

SENEGAL: STRATEGIES TO INTEGRATE YOUTH INTO THE LABOR MARKET

*Dr. Mbaye Diene, Center for Social and Economic Research (CRES) Dakar, Senegal**

Youth unemployment is a major quandary for Senegal; it inhibits the nation's economic well-being and is certainly an issue for upcoming elections in 2012. Recently, the extension of the retirement age coupled with a public sector hiring freeze has made it even more difficult to find jobs. Older employees remain in the labor market while opportunities for job creation are limited. In response, young people have turned to the informal sector to survive. This is evident in the capital where more than 43.9 percent of workers from age 15–24 work in the informal sector. Others resort to illegal migration, typically to Europe, that regularly results in death at sea or deportation. Crime has also become an alternative for troubled unemployed youth, particularly in drug trafficking, theft and drug-use.

In response to the bleak labor market, the government of Senegal has developed strategies to curb youth unemployment. The Accelerated Growth Strategy has defined a development plan for key sectors to boost youth employment and economic growth. The sectors with high potential for youth employment are agriculture, fisheries, textiles, information and communication technology, and tourism. Additionally, the 2010–2015 New National Employment Policy supports the informal sector and aspires to create 700,000 new jobs during the period.

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The government has also designed support specifically for youth projects within the frameworks of various programs and agencies. Since 2006, Senegal has developed a national action plan for youth employment. This plan has established an online management information system to assist youth in their search for job opportunities. The National Fund for Youth Employment and the National Agency for Youth Employment are two additional government organizations dedicated to integrating young people into the labor market and supporting youth-led business projects. These organizations are currently functioning and are broadly considered effective tools for both educated and non-educated young people.



* Mbaye Diene is a Researcher at the Center for Social and Economic Research in Senegal (CRES). More information about CRES is available at www.cres-sn.org or +221 33-864-77-57.

The government's commitment to support young people is an unprecedented, positive experience, but challenges remain. Many youth do not possess the skills for employment and young entrepreneurs often face challenges of limited resources and business networks. These initiatives also have weak donor support; typically their resources come only from government funds. Senegalese youth must receive help to overcome the specific employment problems stemming from a lack of experience and a lack of relationships within the business community. Expanding access to education for previously excluded youth populations will increase human capital levels, while informing young people of opportunities will build their pool of resources. The Senegalese government should support the private sector in the development of technical and professional training programs, while donors should support the establishment of statistical surveys of the labor market. To develop entrepreneurship skills, donors and governments must facilitate access to financial services, business management training, and consultative support for start-up businesses. These efforts to integrate youth into the labor market should be reinforced and expanded to accelerate growth in Senegal over the next decade.

