

“Skills are critical for the job market”

Interview with
Misan Rewane

Ms Rewane, you founded WAVE, which stands for “West Africa Vocational Education”. What made you found WAVE?

Having grown up in the Nigerian education system, I saw the differences in my education and that of family members who didn't get access to private education.

“You have employers desperately seeking talent. But you also have young people desperately seeking work.”

Our levels of skills were very different. As a result, the level of work opportunities after graduating was also very different. I left Nigeria to study abroad, moved back and started working in Nigeria. Then, I realised that the gaps I had witnessed before were

affecting the employment system years down the line. Employers were struggling to find good staff. At my job, we would interview people who had graduated from university but had very low skill levels. Then the wheel started turning in my head: on any given day, you have employers desperately seeking talent. But you also have young people desperately seeking work.

There was a clear mismatch! I traced this back to the fact that the skills the school system is teaching is very different from the skills the work market is looking for. This was my motivation to go to Business School. There, I met other West Africans who were also passionate about tackling youth unemployment. We were convinced that youth unemployment is not only closely linked to the education system but also to the employment system. We started working on an idea targeting not just individuals but the economy as

“Young people should be seen as assets.”

seen as assets and potential dividends of demographic growth instead of liabilities. That was my motivation to found WAVE and this is what we are trying to do.

a whole. In Africa, people tend to think about the “youth unemployment problem”. In my view, it should be considered more as a “youth opportunity”: Young people should be

What is necessary to skill young people for the job market?

Skills are critical. And it's not only about hard skills. Soft skills actually matter more. Soft skills are the skills that allow young people to think critically, to learn and relearn throughout their lives. Hard skills and technical skills needed today will be very different in five to ten years. What's most important is that ability to continue to learn throughout life: life wide learning, lifelong learning. For us, those soft skills are problem solving abilities, critical thinking abilities, decision-making abilities. It is effective communication, working well with others, managing yourself, managing your emotions. Those are skills that employers continue to value years down the line even as machines and artificial learning start to catch up and replace a lot of jobs. Jobs that will continue to be important are jobs that will require this emotional intelligence, will require these soft skills. These are the things that we focus on at WAVE. Because we believe these skills will put people on the path to continue to grow and learn as the 20th century world of work continues to evolve.

“Soft skills actually matter more.”

What support do young entrepreneurs need?

In Nigeria, we have one of the highest rates of youth entrepreneurship. A lot of young people are bursting with ideas and energy to carry out those ideas. Often, however, they lack the skills required to actually launch and grow their businesses. You can have a great idea but executing the idea is the harder piece of work: building an organization, recruiting talent, raising financing, putting in place the legal and operational frameworks. A lot of it depends on education. But even in my entrepreneurial journey, a lot of the things I have learned did not come from

school. I have particularly learned through incubator or fellowship programmes. There, I met other entrepreneurs and was exposed to other skill sets.

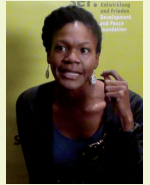
“Experiential learning for entrepreneurs is really important.”

This hands-on experiential learning for entrepreneurs is really important.

Further, I think conducive policies are important to enable entrepreneurs to register their businesses quicker. I remember, when setting up WAVE, the formal paper work took us about a year and a half. In that time, we needed to operate, we needed to collect revenues, we needed to spend cash. You cannot open a bank account without the necessary legal documents. Luckily, we were able to find creative ways to work around the system. But this is a challenge for a lot of entrepreneurs.

Misan Rewane

Founder and Chief Executive Officer of West Africa Vocational Education (WAVE). WAVE tackles youth unemployment by identifying motivated but underserved West African youth, training them on crucial employability skills, and connecting them to entry-level job opportunities.



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Read the conference report.

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