



Generation Connect Podcast

Episode 3: The future of work and employment for youth

With Sinead Bovell, Shergaun Roserie and Valarie Waswa

Hosted by Arissandra Egorova (Aya)

Transcript

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Intro: Hi everyone! Welcome to the Generation Connect podcast, co- designed with youth for youth. The ITU Generation Connect Initiative aims to engage global youth alongside the leaders of today's digital change by empowering youth voices in the digital development dialogue. Tune in every month to listen to inspiring stories of youth all across the world on the power of technology for sustainable development. Get involved by joining a global community of future leaders, shaping the world of tomorrow.

Aya: Hi everyone and welcome to the third episode of the Generation Connect Podcast, co-designed with youth and for youth.

Aya here and I'm part of the Generation Connect team from ITU, and I will be your host for today! In this episode, we are going to look at one of the main concerns of young people today, which is the future of work and employment, especially for youth.

Indeed, in addition to the well-known existing barriers to working life, such as age or experience criteria, new challenges are emerging as we enter an Age of Acceleration where new developments such as technological advancements, are taking place at a rate that is much faster than the youth's capacity to react to them.

To talk about this today, I am joined by three incredible guests - our Generating Connect America's and Africa's Youth Envoys, Shergaun and Valarie, and a great member of our Generation Connect Visionaries Board and the founder of WAYE, Sinead Bovell.

Welcome everyone and thank you for joining me today to discuss this important question. As young people and young entrepreneurs yourselves, your vision of the future of work for youth could be of great value to all the young people across the globe tuning in today to listen to your stories. And so, to start off, it would be great if you could introduce yourselves in a few words, so we can get to know you a little bit better.

Sinead Bovell: Thank you so much for having me, my name is Sinead Bovell and I'm the founder of WAYE, which is a tech education company that helps youth and businesses prepare for a future with advanced technologies and a big part of that is the future of work.

Aya: Thank you so much, Shergaun?

Shergaun Roserie: Hi, good day everyone, excited to have this conversation. My name is Shergaun Roserie, I am currently a junior mechanical engineering major at Haward University, and I'm also the founder of Orbtronics, co-founder actually, and Orbtronics focuses on various stem educational programs in St Lucia and also various other technological services as well, thanks.

Valarie Waswa: Greetings everyone, greetings from Kenya, my name is Valarie Waswa, I am a lawyer by training and a Generation Connect Envoy at ITU. Apart from that, I am the co-founder of "She goes digital", a social enterprise initiative that seeks to provide digital skills training to underprivileged women in Kenya.

Aya: Thank you so much, and it's a pleasure to meet all of you. So, in our previous episode I have discuss the future of education for youth, which I believe is actually in many ways, connected to the future of work, especially when it comes to skills. Young people often face aged- based or experience-based discrimination at the end of their studies. In somewhat of a vicious cycle, where they need more professional experience to get a job, but they also need a job to get this experience.

So, I would be very curious to hear more about your personal experiences. As young professionals, could you please walk me through your academic journey and how hard was it for you at the end of your studies or alongside your studies to get this valuable experience? Did you face any challenges and how much, would you say your studies actually contributed to taking you where you are now?

Shergaun Roserie: I could jump in. So the first time I started working professionally I think I was 17 at that time and I got that opportunity actually after a robotics program that I've been a part of. And at that time, St Lucia was trying to integrate robotics into our secondary school curriculum.

And because I was so good at it, the company, as well as the Ministry of Education that was integrating that into the school system at the time, decided that they wanted me to facilitate the training for other teachers. So, I got contracted as a facilitator for that program. So, I did that for about maybe a year and then after that I just graduated the Community college in St Lucia. After that I started looking for a job and during that time it was very hard actually, it was a lot harder than I thought, to find a job. But at that time my degree pathway was merely sciences, so it was all of theoretical stuff.

So, I had that skill in robotics right, but nowhere to use it, right. In St Lucia, there isn't a big a big market for that skill and it was very difficult for me at first. Probably a few months went by and then luckily I was contacted again to host another robotics program.

And I mean, one of the things that I will say helped me the most was just having those different project experiences. So, I totally understand, my advice to young people that are facing that challenge, make sure you just try to get small projects that you yourself can work on, even if it's with your friends or a personal project, just try doing something like that, and that's something talk about when you are looking for an actual opportunity.

Aya: Thank you so much Shergaun, it's really interesting because actually robotics is considered today to be such a valuable skill, but it's really interesting to hear that you still struggled to find professional experience, even with such a valuable skill, on your CV.

Shergaun Roserie: Yeah, and the other thing is that I come from a developing country. And in St Lucia it's not something that's in high demand yet. So, it just shows that depending on where you are, even if you have the best skills, it's not necessarily the right skills for your environment.

Sinead Bovell: I can kind of follow up with that. One thing that really stood out to me when I was graduating and kind of the mismatch between being a young person trying to enter the job market and the background

that I had, and just for the record I studied finance and chemistry in university, is that school is broken down into siloed subjects, but it's not broken down into skills and so what's really challenging for young people leaving their studies is you don't know how to translate what you know in theory, into the skill that the company's offering or requires.

And you might have those skills, you just don't really realize it. So, trying to market yourself to a position where you might actually be ready, you think you aren't or you don't you know market your resume in a way that matches those skills, because you don't know that you have them.

So, that's something that really stood out to me and contributed to a bit of a leg and finding work after I graduated, and I think the biggest driver of me being able to secure a job was: I had gotten into the Co-op Program in university and so I did have the chance to, first of all know what the workforce looked like and how what I learned would be applied. So, I had a little bit of that know how but not everybody gets into that Program, some schools don't even offer it and so that becomes really, really challenging when you graduate to say "No I'm ready to do this work. You just have to kind of take a chance on me."

So, I think one thing would be helpful is, as you're learning, don't just think about the theory that you're learning. Think about the skills that you're learning behind it, and it would be really helpful if schools helped you break it down into skills or they tested for specific skills, but I think it's something that youth can lean into on their own.

Aya: Thank you so much! Valarie is it also something you have experienced?

Valarie Waswa: Absolutely, absolutely! I totally agree with what my colleagues have said. I think it's very critical for young people to change how they view education, because education, you know you don't learn only what you study in school, for instance I studied law in campus.

But what has opened the most doors for me in my career, are things I learned through workshops, things I learned listening to a podcast, and so, if people can just see every experience as an opportunity for you to learn. For instance, I think I have three or four different CVs for different things. I have my legal CV, I have my development work CV, and so just being open to gaining information in multiple ways, you can have more options.

And I think it's very important to also note that we should not be narrow minded. If I will just be thinking "okay so All I know is law and legal studies", I will not have had the experiences I have so much and found out what my purpose in life is. And so, for me personally, just putting myself out there to see that in everything I do again a skill and I will actually add it in my CV as a skill. And during the interview I'll convince the recruiters that this skill is actually going to be relevant in this work.

Aya: Thank you so much, so I know we'll discuss it further, but why do you think the future of employment is one of the biggest concerns for youth today, what do you think are the factors at play here?

Sinead Bovell: I think one thing that young people realize is education is largely focused and structured around jobs of the past. It's training

young people for jobs that might not exist in the future, or if they do exist, they'll be radically transformed by technologies like artificial intelligence and young people don't get the chance to apply or prepare properly for the jobs of the future.

We hear all of these things about the future of work, that all of these will get automated or augmented, so you don't even really know what the workforce is going to look like, so how can you possibly prepare.

Aya: Definitely, and last time we have pointed out that the traditional education might not be moving or transforming fast enough to keep pace with the current world transformations, as you just said. And thus, should ideally be complemented by additional learning, for example, through those big educational platforms, however like you just mentioned, by far the most widely discussed disruptive force for the Labor market is the technological innovations and advancements are going to happen and happening already now. And its impact on the work and employment, which makes it hard for young people to actually know and determine the skills that they will actually need in the future.

So, since you brought it up, I would like to ask you as well, according to you, to what extent are we witnessing this technologization and digitalization of jobs and especially now, in times of Covid-19 pandemic?

Valarie Waswa: So, what I can say is that... Actually, there's a policy I was working on with an organization called Future Africa, and it was doing a case study of the mismatch between higher education and employability in Kenya, and why is it that so many young people have master's degrees

but end up unemployed and depressed. And so, this is actually a real challenge, but I feel like we need to look at technology, automation, and digital innovation in a different way.

I feel like automation is here to create efficiency in work. A good example is Facebook. How many jobs has Facebook actually created? So, it's how we actually as young people see what opportunities are there for us in the technological space and how can we ensure that we actually benefit from it, as opposed to thinking, how many jobs are going to be lost.

Shergaun Roserie: Yeah, I also believe that one of the issues is that young people currently do not look at where they will apply those skills necessarily. Like you said Valerie in certain areas, they are people with lots of degrees and they don't know where to use it and that's also the case in St Lucia. But one of the things that I would employ young people to do is consider where the need for your skill is, right. In your current environment that need might not yet be something that is required right, but don't think about only what's necessary for now, think about what's necessary for the future in your community and see how you can bring that change right.

Aya: What do you think Sinead?

Sinead Bovell: Yeah, I would say in terms of the digitization that we're seeing right now, of course the pandemic has certainly accelerated us into the future of work. I think for young people and what some of my colleagues mentioned, is that new jobs will be created, in fact 60% of the jobs of 2030 likely haven't been invented yet, and if you were to rewind the clock to 2010 for example, a social media analyst, a social

media marketer, all of that didn't exist and now it's an entire thriving industry.

And I think where there is a foundational shift going forward is the structure of the workforce. The idea that you can go to school and that's enough for the rest of your life, the skills you learn in school can support you for the next four or five decades. That is fundamentally changing.

So, we're moving towards world of work where, you will have to continue to learn and update your skills, whether that involves maybe stepping into a more professional learning environment, like you take a few courses, maybe you kind of go back to school for a bit or you're just constantly learning on the job and learning on your own. But expect to experience a lot of change and to have to adapt and learn accordingly! And the pandemic is an interesting example of one, because how you worked or studied fundamentally changed as a result of Covid, so how did you adapt to that, what skills did you have to quickly deploy that you maybe didn't have?

And if you look specifically at the world of digital technologies, in the last couple years new things like new ideas like blockchain, artificial intelligence, algorithms recommending you content. These are all different concepts that you've had to start to understand over these past few years alone, and these are new ways of living, of trading, of building economies that you learned or had to kind of understand over the past couple years and expect that type of change going forward.

Aya: So, you have all mentioned automation and it's true that for a long time, work has been considered as tasks or activities performed mostly by humans, and now it appears more and more irrelevant with time, with AI, Internet of Things or ICTs in general, becoming increasingly important in our daily lives and are likely to be required in most professions in the future, and also in all sectors.

So, how do we make sure that it doesn't exacerbate existing inequalities? How to make me make sure that ICTs that will be required everywhere in the future are accessible to everyone who wants to learn those skills?

Shergaun Roserie: Okay, so to that point, I feel that a lot of the technologies that we are learning now are not necessarily technologies that will displace current jobs. I feel like technology is a tool, right? Yes, it will change the way that we work, but as Valerie did mention other jobs will be created - we lose 20 but we gain 20,000, right. The types of jobs will change.

So, I think one of the most important things to make sure that persons are not left behind, you know targeting our youth to make sure that our youth participates in various programs and initiatives, where they can gain the experience and skills that they need.

In St Lucia, for example, at the primary and at the secondary level, students are not aware of the skills that they need in the tertiary level and that's something I also wanted to draw a point to, right. I think on the tertiary level we are educated enough to make a decision as to what skills that I need to be employable, right, but on a primary and on the secondary level, we don't have that information yet, we don't know what we need to know. And I think that's where we need to start guiding the youth into the skills that are necessary to be more productive and

employable in the coming futures, and I feel that's something that needs to be changed, not only on a policy level, overall, but I feel like organizations which are hosting various programs need to be supported in their mission to train those youths.

Aya: Thank you! Sinead, would you like to add something?

Sinead Bovell: I would definitely agree with what my colleagues had stated, and I'd say the two most important skills for the future of work are adaptability and learning. So, being able to adapt and pivot in your environment very quickly. And if we zoom in on learning, young people spend the first twenty, twenty-five, thirty years of their lives, learning.

So that it's a really really important skill that you're going to need forever! And so if you can't even access the ability to build these skills, if you can't access the ability to try digital technologies, to learn about them, you're basically shut out of the economy and of the future, so I think really making sure we support schools, local community projects that are trying to minimize that inequality and those digital skills gaps, I think that's of the utmost importance.

Aya: Yeah, definitely definitely. Thank you so much Sinead! And so, with that regard, I would like to hear more about your individual work and the work of your companies. So, maybe we can start with you, Shergaun, what was the motivation behind the creation of your company Orbtrionics? And how did it all begin for you?

Shergaun Roserie: So, Orbtrionics was founded in 2020, so yeah, about one year and seven months old. The motivation for starting Orbtrionics actually was something that I realized back in my days as a facilitator of robotics. I realized how impactful it was to the development of the youth that I was teaching, and I realized the skills that I had learned early on in my career in the areas of robotics like programming and critical thinking, all those skills are really what helped me progress into university and really what helped me excel. And I wanted to give that experience back to the youth in Santa Lucia and the Caribbean at large

The Co-founder of Orbtrionics was also involved in a lot of those programs and he has a very similar background as me. So, our idea at first was to host STEM based educational programs in St Lucia where we teach young students skills in various areas, such as robotics, Python programming, basic digital literacy skills and others. So, that's how Orbtrionics started, and then we moved on into various other educational programs.

So now, Orbtrionics has done that for about a year, and our vision for Orbtrionics is that currently in St Lucia, our technology market does not really exist, and I will say that that is a problem for the Caribbean at large. The technology and the digital manufacturing industry does not really exist, and we believe that, first, before we can grow that industry, we need to grow the human capital necessary to be the backbone for that industry. So, our model is that we're trying to build the human capital first, we put in the necessary infrastructure in place, in terms of our human capital, which will then support that brewing industry moving forward.

Aya: That's amazing! Thank you so much, you're definitely somewhat of a pioneer in your region. Maybe you can go ahead Valarie and tell me a little bit more about your initiatives.

Valarie Waswa: Thank you Arissandra, so my initiative is called "She goes digital" and by the name "She goes digital", basically it seeks to enable more girls to access the digital economy.

Our main organization village seeks to solve the challenges of poverty among young women. And so, we decided to evolve in our programs and see what is the most effective way to solve poverty among young women.

And I realized that the digital space, the digital workspace is somewhere where many young women aren't represented.

As I said, I was able to take myself through university because of working various online work, and that was how I was able to you know, support myself in one way or another. And so, I thought about the fact that you can get to make a lot of money in the online space wherever you are: you can wake up at 3am and work for a company in the US, you actually get to school during the day, and so that is what motivated me to start "She goes digital".

So, we are basically established in the rural parts of Kenya, in a county called Kakamega county, and so many young women are faced by poverty levels, you get that some of them have never seen a computer! So, the project seeks to provide a digital hub for these women to not only learn these basic digital literacy skills, but also to be able to have access to these digital devices, because there's no electricity, they don't have a computer.

So, they're able to come to the space and they can do something, one or two online and go back home. And so, the vision is just to empower women economically through digital skills, so that they can tap into the digital economy and work whenever and wherever they want.

Aya: Thank you so much Valarie, it's so inspiring and it's amazing that you do that. What about you, Sinead, what was the motivation behind starting WAYE?

Sinead Bovell: Yeah, the big motivation for me is that I realized the information about technology in the future I had access to based on my academic background and the path that I was originally headed on, the majority of the world didn't have access to that information. But it's not that they didn't want to know about the future and the way technology is changing their world, it's just that they were never invited to the conversations. And even if they were, the material was never made accessible or digestible to people who don't know in quotation "speak tech".

And so, I just recognize the drastic rate at which technology is going to outpace young people, they don't have access to what's about to happen and the skills they need, how things are going to change... And so, that was the big motivation for me is creating an environment where everybody's invited to learn about the technologies that are going to shape their future.

And so, we have talks, they used to be in person pre-Covid, we have a future of work class that we offer and then just daily information and insights using our social media channels to help guide people on the way technology is going to change their world and what they can do today to prepare.

And you know outside of just skills and being ready for the world of work, there are many other ways that technology is shaping our world in the decisions we make, and I think everybody has a right to be empowered enough to understand how technology guides and shapes their life and that way, you feel empowered to speak up about it, you know what is happening or you know enough about the system to be able to defend yourself.

And to you know build systems where they work for everybody, and you can't create a future with technology that works for everyone if only a few people are invited to the room, so that was kind of the motivation for me behind WAYE.

Aya: Great thank you so much, it's also really inspiring, and that's really crucial now to inform young people on how the future of work is going to develop, so you can enable them to have more opportunities when it comes to a career in the future. And I think you are doing just that!

So, unfortunately, it's almost the end of today's podcast, so lastly, I would like to ask you one last question. As we have seen today, young people are feeling more and more uncertain about what the future holds and as young people yourself, young professionals, young students, what would you like to recommend to them today to better prepare for the future work, so that they can face the future with confidence and courage, rather than with fear?

Sinead Bovell: My piece of advice would be - the best thing that you can do about the future is prepare for it. So, you have to lean into the uncertainty, lean into the technologies around us, learn about them, engage with them, and even if it's something as simple as kind of keeping tabs on Google about how things are changing and some of the fields that you're interested in, whether that's

becoming a librarian or becoming a nurse or becoming a marketing expert. Keeping tabs on how technology is interacting with those fields, so you can feel prepared.

And I also think you can lead in this future too, the interesting thing about technology is, it doesn't necessarily limit the way previous jobs and industries did. You can take a piece of technology that you have access to and use that to innovate and to build something that the world can access! So, that would be my piece of advice.

Aya: Great, thank you!

Shergaun Roserie: So, my piece of advice to young people would, be number one, be excited about the future right, because a lot of change is coming, and we now have the technology in a setting where everything is now more open source, everything is now more openly available. We can go out there and take that technology and become the changes that we want to see in the world.

Make sure that you take all the opportunities that you can to learn, to grow. And maybe you will not see the incremental changes at that time, but eventually it will snowball, all those skills that you learn will

snowball into an organizational skill that make you a force in that area. So, keep learning and keep persevering.

Aya: Amazing, thank you so much Shergaun. and Valarie, do you have any last words?

Valarie Waswa: Yes, my last words, and this is what I always tell the girls when we train them in our digital hub, is that you should be open minded, you should be fluid, you should be flexible. Don't be rigid.

Valarie Waswa: It doesn't matter if you're a doctor, it doesn't matter if you're a lawyer. If you realize that actually going on TikTok may scale up your career, embrace it! Go on TikTok and do those funny videos!

So, I'd just like to encourage young people to be fluid, to be like water because you have to keep up with technology or you will be irrelevant. So, I wish all the young people all the best in their career, and I know that you can do it because the future is the youth, and the youth is the future.

Outro: Thank you for listening to our podcast! You can find all the podcast episodes on the ITU Generation Connect website. And if you don't want to miss an episode, subscribe to us on Soundcloud, Spotify, and Apple Podcasts. Thanks again and see you next month for a brand-new episode of the Generation Connect Podcast.