

## Fostering Entrepreneurship and Building Peace Among Youth in Côte d'Ivoire

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Côte d'Ivoire has a staggeringly high unemployment rate, with 66.7 percent of the youth (ages 14 to 34) in the labor force experiencing either unemployment or inactivity.<sup>1</sup> In addition, higher education is not a solution by itself, as attaining a tertiary degree leads to a two to three times greater chance of unemployment for youth due to a mismatch between graduates and the skills employers look for.<sup>2</sup> Unemployment also has implications for peace and security, including the potential for unemployed and inactive youth to be exposed to violence and radicalization. The latter is a matter of special concern, as illustrated by the recent terrorist attacks in Grand Bassam, Côte d'Ivoire and elsewhere in the region. The economic grievances, anger, sense of alienation, and the powerful societal effect created by mass unemployment are key ingredients of violent extremism. To address the unemployment crisis and the violence it can drive, governments should promote entrepreneurship as a solution for three main reasons: (i) the public sector cannot absorb all the labor force, (ii) youth long for self-employment, and (iii) entrepreneurship leads to positive agency and inclusion. In such a context, education policy in Côte d'Ivoire, in particular, and in West Africa, in general, should mainstream entrepreneurial education in both the formal and informal sector. To encourage entrepreneurship and mainstream entrepreneurship education, African and international policymakers, donors, and universities should focus on (i) rebranding or raising the social perception of entrepreneurship, (ii) increasing the supply of entrepreneurship education, and (iii) building an ecosystem to ensure the sustainability of entrepreneurship.<sup>3</sup>

The social perception of entrepreneurship is key: in Côte d'Ivoire and some other parts of West Africa, entrepreneurship is not well regarded and is seen as a second best option when a job in the public sector is not available. As a consequence, these entrepreneurs do not dedicate all their energy and resources to it, since they hope it will be a transitional experience. This "default entrepreneurship" can be successful, but more frequently provides just subsistence. Reflecting this societal attitude, students prefer careers in the public sector to entrepreneurship. A recent study in Côte d'Ivoire shows that 36 percent of university students prefer government jobs for the higher profile they consider them to have, 26 percent think they provide security, and another 25 percent of the students prefer government jobs as they believe they are not prepared to be entrepreneurs. Only 13 percent of the students surveyed value entrepreneurship (see figure on next page).<sup>4</sup>

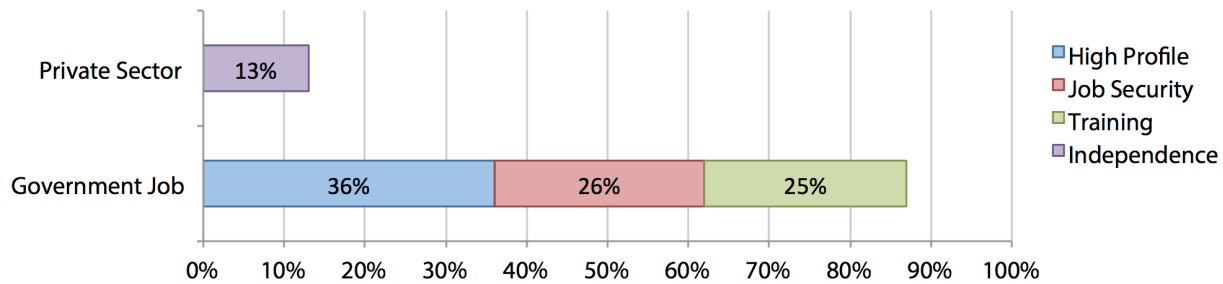
To both change this negative perception and build capacity, universities should mainstream entrepreneurship education into their curricula. Currently very few schools in Côte d'Ivoire offer entrepreneurship awareness classes. For the mainstreaming of entrepreneurship to bear fruit, students need theoretical classes as well as a whole ecosystem of support including courses, mentoring, coaching, seed funding, and more. Building this ecosystem requires that the different parts of the triple helix—government, businesses, and universities—work in synergy.

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## Student Perception of Jobs/Entrepreneurship



*Student preference for government or private sector jobs, and the most important reason for that choice.*

In sum, in a country where two thirds of the youth are either unemployed or inactive, the ministry of education and other policymakers should make it a goal to educate youth to thrive outside the public sector and become job creators. However, this requires universities, government, businesses, and other stakeholders to help rebrand entrepreneurship, mainstream entrepreneurship education, and create entrepreneurship ecosystems. The following policy options would help foster entrepreneurship as a solution to the ills of unemployment in Côte d'Ivoire and in West African countries in general. African governments, universities, the private sector, and the Africa and Malagasy Council for Higher Education (CAMES), a continent-wide accreditation body for higher education, all have a role to play.

### Policy Options and Recommendations

#### 1. For African governments, the private sector, and African policymakers:

- a. Involve governments, universities, and enterprises in education curricula:** The triple helix—government, universities, and businesses—need to be involved in the design of education curricula. So far, education has been mostly supply-driven. Education curricula are designed without the contributions of the private sector, leading to a skills mismatch for graduates. The private sector, which has become the primary employer of graduating students, could be consulted for the appropriate design, implementation, and evaluation of education curricula.
- b. Build ecosystems for entrepreneurship:** An ecosystem is a supporting environment where the members interact to sustain each other's goal. Such an environment is needed for entrepreneurship to thrive in the major public and private universities. This ecosystem should go beyond single introductory entrepreneurship classes to include mentoring, tutoring, seed funding, and more. African governments, policymakers, and the CAMES could supplement that by requiring larger private universities to develop such an ecosystem on their campuses. A recent study indicated that a single course does not impact a student's entrepreneurial intent—that is, taking an entrepreneurship awareness course does not lead a student to choose to become an entrepreneur. But access to an entrepreneurial ecosystem increases the likelihood of a student's entrepreneurial intent by 50 percent. This is particularly important for private universities given that close to 50 percent of Ivorian students are in private higher education and that there is demand for it: by our research 47 percent of Ivorian students would like to become entrepreneurs.
- c. Mainstream entrepreneurship education:** Mainstream entrepreneurship education in all higher-education curricula so that all students are given the opportunity to embrace entrepreneurship. Mainstreaming education implies that every student who goes through the education system is provided

with at least one entrepreneurship awareness class. In addition, optional in-depth courses and training could be made available to provide options to those who want to engage in entrepreneurship.

## 2. For the Africa and Malagasy Council for Higher Education (CAMES):

**a. Engage the private sector:** The CAMES could ensure the participation of the local private sector in the design of curricula by making it a requirement for the accreditation of education curricula within universities. This is a crucial step to address the skills mismatch that many graduates encounter and to ensure that university graduates have the skills to work in the private sector and become entrepreneurs.

**b. Develop quality assurance criteria:** When determining rankings and granting accreditation, the CAMES could use how universities and institutes foster an entrepreneurship ecosystem as one metric. This would ensure universities that provide entrepreneurship-friendly environments are recognized.

## 3. For the international community and donors:

**a. Local private sector involvement:** The international community and donors could encourage or even require the involvement of the local private sector in the implementation of education projects to ensure that their implementation benefits from the private sector's inputs.

**b. Emphasize impact, not quantity:** To avoid the "tyranny of numbers" or mass impact, the international community and donors can focus on education programs with high quality impact. The desire to show that programs have impact on as many people as possible could lead to projects where many people are affected but the impact is neither effective nor sustainable.

**c. Fund entrepreneurship ecosystems:** Consider ensuring dedicated budget lines for building entrepreneurship ecosystems. When education projects are submitted, donors could ensure that there are clear budget lines dedicated to fostering the local private sector.

For an in-depth analysis of the role of entrepreneurship in creating jobs and fostering peacebuilding, see the accompanying Africa Program Research Paper No. 14 by François Paxisnewende Kaboré.

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- 1 *Enquete Nationale Sur La Situation De L'Emploi Et Du Travail Des Enfants* (Côte d'Ivoire: Ministere D'Etat, Ministere Du Plan et Du Developpement, 2014). [http://www.ins.ci/n/documents/travail\\_enfant/Enquete%20nationale%202013.pdf](http://www.ins.ci/n/documents/travail_enfant/Enquete%20nationale%202013.pdf)
  - 2 African Development Fund, *Young Employability and Insertion Support Programme (PAAEIJ): Côte d'Ivoire Appraisal Report* (Tunis, Tunisia: African Development Bank, 2013). [http://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Côte\\_d\\_Ivoire\\_-\\_Youth\\_Employability\\_and\\_Insertion\\_Support\\_Programme\\_\\_PAAEIJ\\_-\\_Appraisal\\_Report.pdf](http://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Côte_d_Ivoire_-_Youth_Employability_and_Insertion_Support_Programme__PAAEIJ_-_Appraisal_Report.pdf)
  - 3 The case for why entrepreneurship could be a solution to unemployment is discussed in a research paper titled "Entrepreneurship, Youth Employment, and Violent Extremism in Côte d'Ivoire"
  - 4 I thank the two students—Jael Konan from CERAP and Gnougou Ouattara—who helped in the data collection. Gnougou Ouattara defended an M.A. dissertation at the National School for Applied Economics and Statistics (ENSEA) in 2016, using the same data.

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