



YOUTH RISING

Three under thirty forge their own futures

In most of Africa and in parts of Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean the working-age population is growing faster than any other segment of society. In India, half of the country's 1.3 billion people are under the age of 27, and 1.3 million young people reach working age every month.

A large, young population can be a country's most valuable asset, opening the door to higher incomes and a reduction in poverty—the so-called demographic dividend. But it can also pose pressing challenges. Countries that fail to generate sufficient jobs for large numbers of youth are vulnerable to social, political, and economic instability.

Youth in many of these countries with fast-growing populations face a daunting labor market. About 20 percent of young people in the average emerging market and developing economy are neither in school nor employed, according to IMF research. Those who do work are often in jobs that are part time, poorly paid, and offer no legal protection.

What can be done? Developing countries have made dramatic progress in school enrollment rates in recent years. The challenge now is to better align education with the skills needed in today's marketplace.

Technology also offers hope. While it will likely displace some jobs, it may also boost connectivity

and the potential for innovation, generating new jobs that give young people an advantage.

And governments can do more to make it easier for youth to enter the labor market. Young people everywhere have a hard time getting started. Policies that limit flexibility and mobility across sectors—such as overly rigid employment protection laws or excessively high minimum wages—tend to penalize them more than older workers.

Nonetheless, many members of the next generation are managing to thrive. The following pages offer an intimate look at three young people navigating the daily challenge of making a life for themselves—with varying degrees of success.

Dhara Shah, 27, is the cofounder of an information design studio in New Delhi, India, a country where women entrepreneurs face serious cultural obstacles. Abdel Illah Safi, 21, is an aspiring performing artist in Fez, Morocco, who dabbled in construction work and pottery sales before enrolling at a vocational center in the hope of landing a decent job. Faith Aweko, 26, is an entrepreneur in Uganda who escaped from the slums of Kampala to start a business that converts plastic waste into fashionable handbags.

Ambitious, socially aware, and open to change, these youth are not sitting back and waiting for opportunity to come to them. Here are their stories.



Dhara Shah, *India*

AT PRESENT, only 14 percent of businesses in India are run by women. The lack of access to financing—reinforced by cultural bias—is a major obstacle for women entrepreneurs. Despite the odds, however, some women are shattering stereotypes as they advance in the field of information technology.

One such woman is Dhara Shah, 27, cofounder and managing partner of Pykih, a company that designs and builds web-based interfaces for content and data. In a typical day, she cycles through many roles, ranging from mother of a toddler to head of a start-up focusing on data visualization and software design.

Juggling family and her own business, Shah sometimes worries that people view her as either a bad mother or insufficiently committed to her work. Indian women are expected to build families, not companies—especially not tech companies, she says.

She has learned a lot. “After motherhood, my outlook changed,” she says. “Now I look

at things around me and ask myself, would I want my daughter to go through the same sort of ordeals I face? If not, then what I can do right now to start to change things?”

A member of Global Shapers, an initiative backed by the World Economic Forum, Shah believes there is a need to stop celebrating public personalities from sports and entertainment and start celebrating people who create jobs and make a real, substantive difference.

With Pykih, Shah aims to take data, evidence, and research from think tanks and academia and make it accessible to ordinary people—a goal she sees as especially vital in this era of low trust in mainstream media.

Photography and reporting by **SAHIBA CHAUDHARY**, New Delhi, India

1. Dhara Shah
2. Mentoring a young employee at Pykih
3. Walking past Nehru Place market
4. Starting the day out right: yoga with daughter Sabi



4



1



2



3

Abdel Ilah Saffi, Morocco

SINCE LEAVING SCHOOL three years ago, Abdel Ilah Saffi has been searching for a purpose in life. With no degree, his options are limited. The Fez native has tried his hand at various things—working in construction, selling pottery, and other temporary jobs.

At a teacher's suggestion, he signed up for classes at the Moulay Ali Cherif School, a center in Fez that provides vocational skills, with a special focus on the performing arts. The school teaches technical skills, such as computer coding and light and sound design, along with acting and contemporary dance.

Saffi was immediately taken with the center's performance arts courses. "They really resonated with me," he says. He is inspired by Rachid Ouahman, one of his mentors at the center who is also a leading young performer in Morocco.

Saffi sometimes thinks about going abroad, as do his four out-of-work brothers. Youth unemployment tops 25 percent in Morocco, and people on the cusp of adulthood wonder, understandably, if the grass is greener somewhere else.

An oft-cited problem with Morocco's educational system is the mismatch between the skills it teaches and those needed in the labor market. To reduce such mismatches, the country has increasingly relied on extending the vocational training system, resulting in a proliferation of centers like the one Abdel frequents. Morocco has more vocational trainees than average for countries in the region, which should help boost employment over time.

For Saffi personally, it has proved a lifesaver. He finds that the vocational center provides more valuable guidance on skills for the future than a conventional school. "I am finding both my passion and my profession," he says.

Photography and reporting by **OMAR CHENNAFI**

1. Saffi plays the lead in a dramatic performance
2. At a part-time job selling pottery
3. Enjoying "Couscous Friday" at the center
4. Learning to code





1



2



3

Faith Aweko, Uganda

GROWING UP in a low-lying slum area in Kampala, Faith Aweko, 26, had to contend with routine flooding caused by plastic trash that the rain had washed into water channels and roadside trenches. This experience instilled in her a deep aversion to pollution, setting the stage for her future calling.

In 2016, after dropping out of the university in her third year, Aweko needed to find a way to support herself. People under the age of 30 make up about 75 percent of Uganda's population, and many of them are jobless. The situation in this patriarchal society is more dire for women, who are three times as likely as men to have difficulty finding sustainable employment.

Refusing to become a statistic, Aweko decided to join the Social Innovation Academy, an organization that works with former orphans, refugees, and other disadvantaged youth to create social enterprises. There, she crossed paths with others who shared her dream of tackling Uganda's plastic waste problem.

With Mema Rachel, a refugee from Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Naluyima Shamim, she founded Reform Africa, a plastic recycling group that collects plastic waste and converts it into beautiful bags.

They source the plastic waste directly from landfills and collection points around Kampala. Workers deliver it to the main collection point where the plastic bags are sorted, cleaned, and hung on clotheslines to dry. The material is then sent on to tailors who heat-press it to create the sturdy material that is fashioned into colorful handbags and backpacks.

You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, they say. But Aweko has managed to do something even better. [FD](#)

Photography and reporting by **JJUMBA MARTIN** in Kampala, Uganda

1. Faith Aweko
2. Harriet Atimango hangs washed plastic to dry
3. Katooke swamp, where people illegally dump waste
4. The MEMA waterproof backpack
5. Kisitu Daniel sews a bag

