

# Urban Youth Unemployment - The case of Harambee, a Youth Employment Accelerator.

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Harambee is a Youth Employment Accelerator to unblock the pathway that young people walk to employment. It was founded in 2011 as an initiative of Yellowwoods Social Investment.

The challenge of youth unemployment involves companies, schools, communities, town planners, public transport operators, universities, non-profit institutions and of course, young people themselves. Apart from being a painful tragedy in its own right it also contributes to other problems including crime and drug abuse.

Harambee began as initiative to match the needs of employers with the enormous potential of young South Africans. It developed a model that sources, screens and capacitates young people and matches them with jobs in partner companies. At the Harambee young people: have their potential assessed; build their CV's; grow through short term work and volunteer experiences; and access learning opportunities directly linked to scarce skills.

Harambee measure success by the 48,000 young people that have been placed in jobs. This is in addition to the 400,000 young people who have attended workshops at Harambee equipping them with job searching skills and the over 1,5 million assessments completed.

Harambee expanded nationwide with a National Treasury's Job's Fund R100 million grant. Its success is due to its innovative data driven approach. For example, it recognised that although maths numeracy skills were low, many young people could be trained for the specific numeracy skills required. They started running a number of learning interventions including Massive Open Online Varsities (MOOVs) at city public libraries.

Harambee has built strong partnerships with national stakeholder groups including the DHE, DPME and the NYDA as well as with Provincial and Local stakeholders. The Harambee model depends specifically on excellent partnerships with the employing companies in their network. There are 400 company partners who work with Harambee.

Harambee also runs a number of successful initiatives that can allow young people to find employment in the value chain of companies. There are opportunities in logistics, sales and research among others. There are also opportunities in new crucial social services such as Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres.

For the young people who are helped by Harambee it can be a life changing experience. While many lessons can be learned from the experience of Harambee, there are many other ways of approaching the 'wicked problem' of youth unemployment.

## **Youth unemployment**

Reducing youth unemployment is a national imperative. 47% of South Africa's population is under the age of 15<sup>1</sup> while youth unemployment in South Africa stands at 52%<sup>2</sup>. Youth unemployment could be termed a 'wicked problem'<sup>3</sup> and a complex issue. The problem will be heightened by the 'fourth industrial revolution' and increasing technological disruption over the next twenty years. The World Economic Forum predicts

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<sup>1</sup> Land, K. (2018, 11 March) It takes a nation to raise a child. Sourced from <https://www.moneyweb.co.za/moneyweb-opinion/soapbox/it-takes-a-nation-to-raise-a-child/>

<sup>2</sup> February, J. (2018, 8 March) SA's Long Journey to Transition. Sourced from <http://ewn.co.za/2018/03/08/opinion-judith-february-sa-s-long-journey-to-transition>

<sup>3</sup> Kolko, J. (2012, 6 March) Wicked Problems worth solving. Stanford Social Innovation Review. Sourced from [https://ssir.org/articles/entry/wicked\\_problems\\_problems\\_worth\\_solving](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/wicked_problems_problems_worth_solving)

that anything between 9% and 47% of jobs may be automated due to technology adoption such as robotics and artificial intelligence <sup>4</sup>.

Why is the problem so severe? Apartheid spatial planning means young people still live far from work opportunities. Since 1994, millions of houses have been built for disadvantaged South Africans, but many of these are not conveniently located. New efforts to integrate public transport are laudable but it remains relatively expensive to travel to look for work.

Basic education quality in South Africa remains poor. Recent reports<sup>5</sup> show that South African kids in Grade 4 score lowest out of 50 countries with 78% of Grade 4 children unable to read for meaning in any language. In 2017, SA was ranked at 138/138 for Maths and Science education<sup>6</sup>).

The economy has not been growing fast enough to absorb each new generation of school leavers and many sectors of the economy are not sufficiently geared towards employing young relatively unskilled workers. Because of this many young people depend solely on the social grants provided to family members. Even where employment in the family exists few family members work in 'good' jobs<sup>7</sup>.

The problem of youth unemployment does not only negatively impact young people. Employers frequently hire the 'first person through the door'. This person is often not the best person for the job. There is mismatch between the demands of the labour market and the skills and capacities of young people<sup>8</sup>. There is also not a large enough pool of work-ready young people to draw from. These issues impede the growth of the economy.

**Question: How can this 'wicked problem' be better understood and better addressed in the context of South African cities of the future ?**

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<sup>4</sup>World Economic Forum (nd) Jobs and the fourth industrial revolution. Sourced from <https://www.weforum.org/about/jobs-and-the-fourth-industrial-revolution>

<sup>5</sup> Huffington Post (2018, 22 February) South Africa's Reading Crisis is a Cognitive Catastrophe. Sourced from [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.za/staff-reporter/south-africa-s-reading-crisis-a-cognitive-catastrophe\\_a\\_23371863/](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.za/staff-reporter/south-africa-s-reading-crisis-a-cognitive-catastrophe_a_23371863/)

<sup>6</sup> World Economic Forum (2016-17) Global Competitiveness Report. Sourced from [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/GCR2016-2017/05FullReport/TheGlobalCompetitivenessReport2016-2017\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/GCR2016-2017/05FullReport/TheGlobalCompetitivenessReport2016-2017_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Harambee (2018) Presentation by Harambee.

<sup>8</sup> Harambee (2018) Presentation by Harambee.