

Staring down the barrel of youth unemployment

By [Onyinye Nwaneri](#)

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Arguably one of the biggest lessons we've learnt from the global Covid-19 pandemic is the power of technology and the positive impact it can have on the education sector. Particularly during the national lockdown period, continued learning is one of the most essential undertakings for the country's young people. For young adults, specifically, this is the time to focus on developing valuable new skills that will ultimately increase their chances of being able to access the economy when it opens.



Onyinye Nwaneri, CEO of Afrika Tikkun Services

That is if they have access to the tools needed to continue learning online. The fact is that many around the country do not, and without it, the rate of youth unemployment is set to skyrocket.

The [Stats SA General Household Survey](#) reports that "the proportion of households in the country that use only mobile devices as a means of communication is 88.2%" and "internet access via mobile devices accounts for the majority of telecommunications (60.1%)". Not only in SA, the [UN Broadband Commission](#) is steadfast in its belief that "mobile technology is key to bringing 'education to all'".

Costs remain far too high

However, given the cost of smartphone technology and data in South Africa, the costs remain far too high for those in vulnerable communities. Though without these tools it's likely that young people will not be able to continue with online learning and will fall out of our programmes, not be able to update CV's or apply for available positions, further reducing their opportunities for gaining indispensable skills and possible employment.

Year on year, South Africa is faced with the crisis of high - and rising – youth unemployment. The latest [Stats SA Quarterly Labour Force Survey](#) proves this, reporting that whilst "the national unemployment rate sits at 29.1%", higher still is the "youth unemployment rate of 38.2%". "Young people aged 15–34 years account for 63.4% of the total number of unemployed persons in the country" with "40.1% not currently in employment, education or training".



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Afrika Tikkun Services goes online

With this information in hand, Afrika Tikkun Services has seamlessly shifted their initiatives online, which will continue to support youth empowerment beyond lockdown and create a sustainable infrastructure in the long-term that will allow learners to study anytime, anywhere.

Clearly, South Africa's youth are still the most vulnerable in the labour market. It is now, more than ever, that we as an organisation are determined to provide young people in vulnerable communities with all the tools they need to enhance their skills and empower them to access the economy. We are certain that in the longer term, these initiatives will provide an additional boost to the informal sector and entrepreneurship.

So far, we have moved our Work Readiness, Specialized Skills Training and Learnership courses online to allow for continued learning without any disruption. But whilst we have tried to assist as many candidates as possible with the essential mobile technology and data, there are around 2,000 learners in need. For this reason, we have introduced a new initiative that calls on the private and public sectors to subsidise the supply of smartphones, 7GB of data per month as well as data top-ups at R1,500.

In partnership with Funzi and the United Nations, we've also launched two free and data-light courses – one of which empowers young South African's with facts about the novel coronavirus and the other equips them with meaningful skills for a more productive future.



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6Million Youth campaign

In addition, our 6Million Youth campaign, in partnership with Harambee and the Solidarity Fund, aims to reach more than six million young people across the country with messages that empower and motivate youth in their continued search of employment.

We must ensure that the country is mobilised to drive young people forward. With these initiatives in place, we are making a difference in the lives of the most vulnerable young people in the country, and everyone can contribute to a stable and sustainable future for South Africa by getting involved.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Onyinye Nwaneri is the CEO of Afrika Tikkun Services. Prior to this she served as the head of strategy, partnerships and marketing for the not-for-profit arm of Afrika Tikkun

(Afrika Tikkun NPC). Prior to working with Afrika Tikkun, Nwaneri worked with the United Nations Development Programme as a consultant where she advised the UNDP on the legal framework governing National Aids Commissions in six African countries. She, in addition, worked with an organisation that partnered with various UN agencies to explore the concept of responsible business and corporate social responsibility, amongst other things. Nwaneri holds a Master's Degree in Human Rights and Democratisation in Africa from the University of Pretoria.

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