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POLICY PAPER

Critical Analysis of Niger's National Youth Policy (PNJ) 16-20) by Young People and for Young People

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1. Statement of the problem

Within the framework of youth development, Oxfam-Niger, with the financial support of INCLUDE, decided to conduct a study on the impact of Niger's National Youth Policy (*Politique Nationale de la Jeunesse, PNJ*) 16-20, specifically focusing on young people's unmet needs in terms of employability and income in Niger. It is in this context that the University of Zinder was commissioned to conduct the study in question in order to produce scientific data that would service as the basis for improving the country's future national youth policy and similar policies. The study's overall objective was to produce a critical and participatory analysis of the impact of the National Youth Policy 16-20 (*PNJ 16-20*) and young people's unmet needs in terms of employability and income, with a view to developing a policy document.

2. Justification of the present study

In Niger, as elsewhere in Africa, for several years the youth issue has been the topic of discussion for both the politicians and the media; indeed, it has increasingly attracted the attention of politicians, development partners, researchers, etc. This renewed interest can be attributed to factors such as the rampant economic crisis, insecurity, and unemployment. With 70% of Niger's population being under the age of 25, according to the National Institute of Statistics (*INS*) figures for 2020, the country's government and its partners, such as Oxfam, have paid particular attention to youth issues through their discussions, interventions, and guidelines often translated into framework documents, among which is the National Youth Policy (*Politique Nationale de la Jeunesse, PNJ*).

With this policy, the government of Niger has equipped itself with a forward-looking policy instrument designed to promote the emerging interests of a self-assertive youth determined to be the driving force behind their own development. It is against this backdrop that the issue of gender and employment in Niger now appears to be a cross-cutting one which must be taken into consideration at all levels. However, the programmes contained in the national youth policy document and are meant to promote youth employment and the youth's involvement in local social and political processes are still to be implemented. This is due, among other things, to the lack of knowledge of the content of the *PNJ* document, which in turn is due to the inadequate dissemination of it during the last five years of its existence, hence the justification for the present study.

3. Analysis

The aim of this study was to get young people to have a critical look at Niger's *PNJ 16-20* so that they could contribute towards improving the country's future national youth policy. However, the *PNJ 16-20* is not well known by young Nigeriens despite its five years of existence. Indeed, only two (2) of the 64 participants (i.e. 3.12%) from the eight regions of Niger said they had seen the document before the workshop. This suggests that it was almost impossible for young people to take a critical and objective look at its content. Nevertheless,

the research team's analysis of the document identified a series of needs and aspirations of the Nigerien youth that were either not included in it or not dealt with in detail. The most concerning of these needs are those of the rural and/or out-of-school youth, on the one hand, and those of young women, on the other hand.

The needs of the rural and/or out-of-school youth that were most expressed as problems are the following:

- lack of a creative spirit,
- inadequate of support for off-season farming,
- limited access to modern agricultural tools,
- rural exodus and/or migration,
- lack of civic culture,
- food insecurity.

The needs of young women are the following:

- the need to increase the means of information for young women,
- the taking into account and observance of the female quota in all sectors,
- the development of women's skills,
- the setting up of a special fund to finance young women's businesses,
- the promotion of equal opportunities on the labour market.

On the issue of employment, the study found that very few young Nigeriens had decent jobs. Its results showed that almost half of those who responded to the question about their income received a salary that was below the minimum wage, while only one (1) of them reported having a monthly income of more than CFAF 150,000. It transpires from the study that the vast majority of young people who look for jobs in vain encounter enormous difficulties, both intrinsic and extrinsic, which they are often not able to overcome and thus remain dependent. Those are difficulties arising from a lack of skills and experience, a lack of information, and a lack of appropriate job-search methods in a world where there is fierce, cut-throat competition and where, unfortunately, unorthodox practices are used in examinations and recruitments. Still in relation to employment, the study found that entrepreneurship was very little developed among young people; it is still embryonic in the context of an unfavourable socio-cultural, economic, and political-administrative environment. For example, of the 64 participants, only 9 (that is 14%) were self-employed.

From such a context transpire the youth's difficulties in getting decent jobs and income despite all the promises made by politicians and non-governmental stakeholders.

It is evident, therefore, that there are major challenges that need to be addressed so that the youth, particularly the rural youth (who are the most numerous) and the female youth (who are the most vulnerable) can participate in the country's development. The challenges of insecurity, lack of adequate education, the various forms of discrimination against vulnerable groups, and the consequences of the misuse of ICT must, of necessity, and immediately, be

addressed so as to prevent young people from falling into idleness, immorality and violence, and from becoming a danger rather than a source of wealth, and a burden rather than an opportunity.

4. Recommendations

Given Niger's youth's lack of awareness of the *PNJ* 16-20 and its shortcomings in terms of youth development, on the one hand, and given the constraints that are faced by all the young people and those that are specific to the rural and the female youth, on the other hand, the research team used the respondents' opinions to formulate recommendations addressed to the various stakeholders concerned with youth development in Niger.

a. Recommendations to the government of Niger and its development partners to consider the youth's unmet needs in the country's future National Youth Policy.

- Widely popularize the future NYP through the media, theatre events, as well as regional and national campaigns to sensitize people to it.
- Involve young people in the implementation of the NYP throughout at every step.
- Invite and involve young people, and not only youth structures or those acting in their name, in the development of the future NYP.
- Take the demands of young people into account without distinction.
- Intensify awareness and follow-up campaigns for youth associations in urban and rural areas on business creation and private initiative.
- Pay particular attention to the specific problems of the rural youth.
- Organize advocacy campaigns for young people at the regional, district, and local levels.
- Organize information and training campaigns on the positive use of ICT.

b. Specific recommendations to the government:

- Depoliticize the National Youth Council.
- Identify young people's real needs.
- Involve young people in decision-making.
- Provide technical and material support to young entrepreneurs.
- Strictly apply the existing legal provisions in favour of young people without any discrimination.
- Establish contacts between youth associations and the non-governmental organizations involved in youth development.
- Strengthen the capacities of young people entrepreneurs and farmers.
- Facilitate young people's access to civil registry and administrative documents through mobile campaigns.
- Set up public-private partnerships for young people.
- Protect young people from joining terrorist networks and their actions, and protect them against drug taking, emigration and the brain drain, the misuse of ICT, etc.
- Develop a culture of monitoring and evaluation of youth enterprises.
- Encourage and promote meritocracy and excellence.

c. Specific recommendations to the government in favour of young women

- Redefine, or review, the strategies for combating child and/or forced marriages.
- Develop ways and means to keep young girls in school.
- Strengthen measures to protect young women against gender-based violence in the workplace.
- Involve young women in decision-making.
- Make young women aware of their responsibility in the development of their communities and, beyond, of the whole country.
- Promote affirmative action.
- Collaborate with women's organizations in identifying young women's real needs.
- Promote young women leaders in rural areas.
- Nurture female talent in rural areas.

d. Specific recommendations to Oxfam-Niger

- Increase the number of training workshops for young people on issues that concern them and diversify the venues of these workshops.
- Train young people in how to start business projects.
- Design and/or sponsor audio-visual programmes aimed at raising awareness among young people about the search for information and knowledge of current affairs.
- Enhance the youth's awareness of other public policies in Oxfam Niger's areas of intervention.
- Increase the number of interventions in rural areas.
- Widely disseminate the results of research on youth issues.
- Relay young people's grievances to the government and to non-governmental stakeholders who want to know them.