



THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY

The East Africa Youth Survey Report¹

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“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 population in the region is below the age of 35 years. The median age ranges between 16 and 19 years, with the lowest median ages of 16 and 17 in Uganda and Tanzania respectively.

East Africa’s youth, defined as individuals between the ages of 14 and 35, are a critical majority and will determine and shape the region’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 in Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda and Tanzania.

We interviewed 7,010 individuals aged 18–35 years, male and female drawn from rural and urban areas. 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 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 both esprit de corps and nationalism among East African youth. Rwandan and Kenyan youth were the most nationalistic, with 44% and 40% respectively identifying first as Rwandese and Kenyans respectively. A strong esprit de corps was exhibited in Tanzanian with 58% identifying as youth first. 34% of Ugandan youth identified as youth first. 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 careers in law, teaching, medicine or 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.

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.

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 believe political participation is a critical civic duty.

However, between 40% of 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, Uganda and Tanzania believed it did not matter how one made money as long as one did not end up in jail. 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 the other three countries.

Overall, East African 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. However, with the exception of Rwanda, youth in Kenya, Uganda believed their societies will be more corrupt and poorer in values and ethics, and that youth will 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. 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.

But what will it take to deliver opportunity and shared prosperity for the youth?

Key findings

1. **Values:** When asked what they value 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 doesn't matter how one makes money as long as one does not end up in jail; 30-58% admire those who make money through hook or crook; 8-45%% believe corruption is profitable; 73-75% are afraid to stand up for what is right for fear of retribution; Only 10-44% of the youth would readily take or give a bribe. 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. **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). A majority of youth up to 75% who had an interest in self-employment or starting a business had primary and secondary education; youth with university education aspire to get jobs in the formal sector. Interest in farming was highest among youth aged 31-35 years.

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

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 women². 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 (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, 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. With the exception of Rwanda, 30-44% of youth 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 26-30 % in Rwanda and Kenya respectively.

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 East Africa's youth to thrive and lead in a competitive and globalized world. Hence, three key implications from the study call for a broader

² Unemployment in Tanzania 55% 58%; 46%, 47%

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 56-82% of the youth having post-primary education, there is an opportunity to leverage the demographic and education dividend and to launch the region on a firm transition to a knowledge-based economy through developing and harnessing skilled human capital, making real the aspirations of the respective vision statements – middle-income nations in which youth 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 governments in the EAC region government have executed effective economic modernization policies, which have led to a sustained period of high growth. Rwanda and Tanzania have been among the fastest growing economies in Africa. However, such impressive economic performance has not been translated into improved labor participation, especially among 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 and structure of the EAC economies?
- 3. A Crisis of Integrity:** 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. 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.