

World Bank unveils plan to strengthen human capital in Africa

The World Bank has launched its Africa Human Capital Plan, a new plan to help African countries strengthen their human capital by enabling the continent's young people to grow up with optimal health and equipped with the right skills to compete in the digitising global economy.



Image source: Gallo/Getty

Sub-Saharan Africa scores the lowest of all the world's regions on the World Bank's Human Capital Index, a measurement of how well countries invest in the next generation of workers. The score is explained by high mortality and stunting rates in the region, as well as inadequate student learning outcomes - all of which have a direct effect on economic productivity.

In an effort to help countries turn these indicators around, the World Bank's Africa Human Capital Plan is setting ambitious targets to be achieved in the region by 2023. These include a drastic reduction in child mortality to save four million lives, averting stunting among 11 million children, and increasing learning outcomes for girls and boys in school by 20%. These achievements can raise Africa's Human Capital Index score upwards to increase the productivity of future workers by 13%.

"Preventing a child from fulfilling his or her potential is not only fundamentally unjust, but it also limits the growth potential of economies whose future workers are held back. GDP per worker in Sub-Saharan Africa could be 2.5 times higher if everyone were healthy and enjoyed a good education from pre-school to secondary school," said World Bank vice president for Africa Hafez Ghanem at the launch of the plan during the World Bank-IMF Spring Meetings.

Women empowerment

The plan also aims at empowering women to prevent early marriage and pregnancy for adolescent girls. "The adolescent

fertility rate in Sub-Saharan Africa is 102 births per 1,000 girls - three times as high as in South Asia. This is not only damaging for girls and their children, but it also hurts economic growth," noted Ghanem.

The World Bank will increase its investments in human capital in Africa by 50% in the next funding cycle. This includes new World Bank grants and concessional finance for human capital projects in Africa totalling \$15bn in fiscal years 2021-2023. The World Bank will invest these funds strategically to unblock structural constraints to human capital development. The World Bank will also target game changing interventions that leverage technology and innovation and that prevent and reverse damage to human capital in fragile and conflict-affected settings.

The World Bank is already supporting countries to come up with new strategies to invest more and better in their people. Twenty-three African countries, covering over 60% of the region's population, have joined a coalition of nearly 60 countries to join the Human Capital Project, committing to a set of accelerated investments in their human capital.

"Human Capital Project countries are breaking away from traditional paradigms to make investment in their people a priority and are working in a more coordinated way across government to ensure that households have the right enabling environment to support human capital formation," said Annette Dixon, World Bank vice president for human development.

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