

DYNAMICS OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND SOCIAL COHESION

A decade after the Development Strategy: Nacala Corridor remains distant from the youth and communities of the North

- The Government of Mozambique, in its last Council of Ministers session held on November 11, 2025, approved a resolution amending Article 2 of Resolution No. 44/2016 of December 30, which establishes the Economic Development Strategy for the Nacala Corridor (PEDEC). The decision assigns to the Minister overseeing the area of Planning and Development the responsibilities for coordinating the implementation of the instrument, thus reinforcing the strategic role of the Nacala Corridor as an anchor for the development of northern Mozambique.¹ However, challenges persist: despite the project's potential, weak links with local communities remain, and there is limited integration of young people and small businesses into large investments. These circumstances exacerbate inequalities and tend to amplify social tensions, jeopardizing social cohesion.



¹ <https://www.rm.co.mz/governo-elimina-indemnizacoes-aos-gestores-publicos-exonerados-por-conveniencia/>



Youth, as the predominant demographic group in the region, must be recognized as key players in building resilient and just cities. Their inclusion in urban planning can occur through spaces for civic participation, capacity-building programs, and local entrepreneurship initiatives, allowing young people to contribute to innovative solutions in urban space management and the strengthening of community cohesion.



The Nacala Corridor and its strategic role

The Nacala Corridor constitutes one of the most strategic development axes in the country, linking northern Mozambique to regional and international markets through the Port of Nacala, the deepest natural port on the East African coast. Historically, the corridor represented a political and economic vision of territorial integration, designed to boost the development of the provinces of Nampula, Niassa, Zambézia, and Tete and reduce the regional asymmetries inherited

from the colonial period.¹

For decades, the corridor was a vital artery for the export of natural resources, especially coal from Moatize, and for the flow of agricultural products. However, the adopted model favored large-scale investments and capital-intensive sectors, with reduced absorption of local labor. Thus, despite contributing to macroeconomic growth, the corridor failed to translate this progress into tangible improvements for the majority of the population, especially young people².

Nacala Corridor: Youth, productive exclusion, and challenges of economic and social inclusion in the development of northern Mozambique

Youth constitute the largest demographic force in northern Mozambique, representing significant economic potential, but paradoxically, they remain on the margins of productive processes and opportunities generated along the Nacala Corridor.³ The absence of robust technical and vocational training policies, low levels of education, and the limited capacity of established companies to absorb skilled labor have created a profound gap between the productive potential of young people and the demands of the formal market. This mismatch prevents young people from fully contributing to local development, keeping them in precarious positions, often dependent on informal and temporary jobs.

As a consequence of this productive exclusion, a growing rural-urban exodus is occurring. Thousands of young people abandon their agricultural communities and move to urban centers such as Nampula, Cuamba, and Nacala-Porto, attracted by the promise of employment and better living conditions. However, upon arriving in the cities, they encounter informality, unemployment, and precariousness, often finding themselves in makeshift housing and overburdening already fragile urban services such as water, sanitation, transportation, and healthcare.⁴ This scenario highlights a develop-

ment model that has been neither inclusive nor equitable, leaving young people vulnerable to social and economic challenges.

The Nacala Corridor Economic Development Strategy (PEDEC, 2015-2025)⁵. It failed to meet its objectives due to profound structural limitations. The lack of inter-institutional coordination, weak community participation in decision-making processes, and the absence of effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms contributed to the frustration of local expectations.⁶ The resumption of the strategy in 2025, with the support of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), brought renewed hope, but also reopened historical wounds. Doubts persist about the ability of this new phase to correct past mistakes and effectively integrate young people into development processes.

Limited youth and local community participation remains a major vulnerability factor in the Corridor. Without clear inclusion mechanisms, large projects can exacerbate existing inequalities and generate feelings of dispossession. In resettlement areas, for example, families often lose their land and livelihoods without adequate compensation, creating pockets of instability, social disintegration, and latent conflicts between displaced people and host communities.

² <https://openjicareport.jica.go.jp/pdf/12268165.pdf>

³ <https://cddmoz.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Cinco-decadas-depois-corredores-de-desenvolvimento-ainda-continuam-no-campo-das-ideias.pdf>

⁴ https://mozambique.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pubpdf/condicoes_socioeconomicas_da_juventude_-_mario-22-06-23_0_0.pdf

⁵ https://omrmz.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Movimentos_migratorios_para_areas_de_con-1.pdf

⁶ https://openjicareport.jica.go.jp/pdf/12268199_01.pdf



Social cohesion is an important debate in this situation, as well as one of the biggest challenges associated with large investments. In the Nacala Corridor, forced resettlements, the loss of agricultural areas, and the degradation of local ecosystems have caused constant tensions. Many interventions were carried out without rigorous planning or the provision of basic infrastructure, exacerbating feelings of injustice and abandonment. Poor management of expectations is equally critical; the corridor, throughout its history, has created promises of prosperity that have rarely materialized, especially for young people. Many have migrated to nearby

areas in search of opportunities that never materialized, generating frustration and distrust in institutions.

If the new strategies do not incorporate a people-centered approach, particularly focusing on youth, there is a risk of reigniting discontent that fuels social conflict and undermines trust in institutions. The effective integration of young people into economic development and the promotion of community participation models are therefore imperative to transforming the Nacala Corridor into a genuine instrument of inclusion, cohesion, and prosperity for all.

The role of cooperatives and youth entrepreneurship in the development of the Nacala Corridor.

Youth unemployment in northern Mozambique is a persistent reality and one of the main challenges to the economic and social inclusion of young people. Integrating young people into the Nacala Corridor development model requires solutions that go beyond the mere allocation of individual resources, involving them in a structured way in collective and

sustainable economic activities.

One of the most prominent strategies has been the promotion of youth cooperatives. Experiences implemented by the Social Cohesion Program, led by the CDD in districts such as Angoche, Moma, and Cuamba, have demonstrated that collective work surpasses individual support in terms of im-

impact and continuity. While many beneficiaries of individual kits faced difficulties in maintaining their initiatives, the cooperatives showed greater resilience, cohesion, and sustainability.⁷

A concrete example is the Chiúre cooperative in Cabo Delgado province, which specializes in the production of school uniforms and textiles. This experience demonstrates that young people can indirectly participate in the corridor's major projects through small local industries, service provision, and the supply of goods, multiplying the economic impact of larger-scale initiatives.

Beyond the economic impact, organizing into cooperatives strengthens essential values such as solidarity, reciprocity, and community responsibility. By promoting collective work, these structures not only facilitate economic and social empowerment but also reinforce the social fabric and com-

munity cohesion, crucial elements in rural contexts.

The sustainability of youth initiatives, however, depends on adequate funding accompanied by ongoing training, technical assistance, and effective monitoring mechanisms. Experiences in northern Mozambique indicate that individual funding frequently suffers from resource dispersion, mismanagement of funds, and a lack of follow-up, rendering initiatives fragile and short-lived. In contrast, collective funding, through cooperatives, associations, or youth centers, tends to generate more consistent results with a lasting impact on the community.

Therefore, youth empowerment should not be understood solely as access to capital, but as an integrated process of capacity building, organization, and active citizenship, enabling young people to become agents of development, contributing directly to economic growth and social cohesion in the Nacala Corridor.

The challenge of urbanization and territorial planning in the Nacala Corridor

The development of the Nacala Corridor has driven rapid and often disorganized urbanization, posing significant challenges to land-use planning. The expansion of industrial, commercial, and residential areas, coupled with the continuous influx of migrants seeking economic opportunities, exerts intense pressure on urban services such as water supply, energy, sanitation, and transportation. As a result, many cities and towns struggle to keep pace with population growth, leading to informal settlements, precarious housing, and environmental degradation, which can compromise the quality of life of communities and the sustainability of local development.

To prevent urbanization from becoming a source of instability, local authorities must have inclusive, integrated, and participatory urban planning tools that can guide growth in an orderly and sustainable manner. This implies not only the design of efficient public policies but also their implementation based on the active participation of the population,

ensuring that decisions reflect the needs and priorities of local communities.

Youth, as the predominant demographic group in the region, must be recognized as key players in building resilient and just cities. Their inclusion in urban planning can occur through spaces for civic participation, capacity-building programs, and local entrepreneurship initiatives, allowing young people to contribute to innovative solutions in urban space management and the strengthening of community cohesion.

The role of civil society is equally crucial in this process. Community organizations, youth associations, and cooperatives can act as mediators between the population and the authorities, promoting citizen monitoring, environmental education, and the defense of urban rights. Their participation ensures that urban development is not only driven by economic criteria but also incorporates social and environmental dimensions, strengthening territorial justice and the sustainability of cities.

⁷ <https://cddmoz.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Caminhos-para-o-Desenvolvimento-Local-Sustentavel-em-Mocambique-.pdf>

Key recommendations:

Effective youth participation – Integrate youth representatives into the planning and monitoring processes of the corridor's projects.

Promoting local cooperatives and incubators – To provide financial and technical support to collective initiatives led by young people and women, with a focus on local value chains.

Technical and vocational training – To strengthen the network of technical institutes and internship programs in the logistics, agricultural, and industrial sectors.

Responsible management of resettlement – To guarantee transparency, fair compensation, and dignified conditions for the affected communities.

Inclusive and decentralized governance – To establish permanent mechanisms for dialogue between local governments, civil society, and youth.

Managing expectations and public communication – Implement information campaigns and community dialogue about the real opportunities and limitations of the corridor.



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INFORMAÇÃO EDITORIAL:

Propriedade: CDD – Centro para Direitos Humanos
Director: Prof. Adriano Nuvunga
Autor: CDD
Layout: CDD

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

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

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