

Policy Briefing

287

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Zambia: Youth at the Heart of Innovation and Transformation

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Recommendations

- The Ministry of Youth, Sport and Arts should collaborate with line ministries to ensure a fixed proportion of youth representation in civic spaces and public and private institutions. This will help to strengthen social justice efforts through policy revision and youth-informed legislation.
- The Ministry of Green Economy and Environment should strengthen its response to climate change by collaborating with 'green innovators' to ensure the fast-tracking of the Climate Change Bill of 2022 into law. It should also leverage agri-tech innovations effectively.
- By updating curricula and incorporating technical and vocational education and training into mainstream curricula, the Ministry of Education can ensure that youth unemployment is addressed and youth entrepreneurship enhanced.
- By establishing targeted partnerships with technology manufacturers and retailers to provide access to the internet to all without discrimination, the Ministry of Technology and Science can ensure equitable access to technological facilities.

Executive summary

The Republic of Zambia is at a critical stage, where the potential of its vibrant youth population can shape its future to a significant extent. This policy briefing emphasises the importance of harnessing the energy, creativity and determination of Zambian youth to address pressing challenges and seize opportunities. An outcome of the ‘Youth and Social Justice Futures: Identifying Future Skills and Training in Africa’ project, this briefing advocates a comprehensive approach to youth development.

At workshops that form part of the project, Zambian youth identified key areas of concern, including the high unemployment rate, limited political representation, inadequate education system and technological access disparities. While the National Youth Policy and the National Information and Communications Technology Policy show the government’s commitment to youth development, it is crucial to bridge the implementation gap and assess their effectiveness.

Zambian youth participants proposed an action plan encompassing inclusive civic engagement, mentorship programmes, increased youth representation in political leadership, enhanced skills development and equitable access to technology. By fostering youth participation in civic space, addressing youth unemployment through entrepreneurship, pursuing climate change mitigation and ensuring technological accessibility, Zambia can pave the way for a more inclusive and prosperous future.

Introduction

The Republic of Zambia is dedicated to democracy, cultural tolerance and peace,¹ and its youth play a crucial role in shaping the democratic course of the nation. This policy briefing is a call to harness the potential of Zambia’s youth in addressing pressing imperatives, as the country stands at a crossroads of opportunity and challenges.

Young people from Zambia were recently among the East and Southern African youth participating in the project’s youth-led futures-informed participatory action research to re-imagine youth futures in the region. This involved exploring anticipatory systems in terms of skills, needs and orientations with policy actors and other stakeholders, with the aim to reframe social justice while co-creating collaborators who are futures literate. The project posits that, to advance civil society, social justice, climate action and a more equitable and sustainable future for all in Zambia and Africa as a whole, young people must be knowledgeable, capable and engaged.

¹ One World Nations Online, “Zambia”, <https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/zambia.htm>

The project employed Youth Futures Literacy Labs and the Three Horizon Framework to this end. Youth Futures Literacy Labs improve anticipatory skills, challenge expectations, increase futures literacy and reduce fears of uncertainty. The Three Horizon Framework aids in addressing complex issues and uncertain futures, guiding youth researchers to rethink current practices, envision an ideal future, plan visionary actions, manage disruptions and find ways to manage these transitions.²

Zambian participants' main concerns were related to high youth unemployment and the lack of policies that guarantee a fixed percentage of youth representation in the National Assembly, public institutions and other platforms dealing with social issues.³

Zambia has the capacity to use its natural resources, young population and advantageous geographic position to promote social and economic development. It can set the pace for lasting prosperity by promoting political stability, putting forward-thinking policies into practice, using technological advancements and cultivating cultural diversity. A collaborative and inclusive strategy that involves the government, civic society, academics and foreign partners is crucial in accomplishing these goals.⁴ However, young people are still excluded from many decision-making platforms and their parliamentary representation is inadequate.⁵ Zambia has not leveraged much of their talent to contribute to socio-economic development. It is also still grappling with an educational curriculum that is focused more on theory than on practice, failing to meet the needs of today's job market, despite calls for an update that reflects society's needs and aspirations. Progress made on this front has been unimpressive and slow.⁶

Policies such as the National Youth Policy of 2015, the National Decentralisation Policy of 2003, the National Technical Education, Vocational and Entrepreneurship Training Policy and the National Information and Communication Technology Policy of 2007 are the major documents that govern issues around youth.⁷ While the country has shown a commitment to youth development and engagement, there are still gaps in the way these policies are implemented. There is also a need to continuously assess how effective these policies are in addressing the evolving needs and aspirations of Zambia's youth. It is therefore crucial to integrate youth perspectives in policy reviews and conduct assessments on the impacts of these policies on the targeted population.⁸

The main purpose of this policy briefing is thus to advocate for increased youth participation in Zambia's socio-economic development. This can be done by addressing

2 UNESCO, "Futures Literacy", <https://www.unesco.org/en/futures-literacy>.

3 Youthpolicy.org, "Zambia", <https://www.youthpolicy.org/factsheets/country/zambia/>.

4 The World Bank in Zambia, "Overview", <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/zambia/overview>.

5 National Assembly of Zambia, "IPU Report Reveals Chronic Under-Representation of Young People in World's Parliaments", March 16, 2016.

6 International Labor Organization, "Enhance Employment and Self-Employment Opportunities for Young People through Access to Skills Development – Zambia", January 27, 2014.

7 Republic of Zambia, Ministry of Youth and Sport, *2015 National Youth Policy* (Lusaka: Ministry of Youth and Sport, August 2015).

8 Plan International, "Youth Engagement and the Sustainable Development Goals", December 15, 2021.

key issues such as skills development, deliberate civic engagement, equitable access to technology, climate change resilience and mitigation, youth unemployment and educational reform.

Reflections on the project

Youth in Zambia, as in many other countries, play a crucial role in shaping the future of the nation. 'More than 70% of [Zambia's] population is younger than 30',⁹ and their voices are vital in a well-functioning society, especially in terms of politics, education, social change and economic development. Hence, their concerns deserve attention and deliberate action from the relevant bodies and authorities.

Young people from Zambia were among the East and Southern African participants in the youth-led futures-informed participatory action research to reimagine youth futures in the region. Many felt that the transformative impact of this journey through the Futures Literacy Labs and the Three Horizon Framework could not be overstated. These workshops not only provided them with invaluable knowledge but also shaped mindsets and capabilities. One of the most powerful lessons encountered was the art of envisioning the future and embracing the processes that lead to it. This fosters open-mindedness, collaboration and adaptability, and trust in the unfolding of events, no matter how uncertain they may seem. From a position of relative inexperience, participants felt they evolved into capable individuals equipped to confront the challenges that lie ahead, and that their foresight had been sharpened. They had developed the ability to look at the horizon of the future, anticipating potential trajectories and discerning the factors that could influence outcomes. This sharpened awareness built their confidence, allowing them to set ambitious standards and rise above barriers that previously might have hindered their imaginative ambitions.

They had embarked on this journey with an anticipated role as youth researchers, participating in virtual meetings and mobilising fellow youth and stakeholders. However, this experience exceeded those expectations by stretching boundaries, unveiling a wealth of diverse knowledge and exposing them to different country experiences and youth perspectives. This exposure expanded the realm of their knowledge, awakening them to the diversity of youth perspectives in each nation. This appreciation for diversity further enriched their understanding of the aspirations that drive young people from different countries, shedding light on the agendas they strive to advance.

Importantly, these experiences also shattered limitations on dreaming big. The workshops showed them that the impossible could be made possible with the right steps and measures. This revelation was instrumental in turning inexperienced youths into policy advocates.

9 fhi360, "Youth Take the Lead in Zambia", April 20, 2022.

Through the workshops, youth had an opportunity to think through some of the challenges they face today in Zambia and recommend ways on how these can be addressed. There was a strategic focus on addressing youth unemployment in the country and on the need to take deliberate measures that will enhance the country's resilience to respond to the effects of climate change. Also, in a world that is rapidly advancing in technology and in the face of the radical shift to leveraging technological infrastructure and facilities in fostering and contributing to national development, the youth's focus is on enabling access to the internet and other technological facilities for all. Another focus area is the desire to ensure youth representation on all decision-making platforms.

This process enabled youth aspirations to focus on a holistic and collective win for all, helping the youth of Zambia to set long-, medium- and short-term goals towards the future they want. By outlining key priority areas, young Zambians recommended national strategic priorities that should be acted upon to help them realise this envisioned future.

Policy recommendations

Strategic priority 1

Promoting youth representation and active engagement in social justice advocacy

The Ministry of Youth, Sport and Arts, working with the National Assembly, aligned ministries, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the media, should collaborate with young people and promote a fixed proportion of youth representation in both civic spaces and private institutions. There should be active engagement in the fight for social justice in order to address issues of youth exclusion and social injustice in Zambia. This can be achieved by revising policies to promote youth participation, strengthening legislation to bring an end to politics of tribalism and regionalism and encouraging active youth participation in economic and social research.¹⁰

Firstly, the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Arts should establish a collaborative Youth Inclusion Task Force, comprising representatives from the National Assembly, NGOs and relevant ministries. This task force should find ways to ensure strong youth representation in civic spaces and institutions. Secondly, collaborative efforts with the National Assembly should focus on developing and passing quota legislation mandating a fixed proportion of youth representation in decision-making bodies. Thirdly, an extensive awareness campaign should be orchestrated by involving various media platforms to educate both youth and the public at large about the crucial role young people play in advocating social justice. Lastly, support for youth-led initiatives should be provided through funding, resources and mentorship,

¹⁰ UNESCO, "UNESCO Supports Development of National Youth Policy for Zambia", April 20, 2023.

enabling them to tackle effectively pressing social justice issues such as gender equality, human rights and environmental sustainability. Participants recommended a multi-sectoral approach in fostering an inclusive society and addressing social injustices.

Strategic priority 2

Ensuring a climate-resilient agricultural response and promoting agri-tech innovation

To achieve a climate-resilient agriculture sector, a holistic strategy is essential. While engaging experts and stakeholders for comprehensive implementation, the Ministry of Green Economy and Environment, working with the ministries of agriculture, education, science and technology and aligned NGOs, should collaborate to strengthen the response to climate change's expected effects on agriculture. This can be done by ensuring an expedited process to pass the Climate Change Bill into law.

Additionally, partnerships with agricultural research institutions and technology experts should be formed to encourage the adoption of innovative agri-tech solutions, providing farmers with incentives and supporting them with training and funding opportunities. The Ministry of Agriculture, in collaboration with the Ministry of Green Economy and Environment, should establish centres of excellence for climate-resilient agriculture, equipped to provide training and technology transfer. They should also enhance climate change mitigation by leveraging agri-tech innovations such as user-friendly mobile applications that connect farmers with markets, buyers and suppliers. Such apps should also give farmers real-time information on weather forecasts, smart irrigation systems, market prices and pest and disease management; and enable smooth transactions, best practices for crop cultivation and lower post-harvest losses. Biotechnology should be leveraged to develop climate-resilient crop varieties that can withstand extreme weather conditions and ensure consistent yields. This will promote value addition throughout the agriculture sector.

By collaborating with agribusiness organisations, value-added processing and marketing strategies can be developed, ultimately enhancing farmers' income and sustainability. This will encourage more young people to venture into agriculture and leverage the technology and resources available to them.

Strategic priority 3

Prioritising youth employment and entrepreneurship

The Ministry of Education should collaborate with the Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprise Development, other relevant ministries and stakeholders such as community leadership, the media, NGOs, institutions of higher learning and the Department of Labour to ensure youth unemployment is addressed and youth entrepreneurship through small and medium-sized enterprises is promoted.

To achieve this, the Ministry of Education, under the Department of Curriculum Development, collaborating with relevant ministries and stakeholders, should update the curriculum to emphasise practical skills that align with the current and future needs of society. This entails strengthening the Technical Education, Vocational and Entrepreneurship Training Authority to ensure that its offerings align with the skill demands of the present and future job market. This includes diversifying training programmes to cover emerging industries and technologies.¹¹ The Ministry of Education can build on the SADC Child and Youth Agency Framework developed by MIET Africa under the FutureLife-Now! Programme to provide a structured approach for guiding young individuals toward their desired futures. This will also help in identifying and nurturing talents among youth who may not have access to formal education through collaborating with relevant stakeholders, such as the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Arts and other organisations, to provide opportunities for talent development and exposure.¹²

Lastly, the Department of Labour, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and other institutions of higher learning, should develop and implement a policy that encourages companies to hire a certain proportion of graduates to facilitate increased youth employment. Such a policy could provide incentives for companies to prioritise graduate recruitment.

Strategic priority 4

Ensuring equitable access to technology and internet connectivity

The Ministry of Technology and Science, collaborating with the ministries of education, local government, and youth, sport and arts, should ensure equitable access to technological facilities. This includes ensuring access to the internet across the board without discrimination.

To achieve this, the Ministry of Technology and Science should use a multi-sectoral approach to promote universal technological access and bridge the digital divide. This means collaborative efforts among the Ministry of Technology and Science, the Zambia Information and Communications Technology Authority, the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development and the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Arts should culminate in the development of a comprehensive National Internet Connectivity Plan, addressing infrastructure, affordability and digital literacy.¹³ Public Wi-Fi zones should be placed strategically in schools, community centres and public spaces, providing accessible internet in both urban and rural areas. This is possible through partnering with technology manufacturers and retailers to provide subsidised devices to disadvantaged individuals

11 Josie Misko and John Saunders, *Training Needs of Emerging Industries* (Research Report, Adelaide National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Adelaide, 2004), <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/training-needs-of-emerging-industries>.

12 Future Life-Now! and MIET Africa, "SADC Policy Framework on Care and Support for Teaching and Learning" (Presentation, Child and Youth Agency Framework Webinar, June 23, 2022).

13 Levy Syanseke, "Zambia Needs the Internet More than Ever", Internet Society (blog post), July 15, 2021.

and persons who are differently abled. These partnerships should be coupled with digital literacy programmes offered through educational institutions, NGOs and community organisations, empowering individuals with the skills needed for effective and secure technological use. Such comprehensive actions will pave the way for a digitally inclusive and empowered society.

Conclusion

In Zambia's journey towards sustainable development and social progress, the significance of its youth cannot be overemphasised. This policy briefing emphasises the crucial role that young people play in shaping the nation's future and calls for a concerted effort to address their concerns and empower them to become active agents of change. The challenges faced by Zambian youth, such as unemployment, inadequate education and technological disparities, demand a comprehensive and collaborative approach.

Futures thinking in this case encourages innovation and creativity in problem-solving among the young and the old. It challenges conventional thinking and opens up possibilities for new, imaginative solutions. This is particularly important when dealing with complex, fixed issues where traditional approaches have proven insufficient.¹⁴ Hence, involving young people in futures-thinking processes will foster their engagement and ownership of solutions. It empowers them to contribute their perspectives, ideas and creativity to shape their own future, making policies more inclusive and effective.

By prioritising youth participation in civic space, fostering entrepreneurship and skills development, championing climate change mitigation and ensuring equitable access to technology, Zambia can create an environment where the potential of its youth is fully realised. Through inclusive policies, strategic partnerships and dedicated efforts, the nation can tap into the enthusiasm, creativity and resilience of its young population, driving Zambia towards a future characterised by social justice, economic prosperity and sustainable development.¹⁵

¹⁴ Larry Schmitt, "Future Thinking: An Innovative Mindset for Innovative Action", Inovo, January 6, 2020.

¹⁵ UN Development Programme, "Placing Meaningful Youth Engagement at the Heart of Environmental Action", June 3, 2022.

This policy briefing is part of a series. The policy recommendations herein are the output of 36 foresight workshops across East and Southern Africa, forming part of the 'Youth and Social Justice Futures: Identifying Future Skills and Training in Africa' project. The aim of the project was to identify and address youth skills needs in the region by employing futures thinking. This research was co-created with youth participants from Tanzania, Uganda, Malawi, Zambia and South Africa in workshops that engaged decision makers in government, civil society, industry associations and the private sector. The research employed both a decolonial-informed method (Futures Literacy Labs) and a policy action-oriented method (Three Horizons Framework).

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