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A Study on Female Youth Unemployment in Sri Lanka: Special Reference to Matale District

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Abstract

Youths are defined as those between the ages of 15 and 24, playing a decisive and crucial role in a country's society and economy, whether developed or developing. However, in recent years, a significant amount of youth unemployment has emerged as a critical issue that has long affected both emerging and wealthy nations. Literature reveals that it has been a long time since more than 25% of young people are unemployed due to a skill gap. The objective of the study was to determine the likelihood that young people in Sri Lanka would be employed or unemployed based on a number of key factors affecting employability. Binary logistic regression was applied through SPSS version 22.0 to analyze the collected data from 200 individuals by convenience sampling using a questionnaire. Following a review of the related literature, the researchers have identified five independent factors - educational qualifications, professional qualifications, training and experience, English proficiency, and basic IT skills - that may contribute to unemployment.

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Results show that youth unemployment in Sri Lanka exhibited a significant link with educational attainment, professional qualifications, training and experience, English proficiency, basic IT skills, and married status, and all of these variables showed a negative correlation with youth unemployment. While decreasing those factors will raise the likelihood of unemployment, increasing those factors will decrease the likelihood. It is important to enhance young people's employment and training opportunities, build career guidance centers, increase awareness campaigns, and encourage an entrepreneurial attitude to fill the gap between Sri Lanka's demand for youth labor and supply of youth labor.

Keywords: Female youth, Sri Lanka, Skill mismatch, Youth unemployment,

Introduction

Youth is undeniably among a country's most important formidable force and resources to boost its social-economic development. In addition to being large in number, the youth are energetic and courageous and poses new ideas that can make changes to the social-economic development if they are well-coordinated and involved in the country's economic activities. Regardless of such importance, youth have been faced with many challenges, one of them being the unemployment problem. According to the Department of Census and Statistics - Sri Lanka, the youth unemployment rate in Sri Lanka was 23.80 percent in the fourth quarter of 2021.

The problem of youth unemployment is among the major challenges facing not only developing countries but also developed countries in the world. The problem of youth unemployment is more critical to developing countries due to the high poverty levels requiring all people to work to ensure survival (ILO, 2011).

According to the UN, youth can be defined as people aged 15-24. If we treat our young as significant community assets, we can differentiate our country's competitiveness through imaginative and creative problem-solving and solution-finding (Bamber, 2014). Of the preceding importance, especially to contributing to a country's economy, those youths should represent that country's labor force. According to the International Labor Organization (2020), global labor force participation in 2021 was 60.3%, with 46.8% of women and 73.8% of men, while youth labor force participation was 40.7%.

Not every member of a country's or economy's workforce is employed. Unemployed people are those who are looking for work in the labor force. According to the World Bank, the global labor force was 3.386 billion people in 2020, with 6.47% of the workforce unemployed. When considering the concept of "unemployment," one of the key concepts to address is "young unemployment." Youth unemployment is not described as a separate entity from overall unemployment in this study, but it does differ from total unemployment in terms of age levels.

ILO provides an informative definition of youth unemployment. According to them, "All persons between the age of 15- 24 who are without work and have not worked for even 1 hour in any activity within a week, should be available to start work in next 2 weeks and actively seeking for work during a specified period" can be identified as youth unemployment. A new and extraordinarily large generation of youth has joined a terrible global economic climate to create record levels of youth unemployment worldwide (Coppes & Plimmer, 2013). According to Buheji and Ahmed (2017), Most of the world's youth live in developing countries, where they are frequently unemployed and forced to labor in the informal sector in deplorable conditions. As a result, it is common to find youth living in poverty and unable to afford to be unemployed. According to the International Labor Organization, around 1.3 billion young people are aged 15 to 24 worldwide. Around 497 million young people, or around 41% of the global youth population, are in the workforce. Of these, 429 million are employed, while about 68 million are looking for work and are available to do so. 2020 global youth unemployment is estimated at 13.8%, with 14.0% of males and 13.2% of females (ILO,2021).

According to the ILO and Department of Census and Statistics (DCS) reports, in Sri Lanka, youth unemployment is significantly high, especially among the low-skilled. Ilmudeen (1960) states, "Youth unemployment has been recognized as a serious problem in Sri Lanka since the 1960s, particularly among female young". A labor shortage in various booming industries and a high young unemployment rate are reported in Sri Lanka, according to the youth labor market assessment of Sri Lanka 2019. Moreover, the high youth unemployment rate has reached unprecedented levels. This raises serious questions about the relevance of past policy lessons to the present predicament of the youth labor market; youth unemployment as a percentage of total

unemployment is also high (Labor Force Survey Annual Report, 2019). In the Sri Lankan economic context, as the employed population has improved, the unemployed have become considerably more educated. High unemployment rates among upper-educated young people, especially in the female youth population in the rural sector (Gunathilaka *et al.*, 2010). This would reduce the opportunities a country would lose for one of its most valuable national assets, the youth's spirit and vitality.

When it focuses on female unemployment, there is a higher unemployment rate among women than men overall and youth. In accordance with the Labor Force survey annual reports from 2010 to 2021, overall female unemployment and youth female unemployment can be recognized as below. The overall unemployment rate from a gender perspective has presented below, and by examining that, it can be identified every time women's unemployment has exceeded the unemployment among men.

Table 01: Unemployment rate _Gender wise

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Male	3.5%	2.7%	2.8%	3.2%	3.1%	3.0%	2.9%	2.9%	3.0%	3.3%	4.0%	3.7%
Female	7.7%	7.0%	6.2%	6.6%	6.5%	7.6%	7.0%	6.5%	7.1%	7.4%	8.5%	7.9%
Total	4.9%	4.2%	4.0%	4.4%	4.3%	4.7%	4.4%	4.2%	4.4%	4.8%	5.5%	5.1%

Source: Labor Force Survey annual report, 2010-2021

This shows the female youth unemployment rate in Sri Lanka. As for the overall female unemployment in the country, unemployment among females ages 15-24 is also higher than among men of that age range.

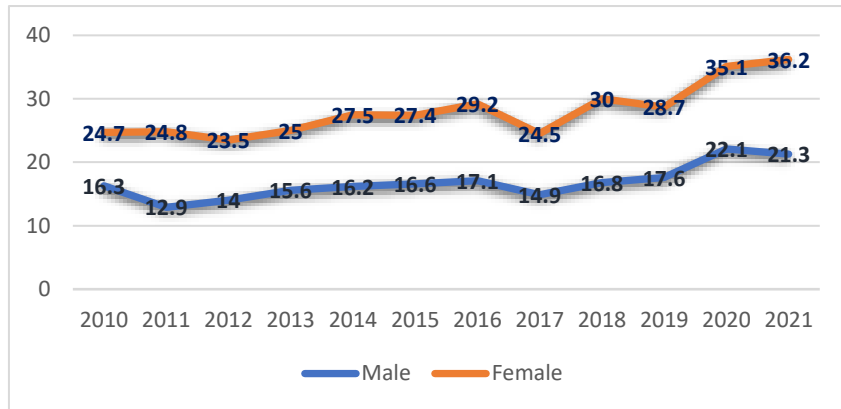


Figure 1: Youth Unemployment by gender (Age 15-24)
(Source: Labor Force Survey annual report 2010-2021)

This issue affects as the reason for choosing the concept of female youth unemployment from overall female unemployment; it can be identified that female youth unemployment is high among all age groups. According to the recent data from the Labor Force Survey annual report 2021, unemployment can be identified as below.

Table 2: Unemployment of 2021 by Age groups

	Age 15-24	Age 25-29	Age 30-39	Age above 40
Male	21.3	7.5	2.2	0.6
Female	36.2	18.3	6.5	1.6

Source: Labor Force Survey annual report, 2021

According to the table 2, the highest employment rate can be identified among age group 15-24. That is the main reason why conduct this study and provide effective recommendations for the problem.

Literature Review

Youth unemployment in the world

Unemployment among young people has become a significant issue in recent years. The form of youth unemployment varies by country, but a few characteristics are strikingly consistent across countries. In both developed and developing countries, youth unemployment remained alarmingly high,

requiring special attention from experts, while youth unemployment is also an issue in Turkey. In Turkey, 17.6% of the labor force aged 15-24 was unemployed in 1988, increasing to 19.7% in 2004 (Taşçı and Tansel, 2005). Palíšková (2014) has mentioned that the economic crisis and subsequent recession have had the most significant impact on young workers (15-24 years). In the European labor market, unemployment is the most significant risk category. The unemployment rate among young people is consistently higher than the average. Broussar and Tekleselassie (2012) have mentioned that Ethiopia offers a unique dilemma in terms of young employment: the country is grappling with rising youth landlessness in rural regions and a lack of rural job creation, which could lead to an increase in migration to cities.

According to Dietrich (2012), the economic crisis has caused a large increase in youth unemployment in most European countries. Compared to youth unemployment, adult unemployment was more slowly affected by the recession. According to the study by Dimitrov (2012), Young people in Bulgaria have been hit disproportionately hard by the crisis, with particularly high levels of unemployment and inactivity, as well as low rates of labor market participation and employment. Gunatilaka *et al.* (2010) have mentioned through their study that most young Sri Lankans struggle to find good jobs: educated young people account for a third of the unemployed, while young workers in informal employment make up a third of the entire workforce.

Female unemployment

Regarding the gender viewpoint of youth unemployment, young women are far more likely to be unemployed than young men. According to Muiya (2014), the unemployment rate for young women in Kenya is more than 10 percentage points greater than the rate for young men. Additionally, they add that women have a high unemployment rate simply because there are few job possibilities. Like in other emerging nations, the unemployment rate for young women is higher than it is for young males, as per the study of Ebaidalla (2016). Girls and young women comprise the world's 621 million young people who are not in school, job, or training (Plan International web page). Young women are more vulnerable in the labor market than men, with a more 'fragile' school-to-work transition (Loi *et al.*, 2016).

Factors Influencing Youth Unemployment

Many explanations have been propounded to explain why young unemployment is so prevalent. This section provides an overview of the supply and demand-side factors identified as potential drivers of high youth unemployment in prior studies. According to Diraditsile (2017)," there are no job opportunities in the area, and young women lack the required abilities to enter the labor market, limited by their lack of skills and knowledge. As mentioned, cultural and other factors exacerbate gender bias against women choosing formal work, and women dominate unskilled and semi-skilled blue-collar jobs, which pay less than skilled blue-collar ones dominated by men.

As per Abzhan and Bekshanova (2020), experience, higher education, good language skills, understanding of software kits, and knowledge of office software are the most prevalent needs of employers for young people, and one of the most significant reasons for the occurrence and growth of youth unemployment is a lack of field expertise (skills) within the specialty nonheritable, lack of professional skills, lack of language knowledge, lack of higher education, and lack of knowledge of office software. Sinha (2013) stated that the major causes of youth unemployment include flaws in the determinants of employability, particularly a lack of training and skill mismatch, Women – Security and Social Restrictions, and a lack of quality work. Uddin and Uddin (2013) have pointed out that rural-urban migration, rapid population growth, corruption, the rapid expansion of the educational system, and a lack of stable and sustainable power supply all contribute to youth unemployment.

Impacts of youth unemployment

A country's economy or society's most significant and crucial resource is its youth community. Their unemployment will have both short- and long-term consequences for many sectors of the country and the entire world. In other words, they are classified as a social problem when they fail or refuse to make the necessary transitions and preparations for maturity. Single parenting, low-skilled labor, unemployment, anti-social behavior, and criminality are some of the most prominent cases. This section gives you an overview of the many impacts. Unemployed women are unhappy and vulnerable, and their daily issues are overwhelming. They may be forced to work involuntarily or engage

in other forms of non-socially acceptable income, such as commercial sex work or criminal activity. It is worth emphasizing that every single one of the young female informants in this survey claimed unambiguously that unemployment had caused them to feel ashamed and guilty, as well as a decline in their health (Diraditsile, 2017).

Unemployment among young people has several personal implications, including a higher chance of being unemployed later in life, poorer income, a lack of skills, social marginalization, and being drawn into unsatisfactory relationships. There are additional economic consequences of youth unemployment, such as lower productivity, lower GDP, expensive costs and payments, and lower tax revenues, to name a few (Putun and Karatas, 2017). Youth unemployment has long-term consequences, such as losing work experience and human capital, diminished career employability and income, poor job performance, and precarious employment (Scarpetta et al., 2010). Some of the main economic and social implications of youth unemployment are criminal activity, gross income inequality, poverty, low psychological well-being, economic decline, marital instability, adult children, a threat to democracy, and emigration and brain drain (Durotoye, 2014).

Materials and Methods

Employment among the young in a country with higher productivity and capacity than adults is essential for the country's socioeconomic development. However, previous studies reveal that the unemployment rate of youths worldwide and in Sri Lanka is very high compared to adults. There is a well-known quote from billionaire Warren Buffet, "The More you Learn, the more you Earn". But it is questionable in the context of Sri Lanka. Although there is a high demand in the labor market in Sri Lanka, especially for youth, many young people in the country have been experiencing an unemployed situation for decades, even though youth have access to various opportunities for education and skill development through free education. It is increasing yearly despite the government taking many measures to reduce youth unemployment in Sri Lanka.

The main problem here is the inability of young people to provide the skills required by employers (weak and less quality labor supply). Young workers may be less efficient in job search activities in the external labour market than

adults. Younger workers are likely to have fewer contacts and less experience finding work, placing them at a relative disadvantage compared to adults. They may also find themselves in an experience trap, where employers select workers with experience, and as a result, labour market entrants are never hired and cannot increase their experience. On the supply side, youths are less likely to have significant financial commitments than their elders.

Moreover, their parents may be willing to support them should they not find work. Such factors may create an incentive to restrict their job search activity, leading to higher unemployment rates. Whether the cause is on the demand or the supply side, the outcome is that youths experience considerably higher unemployment rates than adults. So, it is important to accurately identify the gap between labor demand and labor supply of the youths, evaluate the measures taken to address the gap and attitudes of the youths towards it and, restructure those measures & establish new measures/ policies that suit current and future labor demand.

The research aims to investigate youth unemployment in Sri Lanka, with a special reference to female youths in the Matale district. However, given the current economic and social context, what factors contribute to youth unemployment is still very important to the government, policymakers, and scholars. Therefore, this research seeks new evidence on the determinants of female youth unemployment in the rural sector and suggests possible ways to tackle the problem.

This is quantitative research, and the Matale district in Sri Lanka is the study area. The study uses the internationally accepted definition of youth, which is a person aged 15 to 24 years old. 200 females were selected as the sample size from the above population aged 15-24 and those with no permanent income or occupation. This research used a non-probability sampling technique, purposive. Both primary and secondary data were used. The primary data for this study was collected through a questionnaire survey, and This study employed government of Sri Lanka publications, existing research, and websites to acquire secondary data. The dependent variable of this study was "Youth Unemployment". There were 5 explanatory variables used; educational qualifications, professional qualifications, English proficiency, training, experiences, and basic IT skills. To identify the probability of being unemployed or employed based on the level of selected factors influencing

employability, this research used a binary logistic model with 5 independent variables. Based on one or more independent factors, logistic regression predicts the likelihood that an observation will fall into one of two categories of a binary dependent variable.

$$\ln \left[\frac{Y}{(1-Y)} \right] = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \beta_5 X_5 + \mu$$

Where, $\ln \left[\frac{Y}{(1-Y)} \right]$ – likelihood ratio (being employed or unemployed); β_0 – intercept; β_1 to β_6 – parameters; X_1 = Educational Qualifications; X_2 = Professional Qualifications; X_3 = Training & Experiences; X_4 = English Proficiency; X_5 = Basic IT Skills; μ = Error term.

Results & Discussion

Logistic regression was performed in this research to ascertain the effects of educational qualifications, professional qualifications, English proficiency, training and experiences, basic IT knowledge, and the likelihood that participants are unemployed. When performing the binary logistic regression in SPSS Statistics, it generates many output tables. Only a few primary tables are necessary to comprehend this part's binary logistic regression technique results, assuming that no assumptions have been broken. The logistic regression model was statistically significant, Chi-square = 99.998, $p < .005$. The model explained 52.5% (Nagelkerke R²) of the variance in youth unemployment and correctly classified 78.0% of cases. The table "Variables in the Equation" displays the statistical significance of each independent variable's contribution to the model. This table is as follows:

Table 3: Variables in the equation of logistic regression analysis

Variables in the Equation						
	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1 ^a Edu_Qualification(1)	-2.000	.392	25.979	1	.000	.135
professional(1)	-1.915	.708	7.314	1	.007	.147
Training_experience(1)	-2.089	.506	17.073	1	.000	.124
english(1)	-1.141	.406	7.919	1	.005	.319
Basic_IT(1)	-1.020	.385	7.020	1	.008	.361
Constant	5.351	.916	34.129	1	.000	210.766

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: Edu_Qualification, professional, Training_experience, english, Basic_IT.

According to the output of the analysis;

$$\ln \left[\frac{Y}{(1-Y)} \right] = 5.351 + (-2.00X_1) + (-1.915X_2) + (-2.089X_3) \\ + (-1.141X_4) + (-1.020X_5)$$

H₁: There is a significant relationship between educational qualifications and youth unemployment in Sri Lanka: Here, the significant value of the educational qualification is 0.000. then the null hypothesis can be accepted. ($P < 0.05$). The odds ratio was less than one; Exp (B) = 0.135. It means youths with A/L or above educational qualifications had a lower chance of unemployment.

H₂: There is a significant relationship between professional qualifications and youth unemployment in Sri Lanka: Here, the significant value of the professional qualification is 0.007. then the null hypothesis can be accepted. ($P < 0.05$). The odds ratio was less than one; Exp (B) = 0.147. It means youths with professional qualifications had a lower chance of unemployment.

H₃: There is a significant relationship between training & experiences and youth unemployment in Sri Lanka: Here, the significant value of training & experiences is 0.000. then the null hypothesis can be accepted. ($P < 0.05$). The odds ratio was less than one; Exp (B) = 0.124. It means youths with training & experience had a lower chance of unemployment. **H₄:** There is a significant relationship between English proficiency and youth unemployment in Sri Lanka: Here, the significant value of training & experiences is 0.005. then the null hypothesis can be accepted. ($P < 0.05$). The odds ratio was less than one;

Exp (B) = 0.319. It means youths with good English proficiency have a lower chance of unemployment.

H₅: There is a significant relationship between basic IT skills and youth unemployment in Sri Lanka: Here, the significant value of basic IT skills is 0.008. then the null hypothesis can be accepted. ($P < 0.05$). The odds ratio was less than one; Exp (B) = 0.361. It means youths with good knowledge/skills of basic IT and computer applications have a lower chance of unemployment. In addition to the above five independent variables, the model used one moderate variable; marital status. According to the above table, marital status is significantly related to youth unemployment. The $P < 0.05$ ($P = 0.000$). The odds ratio was less than one; Exp (B) = 0.268. It means youths who are married have a lower chance of being unemployed.

The government of Sri Lanka has implemented various types of measures to reduce unemployment among youths and enhance their employability through skill development. **Enterprise development** has been done through the National youth policy (which was formed under the regional Chambers of Commerce to promote entrepreneurship). They have established **Macroeconomic and Sectoral Policies** to encourage youth in specific industries, such as fishing, agriculture, ICT, and tourism. These industries integrate vocational training with entrepreneurship skills to attract young people, particularly rural women.

Providing **Educational training** through various institutions such as the National Qualification Framework, Ministry of Skills Development, Vocational Education, Research & Innovations, and Human Resources and Employment Policy can be identified as their most prominent measure. Under this, the following programs have been implemented: National Institute of Business Management; Ocean University of Sri Lanka; Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission; Vocational Training Authority; National Apprentice & Industrial Training Authority; etc., and also they have implemented various **Labor Laws & Legislation and Labor Market Policies** such as National Youth Policy Sri Lanka 2014, National Human Resources and Employment Policy 2012 (HREP), National Enterprise Policy, 2009, Sri Lanka Qualifications Framework 2012, Sri Lanka: The Emerging Wonder of Asia, Mahinda Chintana Vision for the Future (National

Development Strategy), Employment of Trainees Act 1978, and Employment of Women, Young Persons and Children Act 1956.

Conclusion and Recommendations

According to the study's results, all the explanatory variables significantly correlate with youth unemployment in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, all five independent variables have revealed a negative relationship with youth unemployment. In addition to the above five factors influencing youth unemployment in Sri Lanka, it also focused on marital status. This study further concludes that skills mismatch is still a fundamental phenomenon of youth unemployment in Sri Lanka. It means there is a huge gap between labor demand and labor supply. Despite high labor demand in Sri Lanka, youths don't have enough skills to fulfil the demand. They have more certifications than skills. This mismatch leads to a huge amount of youth unemployment in Sri Lanka. Skills of the youths should be developed in various ways to enhance the employability of the youth in Sri Lanka.

The Investigation outlines several suggestions highlighting the government's and businesses' shared responsibilities in combating youth unemployment. Employers are increasing their skill demands and providing opportunities for young people. Rather than enhancing their skills and experience, today's youth want certifications. The most noted thing about Sri Lanka is that supply-side initiatives are only one aspect of the solution to youth unemployment in Sri Lanka. It involves policies like increasing the quality of education and training programs, geographical subsidies, and labor market flexibility. To address youth unemployment, both short- and long-term solutions are needed, including raising both labor supply and demand. Policymakers in Sri Lanka should concentrate more on supply-side improvements. Improving education and skills, as well as vocational education, language ability, and digital literacy programs and projects that promote young people's employability, should be given higher priority.

(a). According to employers and young people, lack of job experience is an issue for those wishing to enter the labor market. Employers are responsible for providing work and training opportunities for young people as an engine of business and economic growth. If employers provide opportunities for youths to improve their skills and experience through training programs,

career quality will improve, and young people will be more likely to pursue a work-based path to certification. The government can build a bridge between youth and employers by providing facilities.

The government should do everything it can to encourage internships and work experience programs within its budgetary constraints. The government should collaborate with SMEs to provide internship and training programs to youths while assuring SMEs that their risks are minimized. The government might also focus on using financial support for small enterprises to hire young people. Employers and the government could reap huge benefits if they adopt these strategies. One result would be the formation of straightforward work-based training programs and chances for advancement. Finally, the economy and living standards of young people will improve. The government should enhance both the quantity and quality of training opportunities.

(b). A strong effort is needed to raise awareness of the private and public sector resources to help youth become more employable entrepreneurs. The education system should enhance the awareness of students about their future paths. Institutions such as Export Development Board should be intensely aware of how to become an exporter instead of searching for jobs.

(c). Complexity, simplifying the offer and sustaining cross-departmental and cross-industrial collaboration in business, innovation, and skills. This is for the young person's guarantee to employers to explain a direct and concise offer of help based on training, internships/work experience, and job-ready candidates. Moreover, getting job opportunities abroad and a work visa should be simplified. Moreover, the costs charged for it also should be minimized.

(d). Employers seek information on jobs and skills from various sources, including websites, previous workers or employers, colleges, universities, municipal councils, and other businesses or supply chain organizations. The government can do more to promote a "right career guidance" approach for firms seeking training and recruitment assistance, mainly through websites and helplines. A simple and accurate venue for finding the right career at the right time should be developed.

(e). Institutional structures at the district or regional level are needed to promote capacity building through science and technology transfer, value

chain development, entrepreneurial development, and research applicable to innovation, growth, and productivity. Moreover, the government should give easy-to-use tools and resources to boost non-formal education and young employment, allowing them to contribute more to the economy.

(f). Both the educational and vocational education systems should shape young people with talents that are in demand in the labor market, increasing their employability. Youths obtain their education at schools and universities up to Advanced Level and some through vocational institutions. Vocational programs should be properly incorporated into national development strategies, including employment and socioeconomic growth, focusing on tourism, agriculture, ICT, and contemporary infrastructure development. as well as fostering entrepreneurial mindsets and abilities.

(g). The other policy suggestion concerns tax benefits for private-sector businesses. In this sense, the government should introduce tiny tax advantages for businesses that offer internships and create jobs for the country's youth. This approach will encourage more firms to participate in innovative programs to address the problem of youth unemployment while also providing opportunities for young people to find gainful work.

(h). Developing an entrepreneur market environment. Creating Youth Economy (YE)-driven programs would increase youth participation in the country's socioeconomic development. Through skill development and promotion of youth entrepreneurs, the government can help increase youth income. Youth enterprise development and job creation will increase youth participation in the real economy. Furthermore, the government should promote existing youth-owned and governed businesses to boost economic growth. Policymakers should focus on promoting competitive youth-owned and managed enterprises, attempting to address historical imbalances through youth enterprise development, promoting gender incorporation and youth participation in economic activities, promoting transparency and accessibility, and promoting accountability and evaluation of youth economic empowerment by promoting a culture of youth entrepreneurship. Young people should be encouraged to pursue entrepreneurship, enterprise management, and ownership as realistic career options.

(i). today the young generation uses the internet every day for various purposes. The use of the internet for searching for jobs is also high nowadays. So many websites, FB pages, etc., are available to display job vacancies. However, their reliability cannot confirm. Going to post offices or bookshops and looking at gazettes and job vacancies is also practically impossible. Therefore, setting up a government-run, constantly updated website seems essential. It is vital to develop a common e-platform for job seekers and providers.

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