

# What young people want: Education, skills and training in South Sulawesi's changing economy

## Introduction

South Sulawesi's economy is in transition. A quarter of its population of nearly nine million is young, aged between 16 and 30 years old, with many living in rural regions. These regions are, however, going through major agrarian changes where farm productivity is in decline, land inheritance is being challenged, and farmlands are being acquired for urban expansion and infrastructure development. These changes encourage young people to seek work opportunities elsewhere, in big cities, outer island plantations, or abroad.

Our study focuses on Maros, a district close to the provincial capital of Makassar. With a population of nearly 390,000 (2020), Maros is an example of a place undergoing rapid agrarian change. This policy brief explores specifically how the aspirations of young people are changing and what it means for policymakers, especially in the context of education, skills and training.

We examined four field sites - Barugae, Salenrang, Pajukukang and Pallantikang - representing three different settings: rural inland, peri-urban and coastal. Rural inland areas are dominated by smallholder farmers in commodities like rice, seasonal crops, or candlenut production. Peri-urban areas reflect landscapes in rapid transition with intensifying commercial agriculture, like rice farming, to tourism, urban and industrial development, railway and mining. Coastal settings are dominated by aquaculture and fisheries-based livelihoods.

We interviewed 90 people - from young men and women to the elderly - across the four villages. We also analysed land use data, interviewed government officials, conducted focus group discussions and visited vocational high schools. This diversity of groups and settings gave us a broad perspective of the challenges faced.

## Challenges

Rural regions are going through major agrarian change that makes it difficult for young people to enter farming or even sustain a living from agriculture, aquaculture or fisheries. For example, since 2014, the number of rice fields in Maros has decreased while urban settlements have expanded. This rapid development is creating social and economic conditions that have made it difficult for young people to own productive or adequately sized land, find meaningful employment or sustain a living in fishing and aquaculture as yields decline.

### Youth profile 1: Sustained opportunities for farming in the hinterland

Living in the rural hinterland, Eko enjoys farming and rural village life. As a 22-year-old working his parents' rice, chilli and ginger crops, he has aspirations to one day own his own land. In Eko's words he prefers farming: 'because it's not binding, we are free to go to the fields at whatever time, wake up whatever time.'

Eko finished high school but didn't continue to university because he wanted to work straight away. He doesn't worry about the future, because he believes that what you worry about might not even happen. The biggest concerns to Eko are the prices of agricultural commodities and the removal of government subsidies. When asked what a successful person is, he replied: 'the important thing is that they are happy... Like for me now, I already feel successful because I am independent.'

Young women and men view farming or fishing-based livelihoods less favourably. They seek to work instead in the services sector in cities or search for economic opportunities overseas. Some, however, remain in villages, establishing new rural businesses, such as venturing into ecotourism to define their futures. Increasingly, young men migrate to work as (palm oil) plantation labourers in Malaysia and Kalimantan, and women travel to Saudi Arabia to work as domestic helpers. But overseas labour conditions remain poor, with many women experiencing gender discrimination, violence, and loss of access to educational facilities (for dependent children).

## Youth profile 2: Seeking education in Makassar

23 year-old Rini spends her time between Makassar city and the Maros hinterland. As a tertiary fashion student, she has little interest in the daily farm work needed to sustain her parents' banana and chilli crops. She does, however, help her grandmother with the candlenut harvest. Rini would like to pursue her studies in fashion and one day open a boutique clothing store in the city. When asked whether she likes rural or urban life better, she responded:

'I prefer to live in a village because it is peaceful. But if I open a business, I want it to be in Makassar because there are more opportunities in Makassar than in the village.'

Rini returns to the village most weekends, sometimes with her sewing machine so that she can take local tailoring orders. When asked what success to her means, she answered:

'If I am successful, I can share it with others, like an orphanage. Because what's success for if we don't give \*alms?\*, if we just enjoy it ourselves?'

The population of Maros is growing steadily. Half of the population (166,466 people in 2020) is in their productive working age. While men make up more than half (61.8 percent), and women comprise 36 percent of the workforce, young people (aged 15-24 years) comprise 16 percent and this proportion is expanding. Yet, Maros' workforce is dominated by workers who have received limited schooling. For example, 43 percent of the labour force has a primary school education, with women especially under-represented from primary school to vocational school.

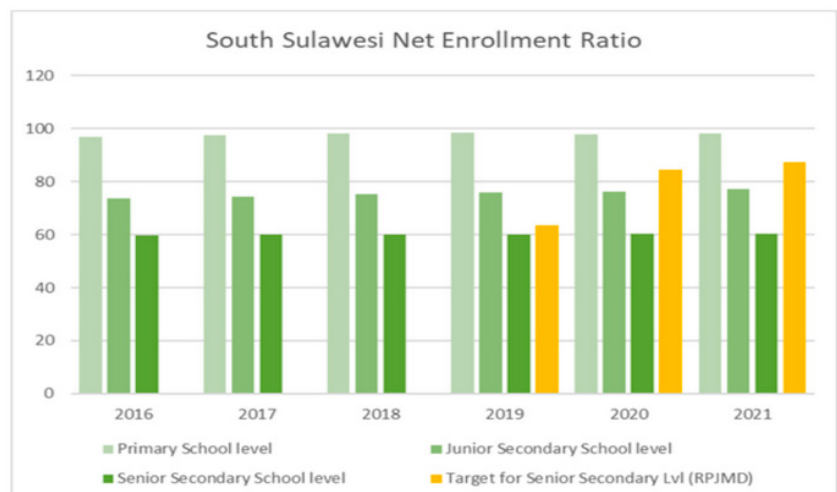


Figure: South Sulawesi Net Enrolment Ratio, 2016-2021 (Source: South Sulawesi in Figures 2016-2021 and South Sulawesi Regional Medium-Term Development Plan 2018-2023).

## Youth profile 3: Farming in a traditional landscape

Ahmad's village is situated between rice fields, karst mountains and a large limestone quarry and cement factory. As a 22-year-old, Ahmad identifies as a farmer, though he spends most of his time working as a driver and travelling mechanic, often for the nearby Bosowa cement factory. Ahmad has experience with rice and shrimp farming, helping to work his parents' land since he was a child. When it comes to farming or driving, essential farm work such as planting and harvesting crops always comes first.

Ahmad doesn't have clear aspirations for the future. He thought about joining the police force but wasn't sure how. He also contemplates travelling to Papua and living with extended family members there. But even if he migrated, he thinks eventually he would return home again because he enjoys the relaxed village atmosphere. If he could achieve anything in the world, Ahmad would be a soccer player. When asked if he is worried about the future he answered:

'Yes, I'm worried. I don't know what I'm going to do after this, I don't know what Allah's plan is.'

Services and other industries dominate the workforce, employing more than 50 percent of workers. Agriculture is second, followed by manufacturing. There has been rapid growth in manufacturing since 2019 due to the construction of new factories. While services and manufacturing jobs are rising, young people with low levels of education struggle to gain employment, increasing the sense of frustration and disempowerment.

### Youth profile 4: Limited aspirations among youth in a declining fishing industry

Era is an 18-year-old who finished her formal education after completing primary school. The daughter of a fisherman, as a child she spent six months of each year living in Kalimantan while her father fished. During this time, she was excluded from accessing local schools. Her family do not own farm land or aquaculture ponds, making their marine livelihoods very insecure. As with other young women living in coastal villages on the outskirts of Makassar, she now works in a factory peeling shrimp. When asked what she would have done if she could have continued school, she quoted:

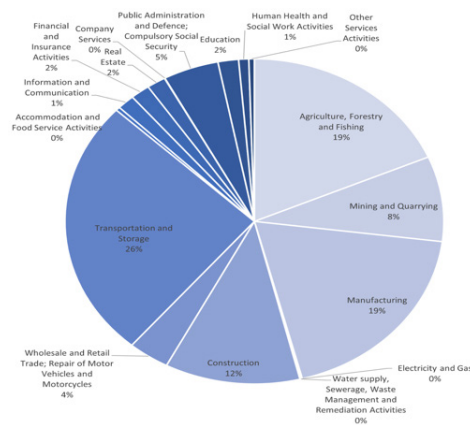
'If I hadn't had to drop out of school I would have liked to have become a flight attendant... I would have liked to be a flight attendant so I could go other places, but I can't reach this

because my father's job is only as a buruh nelayan (fisherman labourer), so because of that I won't achieve my dreams.'

These days Era hopes to find a salaried job at the convenience store Alfamart; she feels this

kind of opportunity is only available to those who had the money to finish high school. In Era's opinion, options for youth like herself are restricted to finding work in Kalimantan or in factories in the KIMA manufacturing district of Makassar.

Young people find it difficult to access education, skills and training opportunities to improve their employment prospects. Economic constraints are the biggest barrier



to completing high school or even continuing studies at the tertiary level. Having to look after parents and family members or take care of their land is a major contributing factor to young people forgoing further education and remaining in the village. Education is needed to find employment in the government, retail or mechanical sectors. Even with a high school education, youth do not always have the knowledge or connections needed to secure salaried positions. For example, many of the male youth described frequent failed attempts to enlist with the police force or military. In practice, vocational training occurs informally, and social connections help secure vocational or retail work.

### Youth profile 5: Moving out of farming in the cities outskirts

23-year-old Andi works as a cleaner in a transit hotel at Hasanuddin Airport on the outskirts of Makassar city. Andi has been helping his parents with farm work since the fourth grade of primary school. His parents are sharecroppers, growing vegetables and rice on land owned by family members who live in the village.

Due to long hours and poor conditions of hotel cleaning, Andi would like to find another job. He is tired of being a subordinate employee. He writes in his spare time - even on breaks at the hotel - and would like to become a poet one day. Andi's graduation from high school coincided with a crop failure and he could not pursue university due to economic constraints. Without further education, Andi does not believe migration will provide upward mobility. Rather than farm, he would like to be entrepreneurial and to focus on his writing:

"I want to get money quickly. We can only get money from the rice fields every three or four months and that's if the harvest doesn't fail, because crop failure is unpredictable."

Young people's hopes and aspirations, of course, vary depending on gender, class, and age across the three landscapes - rural inland, peri-urban and coastal. But what is common is that young people want modern salaried work to be financially independent and contribute to family and society. Being mobile, whether it means moving to the cities or abroad, is viewed as a means to overcome rural livelihood insecurity.

Vocational training is widely promoted by Indonesia's national government to solve livelihood and aspirational issues. Programs are in place, therefore, to prioritise and revitalise vocational schools. For example, the national initiative, DUDI (Dunia Usaha dan Dunia Industri), is aimed at improving the job readiness of SMK graduates. The South Sulawesi Governor has prioritised vocational education development under the Regional Medium-Term Development Plan (2018-2023). There is high unemployment among SMK graduates in South Sulawesi and low net enrolment among high school students, as seen on the right.

Despite SMK graduates mastering various skills and certification standards, they are often still considered less attractive to employers than senior high school (SMA) graduates. This perception makes it difficult to attract quality teachers and students, as well as to secure funding from the government. In the long-term, there is a need to overcome negative perceptions of vocational education and to better equip SMK graduates with the training and skills needed to transition into jobs and/or businesses that can provide adequate wages in their place of residence.

**“There is an assumption that SMK graduates are unskilled and inadequate because they cannot reach industry standards... This is misleading... SMK graduates hold many certificates to prove their skills. They have IKK, and get certificates issued by BNSP which are recognised by ASEAN.”**  
**(Vocational School of Education office of South Sulawesi Province, Feb 2022)**

### Unemployment Rate (South Sulawesi)

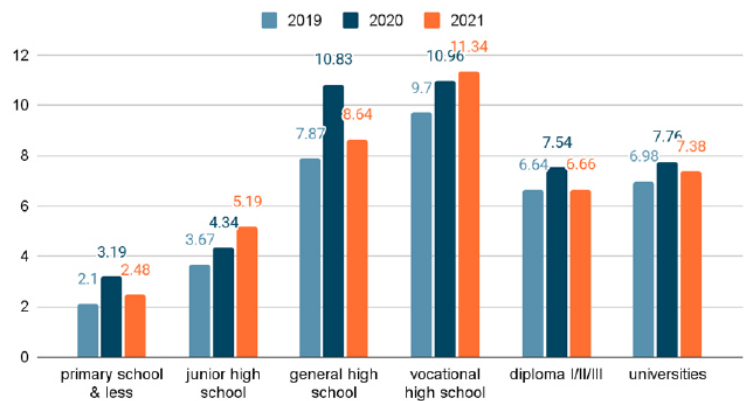


Figure: Unemployment rate in South Sulawesi in Indonesia, 2019-2021 (Source: The Labour Force Situation in South Sulawesi Province August 2019-2021).



Image: Students of SMK 8 Makassar, in the Bread House & Cafeteria

## Findings

While SMK policies and programs have already equipped SMK graduates with training and skills for jobs in some industries, significant policy gaps remain.

- **Training systems:** There is a need to create a stronger SMK training system that is supported by stronger collaboration, communication and trust between key stakeholders. Consider initiating multi-stakeholder forums involving education institutions, government, businesses and community groups that tackles industry jobs demand, employment issues and address industry skills gaps.
- **Expand specialist vocational training opportunities** to focus on transport. As South Sulawesi's connectivity infrastructure continues to expand, the government should introduce specialist curriculum and programs to increase the number of transport ready graduates in railway, airport and seaport infrastructure and services.
- **Incentives to increase vocational training enrolments** - Implement programs (at the provincial and district level) that incentivise youth to continue with high-quality vocational schooling and create tertiary education scholarships that target youth from disadvantaged backgrounds.

- Tailor vocational and job-readiness training to the requirements of employers to increase SMK graduate transition into skilled jobs.
- Improve quality of industry linked teaching - Introduce a “productive teacher” program and combine it with limited incentives and benefits to help grow the number of SMK teachers who are competent in engaging with the business sector. Implement short-course training programs to improve SMK teachers competence in engaging the business community.

**“We need to increase the number and improve the competence of productive teachers. Productive teachers will produce vocational school graduates who are ready to work because they have the knowledge and the skills which are needed by the industry.. But the problem is we lack human resources, few people want to become teachers.. And there is now way out, the government has not issued a particular regulation for this problem.” (Job Provider, 2022)**

- Addressing the low number of teachers in remote areas. The distribution and the ratio of teacher to pupils is far from ideal, particularly for SMKs in remote areas. Provide incentives and allowances to attract more teachers to teach

in remote areas.

- Vocational skills training opportunities are under-resourced and do not always connect with employment opportunities. We found that while policies advocating vocational skills training are timely and needed, work remains to better connect these programs to ‘real world’ paid work opportunities.
- Address negative stereotypes of vocational training - Campaign and promote SMK activities with support from the media to reduce SMK negative stereotypes among employers, parents and students.
- Develop incentives and sanctions, based on institutional performance, covering schools and related government offices. This may involve an integrated funding model utilising public and private sources and will require leadership and political will.

## Recommendations

### For the South Sulawesi Government

- Create vocational and tertiary education scholarships that target youth from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Leverage infrastructure development plans, to provide training and employment opportunities to youth.
- Tailor vocational and job-readiness training to the requirements of job providers.
- Strengthen communication and collaboration among government level across administration, and between government and business around industry job demand.
- Support the redistribution of land to farmers. Adequately compensate farmers who have lost land due to infrastructure/ economic development.

### For District Government

- Appreciate & recognize different youth livelihood aspiration
- Strengthen on promoting the benefit of continuing education to higher level (fact: increasing number of students dropouts)
- Accelerate the redistribution of (securely tenured) lands to smallholders to support their livelihoods and food security.

### For the Ministry of Education and Culture

- Revisit the SMK policies and programs to address potential skills mismatches
- Appreciate & recognize different youth livelihood aspiration
- Address the issue of competency standard and core body of knowledge that meets global competition

- Develop specific mechanisms to read & listen industry needs
- Initiate more incentive to increase industry support
- Create tertiary education scholarships that target youth from disadvantaged backgrounds.

## A way forward

### For the South Sulawesi Government

- Provide more training & internship supports (including for teachers)
- Campaign and promote lifelong learning culture.
- Incentivise youth to continue with schooling by creating tertiary education scholarships that target youth from disadvantaged backgrounds.

- Farmers whose lands have been acquired for infrastructure development should be adequately compensated and be provided appropriate livelihood alternatives.

### For Directorate of SMK

- Increase vocational literacy
- develop curriculum that align to government plan & industry needs
- increasing the number, quality and ratio of guru productive
- providing more training & internship supports (including for teachers)
- locate school building outside urban area

### For Directorate Mitras DUDI

- Develop coaching system to ensure the link-and-match program adopted.
- Develop more mutual incentive framework

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