

YEO 2030 YOUTH DIALOGUES REPORT SYNOPSIS

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YEO2030.org

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Background

Making Cents International's Youth Economic Opportunities (YEO) 2030 is a global initiative that brings together intergenerational changemakers to address key challenges preventing sustainable economic growth and employment for all. The initiative was born out of Making Cents' flagship Global Youth Economic Opportunities (GYEO) Summit and builds upon its commitment to scale YEO programming, opportunities, and multi-stakeholder partnerships.

Beginning in October 2021, YEO 2030 held 19 Youth Dialogues in 18 countries. The gatherings hosted by 11 international partners gave 200 youth the opportunity to provide insight into their experiences with work and livelihoods (e.g., seeking work, employment, and self-employment). The sessions began to identify the issues and topics of priority for them when it comes to expanding economic opportunities where they live.

The YEO 2030 Global Youth Dialogues Report captures the feedback and recommendations shared by youth participants. This is a synopsis of that report.

Approach

The report is organized by the three YEO 2030 areas of focus that include 1) Ready for the Global Workforce (i.e., preparing for, finding, and securing formal work opportunities); 2) Livelihoods Through Self Employment (i.e., navigating self-employment and entrepreneurship); and 3) Global Context Matters (i.e., social, environmental, and political issues that impact young people). Each section identifies key themes and topics that emerged from the youth dialogues. The report also includes recommendations from youth and highlights areas where more attention, support, and investment are required to sustain youth economic opportunities.

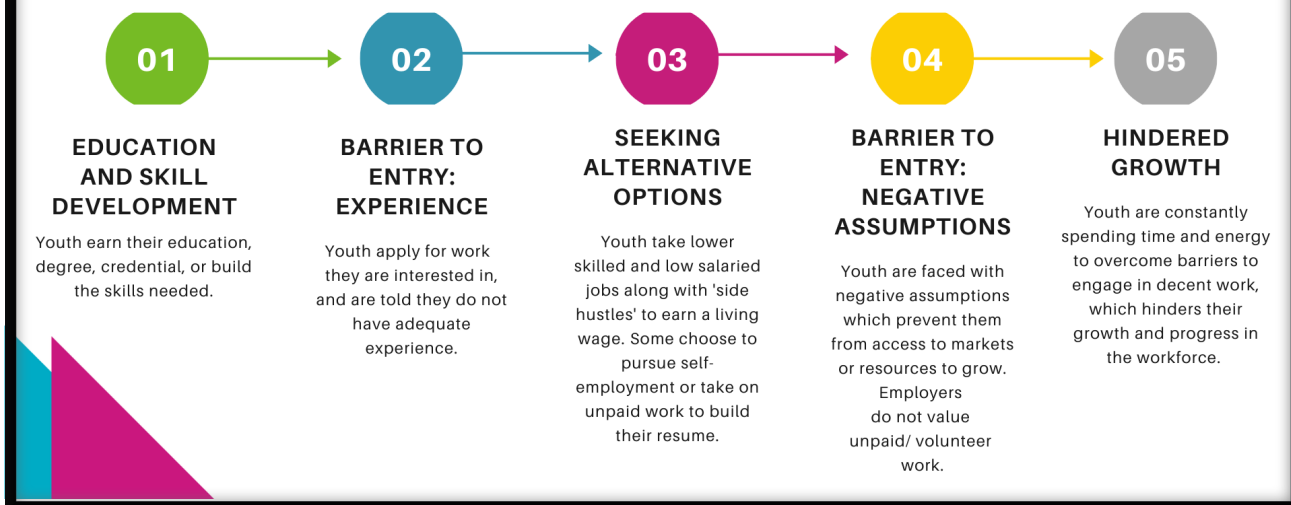
Ready for the Global Workforce

In dialogues across different countries, young people shared a wide variety of industries through which they are either formally or informally employed. While a large number of youth who participated in the dialogues were engaged in some form of employment, it was clear that the majority were facing multiple barriers that inhibited their professional growth and pushed them into overworking for minimal compensation. When young people enter into the formal workforce, they report being kept in unstable, low-paying, and entry-level jobs with limited growth trajectories and career guidance. Key takeaways shared by youth respondents include:

- **More investment is needed to support youth getting and keeping employment.** Young people shared an interest in receiving more job skills training specific to their fields. This training includes working directly with both youth and employers to address perceptions of young peoples' value, the importance of investing in youth skills, and promoting decent work.
- **Build in more mentorship and career guidance opportunities into programming.** A need for mentorship or coaching support during their search for decent work was highlighted across many dialogues, as well as mental health awareness. Having access to good mentors can provide emotional support, access to new networks and skills, as well as lead to successful employment.
- **Build structures for accountability.** Many of the barriers young people face are structural and institutional. Therefore, efforts to support young people in accessing decent employment need to include more systems-level change. For example, increasing accountability in the public sector to tackle nepotism and bribery.

YOUTH EXPERIENCES WITH WORK AND LIVELIHOODS

Youth who participated in dialogues shared common experiences with work and livelihoods, which are represented in the diagram below. While the diagram presents these steps in a straight path, please note that this is not always linear as other environmental, life, and global events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, will add disruptions and further complexity.



The report found several common youth experiences with work and livelihoods. (Making Cents International)

Livelihoods Through Self-Employment

Whether by choice or necessity, many youth dialogue participants have or are currently engaged in self-employment. Youth also shared that they move frequently between formal work opportunities and side-gigs to earn additional income or balance formal jobs, informal work, and personal projects and businesses. Key takeaways shared by youth respondents include:

- **Invest more in the education, skills, and training youth need to navigate livelihoods as freelance workers or as entrepreneurs.** Across the dialogues, youth identified the need for more financial support, scholarships, or other resources to be able to access education and training in the skills necessary for self-employment, including entrepreneurship skills. Specific skills included financial literacy, especially for small grant management and business management; project management; and entrepreneurship education (i.e., training and education, incubation).
- **Increase resources and support for youth self-employment and entrepreneurship.** Related to skills building, youth also shared a desire for more resources and support to navigate the business environment in their community, country, or region. Youth identified knowledge (e.g., market information; business registration; taxes; compliance) and access (e.g., competitive procurement opportunities, better professional and mentorship networks; funding for startups and small businesses) as key issues impacting their experience with self-employment.
- **More supportive ecosystems for self-employed youth through policy reform and investment.** Youth identified specific economic and social issues that need to be addressed to better support the opportunities, well-being, and safety of self-employed youth. Absent safety nets or aid, self-employed youth also shared some of the challenges that the pandemic has posed for their livelihoods, and why governments should invest in more support for young people.

Global Context Matters

Youth across the dialogues identified many of the same or similar barriers in their efforts to access formal employment and self-employment. Participants also shared some of the less visible but important contextual and cross-cutting issues that impact their economic opportunity and personal well-being. Youth also talked about the social and economic shocks they have experienced during the pandemic. In many ways, COVID-19 has amplified the challenges that young people face. Key takeaways shared by youth respondents include:

- **Advocacy for policies and ecosystems that help youth overcome barriers.** Youth across the dialogues identified both policy and systems-level priority areas that include more equitable wages for workers; equitable and inclusive hiring practices for youth who lack traditional credentials, degrees, or experience. legislation to reinforce prioritization of youth in recruitment and skilling, including opportunities to build their skills on the job; and more support, including financial, for youth who lack resources to pursue education, training, and credentialing.
- **Combat discrimination and exclusion.** Young people identified the different ways that discrimination, stigma, and exclusion impact their lives and their economic choices and prospects. The priority issues that were identified in the dialogues include safe spaces for youth who are marginalized, such as women affected by gender-based violence; and addressing gender and other discrimination in the workplace, including banning hiring restrictions based on religion, past records, and marital status.

Opportunities and Next Steps

The challenges and priorities that young people shared through their dialogues and reflected in this report will help inform the YEO 2030 Initiative's strategy and related activities in 2022. These include the Regional YEO Convening (January 2022) and the Global YEO Summit (spring 2022). At both events, the YEO 2030 community will convene to identify specific actions designed to drive and scale solutions that advance the achievement of SDG 8.

