Solving the Concerns of Mozambican Youth

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About the Author

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Preface

This policy brief, "Solving the concerns of Mozambican Youth," is based on the findings of a study conducted by the Centre for Research on Governance and Development (CPGD) for the National Democratic Institute (NDI) on youth attitudes toward political and economic development and their expectations for socio-economic development in Mozambique. The study, conducted in December 2015, was a qualitative public opinion study using focus group discussions methodology. A total of 485 young people (men and women aged 17-35 years) participated in the focus groups, which were held in urban, peri-urban and rural areas across northern, central and southern provinces in Mozambique. A detailed report of the focus group discussions is available and can be downloaded from the NDI website (www.ndi.org).

This brief policy will be of interest to government ministries and policy makers responsible for areas related to youth, education and employment at the national and provincial levels as well as district directors, legislators, political parties, civil society organizations and young people themselves.

Introduction

With more than three-quarters of the Mozambican population aged 35 or under[1] youth concerns are an important topic for the future development of the country. Public decision-makers sometimes point out the need to not study youth concerns, assuming that such concerns are already known by them. They may even provide a relatively long list of youth concerns. However, having a list of youth concerns without fully understanding them can be misleading. Studying why, for example, employment is a concern for youth is equally, if not more, important than making an inventory or list that employment is a concern. This is because someone who is unemployed can express that working is a concern but actually they can be someone who in terms of an occupation is not even studying nor actively seeking employment. Thus, employment is not the concern of this individual.[2] So, if we do not better understand why an individual expresses a concern we run the risk of having a list of concerns that are not real concerns.

Based on focus group discussions of young people conducted in December 2015 across the country, this policy brief seeks not only to describe the concerns of the Mozambican youth but also to better understand them so that the perspective of youth itself on public policy may respond to disparities; and the problems identified by youth can be taken into account.

Firstly, this policy brief outlines the youth's concerns and elaborates on them. Second, it analyzes the involvement of young people in public life. Third, it presents the solutions of young people to their concerns. Finally, it debates youth concerns, making recommendations for different stakeholder groups, to achieve their resolution.

The main concerns of Mozambican youth

The results of the focus groups of young people show that the main concerns of youth are: *access to higher education, scholarships, employment or employment opportunities, means of transport, financing or loans for projects of youth initiatives, technical and vocational training, housing, crime and justice, and the appreciation of the national workforce*. In addition to doing the simple survey of youth concerns, we sought to better understand why these concerns are concerns, having asked young people to discuss or elaborate on each of the concerns raised.

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[1] Based on the 2007 census data for Mozambique, available from the National Institute of Statistics http://www.ine.gov.mz/estatisticas/estatisticas-demograficas-e-indicadores-sociais/projeccoes-da-populacao/mocambique_projeccoes_2007_2040.xls/view

[2] Here, we assume that a concern is such if the individual who expressed such concern is concerned about the matter personally. Sometimes the attitudes of an individual can be influenced by the attitudes of others, and so make this individual to assume anothers' concerns as their own.

With respect to *access to higher education*, the youth elaborated that access to employment in the country today depends on higher education and so they are concerned about access to universities. In addition, some young people in rural areas pointed out that they are not exposed to higher education networks. Therefore they express it is important that the network of higher education institutions is brought closer to young people in rural areas.

With regards to *access to scholarships*, the young people went further on to reveal that it is important that they benefit from more scholarships because it is difficult to afford the tuition fees in private universities.

Regarding *access to employment*, young people noted that there is a lack of opportunities for self-employment and entrepreneurship promotion initiatives and that this can lead to alcoholism behavior, drug consumption and even prostitution of young people.

Regarding the *access to means of transport*, rural youth expressed that the lack of transportation makes it difficult to trade in agricultural products from rural areas to urban centers. Others added concerns about the need to improve roads for the purpose of facilitating agricultural trade. Moreover, some find it difficult to continue with their studies after completing primary school due to a scarcity of transport in rural areas to commute from home to school and vice versa.

Concerning *access to financing or loans for projects of youth initiatives*, the youth revealed they sometimes have brilliant initiatives for development projects, self-employment or entrepreneurship, but have no funding to start with the project.

With regard to *access to technical and vocational training*, youth said that the lack of technical and professional training makes young people themselves unable to resolve their concerns.

With regard to *access to housing*, it was stressed that housing is a concern because it allows independence from their parents. But many young people are deprived from doing this because they are unable to buy or rent houses on the market today.

Regarding *access to crime and justice*, young people expressed concern about the crime that exists within their communities considering that criminals are often returned to freedom after being caught in the act and handed over to police. They were also preoccupied with general safety from political tension in the country and emphasized a need for effective peace. They expressed that the lack of safety does not contribute for youth to becoming entrepreneurs. In the same way, it does not help young people to attend night school.

Finally, related to *access to employment*, the youth expressed that the national workforce is not highly valued, either by national companies or foreign ones. That is, national companies as well as foreign ones tend to employ foreign workers rather than the national labor force.

Are young Mozambicans worried about their concerns?

After being informed about youth concerns, we investigated the degree of involvement of young people with decision-makers so that their concerns are taken into account. The large majority of youth in our focus groups said that they engage with decision-makers through participation in debates, seminars, workshops and through youth associations, as a means for their concerns to be taken into account, albeit with varying degrees of success. They also revealed high levels of interest in politics, debating of public affairs as well as access to news from the media.

However in contrast to the young people with whom we discussed these issues, most young Mozambicans do not care about their concerns, i.e. they are not interested in politics, they do not discuss public affairs and do not even look for news from the media on public and political topics to become aware of how things work and are organized[3]. This way, they do not make any additional effort for policy makers to resolve their concerns.

Youth's solutions to their concerns

After asking the youth to state and discuss their concerns as well as investigate to what extent they engage with public decision makers in order for their concerns to be resolved, we asked that they provide solutions to their concerns. The following solutions were presented:

1. In order to get employment, self-employment and/or be an entrepreneur, some young people revealed the need for *access to technical and vocational training*. Technical and vocational training would ensure that young people have the skills and capabilities to start an activity, own a business, and be an entrepreneur. This way, the issue of employment could be solved.

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[3] The aggregate Afrobarometer public opinion data from 2002, 2005 and 2008 shows that Mozambicans aged between 18 and 35 years old are less interested in public affairs than their adult counterparts (36 years old and over). They are also less likely than their adult counterparts to say they have participated in voluntary or community groups, attended community meeting, join others to raise an issue, or voted in last election. The 2012 Afrobarometer data also shows that the Mozambique youth is less interested in public affairs and to discuss politics with others. They are also less likely to attend a community meeting, join with others to raise an issue or vote in last election (see www.afrobarometer.org).

The youth also point out that technical and vocational training could be accelerated if education in schools was oriented to a *know-how* approach, some refer to this as vocational education through technical and polytechnic institutes.

Moreover, some young people said that the skills and capabilities of entrepreneurship should also be taught in school not only at a basic level, as it has been until now, but in a more in-depth form and with experienced teachers.

2. To address the issue of access to universities and scholarships, young people with whom we talked in the focus groups said that the network of higher education institutions across the country should be expanded further, and more scholarships should be allocated to younger people.

3. With intent for policy makers to better understand the concerns of the youth, they (the president, ministers, governors, mayors, etc.) should be much more open to listening to young people.

4. To solve the housing problem, the government should distribute land to youth, given that they have no ability to buy homes. Therefore, young people could slowly build their own housing within their own capabilities.

5. In order to better serve young people, the government should follow the initiatives developed by young people that are organized in associations, giving relevant information to these associations as well as being open to receiving important information from young people in associations. The youth expressed that government efforts tend to flow better in organized groups and with multiplier effects, rather than when youth are contacted individually.

6. To ensure sustainability and the repayment of decentralized funds related to youth initiatives at the local level (through the Youth Supporting Fund - FAIJ, the District Development Fund - FDD; and the Strategic Program for Reduction of Urban Poverty - PERPU) the government should develop a national legal framework for this purpose. The implementation of such funds should be monitored to ensure transparent decision-making, that the funds are used as allocated and that they are repaid at the end of implementation.

7. In order to finance youth initiative projects, the government should provide more funds for youth initiatives. It is important to have a variety of funding options and capacity support for young people to implement their initiatives, innovations and development projects.

8. In order to allow more funds to be made available to young people, banks' interest rates should be lowered.

9. To allow for the local workforce to be valued, the government should better supervise and promote the recruitment of national workers by domestic and foreign companies.

10. To ensure the rule of law, that is, the enforcement of the law, the government should increasingly inspect all state activities and institutions.

11. In order to allow greater awareness about affairs of the state and political processes, the government should promote more civic education to sensitive and engage young people about democratic principles, rights and duties.

12. In order to ensure sustainability of decentralized funds, the government should empower the beneficiaries of decentralized funds in the matters of entrepreneurship and management. The government should also finance previously established initiatives. i.e. those that enable the production of food or expertise in fields such as aquaculture.

13. To communicate information on job opportunities, the government should use appropriate mechanisms to disseminate information.

14. In order to better listen to young people in rural areas, the government should establish mechanisms based on community radios, for example.

Discussion on Youth's Solutions

Instead of simply taking the recommendations of the youth as our solutions for public policy options, this policy brief discusses them first in order to better address the concerns of young people before providing solutions to their concerns. Contrary to the youth with whom we debated in focus groups, who observe that their concerns should be addressed by government action, this brief policy assumes that there are other stakeholders in addition to the government that should be involved in resolving the concerns of young people. In our view, the stakeholders involved in addressing the concerns of young people are the government, political parties, civil society and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and young people themselves.

Needless to say, the government is a key player in addressing youth concerns and so has to better understand youth concerns to provide the best youth policy options. **It is the government's obligation to administer the state and manage the economy, meeting the collective needs of citizens, i.e. the public interest.** Political parties are also key players in addressing youth concerns, as they aspire the power to administer the state, as an executive. **In order to come to power, political parties need to better understand the concerns of youth and to present the best youth policy options in their electoral manifestos.** And so, this policy brief puts forward some recommendations to political parties with regard to youth concerns.

Civil society and non-governmental organizations also have a role. While the government, for example, makes policy and implement laws, **civil society organizations play a role in education and advocacy through the dissemination of laws and policies within communities**.

Finally, young people themselves are also a key player in the resolution of their own issues. **Young people should not see the government as the only player in the resolution of their concerns. They also have a part to play in influencing and resolving their own concerns through a greater involvement in public life and politics.**

Our recommendations are as follows:

The **government** should:

- Increasingly, be open to listen to the young people to better understand the concerns of young people;

- Adopt a national framework to guide the implementation of decentralized funds in order to ensure uniformity and transparency in the administration of the FDD (District Development Fund) and PERPU (Strategic Program for Reduction of Urban Poverty);

- Provide business opportunities in rural areas through building commercial infrastructure as means of transport and roads, so as to allow agricultural products to be easily transported to urban centers;

- Expand the higher education institutions network throughout the country and provide scholarships in order to allow better preparation of young people for the labor market;

- Provide more technical and vocational training to young people so that they can acquire skills and abilities to start an activity, own a business and be an entrepreneur;

- Interact with the commercial banks to facilitate access to subsidized loans for young people; and

- Inspect private companies more frequently, to ensure that the quota of local and foreign employees complies with labor legislation.

- Ensure that the role of youth in political participation is included in formal education.

Political parties should:

- Increasingly create space to listen to the young people to better understand the concerns of young people;

- Encourage youth to participate and organize themselves in associations, to be better prepared for government efforts;

- Provide for extension/dissemination, access to information and support to youth in order to be able to respond to the government's development funds and initiatives to address the concerns of young people and foster their development;

- Develop better skills and mechanisms to listen and observe all of the concerns of young people before making a decision or act;

- Raise awareness, encourage, and engage the youth to be increasingly involved in the political process in order to understand how society is organized and operates, to better act in search of the best alternatives to their concerns; and

- Influence the socio-economic development opportunities to address and resolve youth concerns.

Civil society organizations should:

- Disseminate legal information to young people about the Constitution, rights and duties of citizens and other relevant legislation, for young people to know the organization and functioning of society, to prevent themselves from unlawful acts and to better understand ways through which their concerns can be addressed;

- Promote more civic education to young people about democratic principles, rights and duties in order to allow for greater awareness of the state of affairs;

- Encourage young people to participate and organize themselves into youth associations, to be better prepared to participate in and benefit from government efforts.

Youth should:

- Get more involved in public and political processes through an interest in politics, public affairs debates, frequent access to news from the media, and also contact public/political leaders in order to better understand the ways through which their concerns can be resolved; and

- Join or even create youth associations in order to be better prepared for government efforts.

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Shenga, C. "Solving the Concerns of Mozambican Youth". *CPGD Policy Paper No 1* (May 2016)

Shenga, C. "To what extent does Mozambique Civil Society promote democracy?" *CPGD Policy Paper No 2* (Forthcoming 2016).

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