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The East Africa Youth Survey Report¹

Alex O. Awiti and Bruce Scott

May 2016

*“Tell me what are the prevailing sentiments that occupy the minds of your young men, and I will tell you what is to be the character of the next generation”. **Edmund Burke (1729–97)***

Summary

East Africa is a very youthful region. About 80% of the estimated 146 million East Africans (excluding South Sudan), are below the age of 35 years. The median age ranges between 16 and 19 years, with the lowest median ages of 16 years and 17 years in Uganda and Tanzania respectively.

East Africa’s youth, defined as individuals between the ages of 14 and 35, are a socially and economically significant majority and will determine and shape the region’s future. With this in mind, the East African Institute of the Aga Khan University commissioned a survey to understand the values, attitudes, concerns and aspirations of this critical segment of the population in Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda and Tanzania.

Between 2014 and 2015 we interviewed 7,010 individuals aged 18–35 years, male and female drawn from rural and urban areas in Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda. In addition 56 focus group discussions, comprising 6-8 participants were also held to provide nuance and context to the responses obtained through the questionnaires. The survey reveals important and surprising insights, and hence, offers reasons for optimism, deep concern and a fierce urgency for action.

The survey revealed a strong sense of esprit de corps and nationalism among East African youth. Rwandan and Kenyan youth were the most nationalistic, with 44% and 40% identifying first as Rwandese and Kenyans respectively. A strong esprit de corps was exhibited among Tanzanian youth, with 58% identifying as youth first. Rwandan youth at 25% exhibited the weakest esprit de corps. East African youth held strong values around faith, work and family.

The youth are entrepreneurial, with the majority (50-65%) aspiring to start their own business, rather than pursue traditional careers in law, teaching, medicine or

¹ The statistics presented in this report are solely derived from the survey designed and commissioned by the East African Institute of the Aga Khan University.

engineering. Although agriculture is one of the leading sectors in the economies of East Africa – accounting for 23-32% of GDP and providing livelihood for over 70% of the population – only 5-20% of the youth were interested in farming as an occupation or a full-time job. Rwandan youth, at 5%, were the least interested in farming or agriculture as a full-time job.

The study revealed that while youth were concerned about unemployment, they were willing to be part of the solution through strong orientation to entrepreneurship; the desire and willingness to create and run their own business. The study also showed that the youth held positive values, and believed political participation was a critical civic duty. However, 40% of East African youth would only vote a candidate for political office if they received a bribe.

With the exception of Rwanda, there is a veritable crisis of integrity among East African youth. For example, over 50-58% of the youth in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda believed it did not matter how one made money as long as one did not end up in jail. In contrast, only 21% of Rwandan youth held the same view. Similarly, only 10% of Rwandan youth said they would take or give a bribe, compared to 35-44 % in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.

Overall, East African youth are positive and optimistic and, are confident that the future will bring more prosperity, with more jobs, better access to health and education. However, with the exception of Rwanda, youth in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda believed their societies will be more corrupt and poorer in values and ethics, and that youth would engage in substance abuse.

While the findings may seem contradictory – hopeful and depressing – there is an opportunity to focus on developing and channeling the strongly held positive values of faith, family, hard work and entrepreneurship to inculcate an ethical orientation. The strongly held values and the spirit of enterprise, along with impressive GDP growth must be leveraged to address the challenge of unemployment, especially among university-educated youth.

Key findings

1. **Values:** When asked what they valued most, 75-88% of East African youth valued faith first, 40-60% valued family first, and 38-48% valued work first.

2. **Identity:** East African youth construct their identity along three key dimensions, that they are young (25-58%); nationalism (24-44%); faith (4.3-23%). Less than 5% of the youth identified as East Africans.

3. **Integrity:** 21-58% believed it did not matter how one made money as long as one did not end up in jail; 30-58% admired those who made money through hook or crook; 8-45% believed corruption was profitable; 73-75% were afraid to stand up for what is right for fear of retribution; Between 10-44% of the youth would readily take or give a bribe; the lower number is Rwanda and the higher number is Tanzania. Only 27-42% strongly believe that it is important to pay taxes.

4. **Political participation:** Overall, the youth had positive views about politics and democracy. 68-90% believed it was important to vote and would participate in the next elections (2014-17), while 54-70% believed they had the power to make a difference through their vote. However, East African youth are vulnerable to electoral bribery, with 40% saying they would only vote for a candidate who bribed them.

5. **Education:** About 56-82% (lower number is Tanzania, highest number Uganda) of the youth had post-primary level of education. 12-42% had post-secondary education. All four countries have nearly achieved parity in enrollment in primary and secondary education. However, the disparity in enrollment in university is highest in Tanzania where the enrollment of men is 2.5 times higher than women's.

6. **Aspirations:** 50-65% would like to go into business, compared to 15-26% (lower number is Rwanda) who wish to pursue careers such as engineering, law, medicine, and teaching; about 5-20% would go into farming (Rwanda is the lower number). About 75% of the youth who had an interest in self-employment or starting a business only had primary or secondary education; youth with university education aspired to get jobs in the formal sector. Interest in farming was highest among youth aged 31-35 years.

7. **Employment:** Overall, unemployment among East African youth is 51-57%. Unemployment was highest among rural women (62-66%), with the exception of Tanzania, where unemployment among urban women was higher compared to rural women. Unemployment was highest (76-83%) among youth aged 18-20. Moreover, their participation in self-employment was also very low (7-10%). Employment among youth with university education was highest in Tanzania (38%) and lowest in Rwanda (28%). Unemployment rates tend to be higher among the educated compared with the uneducated youth; 62% of Rwanda youth with university education were unemployed, compared to 52% of youth with primary education.

8. Youth and government

What they think about government: 40-75% trust politicians (trust for politicians was lowest among Kenyan youth and higher, while 65-84% trust government. The most trusted institutions are family (77-94%) followed by religious institutions at 79-86%. 46-60% of the youth had knowledge of government initiatives for youth. 28-64% of the youth had benefited from government-initiated youth programs and 37-56% knew how to tap into government-initiated youth programs.

What the youth want government to address: Unemployment was by far, the major concern at 48-63%. Other concerns were lack of access to capital for business at 14-24%, poverty at 10-16%.

9. **The future:** 65-85% of the youth were optimistic about the future and believed their societies will be richer materially. 50-75% believed their societies would reward merit. While youth in Rwanda did not envisage a future characterized by corruption, 30% of youth in Kenya and Tanzania, and 45% and of youth Uganda believed there would be more corruption in their countries. 50-60% of Ugandan and Tanzanian youth believed that their society will be poorer in values, ethics and more youth would engage in substance abuse, compared to 26% and 30% in Rwanda and Kenya respectively.

Implications of the findings

This study does not prescribe solutions or offer policy recommendations. Instead, it is an invitation to further dialogue, debate and new questions about values, attitudes, aspirations and opportunities for East African youth. The study furnishes data to inform the collective search for a shared framework for policies, programs and actions necessary to prepare East Africa's youth to thrive and lead in a competitive and globalized world.

Hence, four issues from the study call for a broader and sustained dialogue, debate and action by all stakeholders; youth, educators, governments, civil society, the EAC Secretariat, private sector, development partners and faith and political leaders.

1. Two factors – a large youthful population and a large proportion of post-primary educated youth (56-82%) – converge to create a '**double dividend**' moment for East Africa. There is an opportunity to launch the region on a firm transition to a knowledge-based economy through developing and harnessing skilled human capital, delivering the aspirations of the respective national vision statements – middle-income nations – and making real the aspirations for a more prosperous future, with more and better paying jobs for the youth, better access to health. What will it take to leverage the '**double dividend**'?
2. Over the last three decades the governments in the EAC region have executed fiscal policies, which have led to high GDP growth. Despite impressive GDP growth, all four countries face the challenge of a '**low capacity to provide jobs for growing supply of educated youth**'. Employment among young graduates is feeble (28-38%). Official statistics show that unemployment among Rwanda's graduates is about 7 times higher than the national unemployment rate. In this survey about 48-62% of youth with university education considered themselves unemployed, given their aspirations and what they consider is their capacity and qualifications. Across East Africa, the largest employer is the informal sector; nearly 80% of jobs created Kenya in 2015 were in the informal sector. In Uganda about 84% of youth with no tertiary education work in the informal sector. Jobless growth seems to be the new normal. What does this say about the quality of growth and structure of the economies of the four countries, and the EAC region in general?
3. There is a veritable '**crisis of integrity**' among youth in Kenya Tanzania and Uganda. Up to 45% of the youth believe corruption is profitable and up to 58% would do anything to make money. Only 40% would pay taxes on earned income and up to 73% are afraid to stand up for the truth for fear of retribution. With the exception of Rwanda, corruption in the public sector, and indeed across all sectors of society has reached a crisis proportion. Moreover, Youth Kenya Tanzania and believe that their societies will be more corrupt in the future. In Rwanda, President Kagame says the consequences of graft on public officials are huge. Can the zero tolerance approach to corruption in Rwanda be replicated in Kenya Tanzania and Uganda? The government of Uganda recognizes that corruption poses a major challenge to good governance. In Tanzania President Magufuli campaigned on a platform of integrity and the restoration of the ethos of hard work. In Kenya President

Kenyatta said corruption was a national security threat and costs Kenyans about 250,000 jobs every year according to President Obama.

4. In the minds of young East Africans, a regional polity remains, a lofty political ideal. A sense of **East Africaness** as a dimension of identity is very low. Less than 5% of youth identify as East African. At about 1% regional affinity is especially low in Kenya and Rwanda. Clearly, the drivers of the integration process – customs union, monetary union, political federation and common markets – mean very little to the youth. The integration effort is perceived largely as a political process, which has little social and emotional buy-in, especially among the youth.

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² <http://data.eadialogueseries.org/>