSA. Nigeria also ranks 100 – on Coursera's global proficiency index – lowest in SSA as seen in the data chart below:

⁴²Interview with HR Business Partner of a leading Energy firm in Nigeria.

⁴³Coursera for Business (2023), [2023 Global Skills Report](#).

Regional Skill Proficiencies

GLOBAL RANK	COUNTRY NAME	BUSINESS 54%*	TECHNOLOGY 22%*	DATA SCIENCE 19%*
29	Botswana	100%	40%	27%
48	Cameroon	59%	69%	38%
52	Rwanda	94%	13%	35%
58	Zambia	64%	41%	39%
72	Ethiopia	56%	39%	26%
75	Côte d'Ivoire	60%	27%	20%
77	Zimbabwe	58%	19%	23%
86	South Africa	50%	12%	14%
90	Uganda	46%	9%	10%
93	Somalia	40%	4%	9%
97	Ghana	26%	6%	3%
98	Kenya	24%	3%	4%
100	Nigeria	25%	1%	2%

*Average regional scores

Source: Coursera Global Skills Report 2023

Early grooming prevents late blooming.

In 2015, Tade was an Economics student at Abia State University. His interest in Economics was piqued by his early exposure to annual stakeholder reports sent by banks to his family home. He noticed that most of the banks' CEOs studies Economics and had professional qualifications like ICAN and ACCA. He consequently signed up to join the learning program for the qualifications. However, he noticed that very few other people were aware of these programs in his immediate environment. He often travelled alone to the Central Bank in Enugu from Abia to take his qualifying exams. Today, one of the youngest Associate Managers at MasterCard, Tade credits his success to early exposure, diligence, some luck, and his networking abilities.

Based on his experience, it is almost axiomatic that the existing training model in Nigeria is one that has little chances of success. Unlike Tade, many young people do not get or seek this early exposure. In some instances, they are hampered by the unavailability of resources. Today, young people are becoming late bloomers because of the failures of the education system. Most of the hard work is done at the point of graduation and despite university education, a significant percentage of young graduates are unfit for the world of work. The paper posits that the training system - elementary school, secondary school, polytechnics, Universities, and the industry - should be able to deliver the bare minimum of knowledge, skills and experiences needed to succeed in the future of work.

The Bare Minimum

Upon graduation from the University, a young graduate should have obtained:

- **Basic Literacy and Numeracy:** These skills are a prerequisite to further training. It also ensures comprehension from reading and the ability to communicate in writing.
- **Transferable Skills:** These are skills that can be transferred and adapted to different working contexts. critical thinking and problem-solving skills, interpersonal skills, and multicultural awareness
- **niche knowledge in an industry relevant to the world of work,**
- **Technical and Vocational Skills:** digitally and technical literacy – skilled in the use of Microsoft Office tools like Word, Excel, and PowerPoint.

In its current state, the Nigerian system does not have the capacity to deliver the workforce of the future. The content of the training is not aligned to the needs of the market. All Human Resource professionals who participated in the research confirm that there is a huge mismatch between the jobs on the market and the skills available. The results from recruitment tests also show low levels of understanding of basic workplace skills. One of our respondents noted that “a state of emergency needs to be declared on education in Nigeria”. In most cases, the curriculum and teaching methods are outdated and misaligned with the needs of the workforce.

Addressing Skill Gaps: Vocational and Technical Training

The Role of the Industry

The industry has an important role in ensuring that there is a pipeline of talents. Beyond photo-ops and press releases, there should be planned and deliberate collaboration and exchange programs between the industry and higher education institutions' career departments to ensure that teaching and learning content and methodologies fit into the expectations of the Future of Work in Africa. Practical investments like subsidising tuition for students with an impressive academic track record can also go a long way to secure the FoW in Africa. In view of the transforming work landscape, organisations also have a role to play to ensure continuous learning and improvement of recruited staff. The system should be designed for long-term success.

Based on empirical data, employees claim there is little, or no value placed on the talent within most corporate organisations. Young graduates and new entrants into the world of work need to be given a chance to succeed. Companies need to provide education and training allowance for existing employees and provide other incentives that make learning on the job easy. More long-term thinking needs to be put into workforce growth. In the technology sector, many organisations have become forced to add a learning component to their businesses because some of their core business skills are still being undersupplied. In cases where the capacity for divesting into learning does not exist, training and recruitment partnerships are forged with learning businesses like Quales.⁴⁴

■ *The Role of the Government*

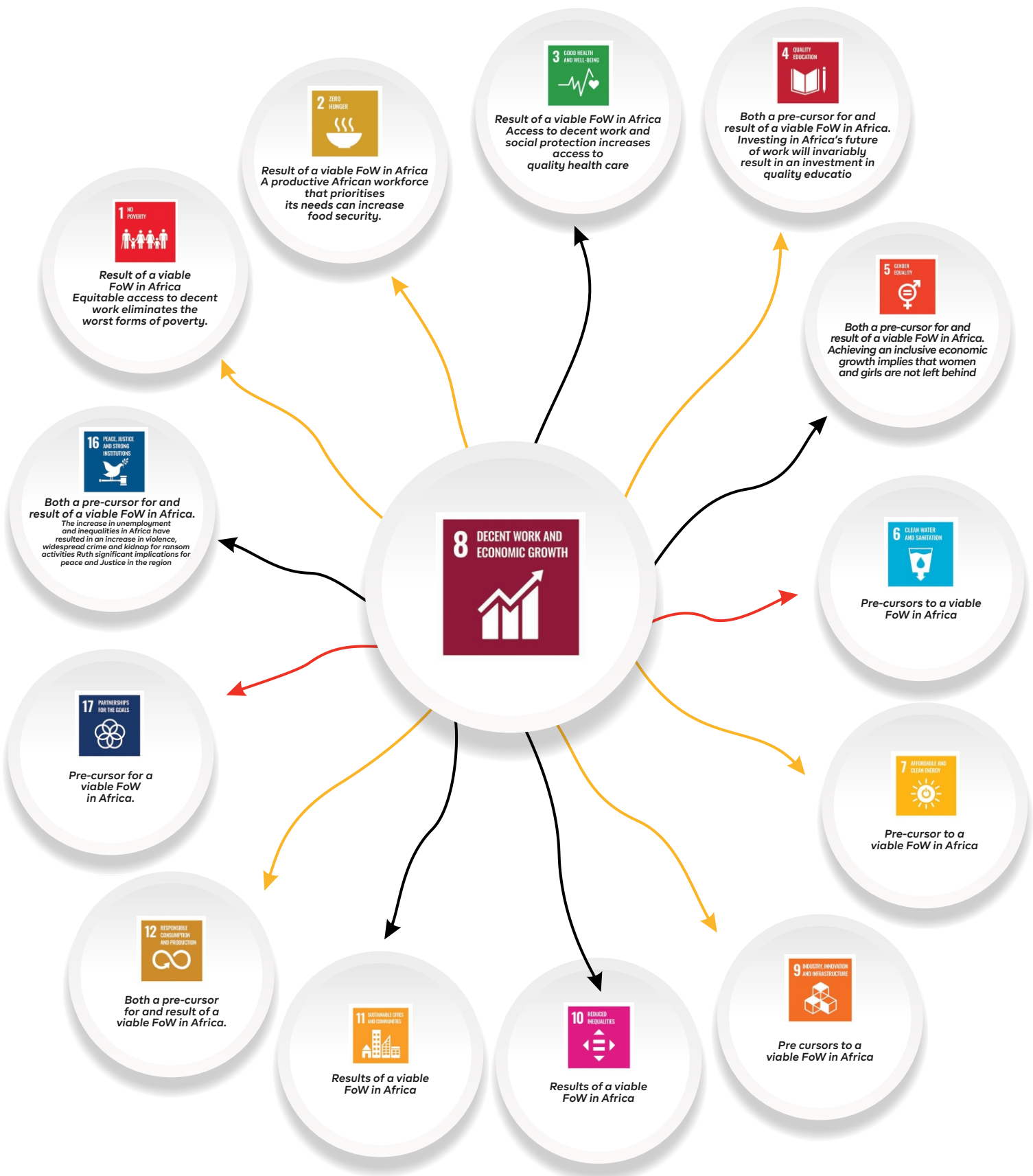
- Ensuring and enforcing access to basic education for children of school going age.
- Overhauling the education system: revising curriculum content, teacher training and incentivization
- Providing educational infrastructure (buildings, technology etc) and basic amenities.
- Review National Curriculum to include early exposure to practical technology and digital literacy modules.
- Building relevant institutes based on national needs: Producing over 2 million tons a year, Côte d'Ivoire is the largest producer of cocoa in the world, yet there are no learning institutes where the jobs in the value chain of cocoa production are trained to exist.⁴⁵ From agricultural engineering, processing techniques and optimization, marketing, and sales, an entire institute can be created in service of cocoa. Senegal did something similar with its National Institute of Petroleum and Gas (INPG) when it discovered oil and gas on its territory in 2018.
- Partnership with large technology-oriented scale learning businesses

⁴⁴ a tech- learning startup that pivoted into consulting due to the increasing need for tech talents. All staff hired into the consulting business are people who have passed through the learning business.

⁴⁵ Interview with a Trade and Investment expert from Ivory Coast.

CURRENT LABOUR MARKET TRENDS IN SUB SAHARAN AFRICA

Unveiling Opportunities in Africa's Evolving Economy



Relationships between SDG 8 and other SDGs in Africa.

▲ *Recapitulation of Key Findings*

- Harnessing Africa's FoW can directly contribute to the realization of SDG 8. By fostering a sustainable, inclusive, and vibrant work landscape, Africa can stimulate sustained economic growth, paving the way for full and productive employment and decent work for all. Such endeavours will, in turn, propel the continent towards SDG 1, progressively reducing poverty and ensuring that Africa's potential translates into tangible socio-economic progress for its people.
- In the current FoW analysis in SSA, there is a hyper focus on digital technology to the detriment of other important factors that can guarantee economic sustainability in the region like agriculture. For a sustainable future of work in Sub Saharan Africa, analyses and policies must be guided not only by external factors and global advancements in technology but they must also be rooted in continental needs and priorities.
- Findings revealed a fragility of the tech sector to external stimuli like investor action and global trends.
- The hyper focus on digital and technical literacy and skills has led to the proliferation of sub-standard training programs that prey on the eagerness of youths to get into tech and earn in dollars.
- The pattern of SSA's skilled workforce's immigration towards Europe and North America is a trend that is not likely to stop soon. Unless SSA governments take decisive steps to address the root issues of low quality of life, insecurity and lack of social protection, the immigration patterns will continue. Immigration programs get the most skilled due to the point-based system on human capital factors like age, skills, and work experience.
- Talent sourcing is more cross border than before the pandemic. Multicultural awareness is becoming a more relevant skill to have even within Nigeria.
- We may be moving into a space of mass customization of contracts and benefits. e.g., more leave days over health insurance for talent A and the



inverse for talent B.

- Until a systemic change happens in Sub-Saharan Africa and their labour patterns, no incremental change will make a significant impact on the rates of unemployment in Nigeria.
- An excessive focus on training talents without commensurate investments in improving social protection and fiscal policies, will only turn SSA into one of the world's largest talent pools: training and supplying a skilled workforce to the rest of the world.
- There is a growing and increasing adoption of generative AI and other forms of digital technology in core working processes and routine functions within existing corporate organisations in Sub Saharan Africa. This has already seen a decline in the number of persons employed for routine roles.
- In Sub-Saharan Africa, the COVID-19 pandemic and technological advancements have increased the demand for flexibility in work patterns and contract agreements. This is more prevalent in technology-oriented industries and multi-nationals than in the traditional economy and sectors.
- Data shows that sectors like agriculture, wholesales, and manufacturing have relatively poor coverage and investment compared to ICT, financial and insurance activities, and professional scientific and technical activities.

▲ *Implications and Recommendations*

■ *Recommendations for Governments*

- Excelling at a creating an inclusive FoW in Africa is an urgent call for infrastructural development and a decisive approach to address organized crime and insecurity.
- Economic reforms: An intentional design and determination of Nigeria's primary economic offering is the first step to a sustainable preparation for the FoW. Understanding your unique place in the world economy and consciously determining your contribution is the first step to designing a



sustainable future of work in Nigeria and the wider sub-Saharan Africa.

- Urgent review and monitored implementation of Nigeria's National Employment Policy in collaboration and consultation with industry leaders, employers, job seekers, education system. The review should not be an academic exercise conducted solely by academic researchers.
- Nigeria, like the wider SSA is a vantage point and increasingly important market. Multinationals that intend to play the global game, cannot ignore SSA. The government has a responsibility to mandate multinationals and startups to treat Nigerian talents right.
- The government should take urgent steps to comprehensively improve the provision of basic social amenities like good roads, potable water, electricity, and security. It is becoming more evident that competitive remuneration packages no longer suffice to keep talent within the shores of Africa. Skilled talents often leave the continent in search of a better quality of life.
- Instituting labour laws that enhance social protection for all including domestic workers.
- Policymakers must strike a balance between supporting informal businesses and encouraging their formalisation to ensure better working conditions for millions of workers.
- SSA governments should leverage technology for the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement and its sister agreement, the Free Movement Protocol. This will increase the economic growth and prosperity on the continent creating more jobs.

■ **Cross Cutting Recommendations**

- The educational sector cannot help itself to do better. It needs decisive action from the government, and the industries it services to ensure that its participants are ready for the future of work.
- Improving coverage and engagement with non-tech sectors like agriculture, wholesales, and manufacturing. This is important given the fragility of the tech sector to external stimuli like investor action and



CONCLUSION

global trends. This will ensure that Nigeria's economy and unemployment figures will not rise and fall on tech trends.

- Coordination and transparency trackers for different unemployment alleviation and skill training programs. This will increase public knowledge on what has been done while amplifying the impact of such interventions. There is no dearth of unemployment alleviation and training programs at all levels, but comprehensive coordination has become necessary.

■ **Recommendations for Industry**

- Increase industry learning experience for high schoolers and create entry pathways into the industry for high school graduates.⁴⁶
- Flexible recruitment and working patterns should be encouraged in non-tech sectors where feasible. Many Nigerian graduates spend money they do not have to travel for entry exams and interviews. Where it is possible to have the test and interviews virtually, this should be mandated not just encouraged by the Ministry of Labour.
- As AI and ML technologies permeate African markets, it is critical to take a cautious approach to their adoption. Ensuring ethical norms, data privacy, minimising digital manipulation, and correcting biases in AI algorithms will be critical in garnering public trust and long-term use of AI.

⁴⁶ [Deloitte apprentice who joined at 18 becomes £1 million a year partner and he went to university](#)



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