

# Investing in YOUNG PEOPLE

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## Online Mideast Focus

Schemes to help create work have been lent a new urgency by the Arab uprisings



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# Jobless generation hungry for change

Social media networks may let tomorrow’s adults talk and mobilise but they do not confer life skills, writes **Sarah Murray**

Judging by the demographic make-up of everything from the Arab uprising to protests against rising tuition fees and the Occupy movement, 2011 was a year in which young people’s voices achieved unprecedented prominence. Yet, while many celebrate the fact that these voices, at least partly thanks to social media, are increasingly powerful, the protests have also highlighted the severe challenges many young people face. For some, the problems are as basic as lack of food or healthcare. Almost a third of children in developing countries are malnourished, according to Unicef, the United Nations’ children’s agency, with 150m underweight and 175m stunted in height because of chronic illness and poor diet. For those not threatened by malnutrition or disease, joblessness can bring a sense of hopelessness and isolation from both the mainstream economy and the political process.

“In some ways, the Arab spring has brought home to us a reality,” says William Reese, president and chief executive of the International Youth Foundation. “Those young people were disempowered – politically and economically.”

The global financial crisis has underlined the fragility of youth in the labour market. At the end of 2010, more than 75m young people worldwide were struggling to find work, according to the International Labour Organization (ILO).

The rate of youth unemployment has risen sharply as a result of the crisis. Between 2008 and 2009, it increased by an unprecedented 4.5m, according to the ILO. The average increase between 1997 and 2007 was fewer than 100,000 a year.

Young people in mature markets have borne the brunt of the unemployment pain, with developed economies and European Union markets experiencing youth unemployment numbers and rates higher in 2010 than any time since the ILO began recording them in 1991.

And, while – globally – more people are graduating from universities, those armed with a degree also number among those finding it hard to get a job. “In Egypt, you have kids with a college education still living at home because they can’t afford to get married, start a family or have their own home because they don’t have a job,” says Mr Reese. “So you’ve got a lot of disaffected middle-class people, too.”

Mattias Lundberg, senior economist in the World Bank’s Human Development Network, is more optimistic. “This is a deep crisis, but we will recover from it,” he says.

Nevertheless, he acknowledges that seismic shifts in the world economy caused by slowing growth in industrialised nations mean that while opportunities are opening up for some, life for others will get tougher.

“It’s going to be harder for someone from a wealthy country to compete with a young person in the developing world,” he says. “On balance, and for the world, that’s a great thing, but it makes life harder for those who are used to competing with a smaller group.”

Meanwhile, technology is transforming the lives of young people. The rapid growth in social networking is



Taking to the streets: thousands of students protest against youth unemployment and education budget cuts in Rome, Italy, last October. Europe has been badly hit by joblessness among the young

Getty

connecting young people to each other in ways that would have been impossible in the past, helping them express their views to mass audiences and rally supporters to causes they care about.

Mr Lundberg points to the big rise in the number of social media users in the five years since the World Bank launched its last World Development Report, which focused on young people. “In December 2006, Facebook had 12m users. In September 2011, it had more than 800m users,” he says. “So on that level, the world is a very different place from five years ago.”

However, social media networking sites, such as Twitter and Facebook, cannot alone give young people the technical and life skills they need to thrive in the global economy.

And while it is one thing to work on increasing literacy rates among schoolchildren, it is more challenging to assist young people who have dropped out of the education system, who are unemployed, and who may even have children of their own.

“There’s been a fair amount of progress in terms of numbers of people staying in schools and getting a basic education,” says Mr Reese. “But youth development is not always embraced, because it’s harder to figure out and requires larger parts of government and business than it does to get a seven-year-old into school.”

Moreover, among the current generation of 18-35s, prospects vary wildly. “There’s a large group at the bottom that isn’t getting the basic building block skills and is falling off the edge of the earth,” says Bill Drayton, founder and chair of Ashoka, a leading US non-profit organisation that identifies and supports social entrepreneurs.

But Mr Drayton also sees large groups of young people who have a hunger to change the world. As part of Ashoka’s efforts to help them do so, AshokaU supports university campus teams that want to promote social entrepreneurship and social innovation. Given the numbers of young people now entering the workforce as a result of the demographic “youth bulge”, the private sector in its current form will not be able to provide sufficient jobs, so promoting entrepreneurship will be essential.

“We have to think about expanding self-employment and entrepreneurship and providing opportunities for young people to take advantage of their creativity and innovation,” says Mr Lundberg. “Otherwise, we won’t get out of this vicious cycle of unemployment.”

In the marketplace, however, young entrepreneurs often face burdensome bureaucracy and a lack of access to credit, advice and networks, making it hard for them to turn their ideas into

businesses that might create jobs for themselves and others. The private sector, however, has a role to play in supporting these young entrepreneurs in a variety of ways. Youth Business International, a network of non-profit groups, taps into the business skills of its members to provide leadership skills, training, access to capital and mentoring for young entrepreneurs. Microsoft, for example, has developed an entrepreneurship curriculum that helps young people build their own technology businesses.

And in 2010, a partnership was established between the US Agency

for International Development (USAID) and Cisco’s Entrepreneur Institute and Networking Academy programme to promote workforce development and entrepreneurship in emerging economies.

Yet the path to entrepreneurship needs to begin at an earlier stage, says Mr Drayton.

He believes that young people need to be encouraged to think that they have the potential to bring about change, but argues that traditional schooling does not create this culture.

“Society doesn’t understand how critical this is,” he says. “We think

growing up is about learning knowledge and rules. But in fact, we want young people to have it in their heads that they can change the world.”

This approach, argue many development experts, is critical, given the potential for young people to improve their own prospects and to help solve social and economic problems.

“Young people are part of the solution and not just part of the problem,” says Mr Reese.

“They are problem solvers – and they are not just tomorrow’s leaders. They can also play a role in helping society today.”

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## Chile protests provide a salutary lesson to region

### Latin America

Inequality, the old foe, has yet to be vanquished, writes **Naomi Mapstone**

When Camila Vallejo rallied tens of thousands of students across Chile to take part in months of protests last year, she put a face to a new generation of frustrated Latin American youth.

“Our fight is not versus the police or to destroy commercial shops,” the 23-year-old activist declared. “Our fight is to recover the right to education.” But the protests, which began with peaceful sit-ins and “kiss-ins”, quickly turned violent.

At the peak of the “Chilean winter”, as the campaign came to be called,

police arrested almost 900 students in a single day against a background of looting and violent clashes.

In all of Latin America, Chile seemed an unlikely location for such unrest. With two decades of political stability and strong economic growth behind it, the country had earned a reputation as an oasis of calm.

The region’s fifth-biggest economy bounced back from an earthquake in 2010 and the global financial downturn in 2008 to grow at 6.6 per cent last year.

But the salutary lesson for the rest of Latin America is Chile’s failure to vanquish the region’s old foe – inequality. Despite significant economic and social gains in the past decade, Latin America still has the world’s highest levels of inequality.

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-

operation and Development, Chile’s schools and colleges are the second most segregated in the region, after Peru, when it comes to social class.

As the student protesters’ banners pointed out, access to a quality education in Chile is still largely the preserve of the privileged: “Five years studying, 15 years paying.”

“We are talking about a better-informed, more ambitious generation of young people in Latin America. Their dreams and aspirations are greater than their parents,” says Guillermo Dema, Latin America specialist at the International Labour Organization (ILO).

He adds: “When they can’t find a job or a place in university, the levels of frustration are enormous.”

While the average unemployment rate across Latin America and the Caribbean



Camila Vallejo: equality call

was 6.8 per cent last year, the lowest since the mid-1990s, youth unemployment is running at 14.9 per cent, the ILO said in a report this month.

About 20 per cent of people aged 15-24 have slipped into the *ni-ni* – Spanish for “neither-nor” – generation, Mr Dema says. They are neither working nor studying, and their chances of entering formal employment are limited.

Colombia had the highest proportion of *ni-nis*, Mr Dema says, with 26 per cent

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# Investing in Young People

# Entrepreneurs aim to benefit communities

### Leadership

It can be difficult gaining the skills to take charge, says Alison Maitland

As a teenager growing up on a rough north London estate, Hammis got involved in gang culture, was excluded from school and, as he says, was “a nuisance in the community”. But the death of a relative who was kidnapped and thrown off a roof shocked him into changing his ways.

He started taking part in football sessions on the estate led by Kickz, one of Arsenal Football Club’s social inclusion programmes. A coach asked Hammis if he wanted to go on a first aid course and, when he failed to turn up, asked again. Hammis went along “to get [the coach] off my back”. However, his led him to other training and qualifications via Arsenal in the Community’s Future Jobs Fund, a govern-

ment-funded employability scheme. Now 24, he has become a positive role model, leading Kickz sessions, talking to teenagers about the pitfalls of gang and drug cultures, and mentoring young people from the estates as they go through courses that offer them the chance of better lives.

“Yes, I have leadership skills, but where I had an influence on people before it was in a negative way,” he says. “Now young men in the area where I grew up are looking at me and saying: ‘He’s doing something positive. If he can do it, so can I.’”

“They’re the next ones in line. If I give them the right words of wisdom and they follow the path I’m on now, they will be the leaders when I move on, and it should break the cycle of violence.”

Gaining leadership experience can be challenging for young people, even when their circumstances are not so extreme.

Ashok Regmi, director of social innovation at the International Youth Foundation (IYF), says the opening up of societies and the advance of tech-

nology and social media in recent years have given young people unprecedented opportunities to make their voices heard and find ways to make change happen fast.

But the choice to go further in the field often comes after they have been involved in community activism or social enterprise for 12 to 18 months and have to decide whether to move to the next level or hand over to someone else.

This is where leadership training, funding and advocacy opportunities offered by IYF’s YouthActionNet programme can be useful.

“They need to become reflective leaders by learning from their failures,” says Mr Regmi. “They also need skills in building a business, differentiating themselves in a crowded marketplace, and advocating their cause, which is about showing the numbers and telling the stories.”

YouthActionNet, which has a range of partners including Starbucks and Laureate International Universities, has supported 600 social entrepreneurs and projects, and established

programmes in 10 countries, he says. It aims to nurture up to 1,700 entrepreneurs in 24 countries by 2015.

The leadership programmes combine peer-to-peer learning with mentoring by experienced adults. “We start with the assumption that the knowledge is with the young people,” he says.

One beneficiary is Kumari Middleton, 26, who co-founded Mayibuye, a social enterprise empowering vulnerable young people in Australia, Cambodia and South Africa through performing arts. She applied to Young Social Pioneers, a YouthActionNet scheme run by the Foundation for Young Australians, which helps

develop 14 change-making ventures a year.

“Things were growing fast and I didn’t have the skills to keep up,” Ms Middleton says. “You do workshops on things such as media training, sponsorship and grants. You get linked up with mentors who have experience doing these things.”

Jan Owen, chief executive of the Foundation for Young Australians, says leadership is becoming more complex. Influence rather than command and control is the path for the future. She says: “The young people I see in – or seeking – leadership positions are hungry for new ways of working with others. They want to get their hands dirty and to immerse themselves fully. They are not afraid to learn and grab every opportunity to do so.”

Founding a business requires confidence, which can be a challenge for young people, says Andrew Devenport, chief executive of Youth Business International (YBI), which works with governments, companies and multilateral agencies to support aspir-

ing entrepreneurs aged 18-35. “To be a successful entrepreneur, you need to be a leader in some form or another,” Mr Davenport says. “It’s about taking risks, investing capital, hiring staff and managing people. We’re looking to develop these skills and the confidence to make the right judgments.”

Amena Begum, founder of Amir Tailors and Boutique in Bangladesh, faced huge obstacles, having entered an arranged marriage at 13 and been forced to leave school at 15. When her husband became terminally ill, she took up sewing to provide for her children.

With a small loan and a business mentor from Bangladesh Youth Enterprise and Helpcentre, a YBI member, she has grown her cottage enterprise into a business employing eight people and supplying big retailers.

Ms Begum also runs a training centre to share her skills and mentor other vulnerable young women. “I encourage these women to learn work so that they can help themselves if they ever face a situation where they have no one by their side,” she says.



Kumari Middleton: 'I didn't have the skills to keep up... you get linked up with mentors who have experience doing these things'

# Disenfranchised youth has positive role to play in improving cities

### Urban living

The challenge is to harness the energy of youth, writes Sarah Murray

The London riots of 2011 highlighted the potential for rebellious unemployed inner-city young people to cause unrest.

However, some argue that instead of seeing youth as a problem to fix, the challenge is to find ways of harnessing their energies so that they can play a role in improving urban life for themselves and others.

“So many older people regard young people as the problem rather than seeing them as part of the solution,” says Sir Tony Hawkhead, chief executive of Groundwork, the UK regeneration charity. “The question is, how do you give young people the tools to be part of the solution?”

With more than half the

planet’s population now living in cities and roughly half that population under the age of 25, young people make up a large proportion of the world’s urban residents.

For many of these citizens, life is deteriorating as rapid urbanisation, environmental degradation and crime make cities unhealthy, dangerous places.

The expansion of the world’s mega-slums means millions of young people in developing countries are growing up exposed to polluted air, toxic waste and lacking access to clean water or sanitation.

Meanwhile, in industrialised countries, young people in cities often feel disenfranchised and ignored,

particularly as cash-strapped governments are cutting back on many of their youth support programmes.

Yet, when consulted on how they would like to see

‘You can give young people control over planning and you can make some real impact’

their cities develop, young people are eager to become involved in everything, from urban design to park clean-up projects.

A first step is to help them understand how their

neighbourhoods have evolved, says Anne Whiston Spirn, professor of landscape architecture and planning at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Prof Whiston Spirn taught a programme in which MIT students worked with an urban middle school on the redesign of the surrounding area.

As part of the programme in Mill Creek, one of Philadelphia’s poorest districts, the children studied original documents and photographs of the area, some dating back to the 17th century.

The results were startling. At the beginning of the course, only one of the 36 schoolchildren said they wanted to go to college and, when questioned by the MIT students about the potential for their neighbourhood to change, they were extremely pessimistic.

“By the end of the semester, all but one of the children said they wanted to go to college and they’d completely transformed their belief that change could happen,” explains Prof Whiston Spirn.

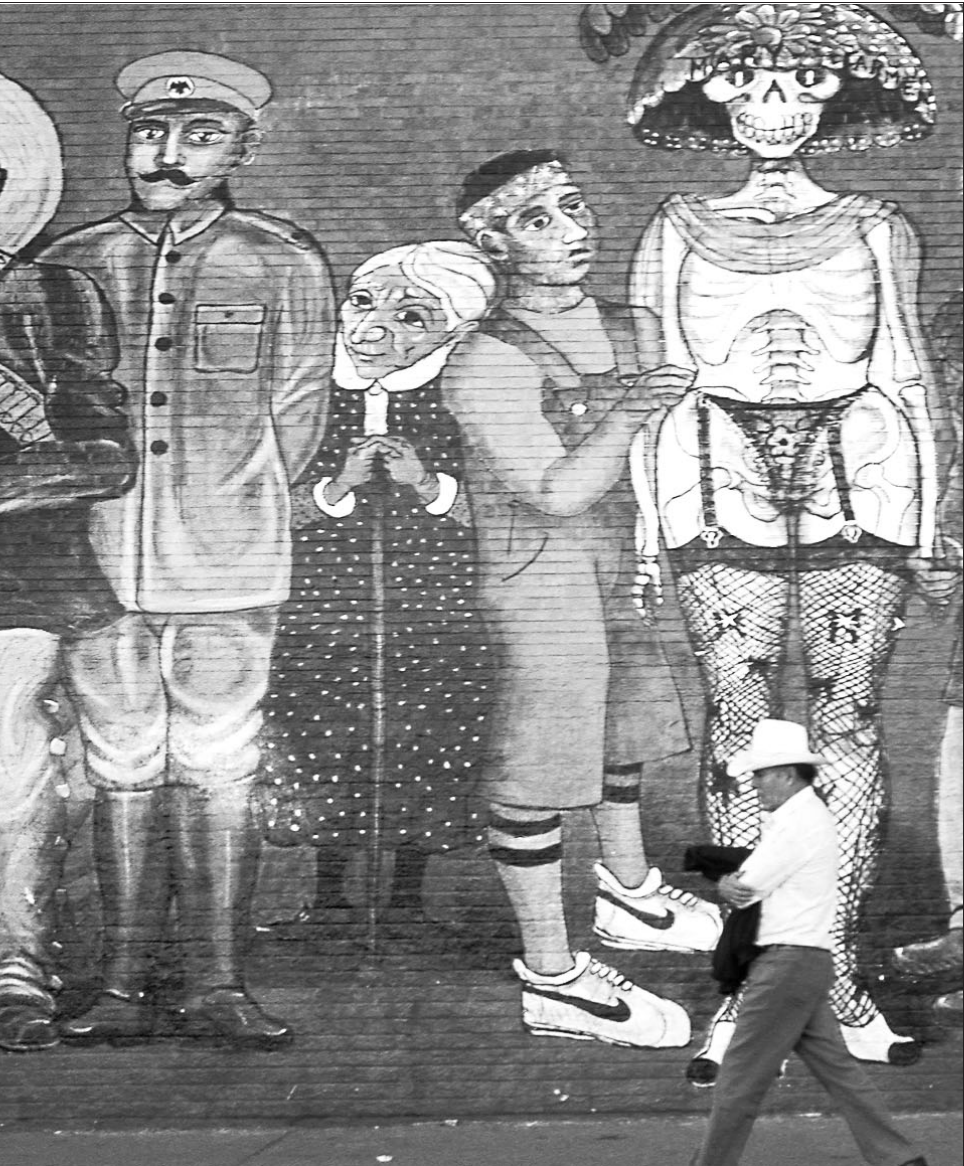
The reason, she says, is that before getting to know the history of their community, the children assumed it had always been that way.

“They were living in an eternal present, so they had no belief in change,” she says.

During the course, they learnt about the political and economic forces – as well as individual and group actions – that had shaped the neighbourhood over the years.

“From there they could imagine change of the future,” says Prof Whiston Spirn.

Once they believe it is possible to play a role in bringing about change,



Street corner society: a wall mural protest in Mexico's Ciudad Juárez

Alamy

young people can become extremely active in cities, says Peter Shiras, executive vice-president of business development at the International Youth Foundation.

He cites the youth-led initiatives taking place in Ciudad Juárez, the Mexican border city.

“This is a city that’s devastated by drug-related violence,” says Mr Shiras. “And yet young people are organising sports events and arts programmes and turning graffiti into murals.”

When visiting Ciudad Juárez recently, Mr Shiras learnt that the young people involved in these initiatives felt a responsibility to take action. “They told me:

‘We can’t just let the drug lords take over the city’.”

However, governments, non-profit groups and other organisations can do much to foster action on the part of urban young people.

Sir Tony points to Groundwork’s Young People Friendly Neighbourhoods project, which aims to give people aged 11-19 an opportunity to design and run youth services in their communities, and develop green space projects.

He says such projects do more than engage youngsters in positively shaping their neighbourhoods. “You can give young people a lot of control over planning and you can make some real impact, not just by

bringing contractors in to do the work, but by getting volunteers to do both the immediate work and the long-term maintenance.”

Such projects help develop skills – both technical and managerial – and build self-esteem, since they can see the results quickly.

Critically, urban renewal initiatives also help alter perceptions of young people by others in the community.

“You get older people walking past and seeing young people volunteering, clearing the paths and weeding,” says Sir Tony. “And all of a sudden their attitudes towards young people begin to shift.”

# Chilean protesters provide a salutary lesson to the region

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of all youth out of a job and out of the education system.

Unemployment rates for young women are substantially higher, as are the rates for young people of African descent, principally in Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru and Uruguay.

In a region in which 40 per cent of the population is under 30, governments and private entities are struggling to build on economic advances and improve the lots of the *ni-ni* generation.

Public policies targeting poverty, inequality and the region’s sprawling informal sectors include cash transfer schemes for those living in extreme poverty, job creation, tax, education and social security reforms.

Mr Dema says Brazil has done better than most of its neighbours at strengthening school-to-work transitions and supporting the unemployed.

Chile, in the wake of the student protests, has

increased scholarships, lowered interest rates on student loans from 6 per cent to 2 per cent and offered subsidies to young workers on low wages. Colombia is planning 250,000 new training places for unemployed youth.

Jurgen Weller, a senior economist at the UN Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC) and the Caribbean in Santiago, says moves to boost technical education are crucial to building on improvements in access.

“Typically, young people who finish secondary school aspire to university and, if they don’t make it, they feel like losers. There is a lack

of technical courses providing a good, faster, intermediate qualification,” he says.

ECLAC is cautiously forecasting 3.7 per cent economic growth across the region this year, depending on how the European and North American economies hold up.

Over the past decade, poverty has fallen from 50 per cent to 30 per cent and inequality has steadily declined.

But Mr Weller points out that education reforms are structural and long-term, and often fraught with tensions between students, teachers and other parties.

“Many of the countries in South America have received a big boost from natural resources demand from Asia, above all China. Their economies have grown, and generated employment and dynamism,” says Mr Weller.

“But it’s not simply a matter of resources. There are many actors that have to agree [on reforms such as education]. There has to be a social pact for change.”

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# Investing in Young People

## Improved employment prospects crucial for stability

**African focus**  
Disillusionment is seen as a 'recipe for disaster', writes **Simon Mundy**

Widespread unemployment and poverty among the young were cited by many as causes of the Arab uprisings of 2011. Sub-Saharan Africa, the world's most youthful region, has similar problems, yet did not experience a pan-regional youth-led rebellion. But, it has been argued, the continent's leaders must prioritise improving young people's prospects to avoid unrest. Some see January's large-

scale protests in Nigeria as a sign of things to come for the continent. While the immediate trigger for the unrest was the government's planned removal of an expensive fuel subsidy, the high youth unemployment was a deeper contributing factor in a country where 60 per cent of the population is aged under 30. The growing disillusionment among Africa's youth is a "recipe for disaster", says Kyateka Mondo, a commissioner for youth and children in Uganda's ministry of gender, labour and social development. "When I was a young man, Uganda had only one university," he says. "Now we have 30, and all of these are churning out young people who join the market place every year. But the

economy is not growing in tandem with the rate at which young people are emerging from universities." Uganda was wracked by violent protests last year against a government that is "trying its level best, but is overwhelmed by the numbers of young people" in one of the world's fastest-growing populations, Mr Mondo says. The state sees boosting youth employment as a priority, and is investing heavily in projects such as entrepreneurship courses, a digital labour market information system, and "sheltered, serviced workplaces" for young artisans. The need to create opportunities for young people is a common topic at summits of African governments. In

2006, the African Union adopted the African Youth Charter, a legally binding document that commits governments to implement programmes to help the young, and provide "equal access to all levels of high-quality education". But young people across the continent are cynical. "They put down solutions, come up with policies," says Diana Mwangi, 25, a Kenyan IT instructor. "But none of the money gets to the youth because of corruption. It ends up in politicians' pockets." Ms Mwangi estimates that only 10 of her 50 primary school classmates from Nairobi's sprawling Kibera slums are now employed. Despite her lack of family wealth or connections, she spent hours in

her school library to win a student loan, available only to the most accomplished students. This allowed her to study for a degree at the University of Nairobi. Like most of her fellow 'None of the money gets to the youth, it ends up in politicians' pockets' students, Ms Mwangi spent months after her graduation searching for work. Thanks partly to new fibre optic broadband links, Kenya is enjoying a boom in telecoms and technology, but these industries are closed to the majority of

young Kenyans who, like Ms Mwangi, receive little training in IT at school or university. Her route into employment was opened by African Centre for Women, Information and Communications Technology (ACWICT), a non-governmental organisation (NGO) that provides IT training to women from underprivileged backgrounds. NGOs have an important role to play in unlocking the potential of African youth, says Ciré Kane, director of Synapse Center, a Senegalese organisation that helps young people find work or establish businesses. While Mr Kane speaks with pride of the 5,600 young people his organisation has helped in the past nine years, he says the

government must do more to cut the bureaucracy that makes it difficult for many gifted young entrepreneurs to turn bright ideas into businesses. The private sector must also remedy the lack of funding that hampers creation of small businesses. Even in South Africa, the region's most advanced economy, more than half of young people are out of work, a problem that is a key factor behind the country's high crime rate. The support of disaffected young people has boosted the influence of Julius Malema, the suspended leader of the ruling African National Congress's youth wing, who has frightened investors by calling for nationalisation of the mines.

But the country is home to a thriving initiative that aims to nurture talent that will aid long-term sustainable development. Each year, the African Leadership Academy, founded in 2008, brings dozens of young people from across Africa for 24 months of study at its Johannesburg campus, from where most of them achieve full scholarships to study in the US. Fred Swaniker, 34, the academy's Ghanaian founder, wants it to train "6,000 leaders over a 50-year period". He says: "In Africa, where you don't have strong institutions, one good leader can have a tremendous impact on society, but similarly, on the downside, one bad leader can destroy society."

## A helping hand can get people volunteering

**Non-profit sector**  
There is a range of obstacles deterring youngsters, says **Sarah Murray**

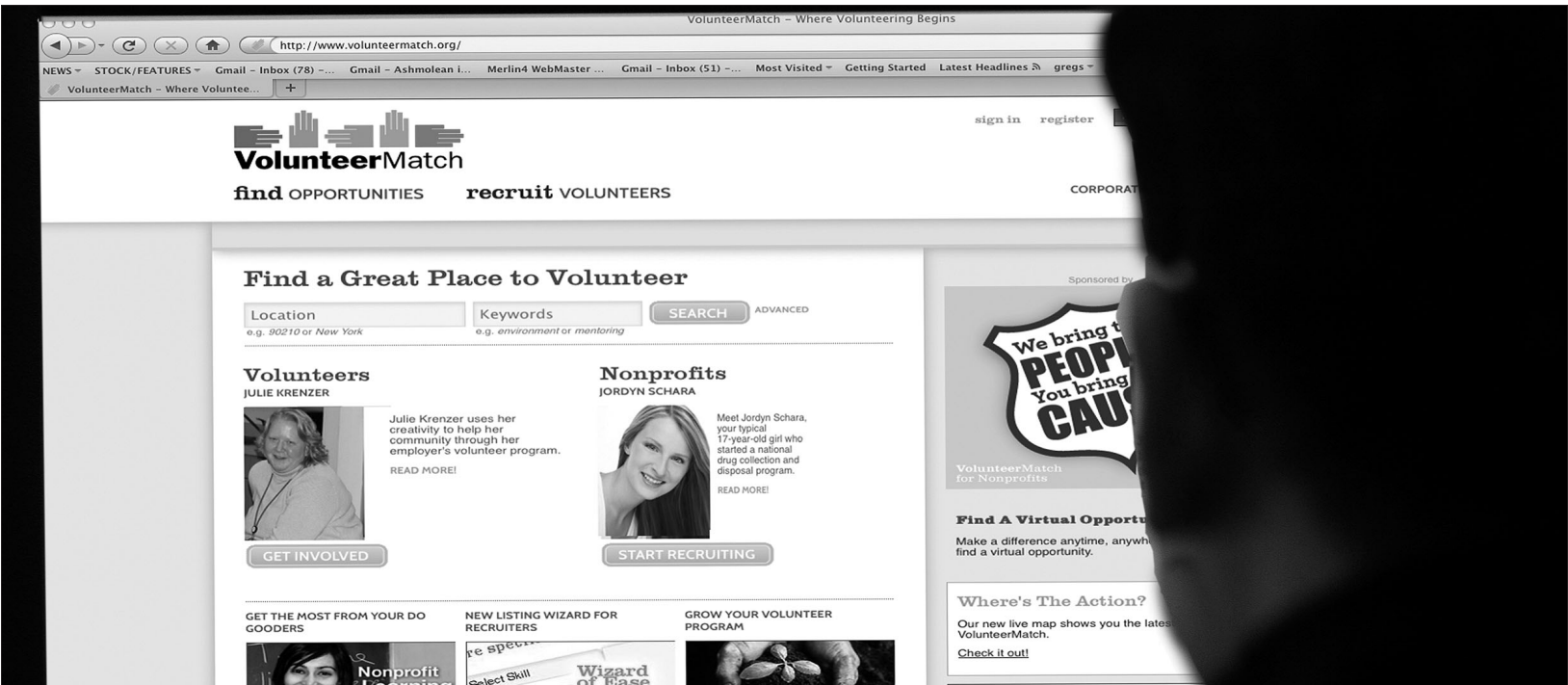
Ori Wachtel was studying law at Tel Aviv university when he first realised few students took up voluntary work because they found it hard to find opportunities and fit community service into their schedule. As a result, he founded Hevra Tova (which translates as "good society"), an online calendar of volunteer activities. Hevra Tova, which receives support from the United Jewish Appeal-Federation of New York, is one of many organisations helping young people who would like to do more to make a difference. "Young people need a tool to understand the relevant volunteer opportunities in their area and time frame," says Mr Wachtel. Visitors to the Hevra Tova website can browse through the calendar of activities in their area – many requiring no more than a couple of hours commitment – to see if anything that interests them is taking place in their free time. "It's a new solution for an old problem," says Mr Wachtel. Members of the so-called millennial generation

(born after 1980, also known as generation Y), often have a strong desire to help solve big global challenges. "Millennials are uniquely positioned to bring their characteristics to bear on solving some of the greatest problems society faces," says Maya Enista Smith, chief executive of Mobilize.org, which works to empower young people to help solve social problems. And once they have had a taste of volunteering, they often return for more. "Leisure volunteering", which usually begins as a discrete one-off activity, ends up in many cases as

'Organisations should be more aware of the financial hardship of participating'

the gateway to regular volunteering," says Mr Wachtel. Technology is certainly a powerful tool, helping match young volunteers with appropriate activities. In the US, organisations such as VolunteerMatch and the Corporation for National and Community Service, a federal agency, provide online search functions that help people find suitable placements, as do organisations such as Do-it in the UK. Yet identifying a project

or organisation is just the start. Young people often need training and mentoring in how to make the most of their time as volunteers. In Vietnam, for example, Solidarités Jeunesses, an international youth non-governmental organisation, arranges training activities for volunteers as well as work camps and projects. The experience acquired on volunteering projects provide young people with skills that prove valuable when they enter the workforce, both improving their chances of getting a job and making it easier for them to succeed in the working environment. Volunteering not only helps young people learn to do everything, from running a soup kitchen to building a wall; it also gives them exposure to different sectors and communities, and helps them start to interact with adults in a way that is different from relationships with parents or teachers. However, young people often face barriers to taking action. "There are all kinds of studies showing that the vast majority of young people say they want to make a difference. Yet volunteer rates are only one in four," says Nancy Lublin, chief executive of DoSomething.org, a US non-profit organisation that helps young people to contribute to causes they care about. "It's not that those kids



NGOs need you: technology is increasingly becoming a powerful tool that is helping to match young volunteers with appropriate activities

are lying – it's that there isn't stuff for them to do." Among these problems, she says, is the fact that young people do not have money to donate to causes. Also, their time is limited, and something as simple as lack of access to transport can prevent them from assisting with projects taking place outside their area. In some cases, an organisation's insurance coverage means it cannot accept volunteers under a certain age. Moreover, young people from poorer backgrounds often cannot afford to volunteer. "Organisations should be more aware of the financial hardship participating in programmes puts on people," says Ms Enista Smith. She also says organisations that offer only unpaid internships are raising barriers that prevent many young people participating in social or environmental projects. "One thing that would ensure more young people can participate in civic and political spheres would be paid internships," she says. Ms Lublin believes that

these kinds of barriers are not being addressed by many non-profit organisations. "Most organisations haven't figured out how to use young people," she says. "And they're this great untapped resource."

For the non-profit sector, failing to tap into the energies of the younger generation means they are also missing out on an opportunity to spread the word about their causes, since young people often treat

activities as social events, documenting them on Twitter or uploading photographs to blogs and Facebook pages. "They're not just volunteer labour. They're a great marketing mechanism, because you don't just get their time – you also get their friends," says Ms Lublin. "And because they do everything with friends, you get even more positive ideas and creativity."

### Policy change Youth has the potential to help economies improve their GDP

As the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) nears the launch of a reshaped youth development policy, its sights are set on a rich prize: the potential for countries with a youth bulge – those where a large share of the population is comprised of children and young adults – to increase their domestic economies' gross domestic product. USAID's Youth In Development policy, which is due to be launched formally in the next few weeks, is one of the few comprehensive efforts to be focused on young people and global development to have been launched by a large bilateral donor institution. It is an area long-neglected by the sector, says Rajiv Shah, USAID administrator. "Most big development organisations have not traditionally focused effectively on youth," he says. "Our whole community is now catching up." Given the rapidly increasing potential of mobile technology and social networking to mobilise young people, Mr Shah argues that it is now critical to engage them in promoting economic growth and social stability. "With millions more young people connected to Facebook, the internet and systems where they feel empowered, you can either get instability and the challenges that come with it – or you can deploy that energy more effectively in the economy and reap a significant demographic dividend," he says. That dividend could be an important one for developing countries. In research conducted with the World Bank and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, USAID found that in east and south-east Asia and Latin America, where young people have been successfully integrated into the economy, many of the nations in those regions gained almost 2 per cent a

year in GDP growth. "If you connect those people to your economy and turn them into sources of growth, that's an incredible driver of change," says Mr Shah. "And that's exactly what we want to see in sub-Saharan Africa, north Africa and the Middle East to make economies more vibrant, offer people more opportunities and eliminate the scourges that come with high levels of poverty and lack of education." The Youth In Development policy has been designed not only to include young people in every aspect of the agency's work but also to create more focused youth programming than in the past, in areas ranging from health



**Rajiv Shah: 'Young people are important actors, partners and leaders in shaping their communities and economies'**

and employability to human rights and civic engagement. Specific areas of focus include providing young people with economic opportunities, increasing their potential to have a voice in civil society and investing in science and technology so that they can become innovators and entrepreneurs. USAID has also set itself concrete goals, such as providing 100m young people with the literacy skills that will enable them to join the workforce. "Our youth policy is going be about how to do a better job of capturing the opportunities," says Mr Shah. While the agency has long run youth-focused programmes, Mr Shah explains that the Youth In Development policy will differ from previous efforts

in the setting of targets and in harnessing technology to roll out initiatives on a vast scale. "Doing small projects or pilot programmes here or there would not effectively capture the demographic opportunity that exists," he says. Meanwhile, USAID's policy will place an emphasis on forming partnerships with other organisations and with the private sector, particularly technology companies. The agency sees technology as a critical development tool, whether in using mobile phones to give young people access to the banking system or in designing schemes that allow them to use their mobile phones to create a résumé and search jobs databases. Technology is also a powerful way of connecting young people who want to take action, as seen during the recent political turmoil in north Africa and the Middle East. "We want to engage with Facebook, Google and Twitter, which can help reach not just thousands but millions of people and engage them in problem-solving," says Mr Shah. In fact, the potential for young people to be problem-solvers rather than passive recipients of aid is a critical element of USAID's objectives. "Across the board, we see that as a major part of the engagement strategy," says Mr Shah. This is also the reason USAID is calling the policy "Youth In Development" (rather than, say, Youth and Development). Mr Shah says: "It recognises explicitly that young people are important actors, partners and leaders in shaping their communities and economies. "We want to be at the cutting edge of getting development institutions to be more focused on youth."

**Sarah Murray**

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# Investing in Young People



Chilean winter: Colombian students protest in support of their peers in Chile, who took part in widespread protests for better education and jobs in 2011

# Workplace skills have become the main focus for students

**Universities' role**  
Even those with degrees find they need to do more to get a job, reports **Stephanie Gray**

Many young people enter labour markets each year armed with little education to equip them for work. Even for those leaving university, a lack of demand means many have little hope of using their hard-earned knowledge in a proper job.

The International Labour Organization has warned of "a scarred generation of young workers facing a dangerous mix of high unemployment, increased inactivity and precarious work". In Egypt, where the majority of the 80m population lives in poverty, 1m young people join the labour force every year.

Most will be underemployed in the vast informal sector or in the country's enormous and lumbering bureaucracy.

But the lucky ones with a tertiary education and inspired by the possibility of a new dawn, are aiming higher. "Egyptian youths are trying to find jobs that give them social mobility," says Ayman Ismail, professor of entrepreneurship at the American University in Cairo.

Even before the revolution, when investment lev-

els were high, graduates were taking four or five years to find their first job, he says.

Prof Ismail is on the board of Nahdet El Mahrousa, a development group that operates the Career & Entrepreneurship Development Office at Cairo University.

The organisation, like many others, has introduced a volunteering programme, experience having shown that work in the community provides graduates with the skills they need in a real job.

"Volunteers have a certain work ethic," says Prof Ismail. "They're self-motivated. They are good people to have in your company."

In Chile, meanwhile, where students have been protesting for months over the poor state of public universities, a system is being put in place at Santiago's School of Business and Economics which it is hoped will be copied elsewhere.

Jorge Marshall Rivera, the dean, says that, with 50 per cent of young people having secured degrees, they have had to find a way of differentiating themselves and have driven a system whereby, in their final year, instead of producing a thesis, they come up with a business idea, which they must implement and demonstrate.

"This is has been driven by student demand, not by the universities," he says. "Students have been way out ahead of us."

In the US, outside the Ivy League institutions with

their strong social networks, graduation rates are lamentable, says Lorlene Hoyt, director of programmes and research at the Talloires Network, an international association committed to strengthening the responsibilities of higher education, at Tufts University, Boston.

"Half our colleges are community colleges and only one in three students stays to the end of the course," she says.

She adds that the Occupy Wall Street protest is starting to focus government attention on social disparities, but believes the UK is quicker and more flexible in adjusting to a new world order.

Driven by increased tuition fees, many British institutions – not so long ago more interested in attracting the requisite number of students than in what happens to them when they leave – have felt compelled to emphasise employment opportunities.

London Metropolitan University is no stranger to the need to ensure its graduates gain employment, given its beginnings in 1848 as a workingmen's college.

Having streamlined its offering last year, it is intro-

ducing a course in social media, capitalising on its position at the heart of London's so-called "tech corridor", from film companies in Soho to the explosion of digital, design and other new media businesses around Hoxton, and concentrating on Britain's reputation for creative brands.

"Media and communications have seen huge growth – more than 150 per cent in the past 20 years," says Chris Lane at the university's department of applied social sciences. "We're world leaders in brands and all the innovation is here," he says.

Ben Harris, director at New Brand Vision, a website agency and software developer, says his highly qualified team has been largely recruited from London Met.

His approaches to competing universities have fallen on deaf ears. "No one was interested," he says. "But we found the right person at London Met and they started to feed us their best candidates."

Eighty-three per cent of the university's graduates find employment within six months of leaving and their starting salaries are £5,000 above the average.

At the other end of the scale, London's elite Imperial College has a long history of supplying industry with science graduates.

Nigel Bell, professor of environmental pollution and director of careers and alumni, says the college's careers and alumni system has huge benefits. "I know

all the students I have taught here since the 1970s," he says. That is invaluable when it comes to securing employment for subsequent generations. "It's not the sort of alumni system where the university only gets in touch with you when it needs money."

Some young people may have had as many as 18 jobs by the time they are 32. So what of the old-fashioned polymaths? And what of the argument in favour of education for education's sake?

"There's no such thing," says David Eade, the newly appointed head of student employment and enterprise at Nottingham Trent University. "Everything has a value. It doesn't all need to be about money."

## EU cash College aims to boost start-ups and job hopes

It is not just learning and teaching that is going on at Hull College Group, there is moneymaking too.

The Yorkshire-based further education college, which is located in one of the UK's most deprived cities, is part of Net315, a project that aims to create 315 businesses and 515 jobs by September 2013 by helping its students found start-ups.

Funded with £5.6m from the European Union, cash that has been matched locally, Hull's target is to provide 8 per cent of the total. It is working with 60 students and has so far created 26 businesses and 43 jobs in the area.

Elaine McMahon, college chief executive and principal of HCG, which has 30,000 students, many of them mature, says it is successful because staff and students value enterprise.

"We look for enterprise as a core theme when we recruit staff," she says. "Some are still running their own businesses. Net315 works with students who are self-starters."

She says the take-up in Hull was greater than in Harrogate, a richer town to the north-west. "Hull has more need. People are hungrier," she says. The college also has a campus in nearby Goole.

Tad Richert, 24, and Vincent Wilkinson, 32, had considered starting a shop to fix computers and sell

accessories and parts as they entered the final year of computing degrees. But a conversation with Alastair Brooks, who runs enterprise programmes at the college, led them to be more ambitious.

"He thought it might be better to supply these services on a national and then global scale. We hadn't thought of that," says Mr Richert. The pair had spotted a gap in the market to recover data for individuals from their computers, smartphones

dance studio.

The scheme offers help from established companies – such as Baker Tilley, the accountancy firm, and British Land, the property developer that runs the St Stephen's shopping centre in the city – who offer tips on marketing, market testing, accounting and the law.

Tom Morrison, partner at Rollits, a law firm that helps students set up businesses, says it is important to give even younger students hands-on experience of the world of work.

"It is about getting them work-ready, so they can operate as a team, turn up on time, and so on."

There are signs that a range of measures is beginning to improve opportunities for young people in Hull, which was hit by the sudden decline of the fishing industry in the 1970s.

The government is investing £465m to rebuild every school in the city and the proportion of 16-18s not in employment, education or training has fallen from an estimated 14.1 per cent in 2006 to an estimated 10 per cent in 2010.

The college's ambitions do not end here. It will soon open a studio school for 14-19-year-olds that will focus on employability skills and it is also partnering with primary schools to encourage enterprise.

Ms McMahon says the college is now working with local businesspeople to create an apprentice entrepreneur qualification.

"Helping students find – or create – a job is as important as the education itself," she says.

'Helping students find – or create – a job is as important as the education itself'

and other digital devices when they broke down.

"We had help with marketing, the legal work and money. We were offered an office here at the college, but we wanted somewhere bigger," says Mr Richert. Datawise Recovery was set up in August and is breaking even.

Mr Wilkinson says: "Without Net 315, it would have taken us a lot longer. We would not have had anyone to talk to."

It also helps to network with the other young entrepreneurs among the students, he adds. Other businesses that have been set up include a digital marketing agency and a



**Andrew Bounds**  
High-tech start: Datawise founders Vincent Wilkinson, left, and Tad Richert

# Daily struggle increases anxiety

**Chinese viewpoint**  
The dreams may be simple but the way is difficult, says **Kathrin Hille**

Ni Lu takes things one step at a time. "It's most realistic to set yourself targets for the next three or five years – longer periods of time you can't control," the Shanghai girl says.

Ms Ni's short-to-medium term goals include working less, travelling a lot; finding a man to marry and having a baby.

With her ambitious agenda, the 24-year-old office worker at Shanda, an internet company, is an emblem of China's young generation. Markedly different from their parents and grandparents, under-30s in the world's most populous nation have grown up in a relatively stable society and experienced increasing, if modest, prosperity, so they have certain expectations.

"These people have what I call middle class anxiety," says Li Chunling, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Science in Beijing. "They all strive for a decent standard of living which makes other people respect them."

It is a familiar picture. As continuously growing demand makes China the world's largest market for

everything from mobile phones to cars, and as the country develops a voracious appetite for luxury goods, the plans and expectations of young people also seem increasingly to resemble those of their western peers: and, it seems, they share the same status symbols and desires.

But the path to realising these seemingly simple dreams in China is very different from what it might be in Europe or America.

China's society and economy are changing rapidly. The countryside is urbanising at a dizzying speed, the job market is being transformed overnight, and the media and entertainment landscape is undergoing sweeping changes.

While these conditions offer many opportunities to strike it rich, they also create huge hurdles for young people to attain their desired state of a middle class goal.

"As a result, they feel a lot of pressure," explains Mr Li.

To be sure, the lives of the young can differ vastly, depending on whether they were born in a big city or in the countryside and whether they come from an affluent or well-connected family or a simple peasant household.

Mr Li says: "It is broadly felt that one's family background is an increasingly important factor in one's future, that social mobility

is somewhat decreasing in China."

But what young people across all social groups share is the expectation of a good life and the sobering realisation that getting there can require a rather uncomfortable struggle, if it does not turn out to be impossible altogether.

"For young people in the cities, a home is probably the biggest issue," says Wang Xiaodong, a researcher at the China Youth Research Centre. "Property prices are too high," he says.

For young men and women who grew up in a



**Wang Xiaodong: housing is the biggest issue for the young**

small town or village, making a fresh start often seems easy.

Especially in the poorest rural regions, the young increasingly leave school early to go to the more developed coastal regions to work there.

"At the beginning, I was dazzled that I'd have my own cash every month," says Zhuo Hong, a 25-year-old from Sichuan, one of China's most populous western provinces. He left his rural home at 15 to work in a factory in Dongguan, an export manufac-

turing hub close to Hong Kong.

But Mr Zhuo now finds it hard to get by. He has been saving his wages for marriage, but he is no longer sure he wants to go back to the village where all the young people have left, where the roads are muddy and where there is no work.

Staying in Dongguan would be difficult too, because he does not earn enough to buy a flat there. "But I'm too old to start again, so maybe I made the wrong decision 10 years ago," he says.

Those younger than him who leave the countryside now often do not wish to work in a factory. "They can't eat bitterness," says Mr Zhuo, using a common expression for enduring hardship.

Many younger migrant workers try to find jobs in the service industries instead of construction and factories.

Although young people in cities have more options, they often share the same sense of confusion. "I don't know in what direction the future will take me, I haven't thought about that thoroughly," says Ms Ni.

She has taken up religion, something unthinkable in Maoist China a few decades ago. Once a month, she visits the Jing'an Temple in Shanghai to "have a chat with the Buddha. I think it's a good thing when people have some faith."



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