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# **M2-H2-Perspectives of Youth in South Africa**

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# *N.B. Full Report Details Can Be Found:* [*http://hsf.org.za/resource-centre/hsf-briefs/the-state-of-youth-1-part-1-2013-perspectives*](http://hsf.org.za/resource-centre/hsf-briefs/the-state-of-youth-1-part-1-2013-perspectives)

This Brief is the first in a series examining the state of youth in South Africa.

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## **Introduction:**

During the past twelve months youth[1] mobilisation has increased. Student protests like the University of Cape Town’s recent #Rhodesmustfall[2] and the University of Stellenbosch’s #OpenStellenbosch[3] protests about transformation, exclusion and the vast economic disparities between black and white students are examples of youth mobilising. Unemployed youth have also taken to the streets in eMalahleni[4] to urge government and the private sector to make available more jobs for youth in the area. These young people claim that the private sector isn’t offering employment opportunities for township youth. It is not the first time young, frustrated South Africans have taken desperate action to draw attention to their plight. But the current mobilisation could also be the beginning of a social movement which comprises students and unemployed youth. The rise in the number and level of protests and demonstrations taking place in different locations from Bekkersdal to Soweto to Cape Town to Durban and the number of young people taking part cannot be ignored. The causes of these protests and demonstrations range from structural to systemic to governance issues[5] and all need to be urgently addressed.

There is no denying that South Africa has experienced rapid development in its social and economic spheres over the past 21 years. But the youth of today are no longer satisfied with formal rights alone. Material equality is on the agenda. This raises important issues about the true state of youth in the country.

## **Youth Unemployment:**

Youth account for 36.2% of the population[6] and understanding the nature of youth unemployment is of great importance and can provide some insight. The official unemployment rate is 24.3%. On the expanded definition (which includes discouraged workers) it is 34.6%[7]. It is higher for Black Africans at 39% compared to their counterparts (Coloured: 26.8%; Indian/ Asian: 16.8%; White: 9.4%)[8]. These numbers have remained stubbornly high over the past decade.

Of the 4 909 000 officially unemployed people in South Africa, 66.2% are youth, with 2 887 000[9] being Black African youth. This makes unemployment predominantly a youth employment problem. Just under a third of the 15 - 24 cohort are neither employed nor in education and training[10]. Extremely high youth unemployment numbers have an impact on both the economic and social landscape of a country. It means young adults cannot buy homes, get married and begin families. Slowing economic growth makes things worse. Prolonged unemployment restricts social mobility and creates the risk of social instability. More and more young people find themselves in frustrating situations and are taking to the streets to express their anger and disappointment.

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## **The Education of Youth:**

Education is critical. The knowledge and skills which young people acquire must be relevant to the economy if it is to have a material impact on future job prospects. Over the past decade, the percentage of learners who benefited from the “no fee” system increased from 0.6% in 2003 to 62.4% in 2013 but inadequate access to money to pay fees is still cited as a major obstacle for learners to attend school[11]. The number of all people aged 20 years and older who have completed grade 12 has also increased from 22.3% in 2003 to 27.7% in 2013 but only 12.8% have completed a post school education qualification.[12]

Much needed attention is required in addressing the quality of education delivered to learners. South Africa was ranked last of the 50 countries tested in Mathematics and Science by the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMMS) in 2003. In 2006 it achieved the lowest score of 45 countries that participated in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) which tested reading and literacy among grade five learners. This means the majority of learners are receiving poor quality education. At senior secondary level the National Senior Certificate (NSC) is the only credible measure of education outcomes and over the past few years we have seen an improvement from 70.2% in 2011; 73.9% in 2012; 78.2% in 2013; and 75.8% in 2014[13]. This, however, does not clearly reflect how many of these learners qualify for university and further, nor does it take into account the number of learners who drop-out before grade 12.

## **The Health of Youth:**

Due to inefficiencies and underperformance in the government health sector, and lack of access to quality healthcare, South Africa is experiencing high rates of maternal deaths and a high prevalence of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and other major diseases. South Africa’s health expenditure as a proportion of Gross Domestic Product is similar, and in some cases higher, than its peer countries, yet it experiences poor health outcomes.

An investment in young people’s health is important because when young people make a healthy transition from adolescence into adulthood their future prospects increase. However, 720 000 young people aged 15 - 24 (with teenage girls 8 times more prevalent than their male counterparts) and 4 706 000 people aged 24 - 49 are living with HIV; women aged 30 - 34 have the highest infection rate at 36%; and almost a quarter (24.1%) of all new infections occurred in young females aged 15 - 24[14]. In 2013 it was reported that 5.4% of teenage girls aged 13 - 19 were pregnant[15].

The 2013 Mortality and Causes of Death statistical release shows that 16.9%[16] of all deaths that occurred were amongst youth. In the 15 - 44 age group tuberculosis was the leading cause of death at 10.1%, with HIV at 10.8% and other viral disease at 6.0%.[17] The underlying causes for the 15 - 24 age group were very similar with tuberculosis leading at10.1%, followed by HIV and influenza and pneumonia at 3.7%.[18] Deaths attributed to non-natural causes, like transport accidents, other external causes of accidental injury, and assault, were highest among the 15 - 29 age group at 34.5% of all deaths[19].

## **Conclusion:**

Education, employment and health are important measures and provide us a glimpse of the true state of youth in South Africa. Putting into perspective the urgency that is needed to articulate and analyse youth matters.

Strategic investments are needed to build institutional capacity, strengthen human capital, and pursue programmes that will target and improve employment prospects. This should be accompanied by inclusive governance and the equal enjoyment of human rights.

This is about how the needs, talents and expectations of millions of young people, from the most well-educated and inclusive generation in South Africa’s history, are integrated into the globalised economy.

**Notes**

[1] The official definition of youth comprises people age 15 to 34. This definition is used here unless otherwise stated.

[2] http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/4/6/anti-racism-protesters-in-south-africa-take-aim-at-a-statue-with-poop.html

[3]http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2015-04-28-op-ed-open-stellenbosch-tackling-language-and-exclusion-at-stellenbosch-university/#.VVxgWUbcDzs

[4] http://www.news24.com/Archives/City-Press/Jaded-jobless-youth-wreck-municipality-20150429

[5]http://pressoffice.mg.co.za/universityofthefreestate/PressRelease.php?StoryID=255849

[6] Stats SA, 2014. Mid-year population estimates, 2014. http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0302/P03022014.pdf

[7] Stats SA, 2014. Quarterly Labour Survey, Quarter 4 2014. http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0211/P02114thQuarter2014.pdf

[8] ibid

[9] ibid

[10] Stats SA, 2010. Social Profile of South Africa, 2002 – 2009. http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/Report-03-19-00/Report-03-19-002009.pdf

[11] Stats SA, 2013. General Household Survey, 2013. http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0318/P03182013.pdf

[12] ibid

[13] http://www.education.gov.za/SearchResults/tabid/37/Default.aspx?Search=matric+results

[14] HSRC, 2012. South African National HIV Prevalence, Incidence and Behaviour Survey. http://www.hsrc.ac.za/uploads/pageContent/4565/SABSSM%20IV%20LEO%20final.pdf

[15] Stats SA, 2013. General Household Survey. http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0318/P03182013.pdf

[16] Stats SA, 2014. Mortality and Causes of Death in South Africa, 2013: Findings from death notification. http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P03093/P030932013.pdf

[17] ibid

[18] ibid

[19] ibid

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