

Oscar Kimaro

Youth in Tanzania: Their Priorities, Challenges and Opportunities

Despite Tanzanian youths being the majority in the country's labour force, they are still challenged in issues around pursuing their destiny through decent employment, access to quality education and their participation in decision making processes. These are largely the results of inadequate initiatives to support youth in search of economic empowerment opportunities especially through social entrepreneurship and formal businesses, minimal recognition in formal governance processes as well as mismatch between skills they get in schools with the job market requirements. This signals untapped youths potential. It is key for partners, stakeholders and the government to recognise the youth power and leadership as a key asset in addressing all the development challenges facing communities in the country.

Keywords:

Youth - Tanzania Population - Employment - Quality Education - Decision Making - Challenges - Youth Power

YOUTH IN TANZANIA: THEIR PRIORITIES, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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Today, 50 percent of the world's population is under 25 years old. In Tanzania, 64 percent of the population is under 24 and those aged (15-35) account for 34 percent of the entire population of more than 45 million people. They represent the largest generation in history in an era of Peak Youth; a diverse group of people with different needs, skills and aspirations – and they are increasingly connected.

Youth constitute a great share of the country's labour force – about 68 percent – and one third of the population. This translates in power to drive development in their communities, to participate in decision making or democratic processes. Still, youth are unrecognized and adversely affected in many aspects.

What matters to this generation?

In a survey conducted in 2015 by the NGO Restless Development and other youth-led organizations in Tanzania, young people gave their opinion on ten priority issues which were incorporated in a manifesto (see p.66). Among the issues raised, three main challenges were identified and are explained in more detail below:

Unemployment

According to the youth interviewed unemployment stood out as a key challenge. The government's Integrated Labour Force Survey found national unemployment among youth aged 15-24 being 13.7 percent and those 25-35 being 9.8 percent. However, a representative survey conducted by Restless Development in the year 2012/2013 in 7 regions of Tanzania mainland shows unemployment among the 1000 participants was above 50 percent, exceeding the national rate.

Around 800,000 to 1,000,000 youth are entering the job market every year in Tanzania, and their access to formal employment is minimal. The infrastructure to support those who are interested in social entrepreneurship is very limited. Challenges are skills mismatch between formal education and job market requirements, accessing capital as well as high costs of running a business in Tanzania. All these factors contribute to high unemployment rates among youth. The majority left out by the existing few formal jobs are absorbed in the informal business sectors, often ending up not being recognized and supported.



Ten key issues raised in the manifesto by Restless Development in 2015.

Education

Several studies that have been conducted revealed a mismatch between the quality of education and job market requirements. Youth also identified the quality of education they receive in different education settings to be too theoretical and not equipping them to better match employment opportunities. They further identified contributing factors to this being unsuitable learning materials and environment, teachers' missing motivation and the curriculum not reflecting changing technologies and markets.

Youth Involvement in the Decision Making

Despite constituting the majority of the population (under 35 year olds account for almost 65 percent), young people are underrepresented at all levels of decision making institutions, especially in the local governments. Only 27 percent have reported to have meaningfully participated in local government meetings which are elementary in making development plans and budgets providing direction and a vision for development. This low

percentage can be connected to governance and accountability issues: Due to limited spaces for participation, there is also limited transparency and accountability. Hence misuse of resources and corruption are more likely to occur.

What needs to be done?

Young people are not waiting for the permission to lead; they take actions that help bringing solutions to their challenges. They are taking initiative to empower themselves through volunteer programmes and internship opportunities. Youth are strengthening their voices through campaigning and even get those with powers to have a deep look at the challenges they face, be it clearing the fear of misconceptions, addressing the skills mismatch between formal schooling an labour market or campaigning for leadership roles.

One major aspect in tackling the challenge of youth unemployment is the potential social entrepreneurship initiatives. Youth have a strong feeling that it can play a great role in unlocking growth by creating jobs and supporting small and informal sector businesses.

Here, Public Private Partnerships (PPP) Programmes and social entrepreneurship initiatives aimed at empowering the majority of youth entering the job market every year are tools to consider.

There is also a need to engage and build relationships between decision makers and youth, especially those at local level governments, to ensure they understand the importance of engaging young leaders and youth in general as change makers.

vision of a just and better community. We should keep our minds and plans on ensuring that youth are at the core of designing, delivering and evaluating these programmes. They know best what their needs are and what will work to engage them.

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Source: Oscar Kimaro.

Oscar Kimaro is Policy and Advocacy Manager and leading the Kijana Wajibika (Youth be Responsible) project funded by the European Commission in the NGO Restless Development Tanzania. Not only leading the direct implementation of these programmes, but also leading on national government engagement. He has a vast experience on local community engagement on youth-led data and evidence based advocacy as well as building capacity of youth to influence policy implementation and promote accountability in the SDGs and the National Development Plans.

Based on my experience working with youth in Tanzania, building strong coalitions among young change makers and leaders, government agencies, international organizations, the private sector and other stakeholders proves to be a coordinated way to support and empower young people to reach their