

Fast-Tracking University Education for Youth Employment: Empirical Evidence from University Graduates in Rwanda

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Abstract : Like elsewhere in the world, youth unemployment remains a big problem more so to the most educated youth and female. In Rwanda, unemployment is estimated at 13.2% among youth graduates compared to 10.9% and 2.6 among secondary and primary graduates respectively. Though empirical evidence elsewhere associate youth unemployment with education level, relevance of skills and access to business support opportunities, mixed evidence still exist on the significance of these factors to youth employment. As youth employment strategies in countries like Rwanda continue to recognize the potential role university education can play to enhance employment, there is a need to understand the catalysts or barriers. This paper, therefore, draws empirical evidence from a survey on the influence of education qualification, skills relevance and access to business support opportunities on employment of the youth university graduates in Masaka sector, Rwanda. The analysis tested four hypotheses; access to university education significantly affects youth employment, Relevance of university education significantly contributes to youth employment; access to business support opportunities significantly contributes to youth employment, and significant gender differences exist in the employment of youth university graduates. A cross-section survey was used in lieu of the need to explore the prevailing status of youth employment and contributing factors across the sector. A questionnaire was used to collect data on a large sample of 269 youth to allow statistical analysis. This was beefed up with qualitative views of leaders and technical officials in the sector. The youth University graduates were selected using simple random sampling while the leaders and technical officials were selected purposively. Percentages were used to describe respondents in line with the variables under while a regression model for youth employment was fitted to determine the significant factors. The model results indicated a significant influence ($p < 0.05$) of gender, education level and access to business support opportunities on employment of youth university graduates. This finding was also affirmed by the qualitative views of key informants. Qualitative views pointed to the fact that university education generally equipped the youth with skills that enabled their transition into employment mainly for a salary or wage. The skills were, however, deficient in technical and practical aspects. In addition, the youth generally lacked limited access to business support opportunities particularly guarantees for loans, business advisory, and grants for business as well as training in business skills that would help them gain salaried employment or transit into self-employment. The study findings bear an implication on the strategy for catalyzing youth employment through university education. The findings imply that university education should be embraced but with greater emphasis on or supplementation with specialized training in practical and technical skills as well as extending business support opportunities to the youth. This will accelerate the contribution of university education to youth employment.

Keywords : education, employment, self-employment, youth

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