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The Uganda Youth Survey Report¹²

Alex O. Awiti and Bruce Scott

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

Uganda is the most youthful country in East Africa. The median age is estimated at about 16 years, and about 80 % of the population is below the age of 35 years.

Uganda’s youth, defined as individuals between the ages of 18 and 35, 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 1,854 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 esprit de corps among the youth, with 35% identifying first as youth. They value faith, hard work and family. 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 Uganda accounting for 23% of the GDP, 30% of total exports and 65% of raw materials for local industries only 12% of the youth want to become farmers.

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 many hold beliefs that make them

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² The statistics presented in this report are solely derived from the survey designed and commissioned by Aga Khan University.

vulnerable to corruption and political manipulation and that risk undermining democracy and good governance.

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 faith, family, hard work and entrepreneurship must be leveraged to address the crisis integrity as well as the challenge of unemployment among the youth.

Overall, Uganda 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. What would it take to deliver opportunity and shared prosperity for the youth?

Key findings

1. **Values:** When asked what they value most, 79% valued faith first, 47.5% valued work first, 39.6% valued family first and 37.6% valued wealth first, and 25.7% valued freedom first. Only 5.6% valued integrity first. The association between hard work and success was strongest (89%) among youth with undergraduate education and lowest (50%) among youth with postgraduate education.

2. **Identity:** Ugandan youth constructed their identity along three major dimensions; 34.7% identify as youth first. 29 % identify as Ugandans first, 9.7% identify by their faith first. A larger percentage of youth (28-31%) between 26 and 35 years old identified as Ugandan first. Only 4.3% identify as East African first, with youth aged 30-35 years (8.4 %), expressing a stronger sense of East Africaness.

3. **Integrity:** 56% believed it doesn't matter how one makes money as long as one does not end up in jail; 55% admire those who make money through hook or crook, (including hustling); 33% believe corruption is profitable; 73% are afraid to stand up for what is right for fear of retribution; 40% of the youth would readily take or give a bribe. Only 27% strongly believe that it is important to pay taxes.

4. **Political Participation:** Overall, the youth had positive views about politics and democracy. 68% believed it is important to vote and would participate in the next elections (2016), while 54% believed they had the power to make a difference. However, 74% of the youth are vulnerable to electoral bribery, with 39% saying they would only vote for a candidate who bribed them.

5. **Aspirations:** 48% would like to go into business, compared to 24% who wish to pursue careers such as engineering, law, medicine, and teaching; About 12% would wish to go into farming. Similarly, 13% of the youth aspire to be powerful politicians, and 6% would like to be musicians. Interest in business was highest (51%) among youth aged 21-25 years, while interest in 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 18.4% of the youth had primary level of education. 39.6% of the youth had post secondary level of education. Uganda has nearly achieved gender parity at all levels

of education; from primary through university. However, there were 10% more women enrolled in primary and university compared to men.

7. Employment: Overall, unemployment among youth was about 52%. At 62%, unemployment was highest among rural women. 22% of the youth reported they were self employed while 26% were in formal employment. There was a strong positive correlation between level of education and labor participation. Hence, labor participation rates were generally higher among youth with university level of education. Labor participation rates (formal employment and self-employment) were highest among youth with post-graduate education. Self-employment rates were lowest among youth with university level education. Youth aged between 18-25 were on average twice more likely to be unemployed compared to those aged between 26 and 35. Unemployment rates in rural areas were 33% higher compared to urban areas.

8. Youth and Government

What they think about government: 75% trust politicians, while 80% trust government. The most trusted institutions are religious (84%) followed by family at 88%. 46% of the youth had knowledge of government initiatives for youth. 28% of the youth had benefited from government-initiated youth programs and 37% 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%. Other concerns were lack of access to capital for business at 19%, poverty at 10% and discrimination and lack of opportunity at 8%.

9. The future: 75% of the youth believed Uganda would be richer materially. 66% believe there will be more opportunities for youth – better access to quality education and health, and more jobs for youth. Moreover, 62% believed society would reward merit or hard work. 45% believed there would be more corruption, and 56% believed Uganda would be poorer in ethics and values, while 40% believed more youth would engage in substance abuse.

Implications of the findings

This report does not prescribe solutions or policy recommendations. This report is an invitation to further dialogue, debate and to ask new questions. The report furnishes insights to inform the collective search for a shared framework for policies, programs and actions necessary to prepare Uganda's youth to thrive and lead in a competitive and globalized knowledge economy.

Hence, three key implications from the report call for a broader and sustained national dialogue, debate and action by all stakeholders; youth, educators, government, civil society, private sector, development partners, religious and political leaders.

- 1. The Double dividend:** With 71% 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; making real the aspirations of Vision 2040 –“**A Transformed Ugandan Society from a Peasant to a Modern and Prosperous Country within 30 years**”. High expectations of the future – wealthier society, more jobs for the

youth, better access to health – demands that we ensure that the national vision and development planning are both anticipatory and responsive.

- 2. Low capacity to absorb the growing supply of human capital.** Over the last three decades the Uganda government has executed effective liberalization policies, which have led to a sustained period of high growth. The country posted an average GDP growth of 7% in the 1990s and 2000s making it one of the fastest growing economies in Africa. However, such impressive economic performance has not been translated into improved labor participation among youth. Employment rate of about 50% among university graduates reflects a weak positive association between education and labour participation. Uganda’s Vision 2040 recognizes that high unemployment is largely due to the slow labor absorptive capacity of the economy and a failure to match skills with the needs of the economy³. In the just concluded elections, President Museveni pledged to “increase on job creation through wealth creation programs.” Moreover, it is imperative, especially over the next five years, to address the skills gap, and prioritize investments in agriculture and industry to expand opportunity and harness the demographic and educational dividend presented by the youth.

- 3. A crisis of integrity:** That corruption is perceived as profitable by 33% of the youth is perhaps consistent with the fact that Uganda has been tumbling down on the Corruption Perceptions Index. The global Corruption Perception Index (CPI) shows that corruption is getting worse. Uganda was ranked 127th in 2010, 143 in 2011, 130 in 2012, 140 in 2013, and 142 in 2014, and dropped to 139 in 2015. A significant proportion of youth believes corruption is profitable, would take or give a bribe and would not pay taxes on earned income. What is deeply disconcerting is that widespread perception high levels of corruption could be eroding trust in vital public institutions. To its credit, the government of Uganda recognizes that corruption is an impediment to development and it poses a major challenge to good governance, which is a core principle of Uganda’s Vision 2040. Most importantly, our best efforts to address to deal with the integrity crisis must enlist the majority and the curators of Uganda’s future, its youth.

Acknowledgement

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³ Uganda Vision 2040. <http://npa.ug/wp-content/themes/npatheme/documents/vision2040.pdf>

⁴ <http://data.eadialogueseries.org/>