

How does lack of jobs and income streams affect the South African youth?

A mixed-method study for a national policy dialogue on youth economic empowerment

**66.5%**Youth unemployment rate at its **Q4 2021 peak** — still deteriorating through post-COVID aftershocks**1.2m**Young people **entering the labour market every year****65%+**Of them remain **outside employment, education or training****29.4%**Of household income where youth live comes from **social grants**; 52.4% from wages**EVIDENCE BASE****402**

valid youth survey responses (673 engaged · 59.7% completion)

19

organisations fully responding (46 engaged · 41.3% completion)

4

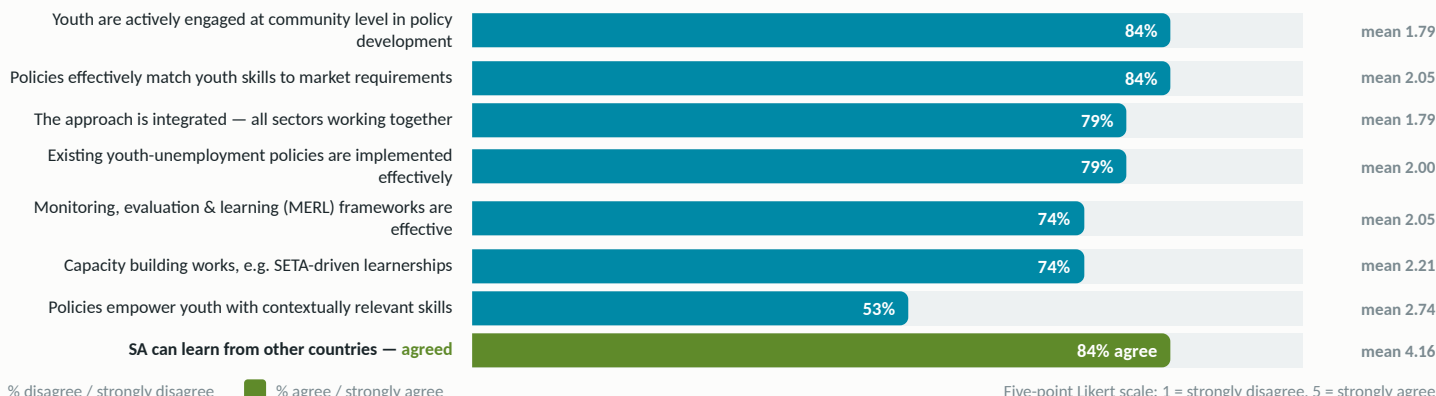
sectors: government, private, civil society, academia

Mixed

method: desktop review, key informants, youth survey, R sentiment

1 The sector grades its own policy — and it fails on delivery

% of 19 organisations who disagreed with each statement



The one thing everyone agrees on is benchmarking — yet organisations could not name a model to adopt (best-practice awareness sentiment 0.09, effectively neutral); Botswana was the single example volunteered. Sentiment on government and private-sector interventions: **-0.25**, the study's most negative score.

2 The intervention architecture — heavily targeted, barely measured

NDP Vision 2030 · MTSF 2019–24 · PYEI 2020

NDP VISION 2030

6%target unemployment rate by 2030, on a **24 million** working labour force

MTSF 2019–24

3 interventions**6 indicators** set to move unemployment from **27.6% to 20–24%**

PYEI · LAUNCHED 2020

2myouth jobs promised over the decade through **4 components**, incl. the National Pathway Management Network

THE MEASUREMENT GAP

3 of 6MTSF indicators were logged as **"New indicator"** — **no baseline**, so progress against them cannot be calculated

TARGETS ON THE BOOKS 275 000 jobs/yr via Job Summit · **402 950** via Operation Phakisa by 2024 (baseline 9 146) · **4.4m → 5m** public employment work opportunities · **1m** NEET absorbed by 2024 · **PYEI 1.5m** temporary + **500 000** sustainable earning opportunities. All five standing instrument types — education, post-school training, public employment, entrepreneurship, placement — are **supply-side**.

3 What young people say

n = 402 · 55% aged 24–35 · 92% matric or above · 74% urban

WHO IS BACKING THEM**49%****51%**Government support is **adequate** — opinion split almost evenly**69%****31%**Private-sector support is **adequate** — business is rated well above the state

Sentiment: government +0.12 · private sector +0.21

THE INFORMATION GAP**68%**of youth were **not aware of any enterprise development channel** for youth employment — support that exists is not reaching them.**8.6%** of never-employed youth have turned to entrepreneurship; **81%** are still actively job-hunting.

Implies low youth engagement across the whole empowerment process

NO FOOTHOLD IN THE ECONOMY**40%**of unemployed respondents have **never been employed at all**; 28% have been out of work over a year.Of those in work, **91%** have held the job under 12 months — churn, not entry. Only **10%** are employed by government.

Overall youth sentiment +0.23 — wanting better support, unclear what kind

Where the evidence converges

- Implementation, not intent, is the failure point.** Policies exist; delivery, monitoring and follow-through do not.
- Skills are mismatched to the market** — named by organisations and youth alike.
- The approach is fragmented.** Not one organisation agreed the sector works in an integrated way; sentiment on collaboration is negative.
- Youth are absent from the process** — 84% of organisations say so, 68% of youth don't know what channels exist, and support is geographically skewed to urban, better-resourced provinces.

What the report recommends

- Engage bottom-up.** Community-level youth engagement first, policy direction following the identified need.
- Realign policy and curricula** to the prevailing economy and to **local** economic activity.
- Target where the mass sits:** ages 21–35 with matric-level qualifications, channelled into demand-relevant skills, with coaching and mentorship to close the experience gap.
- Weight delivery to private sector and civil society**, which absorb 90% of employed youth in this sample.
- Rebuild MERL and benchmark deliberately** — set real baselines, review SETA modalities against market trends, and strengthen public-private partnerships.