

## Towards a Compact for Ghana's Political and Economic Transformation

# Youth Education, Skills Development, and Engagement

## Technical Background Paper: Executive Summary

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Ghana has a youthful age structure, with the 2021 Population and Housing Census recording 56 percent of the population being under 25 years old. While unemployment in Ghana is 13.4 percent, the census indicates that unemployment among youth aged between 15 and 35 is much higher at 19.7 percent. If sufficient investments in human capital are made in this current period, there is a window of opportunity to reap a demographic dividend, resulting in accelerated economic growth.

This Compact for Ghana's Political and Economic Transformation will offer Ghana an opportunity to reach consensus on medium-term priorities in youth education and skills development, youth employment and youth leadership and engagement for economic transformation.

### Key Area 1: Education and skills development

Despite considerable progress in reforming the education system, particularly at the pre-tertiary level (primary, secondary and technical and vocational education and training (TVET)), there is evidence of a decline in the quality of public education. This paper is limited to issues related to the pre-tertiary level to enable the Compact to achieve the set objectives within the proposed time frame.

#### What are the challenges?

1. **Declining quality of basic education and FCUBE policy:** While policies and programs, including the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE), have been successful in helping expand access to basic education, there are several challenges such as:
  - a. **Ghana School Feeding Programme (SFP):** The SFP under FCUBE has huge potential to enhance school enrolment, attendance and retention and reduce hunger and malnutrition for deprived children. However, challenges persist, such as keeping up with enrolment numbers, political interference, poor quality of food served to the children, and delays in payment of contractors.
  - b. **Inclusive education:** Children with disabilities are "invisible" in education data and schools lack disability-friendly infrastructure and learning environments, for children with physical and learning disabilities.

- c. **Gender divide:** Ghana is near gender parity in enrollment in primary education, but completion rates and education attainment remains higher among boys than girls.
  - d. **Geographical and spatial disparity:** Spatial inequalities in the implementation of FCUBE such as disparities in the distribution of teachers, learning materials and quality of infrastructure and resulting learning outcomes between northern and southern regions, and urban and rural areas.
2. **Implementation of Free Senior High School (SHS) and TVET program:** While the reintroduction of the Free SHS/TVET program has increased enrollment, its implementation has generated considerable criticism, including:
    - a. **The pace of implementation of the program has been** hasty, and was undertaken without adequate preparation, compromising quality and effectiveness. This in turn led to overcrowding in schools and an increase in the student-teacher ratio.
    - b. **Gender and other vulnerable groups.** The policy does not adequately address the issue of inclusiveness, particularly of girls, other vulnerable groups, and underserved communities. Many disadvantaged students do not complete junior high school (JHS) and are therefore not eligible for free SHS.
    - c. **Sustainability and financing of Free SHS.** The policy was designed to be financed from the nation's oil revenues via the Legacy Fund, which is arguably risky and unsustainable.
  3. **Issues with TVET Education:** TVET remains the "step-child" of the education system despite its potential contribution to socio-economic transformation and job creation. TVET uptake is still hampered by the poor public perception of the sector. Furthermore, the costing framework for TVET under the Free SHS program omits critical inputs such as protective gear, which could serve as a prohibitive cost for the most deprived students.
  4. **Inadequate physical and digital infrastructure:** The education sector faces chronically inadequate physical and digital infrastructure. The policy commitment to expand physical infrastructure has not in reality kept at par with enrollment. Digital infrastructure is also weak, with only 50 percent of regular secondary schools and 25 percent of technical schools having access to the internet.
  5. **Weak teacher training curricula:** The teacher training curriculum content is congested and has limited focus on critical skills such as problem solving, critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and digital literacy and is disconnected from the curricula taught in schools.

## Potential solutions for Key Area 1

The following solutions are recommended for review under the Compact:

1. **Enhancing implementation of FCUBE:** Increase investment in school infrastructure, improving the pupil-teacher ratio and supply of learning materials, particularly in rural areas and underserved regions; effective implementation of the SFP with timely disbursement of funding; creating inclusive environments for children with physical and learning disabilities; tackling both educational and societal barriers to girls' educational attainment and retention in school.
2. **Ensuring that Free SHS is inclusive:** This means (i) decentralizing the Free SHS (FSHS) program by building more community senior secondary schools and TVET institutions so that students can attend SHS in their own locality; (ii) rethinking the blanket free boarding school for all; and (iii) exploring innovative approaches to learning, including distance learning.
3. **Rethinking the financing of Free SHS.** A more sustainable mode of finance is required for free SHS. Perhaps the policy should be means-tested so that middle- and high-income earners who do not necessarily need free secondary education for their wards can revert to paying fees.

4. **Improving quality and relevance of education and training.** Curriculum gaps can be addressed by fostering greater cooperation between schools and the private sector to be able to better match the curriculum with the needs of industry.
5. **Improve representation of girls in STEM education.** One of the difficulties faced by girls and women is their under-representation and inadequate access to courses in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). To address this, it is necessary to incentivize girls' participation in STEM through scholarships and public campaigns to correct the misconception that STEM courses are "male" courses.
6. **Bolstering and promoting TVET.** The financing of TVET under Free SHS must be holistic, using current industry baselines for costing. Costing must include: industrial protective gear; insurance for instructors and learners against workshop hazards; full and realistic cost of practical work specific to each program. The government should undertake a public campaign to boost the image of TVET, showcasing the jobs readily available for TVET graduates and the high returns to technical education over time.
7. **Investing in collecting gender-disaggregated data** to provide evidence to inform policy design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.
8. **Expanding digital infrastructure:** The government should prioritize an education and learning system that focuses on the digital skills needed to spur industry. Both teachers and students must have access to working computers and the internet, stable electricity, well-equipped STEM laboratories, projectors, and modernized TVET tools.
9. **Strengthen teacher training curricula:** Stronger frameworks are required for stakeholder involvement, especially of the private sector, in teacher curriculum development .

## Key area 2: Youth employment

Ghana continues to struggle to absorb its burgeoning youth population into the labor market, risking failure to benefit fully from the potential demographic dividend.

### What are the challenges?

Four key youth employment concerns are identified for the Compact:

1. **Misalignment of skills to labor market requirements.** Skills mismatch denotes a mismatch between the skills that are in demand in the job market and the skills that are supplied to entrants to the job market. This is attributable to the weak interface between learning institutions and industry, resulting in ill-prepared school-leavers.
2. **Weak school-to-work transition frameworks and career guidance.** School-leavers often face the challenge of having no job experience, while employers often require some basic level of work experience for entry-level jobs. Again, this reflects the weak interface between learning institutions and industry. There is also limited career guidance in schools, with counselling that is often inadequate and unstructured when available.
3. **Weak labor market information system.** Systems to track and forecast labor supply and demand trends are inadequate and outdated, hampering efficiency in the labor market. A functioning labor market information system would help identify, early on, sectors and sub-sectors with excess supply of skills versus alongside those with a shortage to feed back into the education and training policies for incoming graduates.
4. **Neglect of youth not in education, employment or training (NEET).** There is a growing number of youths on the streets, particularly in urban areas. Even when employed, they are often engaged in vulnerable and hazardous work in poor conditions.

5. **Concentration of youth in the informal sector.** Over a third of young Ghanaians are employed in the informal sector. The sector is characterized by underemployment, bad working conditions, job insecurity and low wages.

## Potential solutions for Key Area 2

The following are proposals towards solutions to the above issues.

1. **Bridge the skills mismatch** through a structured, collaborative, institutionalized and well-resourced framework that brings together industry and all levels of the education and training system, from primary to tertiary. It should also comprise curriculum redesign, career guidance, teacher-employer peer networks and student placements and internships.
2. **Complete and rollout the Labor Market Information System** to provide timely forecasts on labor market trends and flag sectors with high or low labor demand and supply.
3. **Create job centers and hubs** to centralize access to information on jobs. It will become a platform for connecting employers with jobseekers as well as connections to upskilling or reskilling opportunities, particularly for underserved youth and the NEET category.
4. **A revamp of the National Service Scheme** to address the school-to-work transition challenges by revisiting the mission and governance arrangements of the scheme and strengthening collaboration with the private sector.
5. **Invest in the youth entrepreneurship and “tech-preneurship” (entrepreneurship in the field of high technology) ecosystem.** In Ghana, efforts in this space are currently led mainly by international actors. The government should step in to establish public-private partnerships that amplify, scale up and institutionalize such initiatives. It should also promote an enabling environment to provide incentives and lowering of barriers to investment for youth entrepreneurs. Promoting the viability of youth-run enterprises will also require facilitating the access of youth to information on product and input markets and linking them to global value chains
6. **Relocate key public institutions outside of Accra.** Decongesting Accra and relocating some institutions to other regions could help to create jobs as some businesses and private investors will follow these institutions.
7. **Protection of youth in the informal sector:** There should be a two-prong approach where the informal sector becomes increasingly formalized while policies that regulate the informal economy need to be more favorable to young people.

## Key Area 3: Youth leadership and empowerment

Young Ghanaians have demonstrated a strong interest in contributing to the country's development, not just in the labor market but in society more broadly. Their ability to mobilize and lead must be nurtured and harnessed.

### What are the challenges?

1. **Governance and leadership.** While the youthful age structure becomes reinforced, youth representation is near invisible in governance and political leadership processes and positions, with no concerted and structured effort to address this issue. A majority of young Ghanaians remain interested in political discourse but increasingly feel their voices go unheard and do not influence governance.

2. **Civic participation.** Youth participation in civic activities enables the youth to address directly any societal problems confronting their communities. However, young people are becoming invisible in civic processes, partly due to the lack of knowledge of the nation's Constitution.

### **Potential solutions for Key Area 3**

1. **Institute progressive policies to engage young leaders** – both men and women, by providing incentives and platforms for mentorship and to engage both urban and rural youth at all levels of governance, from local assemblies to districts, Parliament, regional, and national. Emphasis should be placed on reforms to political structures and legislative frameworks to make them more inclusive.
2. **Empower young people to engage with civic processes.** Civic education should be intensified with the aim of increasing youth awareness of political processes, civic rights, civic issues and encouraging them to be active participants in community services.
3. **Creating enabling environments for young people to feel heard:** An enabling environment must be developed for young people to feel heard in public affairs as well as able influence government decisions or policies.