

The success of youth policies requires coordinated actions between the Government, civil society and development partners

- Mozambique has a considerable institutional framework for promoting youth leadership and participation in political, social and economic processes. However, almost three decades after the approval of the youth policy, the great objective of giving primacy to the participation of young people in the construction of the Mozambican nation proposed in the Youth Policy remains a mirage, despite apparent policy efforts, which raises questions about its effectiveness.



The background of the page features a vertical orange band with white text. On either side of this band are vertical panels showing silhouettes of people celebrating with their arms raised against a sunset sky. The overall color palette is warm, dominated by oranges, yellows, and greens.

In the field of public policies, the youth dimension is relatively recent in the international sphere in general, and particularly in Mozambique. Indeed, the notion of youth as a “subject of rights” that demands specific policies began in the second half of the 1980s, when the social exclusion of young people became an integral part of social problems¹.

At the national level, public youth policies must be seen in the context of political pluralism, with the transition to a multi-party democracy through the approval of the 1990 Constitution. This Constitution established a series of rights and freedoms that opened spaces for the institutionalization of mechanisms of participation and civic engagement, by establishing freedom of assembly and association for citizens.

Thus, in 1991, Law nº 8/91, of 18 July, was approved, which regulates citizens’ right to free association, opening a new paradigm for participation, since after independence in 1975, due to the political and emerging ideological context, marked by political centralization around a party, there was a contraction of the associative movement².

¹ ABRAMO, Helena. *Estação Juventude: Fundamental concepts – starting points for a reflection on public youth policies*. Brasília: SNJ, 2014. p. 50.

² https://www.iese.ac.mz/lib/publication/livros/cidadania/IESE_Cidadania.pdf

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In 1992, the Ministry of Culture and Youth was created, later transformed into the Ministry of Youth and Sports, which allowed the prioritization of youth issues on the Government's agenda, leading to the approval, through Resolution n° 4/96, of the Youth Policy, whose fundamental objective was "to make youth the most participatory group in society in the process of building the Mozambican nation"³.

To respond to this fundamental objective, a series of policy measures have been implemented over the years. The year 2006 marks the approval of the Comprehensive Youth Development Strategy, whose vision was to empower young Mozambicans to realize their creative, enterprising and voluntary potential and abilities, assuming their responsibilities in the country's development process.

About two years later, the Assembly of the Republic ratified the African Youth Charter adopted by the Heads of State and Government of the African Union. This instrument brings with it a set of devices that must be followed by member countries to respond to the diverse needs of African youth. This series of institutional reforms to meet the main objective of the Youth Policy culminated in the replacement, in 2020, of the Ministry of Youth and Sports by the Secretary of State for Youth and Employment, an entity that was born from the understanding of the need to promote and prioritize youth employment.

In this context, the Government introduced the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Youth Policy – 2020 (PAIPJ 2020), which essentially results from the harmonization of actions that affect adolescents and young people contained in the Economic and Social Plan 2020 (PES 2020), to improve the quality of life of adolescents and young people by promoting access to education, health, employment, housing, preventing and combating forced unions and early pregnancies⁴.

However, the influential factor in defining the fundamental objective of the Youth Policy in Mozambique was essentially the phenomenon of rejuvenating the Mozambican population.

Data that support the development of Youth Policy show that the historical evolution of the birth rate has modeled a very young population structure, characterized by a very wide base and a flattening at the top of the age pyramid.

In fact, between 1950 and 1980, the time before the policy was drawn, there was an increase in the general population and a proportional increase in young people. In 1980, the first census of independent Mozambique was carried out, with a population of around 12.1 million inhabitants, rising to 16.1 million in 1997, of which 44.8% were young people. In the 2007 census, 20.6 million inhabitants were registered, of which 46.9% were young, and in the last 2017 census, 27.9 million inhabitants were counted, with about 66% of the population being young, that is, under 25 years old. Therefore, it is possible to observe that with the increase in population volume, the proportion of young people also increased, as expected.

Currently, some 27 years after the approval of the Youth Policy, youth is the most participatory age group in the population in demographic terms, but the same is not felt in the process of building the Mozambican nation. This situation is a cause for concern, as the speed of population growth has implications for all development sectors in the country, particularly, at an economic level, which is reflected in the levels of poverty.

Despite a reduction in poverty rates in Mozambique between 1996 and 2014 (the levels reduced from 69.7% to 46.1%) due to a series of factors, the rate has increased again in recent years, with a projection of about 63% of the poor population in Mozambique in the year 2021. This is alarming, given that in the same interval the population increased by more than 50%⁵. A population increase that is disproportionate to the reduction in poverty levels puts pressure on public spending. Since most of the poor population is made up of young people, therefore, the age group that most put pressure on public spending, is mainly reflected in deficits in meeting their needs in terms of education, employ-

³ https://www.youthpolicy.org/national/Mozambique_2012_Draft_National_Youth_Policy.pdf

⁴ <https://cddmoz.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Governo-continua-sem-estrat%C3%A9gia-clara-para-tirar-milh%C3%B5es-de-jovens-do-desemprego.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.theigc.org/blogs/progress-poverty-eradication/poverty-eradication-mozambique-progress-and-challenges-amid>

ment, housing and health.

It is, in fact, a cycle that starts from the phase before youth, childhood. Still, on the path to professional training, they are faced with several challenges. In addition to poverty, factors linked to the quality of education, such as the lack of properly qualified teachers, study conditions and precarious sanitary equipment in primary and secondary schools, hinder the learning process even in the early stages of young people's lives. Although enrollment rates have increased in recent years, more than half of students never complete primary education, which is reflected in high illiteracy rates, estimated at around 39%⁶. And more: many children and adolescents finish school without proper training and skills improvement, later facing difficulties in entering higher education. At this stage, young people are faced with new challenges, starting right away with entering universities.

There are around 56 Higher Education Institutions in Mozambique (HEIs), a third of which are public. However, the university population ratio in relative terms is still very low. Mozambique is very far from both regional and global ratios. The African average is above 10%, against around 25% in global terms, and in Mozambique, it barely reaches 1%. Therefore, for a population of 28 million inhabitants, of which more than 50% are over 15 years old, only 200 thousand attend higher education⁷. One of the factors behind this phenomenon is the high inequality in access to HEIs between the different regions of the country, even though they are present in almost all provinces. This reflects, on the one hand, the pressure that is felt on admission to public universities, which tends to get worse over the years given the increase in the ratio of applicants per vacancy and, on the other hand, the lack of resources of most of the young people to join private universities, especially the most prestigious in terms of teaching quality, whose membership fees and tuition fees become more expensive over the years due to the influence of the dynamics of demand itself.

Thus, only a small proportion of young people

achieve higher education in Mozambique and the vast majority are privileged young people. Having arrived at the stage of entering the labor market, young people are, on the one hand, challenged by their lack of technical and professional training and, on the other hand, by the reduced number of opportunities to absorb so many young people.

Around 500,000 young people enter the labor market annually and existing jobs cannot keep up with the pace⁸, which is reflected in the youth unemployment rate which in 2019 was estimated at around 7.18%. This rate, although it seems low, is far from the standards of unemployment considered acceptable, in addition to not capturing the desperate reality that young people in Mozambique are experiencing in their search for a job, giving rise to various forms of expression of dissatisfaction, there is even some skepticism about the accuracy of data on youth unemployment in Mozambique⁹.

Of the 92.82% of employed young people, the majority belong to urban areas, and in peripheral-urban and rural areas young people tend to be in less productive activities and an even more expressive number of these young people do not have access to basic health services, housing, or funding for youth initiatives. In turn, these factors end up leading young people to deviant behavior and to get involved in various criminal practices, the incidence of which has been increasing in recent years. The recruitment of young people by violent extremist groups in Cabo Delgado is part of this problem¹⁰. Not having many options left, young people who should contribute to building the Mozambican nation end up participating in its destruction.

Associated with the impasses mentioned above, deficits in education in terms of supply, quality, and conditions of access are at the origin of other social problems, such as marriages and premature pregnancies. In 2018, the teenage fertility rate was 194 births per 1,000 female adolescents, 230 per 1,000 adolescents in rural areas, and 134 per 1,000 in urban areas. As a result, 45% of young Mozambicans, aged between

⁶ <https://clubofmozambique.com/news/germany-and-partners-support-youth-education-and-employment-to-promote-mozambiques-inclusive-growth-232494/>

⁷ <https://jus.com.br/artigos/97289/desafios-do-ensino-superior-no-ambito-do-desenvolvimento-social-e-economico-em-mocambique>

⁸ <https://blogs.worldbank.org/jobs/four-ways-mozambique-can-achieve-faster-jobs-transformation-and-capture-demographic-dividend>

⁹ <https://www.voaportugues.com/a/campanha-custa-ser-jovem-em-mo%C3%A7ambique-clama-por-emprego-para-a-camada-juvenil/6018887.html>

15 and 19 years old, were pregnant or already had a child¹¹.

In turn, these factors are associated with the reproduction of poverty and the cycle of frustrations described above, which leads many young women to abandon their studies and miss out on opportunities due to maternal and conjugal responsibilities. Still, within the scope of aspects related to sexual and reproductive health, it is important to mention that Mozambique ranks among the 10 countries with the highest number of HIV infections globally. Although visible, the efforts of government entities both in terms of raising awareness and providing sexual and

reproductive health services are not being felt in reality, considering the growing number of infected people in the country. The most worrying thing is that most of those infected are young people.¹²

Therefore, instead of reaping the benefits of the demographic dividend, it became a “curse” for Mozambique. Almost three decades after the approval of the Youth Policy, the great objective of giving primacy to youth participation in the construction of Mozambique remains a mirage, despite the apparent policy efforts in its follow-up, which raises questions about the effectiveness of such efforts.

Some challenges in implementing youth policies

Studies on the effectiveness of youth policies in Mozambique raise some problems in implementation, namely (i) the character discontinuation of activities carried out in the youth sector; (ii) the transitory and isolated nature of the results associated with the inability to make a deeper assessment of the impact of the sector’s actions and others on youth issues; (iii) predominance of “quick wins”; (iv) weak appropriation of the results achieved in actions collective, especially for youth and pro-youth associations; (v) usurpation of protagonism by some organizations

and/or the Government concerning the results produced in the scope of collective work; and (vi) lack of social basis in legitimizing the agenda to be advocated¹³.

The objectives and dimensions covered by youth policies and strategies greatly reflect the transversality and intersectoral nature of youth issues. This fact underscores the importance of coordinated actions between the Government, civil society and development partners to achieve the objectives of youth policies.

¹¹ <https://www.afro.who.int/pt/news/about-half-of-the-mocambican-adolescents-has-a-child-or-is-pregnant>

¹² <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/hiv-rates-by-country>

¹³ Report on the Degree of Implementation of Youth Policies and Strategy in Mozambique. CEURBE, 2020.



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EDITORIAL INFORMATION

Property: CDD – Centro para Democracia e Desenvolvimento
Director: Prof. Adriano Nuvunga
Editor: Emídio Beula
Author: Glédice Biza
Layout: CDD

Address:
 Rua de Dar-Es-Salaam Nº 279, Bairro da Sommerschild, Cidade de Maputo.
 Telephone: +258 21 085 797

 CDD_moz
E-mail: info@cddmoz.org
Website: <http://www.cddmoz.org>

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