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The Rwanda Youth Survey Report¹²

Alex O. Awiti and Bruce Scott

April 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

Rwanda is youthful country. The median age is estimated as 19 years, and about 78 % of the population is below the age of 35 years.

Rwanda’s youth, defined as individuals between the ages of 14 and 35, are a critical majority and will determine and shape the country’s future. With that 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.

We interviewed 1,1336 respondents aged 18–35 years from across the country, including both urban and rural areas. The survey reveals a number of important and sometimes surprising insights, and offers reasons both for optimism, deep concern and the need for urgent action.

There is a strong sense of patriotism among Rwandan youth, with 44% identifying themselves as Rwandans first. They value faith, family and hard work. The youth are entrepreneurial, with the majority aspiring to start their own business, rather than pursue careers in law, teaching, medicine or engineering. Although agriculture is one of the leading sectors in Rwanda – accounting for 35% of the GDP, only 5% of the youth were interested in farming as an occupation.

The study reveals that while youth are suffering from and concerned about unemployment, they are willing to be part of the solution by creating jobs through entrepreneurship. The study also reveals that while the youth hold positive values, and

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² 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.

believe political participation is critical civic duty, 60% of the youth are vulnerable to electoral fraud, which could undermine governance and accountability.

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. The strongly held values of hard work and entrepreneurship, as well as impressive GDP growth must be leveraged to address the challenge of unemployment, especially among university-educated youth.

Overall, Rwandan youth are positive and optimistic about the future and are confident that it will be more prosperous, offering more jobs and better access to health and education. But what will it take to deliver opportunity and shared prosperity for the youth?

Key Findings

1. **Values:** When asked what they value most, 88% valued faith first, 55% valued family first, 43% valued work first and 38% valued wealth first, and 21% valued freedom first. Only 3.6% valued integrity first. 75% of the youth believed they would succeed if they worked hard.

2. **Identity:** Rwandan youth constructed their identity along three major dimensions; 44% identify as Rwandans first. 25% identify as young person first, 23% identify by their faith first. Only 1.4% identify as East African first, with youth aged 30-35 years (2.6 %), expressing a stronger sense of East Africaness.

3. **Integrity:** 21% believed it doesn't matter how one makes money as long as one does not end up in jail; 30% admire those who make money through hook or crook; 8% believe corruption is profitable; 73% are afraid to stand up for what is right for fear of retribution; Only 10% of the youth would readily take or give a bribe. Only 40% strongly believe that it is important to pay taxes.

4. **Political Participation:** Overall, the youth had positive views about politics and democracy. 83% believed it is important to vote and would participate in the next elections (2016), while 70% believed they had the power to make a difference. 80% of the youth would vote to elect a youthful candidate. However, 68% of the youth are vulnerable to electoral bribery, with 40% saying they would only vote for a candidate who bribed them.

5. **Aspirations:** 65% would like to go into business, compared to 15% who wish to pursue careers such as engineering, law, medicine, and teaching; About 7% of the youth aspire to be powerful politicians and musicians. Only about 5% of the youth would wish to go into farming. Interest in business was highest (74%) among youth with primary school education, while interest in traditional formal employment was highest among youth with university education farming was highest (24%) among youth aged 31-35 years

6. **Education:** Overall, about 71% of the youth had post-primary level of education. Only 22% of the youth had primary level of education. 28% of the youth had post secondary level of education. There were 28% more girls with secondary education compared to boys.

7. Employment: Overall, unemployment among youth surveyed was about 57%, 27% were in formal employment and 16% reported they were self-employed. At 66%, unemployment was highest among rural women. Rural males had the highest self-employment levels at 22%. Labor participation rates were highest among youth aged 26-35 years, 60-70% and lowest (24-40%) among youth aged 18-25 years. Unemployment rates tend to be higher among the educated than the uneducated youth; 62% of Rwanda youth with university education were unemployed, compared to 51% of youth with primary education.

8. Youth and Government

What they think about government: 70% trust politicians, while 84% trust government. The most trusted institutions are family (87%) followed by religious institutions at 85%. 60% of the youth had knowledge of government initiatives for youth. 64% of the youth had benefited from government-initiated youth programs and 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 51%. Other concerns were lack of access to capital for business at 24%, poverty at 16% and illiteracy at 8%.

9. The future: 85% of the youth believed Rwanda will be richer materially. 70% believe there will be more opportunities for youth – better access to quality education and health, and more jobs for youth. Moreover, 75% believe society will reward merit or hard work, and 26% believe Rwanda will be poorer in ethics and values.

Implications of the Findings

This study does not prescribe solutions or policy recommendations. Instead, it is an invitation to further dialogue, debate and new questions. The study furnishes key data to inform the collective search for a shared framework for policies, programs and actions necessary to prepare Rwanda's youth to thrive and lead in a competitive and globalized world. Hence, three key implications from the study call for a broader and sustained national dialogue, debate and action by all stakeholders; youth, educators, government, civil society, politicians, private sector, development partners and faith and political leaders. This is consistent with the importance the East African Institute attaches to the role of public dialogue as a vehicle for socio-economic change.

- 1. The Double Dividend:** With 76% of the youth having post-primary education, there is an opportunity to leverage the demographic and education dividend and to launch the country on a firm transition to a knowledge-based economy through developing and harnessing skilled human capital, making real the aspirations of Vision 2020 – a middle-income nation in which Rwandans are healthier, educated and generally more prosperous. High expectations by the youth of the future – wealthier society, more jobs for the youth, better access to health – demands that the national vision and development planning are both anticipatory and responsive.
- 2. Low capacity to absorb the growing supply of educated youth.** Over the last three decades the Rwanda government has executed effective liberalization policies, which have led to a sustained period of high growth. Rwanda has been among the fastest growing economies in the world. Between

2000/01 and 2010/11, the economy grew at nearly 8% per year. However, such impressive economic performance has not been translated into improved labor participation, especially among youth. Official statistics show that unemployment among Rwanda's graduates is about 7 times higher than the national unemployment rate. In this survey about 60% of youth with university education considered themselves unemployed, given their aspirations and what they consider is their capacity and qualifications.

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³ <http://data.eadialogueseries.org/>