

AFRICA ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMME



THE LONDON SCHOOL
OF ECONOMICS AND
POLITICAL SCIENCE ■

Career Transitions Lab



LSE Firoz Lalji Institute
for Africa

AEP Career Transitions Lab 2022 Report



Firoz Lalji Institute
for Africa

Context

According to the [International Labour Organization](#) (ILO), youth employment in Africa remains one of the most pressing issues on the continent. Estimates are currently as high as 60% for youth unemployment, with the effects of Covid-19 continuing to exacerbate the issue.¹ It has been projected that youth entering the labour market today, and over the next decade, face a set of constrained choices. The current levels of economic development and transformation will not provide enough wage employment opportunities to match the high rate of growth of the labour force.²

Studies have highlighted an under-skilling and over-skilling problem in Africa.³ Years of higher education are not translating into better employment opportunities; unemployment is highest among those with the highest levels of education. Alternatively, for those in employment, the well-educated are likely to report that their skills are not being utilised to their full potential. There is a mismatch between the skills African students obtain in school and those required by employers, resulting in majority of Africa's youth working in the informal economy or being underemployed. Young women also tend to face more disadvantages in access to work, and are more likely to experience poor working conditions than their male counterparts.

As the world's youngest region, improving employment opportunities, especially for youth, is important to the economic development and transformation of the continent, to reap the demographic dividend offered by the continent's growing young population.

In recent engagements, LSE African students expressed how these factors affect them, particularly the obstacles they face when transitioning into the job market after graduating from LSE. In response to these issues, the Africa Engagement Programme (AEP) developed the AEP Career Transitions Lab in 2021.

1. THE LAB

Running for its second year, the AEP Career Transitions Lab is a 4-day hybrid event that aims to equip LSE African students interested in working on the African continent or on African issues, with the knowledge, skills, and tools needed to support their transition from scholarly work at LSE to professional work pursued on the African continent and/or on African issues. This Lab is a space for visioning, exploring, discussing, and exchanging ideas about how best to pursue a career that creates a positive impact. With different reflection activities, presentations, and interaction with speakers, the programme aims to facilitate peer-o-peer learning and build a community of like-minded individuals who will support each other's career progression, even after the lab finishes.

The 2022 Lab was held in person with 14 LSE African graduate students.

¹ <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2021/12/08/the-case-for-job-creation-hubs-to-reduce-youth-unemployment-in-africa/>

² https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/21.03.24-IWOSS-Intro-paper_FINAL.pdf (pg. 3)

³ https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/21.03.24-IWOSS-Intro-paper_FINAL.pdf (pg. 29)

The Lab included 4 days of career-based workshops, presentations and conversations with 7 industry professionals ranging from NGO consultants, policy professionals, bankers and entrepreneurs, discussing their career journeys, what worked – or did not work – for them, personal branding, how to navigate the job market as a recent graduate, futureproofing your career, pivoting and setting yourself up for success.

The workshops focused on the reflection of (1) the students' self-purpose; (2) their career values and career priorities; (3) cross-cultural management tools for entering the African job market; (4) the tools to gain deeper insights on a specific industry or organisation; and (5) the LSE resources available for further guidance in their career journey post-graduation.

One of the central aims of the Lab was to facilitate peer-to-peer learning by creating a space for visioning and exchange of ideas on how to best pursue a sustainable career, while achieving positive and lasting impact, contributing to the ecosystem of change-makers. The students had opportunities to share their career progression, reflect on learnings from the sessions, and consider their own career ambitions and plans post LSE. This was done in part with the industry/organisational analysis where the students presented on organisations or industries they were interested in transitioning into.

2. OUTCOMES

To assess the impact of the lab, students completed a survey aimed at measuring their level of confidence, critical skills, knowledge of the job market and industries, preferences in different sectors, and the impact the Lab had on their career journey.

In addition to engaging with speakers and learning from their experience, the main reason for students signing up was to connect and network with peers in a similar position of navigating career transitions, gain insights on regional job markets, and make diverse industry connections built on social capital.

The survey asked students what their career aspirations were before attending the Lab. There was a myriad of responses. Some were quite sure of their next steps e.g., working for an organisation such as the UN or Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, while others were not very specific but keen to get into consulting, policy research/advisor roles in international organisations, or transition from clinical practice to health policy research and evaluation – effectively pivoting within the same sector. Additionally, there were students who specifically wanted to transition from Africa to the West but still focusing on African issues or policy making for the African continent. Only one student wasn't very sure of what they would do next other than transitioning back to their home country.

The graph below shows the most popular sessions from the industry professionals with [Madvee Muthu](#) (T.i.A Bee Products Ltd., Founder/CEO) and [Patrick Kibunja](#) (International Banker, Absa Group) topping the chart followed by [Olauluwa Samuel-Biyi](#) (Co-founder SureGroup and Director at Busha) and [Oyin Solebo](#) (Founder & COO of MoveMeBack).

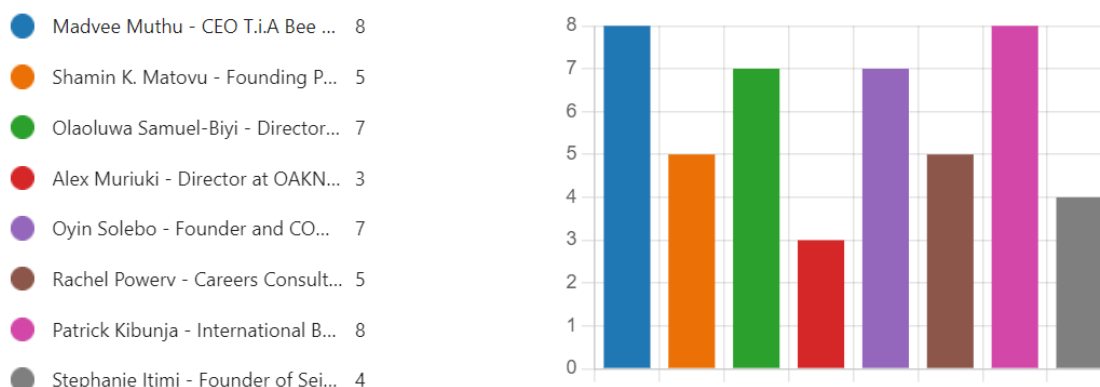


Fig. 1.1 Graph representing the most popular sessions and speakers among the attendees.

During the Lab the participants:

- Reflected on their career journey, goals, purpose and priorities. They were able to start planning their next steps after graduation and begin mapping out the industries or organisations they were interested in working in.
- Gained a greater understanding of the African job market and transitioning from the West or into different sectors.
- Learned how their career can impact issues facing the African continent.
- Engaged in networking and knowledge exchange with a cohort of individuals, all with their own experiences of working on the African continent or engaging with African issues.
- Gained greater understanding of the LSE support available post-graduation for alumni.
- Developed more confidence in navigating the job market, the power of networking and building their credibility.
- Strengthened their critical skills to achieve their career goals. There was an extensive discussion of demystifying a linear career path and understanding the need for pivoting if needed.

Topics covered in the sessions were:

- Building credibility and setting yourself up for success.
- Navigating new work environments and organisational culture.
- Positioning yourself in a new role/company or organisation.
- How network effectively and combating imposter syndrome.
- Futureproofing your career, personal branding, rebranding and pivoting.
- Building a sustainable career without compromising your values.
- The most effective way to make an impact on African development through your career.
- How to access roles in major multilateral organisations or in government and the knowledge and skills needed.

- What is important to know if you are considering starting your own project or business in Africa or focused on African issues.

The attendees were also able to share their experience immediately after the Lab. Please click on the link below to hear about their 2022 Career Transitions Lab experience.

Click to watch: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EKRpEx_HOf8



Africa Engagement Programme: Career Transitions Lab 2022

The **main takeaways** for attendees included the importance of purpose and values in career growth and progression, building credentials and credibility as well as fostering relationships and networks that aid career growth.

Main takeaway from a student:

“Career development is not necessarily linear (anything could happen and it’s okay to be adaptable).

Personal branding is essential – people need to know you to trust you.

Go against the grain if possible – shake things up.

Pay it forward – whether through mentorship or otherwise.

Find your purpose – only then can you be passionate in what you are doing and give it 100%.”