



Our voices must be heard – Youth Hubs discuss economic exclusion

// Government job openings are filled before they are advertised” a young lady in Niassa says. Then a young man responds, “They advertise them only to fool people.” In Chiure, Cabo Delgado, a young man describes unemployment and lack of development as the “genesis of all this evil”. In response, and writing from Balama in the same province, another Youth Hub member agrees: “unemployment and corruption push young people into the hands of the insurgents”.

At one point during this emotional online conversation by 123 young people, the moderator says, “I am tearing”. The conversation on youth economic exclusion had expanded to include examples of young people who, after being discharged from the army, are forsaken and abandoned to rot in

despondency. “They are marginalizing us”, a participant says. “Where are we going to get the five years of experience they want if we are never hired?” a female participant in Niassa wonders.

Their lively conversation is reminiscent of the youth dialogues that the Foundation for Community Development (FDC acronym in Portuguese) and CDD held in 2019 in Nampula, Manica and Gaza. The northern region three-day dialogue, held in Nampula, involved 92 young people (52% girls and 48% boys) between the ages of 17 and 29, with one or two young people from each of the districts in that region. The concept of transformational leadership set up discussions on topics such as Human Rights; child marriage; HIV/AIDS; employment and employability; information and communication



technologies; nutrition and environment; entrepreneurship and governance participation, particularly in water, school and health committees.

Unemployment was singled out as the most pressing challenge that young people face. To them, unemployment stemmed mainly from two factors, namely youth unemployability due to poor quality of education which is also unaligned with market needs, and government policies that prioritize megaprojects to small and middle size companies and youth startups.

An intervention by one of the participants in that 2019 dialogue summed the feeling of the group: "We young people do not have an agenda nor a space for us to discuss our real problems. We face unemployment problems; some young people give themselves in to bad practices in exchange for 5 000 to 10 000 meticaís because they do not have hope of ever getting a job here in our province because they do not have money to bribe nor do they have relatives well placed in the government or in companies. Many young people from Maputo come here, apply for jobs and get hired."

As an answer to unemployment, these young people highlighted that education must equip

students with relevant skills to be innovative and entrepreneurs, and to be competitive in the labor market. Schools should send out students to the labor market to craft and produce goods and services in several economic areas, they said. Schools should provide information and communication technologies skills to ensure that youth enter and compete in the labor market.

Youth Hubs are physical and virtual places to empower youth to become agents of transformational and developmental change at all levels starting from the communities where they belong. Currently there are 18 Youth Hubs in equal number of districts involving more than 700 young people in Niassa, Cabo Delgado and Nampula. Through social media, they discuss COVID-19 and other pressing topics such as, Human Rights, teaching and learning, and food security in the current context of the State of Emergency, and reflect on solutions. Unemployment and social exclusion, including youth economic exclusion, have risen much higher on the list of challenges that young people face. Instability and militarization of life particularly in Cabo Delgado and increasingly in Niassa are also emerging as a major concern. Below are some quotes

from young people in CDD Youth Hubs in Cabo Delgado and Niassa.

- *We see economic exclusion when the government fails to create economic policies such as credit lines that would address crucial concerns that affect young people. Life is tough and it seems that if you are poor now, you are poor for good.*
- *The scenario that we go through here in town is troubling. All job adds you see in papers or hear about are already taken. It is worse in the public sector where you never get hired no matter how many times you apply. And almost from nowhere you see that some people got hired and they are working. It is sad. We must join our voices and speak out.*
- *The government only talks, but they never do what they say. Our challenge now is finding ways to be heard. When will our ideas be respected? 90% of MPs are old people. Who will take youth concerns to Parliament?*
- *In terms of sponsoring youth projects, it takes me back to what we have already mentioned about corruption relating to the Sete Milhões (District Development Fund). For example, if you applied for 70 thousand meticaís to finance your project, district and community leaders would want you to give them, say, 30% of the amount. It is only and only if you agreed to this that you could get the money, but you would be left with little money for your project and this would have negative implications in the implementation, no matter how efficient you may be.*
- *Because of the current military tension, we have many displaced people including children and young people who are no longer going to school. In addition to providing security for them, the government should provide trade schools to teach carpentry, locksmith-*

th, house construction and more. This would help people understand the benefits of school. People do not see the purpose for schooling since it does not bring tangible benefits.

- *Unemployment and lack of development are the genesis of all evils. I am 25 years old, son of a poor family. I finished my teacher's training in 2019 with an overall grade of 17, but today I am unemployed. However, some of my colleagues were hired though their overall grades were lower, as low as 13. I say this to emphasize the points that my colleagues raised earlier. The higher the unemployment rate, the higher the youth marginalization, and the more gangs sowing deaths in our communities. I believe that the insurgents are our fellow, despondent Mozambicans... Look at the system of conscription; this can also be related to youth marginalization. Nearly 70% of demobilized young soldiers are unemployed and wandering the streets... if they get a weapon, they will rob and kill... Five years ago, I designed a project for a stationery and ICTs, the municipal authorities told me that "the project is good, but we doubt your ability to implement it". Can anyone imagine what this country would be if frustrated young people like me came together to create a discontent group? To overcome these adversities, young people must raise their voices until they are heard.*

There is fatigue of young people to participate in participation. Youth potential calls for concrete opportunities to materialize. The question here is how public-private dialogue has addressed this structural issue because, while old wisdom suggests that young people are the leaders of tomorrow, the demographic realities suggest that young people, in general, are faced with something akin to what Dr Martin Luther King (Jr) described as the "fierce urgency of now".

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