

# UNHEARD VOICES: YOUNG PEOPLE'S STORIES OF STRUGGLE, HOPE, AND RESILIENCE IN A COVID-19 AFFECTED ECONOMY – MOZAMBIQUE

## The Government of Mozambique's approach to the crisis was aimed at mitigating the effect of the pandemic on people's lives and livelihoods.

- On the economic front, measures included the adoption of tax and monetary policy measures to support the formal private sector in addressing the economic impact of the pandemic, including improving the conditions for small and medium enterprises' (SMEs') access to financial support and providing cash support to firms and the financial sector.

## Policies and stimulus packages focused mostly on the formal economy and on larger firms, missing opportunities to support key sectors and small businesses, which are critical to the economy and to employment creation for youth.

- Our policy analysis found that most economic policies, including stimulus packages, focused mostly on the formal economy, benefiting mostly large businesses.
- In Mozambique, restrictive eligibility criteria meant that most small businesses did not benefit from fiscal measures introduced to support small firms, threatening business survival and jobs.

## Measures taken to combat the spread of the virus severely affected labour markets and economic opportunities for youth.

- Young people – many of whom work in the informal sector – have faced a loss of work, reduction in their working hours, wage cuts, and layoffs, significantly affecting their livelihoods.
- Income losses have been concentrated in sectors and areas where the poor and young people are predominant.
- The service sector – including retail, transport, restaurants, tourism, and personal service – reported a 60% over-all reduction in jobs. While the situation was consistent across provinces, it was more prominent in Manica, Cabo Delgado, Niassa, and Zambezia.

## School closures are increasing inequality and deepening the digital divide.

- Overall, school closures in developing countries have lasted longer than in developed economies, acutely affecting populations with limited access to infrastructure and technology such as Internet or computers.
- In Mozambique, where only 7% of the population has access to Internet, online learning is not a viable option. School closures mean not only lost learning time for students, but also increased costs as students need to buy exercise sheets every week to keep up with lessons.
- Education can make all the difference in opportunities for youth in a country where just 47% of the population has completed the first level of primary education, and only 20% has completed a full primary education.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Governments and policymakers should:

- Apply, design, and implement policies with a youth lens,
- Scale up existing social protection programmes and re-purpose them to protect young people,
- Provide access to education and training, ensuring support for the most vulnerable,
- Ensure young people receive financial assistance, and
- Provide support to keep building the evidence based on what policy approaches work best for youth.

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**N**omssa is 21 years old and lives in Marracuene, a village 30 kilometres north of Maputo. She lives in a small brick house with her two children, three adult siblings, and her mother. Nomssa wanted to continue her studies, but when she finished primary school (grade 7) there was no place for her at a secondary school due to her age.

Before the pandemic, Nomssa sold vegetables and other small food-stuffs from her doorstep. She used to buy her products at the wholesale market in Zimpeto, 10 kilometres from her home. When there was enough money, she took the taxi-bus to get there, but sometimes she had to walk. Nomssa earned around 200 MT (US\$3.50) a week. While her income was not significant, it helped financially support the household. The family made a decent living with the salaries of her two brothers and the money Nomssa earned. Moreover, selling at home allowed her to keep an eye on the children.

Since the government declared the first state of emergency, Nomssa and her family have felt the consequences. One of her brothers lost his job and, although Nomssa has not stopped buying and selling vegetables and fruits, her sales have decreased significantly. People just do not have enough money anymore to purchase the same quantity and quality of food as they did before. Like so many other families, Nomssa's family had to cut back on food intake, reducing daily meals from three to two.

Her household has used some of its savings to pay



for regular costs, such as energy and water. Nomssa is happy that she has managed to continue participating in her 'Xitique' group (an informal saving and credit group). The household also gets some in-kind support from family members who have a machamba (agriculture farm). Neither Nomssa nor her family have received any support from the government or nongovernmental organizations.

In the near future Nomssa wants to continue and expand her business. Later on, when the children are older, Nomssa would like to go back to school, to finish secondary school and pursue professional training. Taking evening classes would allow her to continue with her small business during the day.

## The research

These findings are based on a research study exploring the effects of COVID-19 on young people's lives in Bangladesh, Kenya, Mozambique, and Tanzania with respect to income and employment opportunities. A youth-led research approach was utilised as part of the study.

The study outlines the evidence and provides recommendations to shape future crisis management's responsiveness to youth-specific issues and provide guidance on measures that can be taken to avoid exacerbating the exclusion and poverty experienced by many young people.

In Mozambique, the research took place in Maputo city and Maputo province as well as Gaza, Zambezia, Inhambane, Cabo Delgado, and Manhiça provinces. The data collection process was conducted in Portuguese and Chichangana.