

Policy Briefing

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Tanzania: Empowering Youth Through Innovation and Inclusion

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Recommendations

- The Ministry of Information, Communication and Information Technology should use technological advancements to enhance productivity and equity in different sectors. This can be achieved by collaborating with tech initiatives and providing gender-inclusive training, eventually leading to improved efficiency, accessibility and fairness in various areas of Tanzanian society.
- The Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority and related bodies need to ensure unrestricted access to information through digital literacy programmes, expanded connectivity and gender-responsive initiatives fostering education and empowerment.
- The Prime Minister's Office – Labour, Youth, Employment and Persons with Disabilities and related bodies should champion policy reforms in employment through public–private cooperation, focusing on equal opportunity, fair pay and gender-sensitive vocational training.

Executive summary

Tanzanian youth recently participated in the ‘Youth and Social Justice Futures: Identifying Future Skills and Training in Africa’ project, with youth-led participatory action research grounded in futures perspectives. This collaborative endeavour, culminating in this policy briefing, envisions innovative pathways for Tanzanian youth by examining forward-looking systems in Tanzania, youth skills prerequisites and youth viewpoints.

This policy briefing urges the country’s Ministry of Information, Communication and Information Technology to integrate technological advancements for greater productivity and equity across sectors. Such a move will improve efficiency, ensure accessibility and promote fairness for the country’s youth. It calls on the Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority to enable unrestricted access to information through digital literacy programmes and expanded connectivity, with gender-responsive initiatives fostering education and empowerment. In addition, the Prime Minister’s Office – Labour, Youth, Employment and Persons with Disabilities, collaborating with others, should lead policy reforms focused on equal opportunities, fair wages and gender-sensitive vocational training to foster inclusive economic growth.

These policy recommendations aim to secure a strategic future for Tanzanian youth by fostering technological integration, equitable access to information, gender-responsive initiatives and inclusive economic policies. Such policies should drive youth empowerment and create essential opportunities, including greater access to technology, education, fair employment, gender equality, active youth participation in the country and sustainable growth.

Introduction

In July 2020, the World Bank upgraded Tanzania’s economic status from low-income to lower-middle income.¹ In 2019, the average income per person had also increased, complemented by robust economic growth, with an increase in gross domestic product of over 6% annually for the previous 10 years.²

According to the Age and Sex Distribution Report by the Tanzania National Census in 2022,³ of an estimated 65 million citizens, the percentage of people aged 15–35 decreased slightly from 34.7% in 2012 to 34.5% of the total population. This trend was consistent on mainland Tanzania. However, in Zanzibar, the percentage of people aged 15–35 increased from 36.2% in 2012 to 37.03% of the total population in 2022. This means that youth make up a substantial part of the labour force, constituting about 64.6% of the population.

1 William Bataille, “What Does Tanzania’s Move to Lower-Middle Income Status Mean?”, World Bank Blogs, July 10, 2020.

2 Bataille, “What Does Tanzania’s Move”.

3 United Republic of Tanzania, *Age and Sex Distribution Report* (Dodoma: National Bureau of Statistics Tanzania, 2022).

Tanzania has been implementing various initiatives and policies to ensure a promising future for its youth. One such initiative is the [Tanzania Development Vision 2025](#), which sets out a comprehensive roadmap with the goal of elevating Tanzania from a least developed country to a middle-income nation. It emphasises human development by transitioning from a low-productivity agricultural economy to a semi-industrialised one. The [National Strategy for Inclusive Education](#) focuses on strengthening the education system and offering equal learning opportunities to all children and youth, including vulnerable groups. The [Agricultural Sector Development Strategy](#) seeks to modernise the agricultural sector by fostering commercialisation, market orientation, high productivity and sustainability. The [Health Sector Strategic Plan](#) focuses on delivering essential health and social welfare services efficiently, with measurable improvements in primary healthcare services, particularly in underperforming regions.⁴

Despite Tanzania's efforts to implement these policies, its youth continue to struggle with various challenges that have them feeling left behind. These include being excluded from education. According to a 2018 UNICEF report,⁵ the country faces a significant education challenge. Approximately 2 million children of primary-school age and 1.5 million children of lower-secondary-school age are not attending school. This represents nearly one out of every four primary-school-age children and more than two out of every five lower-secondary-school-age children.

Outdated curricula are another issue. A focus on 21st-century skills is evident in syllabus documents such as Julius Nyerere's Education for Self-Reliance, the 2014 Education and Training Policy and the National Curriculum Framework for Basic and Teacher Education. However, according to a recent report, while there is a clear intention to instil 21st-century skills in students through the basic education system, graduates from both basic and advanced secondary levels are often perceived as lacking these.⁶

Other issues are the prevalence of mental health problems in the country and the failure to give young people opportunities to showcase innovative ideas. Findings published by the AU Development Agency in 2022⁷ showed that young innovators in Tanzania, like many in Africa, face challenges in accessing markets and getting the necessary bureaucratic approvals as a result of corruption, inhibitive policy and regulatory frameworks and cultural disparities. Ineffectual employment policies and their inconsistent implementation, along with digital illiteracy and limited access to bank loans for start-ups, worsen these challenges. This highlights the need for the government and policymakers to address policy gaps related to national employment and to deal effectively with these challenges.

4 United Republic of Tanzania, *The Tanzania Development Vision 2025* (Dodoma: United Republic of Tanzania, 2021).

5 UN International Children's Emergency Fund, *Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children: Tanzania Country Report* (Dar es Salaam: UNICEF Tanzania, 2018).

6 Policy Forum, "The Education We Want: A Critical Analysis of the Education and Training Policy (ETP) 2014, Issues, and Recommendations", February 14, 2022.

7 Justina Dugbazah et al., "Promoting Youth Participation in Innovative Entrepreneurship to Enable Access to Clean Water in Tanzania", AU Development Agency, Blog Post, July 22, 2022.

Tanzanian youth are also not adequately represented in decision-making bodies, according to one study.⁸ This is especially true at the local-government level, where their participation is crucial in shaping development plans and budgets. The study showed that only 27% reported having had meaningful involvement in local government meetings, which play a vital role in setting the direction and vision for youth development. These exclusions form a complex web of difficulties that the country's young population must navigate.

The workshops that form part of this project collected the insights and concerns of youth through two foresight approaches: Youth Futures Literacy Labs and the Three Horizons Framework. They were held in June 2023 and included a diverse group of young Tanzanians. The Futures Literacy Labs aimed at uncovering human anticipation by exploring the capacity to imagine, anticipate and shape the future by revealing, reframing and rethinking given circumstances. It included distinct phases such as the probable future, desired future and reframed future of Tanzania, with associated actions. The Three Horizons Framework facilitated transformative change, focusing on elements of current systems losing purpose, elements worth preserving and innovative solutions for new Tanzanian patterns to emerge.

Reflections on the project

These workshops shifted participants' outlook on Tanzania's future, fostering the realisation that prompt action is needed on matters such as youth employment, the tech industry, access to information and education resources, and the healthcare system. Currently, agriculture is the primary source of employment in Tanzania. According to one study, the sector employs 62.3% of men and 68.5% of women in the country.⁹

The workshops revealed that most of the challenges facing youth in Tanzania correlate with extreme poverty and mental health issues. While young people recognise the importance of mental health and the need for increased advocacy and support, they often do not get a say in decisions that could improve their situation. Local and national governments should actively engage with youth and related organisations to understand their perspectives, concerns and aspirations. This can be done by involving young people in policy discussions and decision-making platforms to ensure that policies are comprehensive and reflect the entire population's needs. Implementation bodies should also provide mental health services that are accessible, affordable and integrated into the healthcare system. This includes establishing more counselling centres, helplines and digital counselling apps for greater accessibility.

8 Oscar Kimaro, "Youth in Tanzania: Their Priorities, Challenges and Opportunities" (Policy Briefing, Restless Development Tanzania, Dar es Salaam, 2021).

9 Restless Development, *State of the Youth in Tanzania*, Annual Report (Dar es Salaam: Restless Development, 2011).

Recognising the effectiveness of collective efforts toward the common good, youth have to readjust their aspirations to prioritise actions benefitting both people and the environment. This includes engaging in initiatives to enhance public and environmental health, such as organising regular clean-ups in neighbourhoods and public spaces and running awareness campaigns about the importance of waste management and recycling. The government and other stakeholders should also hold awareness workshops focusing on nutrition, hygiene and disease prevention and partner with local clinics and health organisations to offer free check-ups and vaccinations. To foster employment opportunities the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, in collaboration with the Prime Minister's Office – Labour, Youth, Employment and Persons with Disabilities, should develop youth-led entrepreneurship programmes to encourage self-employment and small business ventures. It should also provide mentorship programmes connecting experienced professionals with young entrepreneurs and establish vocational training centres to provide practical skills to Tanzanian youth. In terms of protecting the environment, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism and other environmental organisations should collaborate to develop programmes such as tree-planting campaigns to combat deforestation and promote biodiversity. They should also raise awareness of the negative impacts of pollution, advocate cleaner energy alternatives and organise youth events such as workshops and seminars that promote sustainable living.

To raise awareness of the importance of including youth in decision-making platforms, the government should collaborate with youth councils and committees that voice the concerns of the youth. It should also organise workshops on leadership, public speaking and civic engagement to empower young leaders. In addition, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and other educational institutions should integrate courses on civic responsibility and governance to foster interest in public affairs among youth. This will allow them to advocate for their rights and become informed citizens who can make well-informed decisions, hold public officials accountable and play an active role in shaping policies that affect their lives. The participants' mission now is to contribute to a future characterised by equity, environmental stewardship and equal opportunities for all.

The Youth Futures Literacy Labs and Three Horizons Framework were innovative approaches that focused on exploring human anticipation and imagination. The two methods offered a scientific way to begin making sense of the persistent and complex problems that form the core challenges facing youth in Tanzania. Combined, they instilled a sense of hope for a better future by challenging the limits of imagination and creating a broad understanding of issues. They also empowered participants to look for alternatives that can support the environment while brainstorming transformative innovations that can bring about sustainable development in Tanzania. This was achieved by involving a diverse range of youth participants in testing practical scenarios for the country and building participants' ability to think about the future. They also deepened understanding of how future literacy relates to adaptability to innovations, sustainability, equity and peace.

Sharing these innovative methodologies and approaches will be a catalyst for intellectual growth and solution generation among Tanzanian youth. This exchange of ideas has not only enhanced the imaginative problem-solving skills of the Tanzanian participants but also created an environment rich in fresh solutions to existing challenges.

By conveying the potential of the futures workshops and the strategies for shaping a more equitable and sustainable Tanzania, youth can advocate for positive change among their fellow citizens. Such advocacy can influence policymakers, community leaders and other stakeholders to consider and implement progressive measures. Sharing their insights contributes to the augmentation of skills and knowledge of individuals, organisations and institutions in Tanzania. This can be enhanced by incorporating an understanding of future planning, empowerment and social justice that will contribute to a stronger and more informed society.

Policy recommendations

Strategic priority 1

Prioritising technological advancement and gender-inclusive training

Public and private stakeholders in Tanzania should prioritise and invest in technological transformation across sectors. This includes fostering partnerships with tech companies and experts to promote the integration of innovative technologies. Having achieved this, Tanzania can enhance efficiency, elevate productivity and improve service accessibility, thereby driving overall socioeconomic development.

To achieve this, the Ministry of Information, Communication and Information Technology should collaborate with technology-driven initiatives inside and outside the country and provide targeted funding and support for tech startups. Among the relevant tech initiatives are Tanzania Data Lab, M-Pesa, AgriApp, Smart Grid Solutions, Jamii Pay, Google Loon and IBM Research Africa. This will ensure that these initiatives consider the diverse needs and aspirations of all genders. In addition, gender-sensitive training programmes should be established to empower women and other marginalised groups to participate fully in technological advancements and opportunities.

Consideration should also be given to blending older technology with more recent advancements to build a robust technology that addresses Tanzania's specific needs. These technological improvements should be inclusive, benefiting young people in rural areas, especially those with disabilities.

Strategic priority 2

Ensure unrestricted information access

The Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority and associated bodies should ensure unhindered access to information through digital literacy programmes, expanded connectivity and gender-responsive initiatives, fostering education and empowerment.

Tanzania values freedom of expression and access to information as two main democratic pillars. Understanding the crucial role that information plays in making well-informed decisions and moving society forward, it is essential for the government and all parties involved to work together with the aim of guaranteeing that everyone can access information freely and fairly. Public development banks, including the Tanzania Agricultural Development Bank and the Tanzania Development Bank, should team up with the Ministry of Information, Communication and Information Technology, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Ministry of Community Development, Gender, Women and Special Groups, Tanzania Information Service Department, Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology, Tanzania Education Authority, Tanzania Gender Networking Programme and related agencies in projects that promote digital literacy, expand internet connectivity and establish information centres in underserved areas. These efforts should be oriented towards a gender-transformative approach, with special emphasis on empowering women and girls with digital skills.

The Tanzanian government should make sure that information and data are readily available on the internet. It should also reconsider how it manages access to sensitive information. To this end, the government should explore new methods of managing data instead of keeping it under a single entity's control, allowing both the public and the private sector to be involved in data collection processes.

Strategic priority 3

Foster inclusive economic growth through employment policy reforms

Tanzania's focus should be on comprehensive employment policy reforms. Such reforms should enhance the quality and relevance of vocational education and training programmes to match the job market's needs. It is crucial to implement targeted youth employment programmes, including apprenticeships, skills development and job placement initiatives. Another focus should be on promoting industries such as agro-processing, manufacturing and technology-based sectors for economic diversification, with their effective implementation relying on investing in modernised vocational training facilities. Qualified instructors and partnerships with related actors should provide practical training opportunities and regularly monitor and evaluate the impact of youth employment programmes. Collaborations with the private sector should also create entry-level positions and internships for young people. By offering incentives, tax breaks and streamlined regulatory processes, the government can attract investors and develop supply chains and

value-added production to boost job creation. Such changes are important in creating a fair and diverse environment and ensuring equal opportunities for everyone. Since public–private partnerships are crucial in driving this transformation, the Prime Minister’s Office – Labour, Youth, Employment and Persons with Disabilities, along with other relevant authorities, will need to lead these reforms.

To achieve this, public development banks need to team up with both the public and private sector. They should advocate practices that encourage fairness, such as hiring practices that respect gender differences, equal pay for equal work and flexible work arrangements. They should also join hands with specialised institutions in terms of skills development and vocational training, focusing on sectors with growth potential. These efforts must be focused on the unique challenges faced by women and vulnerable groups in the workforce.

The Tanzanian government and wider stakeholders should consider ways in which to include youth in the formal employment sector. This involves changing how young people perceive the formalisation process and ensuring that their progress is properly recorded, making them eligible for financial support and inclusion. Furthermore, to digitise government data and services, the government can tap into the youth workforce, as it did during data collection for the national census in 2022. This would create job opportunities for Tanzanian youth, ultimately reducing youth unemployment and contributing to the nation’s growth.

Conclusion

These recommendations are the culmination of a comprehensive exploration of alternative futures for Tanzania. It draws inspiration from the innovative methodologies of the Youth Futures Literacy Labs and the Three Horizons Framework. The essential input from youth researchers from East and Southern Africa intricately shaped this policy briefing, offering a distinct lens through which to identify and tackle crucial developmental challenges.

Tanzanian youth place emphasis on policy interventions by advocating for smooth technological integration led by the Ministry of Information, Communication and Information Technology that strengthens productivity and equity across sectors. This will enhance efficiency, accessibility and fairness for Tanzanian youth. The call extends to the Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority to promote unrestricted information access through digital literacy initiatives and expand connectivity, alongside gender-responsive initiatives that foster education and youth empowerment. Moreover, collaborative efforts led by the Prime Minister’s Office – Labour, Youth, Employment and Persons with Disabilities, among other stakeholders, should drive policy reforms anchored in equal opportunities, fair wages and gender-sensitive vocational training, fostering an inclusive economic landscape.

Through these policy recommendations, a strategic future can be safeguarded for Tanzanian youth and the broader East and Southern Africa regions. This forward-looking viewpoint encompasses technological integration, equitable access, gender-responsive actions and inclusive economic policies. Such policies can catalyse youth empowerment, set up channels for youth inclusion and nurture sustainable growth. By adopting these insights, Tanzania will pave the way towards a transformative, equitable and sustainable future that benefits not only the youth but also the entire citizenry.

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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Cover image

Young men playing basketball in Zanzibar, October 2020. Tanzania experienced a period of political unrest prior to elections on October 28th (Patrick Meinhardt/AFP via Getty Images)

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