

THE YOUTH'S MANIFESTO TO BREAK THE BARRIERS TO THEIR EMPLOYMENT IN NIGER

Introduction

We, the young people of the eight regions of Niger, gathered in Zinder on 28 and 29 June 2021 for the workshop “**Critical analysis of the impact of the PNJ 16-20 and young people’s unmet needs in terms of employability and income**”, express our concern and anguish regarding the manifest lack of employment that besets the youth. This lack of employment is the result of the politicization of public administration, the lack of a concrete employment policy, the inadequate promotion of entrepreneurship, the mismatch between education and employment, etc. For all these barriers to be broken, so that we can become a healthy youth, behaving as responsible citizens, we, both young men and young women, from both the rural and the urban areas of Niger, address this manifesto to the government of Niger and its development partners.

Inclusion

Although more than 70% of Niger’s population is under 25 years of age, young people are hardly involved in decision-making, even when decisions concern them. This means that they are not well informed about what is happening in the country and, as a result, cannot adequately participate in its development. Young people thus become a burden rather than key players in the country’s development, contrary to what is proclaimed from rooftops.

We demand that young people be included in all decision-making and actions concerning them, on the one hand, and demand that concrete decisions be made in their favour, on the other hand. To this end, public policies must place particular emphasis on the inclusion of young women in the design and implementation of all development projects and programmes that concern them. Social status, level of education, place of residence, or any disability, should not be a factor in excluding women from the overall development process.

A national youth policy worthy of its name

Considering that the National Youth Policy 16-20 (*Politique Nationale de la Jeunesse, PNJ 16-20*) is little known by young people,

Considering that the same policy does not capture many of the current challenges facing young people,

It is essential that the future national youth policy be a true reflection of young people's aspirations and that it be popularized not only in French but also in the national languages and in all villages and towns of Niger. For the future NYP to be truly representative of young people's aspirations, the government and its development partners must imperatively conduct opinion polls on a representative sample throughout the country before and during the drafting of the policy. Further, to ensure an effective dissemination and ownership of the document by young people, the government and its development partners must necessarily undertake campaigns to popularize the document using all communication channels, depending on the time of year and place of residence.

Education and training

Given that education is a right for all (in accordance with the United Nations MDG2) and for all Nigeriens (in accordance with Article 12 of the Constitution of the Seventh Republic), Niger's youth must not suffer from a low level of schooling illustrated by the following figures: 11.9% in pre-school; 69.8% in basic education with persistent disparities between rural and urban areas, on the one hand, and between girls and boys in primary school, on the other hand (see the *Direction des statistiques, Statistiques de l'Éducation de Base et de l'Alphabétisation, Annuaire 2018-2019*); 36.8% in junior secondary school and 9.8% in senior secondary school in 2017-2018. Overall, education and training opportunities are quite unevenly distributed in terms of gender and region in Niger, with Niamey, the capital, benefitting most (see the *Direction des statistiques et de l'informatique, statistiques de l'enseignement secondaire, Annuaire Statistique 2017-2018*).

Against the backdrop of such a poor educational performance, it is difficult for young Nigeriens to participate fully in their country's development. In fact, it is easy for them to fall into juvenile delinquency and idleness, or even to be recruited into networks of violence of all kinds. To forestall all this, the government of Niger must raise its school enrolment levels, create the conditions for keeping pupils in school, and improve school infrastructure and education quality to satisfy the needs of both the national and the international labour markets.

Entrepreneurship

All the stakeholders concerned with employment (the government, its technical and financial partners, the private sector, and the young people themselves) are unanimous on the fact that entrepreneurship is very little developed in Niger. At the beginning of the 21st century, when competitiveness must be the order of the day, such a situation is untenable.

It emerged from the workshop that barely one young person in six was self-employed, and within this insignificant percentage, the presence of women was even more marginal.

To remedy this precarious and unacceptable situation in the context of globalization, we demand that deliberate and concrete measures be taken to promote entrepreneurship in both the urban and the rural areas of the country and in favour of young people without any discrimination based on gender, education level, or social status.

Depoliticization

The politicization of public administration and, beyond that, of public life is decried by all in the prevailing discourse. For example, during the workshop, the politicization of the national youth council was pointed out by several speakers. It was even labelled one of the main sources of difficulty in accessing information and training in entrepreneurship and, more generally, in youth employment. For example, how can it be that civil service entrance examinations are organized or cancelled depending on certain politicians' interests or those of their protégés? The management of public affairs should not be subject to any politicization. Consequently, having access to government services, enjoying the fruits of one's skills and merits, or even being punished for mistakes committed, should no longer be based on political considerations.

Conclusion

Although we young people constitute the vast majority of Niger's population, and although we should be the most active segment of the population of a country that aspires to be an emerging economy, all public pronouncements and statistics are unanimous in showing that, unfortunately, we are still marginalized. Thus, we are not playing our role as fully fledged development actors. As a result, we remain dependent and exposed to poverty, idleness, all kinds of vulnerability and, hence, to all kinds of danger.

The youth of Niger do not deserve such a fate, given that the country's future entirely and undoubtedly rests on them, as everyone knows and says.

Thus, for Niger's youth to regain their credentials and fully play their role as development actors, they must first and foremost be well educated so that they can acquire all the necessary skills to meet today's challenges and face tomorrow's adversities. To this end, we appeal to the government of Niger and its partners to take into consideration our aspirations while designing and implementing their public policies on employment and income generation. As the linchpin of development, we must be fully and constantly involved in the decision-making process at all levels.