



AFRICA YOUTH PARTNERSHIP

TO ADVOCATE AN EQUITABLE RECOVERY
FROM THE GLOBAL COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Building Back Better



A research series led by young people in Kenya, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe

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DEVELOPMENT**



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YOTA

Youth Opportunity
& Transformation
in Africa



We call on Governments spotlighted in this research to have zero tolerance for corruption involving all funds meant to benefit the public.



Foreword

By Benson Onyango (Uganda) – On behalf of research team

The Covid-19 pandemic is probably the biggest global crisis in the 21st century due to its unprecedented shock to both economies and the social well-being of people across the world. The health emergency, plunged the global economy into a recession bringing to a halt most economic activities and disrupting normal human social life as nations were put under total lockdown. Jobs were lost and schools closed for learners, mental health issues especially among young people were also accelerated. The pandemic ravaged the world, affecting everyone. Due to its global impact, it is important to reflect on how youths, who constitute the majority of Africa's population were affected. This research was conducted by national youth researchers from Kenya, Uganda, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe under the Africa Youth Partnership program (AYP) implemented by Restless Development in partnership with Youth Opportunity and Transformation in Africa (YOTA) with support from FORD Foundation. It gives insights into how young people living in Africa were affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, looks into national recovery programs being implemented by governments and development partners, and analyses youth inclusion in these programs. The research process involved capturing insights from different categories of young people who including students, out-of-school youths, young entrepreneurs and leaders, key national policy and decision makers such as members of parliament, and stakeholders from relevant ministries to give first-hand experiences and information

As young researchers, this process has contributed towards a deeper understanding of how young people in their diversity were affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. It also helped us reflect on how the different identities of young people including gender, age, disability, physical location, and economic standards intersect to increase vulnerability and/or privilege. The difference in experiences exposes socio-economic inequalities in Africa and how the pandemic has widened them even further. As we present this report, our hope is that it is of use in influencing the design of programs and policies to ensure equitable recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic because it provides insights into young people's calls for action and recommendations to their governments and development partners.

This report also outlines young people's calls to action and recommendations aimed at improving opportunities through meaningful engagement with different stakeholders both at the local level, and global levels. For us as young researchers, participation in this project has been enriching, as we got to connect with other young people, hear their stories, and help to amplify their voices. We hope that the many voices of young people compiled into this report will guide the design of programs and policies by private and public development agencies, multilateral organizations, and civil society across the globe in effectively building back better post-Covid-19.



Benson Onyango ,Youth Task Team Member Uganda

As young researchers, this process has contributed towards a deeper understanding of how young people in their diversity were affected by the Covid-19 pandemic

Executive Summary

The research conducted under the Africa Youth Partnership outlines the various impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and the gaps in recovery processes in Kenya, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Whilst there have been numerous initiatives conducted by the various authorities in the geographical locations explored by this research, equitable recovery from Covid-19 remains far from being achieved. This research found that:

The Covid-19 pandemic affected everyone with a greater impact on young people in traditionally underserved and rural areas as well as young people with disabilities. Young people with disabilities and those in underserved areas faced disproportionate levels of social isolation and prejudice and were the last to be reached with Covid-19 information and the last to get vaccinated. In addition, they were the last to be involved in any recovery efforts that were implemented by their governments.

COVID-19 affected young people's food security and livelihoods. The pandemic affected the agricultural sector and informal trade. Youth in these and other sectors are now experiencing extreme poverty and hunger and failing to fend for themselves and their families. Young women in the focus countries are the ones that largely work in the fields and run small businesses such as selling farm produce, at the same time performing care work at home. With the coming of travel restrictions, young women could not work in their fields or sell produce. This had a huge impact, particularly on young mothers who were unable to fend for their children.

There was rampant corruption and a lack of transparency in the use of Covid-19 funds and distribution of Covid-19 materials. There was corruption and a lack of transparency and accountability during the pandemic affecting inclusive and sustainable recovery for youth and other underserved groups. Through this research, it was evident that corruption and lack of accountability did not only start with the pandemic but have been the modus operandi in the spotlighted countries. The pandemic thus magnified an already existent problem. 40% of the young people in this research mentioned that their governments' transparency and accountability around Covid-19 support grants/funds was below average and poor.

Young people are not involved in the planning, implementation, and Monitoring of Covid-19 recovery processes the biggest gap in the economic recovery efforts in the focus countries is around youth involvement in the planning, implementation and monitoring of Covid-19 recovery processes. 65% of the young people interviewed mentioned that they were not involved in any Covid-19 recovery process. Of the 35% that said they were involved, 90% of them stay in the urban areas and were only involved at the consultation stage only.

Covid-19 increased the burden on already struggling healthcare systems and workers Low to middle-income countries channeled all or most of their health budgets to the fight against Covid-19, this put a huge strain on the already struggling health systems in the focus countries. Young people who had other health issues struggled to get medicine let alone medical attention because of the limited accessibility prompted by restrictions on movement, and the closure or repurposing of health facilities.

Executive Summary

Closure of schools exacerbated the issue of child marriages which has been topical in social and health discourse for a long time. The lockdown caused by the pandemic meant young girls stayed at home. Most of them ended up engaging in sexual activities as a means to try and run away from poverty which was catalysed by the shutdown brought by Covid. Learners who historically found a safe space in schools were left facing sexual abuse perpetrators both at their homes and communities.

75% of the young people engaged in the study reiterated that the only way to ensure a sustained and equitable recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic is to co-create solutions with young people and foster meaningful youth engagement/participation in the implementation of the same

As part of collective advocacy and campaigning processes the YTT came up with 6 policy briefs across participating countries to highlight key findings from the research and offer youth-inclusive policy options for recovery efforts. Additionally, they participated in high-level conferences like the YouthConnekt Africa (YCA) in Rwanda which is an African space to provide relevant solutions for Africa and to support the implementation of relevant initiatives to empower youth. The YTT also participated at the International Family Planning Council- Intersecting Climate Change and Family Planning in Pattaya Thailand. Through this platform, young people convened to innovate, collaborate, & accelerate progress toward achieving universal access to Family Planning which was affected during the Covid-19 pandemic.



Youth Task Team Members from Zimbabwe, Uganda, Tanzania, Nigeria, Liberia and Ghana at the Africa Youth Connect Summit in Rwanda



“

As Young people we want to be in more spaces where decisions are made, we want to be more connected to people doing Covid19 recovery projects but sadly they are being side-lined

– Zim YTTs

Call To Action

In order to ensure that the young people build back better and are better prepared for future pandemics, the young people proffered the following calls to action based on the research recommendations, intended for the Governments spotlighted in this research:

1. We call on all stakeholders including the government to prioritize youth leadership in the planning, implementing, and monitoring of projects that affect them, this includes supporting them with pre-requisite skills and platforms to design road maps of what should be done to better support young people's needs.

2. We call on stakeholders including the government to prioritize and mainstream gender equality, and social inclusion principles in all public programs. This will be key in redressing previous inequalities and injustices that females and young people with disabilities continue to face

3. We call on governments spotlighted in this research and stakeholders in the education sector to reconfigure the curriculum of primary, secondary, and higher education so that entrepreneurial and life skills follow the current trends and context.

4. We call on governments spotlighted in this research to ensure that all information on youth empowerment processes is tailored to reach and benefit all young people regardless of geo-location

4. Power reconfiguration is key. We call on all governments spotlighted in this research to ensure that young people are decision-makers and are at the centre of making decisions on issues that concern them.

5. Covid-19 has taught us a lot. It should therefore not be business as usual. We therefore call on governments to be better prepared for future pandemics by ensuring that there is a full proof fall-back plan that allows learners to continue with their education regardless of the prevailing context

6. We call on governments spotlighted in this research to have zero tolerance to corruption for all public funds meant to benefit the public.

7. The internet was a source of verifiable credible information about Covid-19 but the young people in rural and underserved areas were the last to get information because of a lack of access. We therefore call on governments spotlighted in this research to ensure universal access to the internet to all young people so that they have access to vital life-saving information.

Key Terminology and Acronyms

- COVID-19 – Coronavirus Disease 2019
- Decent work – Productive work for everyone in conditions of freedom, equity, security, and human dignity
- Female– Young people identifying as female regardless of their given sex.
- FGD – Focus Group Discussions
- ICT – Information Communication Technology
- KII – Key informant Interviews
- Male– Young people identifying as male regardless of their given sex.
- Non-binary– young people falling outside the binary genders of male and female.
- PWDs – Young people with disabilities
- Rural – Less developed remote communities with limited availability of essential services and infrastructures.
- SDGs – Sustainable Development Goals
- Urban – More developed accessible communities with available essential services and infrastructure
- Underserved young people – Young people who are excluded from social, economic, and/or educational opportunities enjoyed by other adolescents in their community due to numerous factors beyond their control
- Youth – Young people between the ages of 15 – 35 years old.
- YOTA – Youth Opportunity and Transformation in Africa
- YTT – Youth Task Team Young leaders who led this research

Introduction

The research conducted under the Africa Youth Partnership outlines the various impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and the gaps in recovery processes in Kenya, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Whilst there have been numerous initiatives conducted by the various authorities in the geographical locations explored by this research, equThe COVID-19 pandemic presented the world with a dark moment, a moment of uncertainty with the future seemingly oblique. It cut across age, status, and gender. Under served groups had it worse as the effects of the pandemic were so detrimental that millions lost their lives while more people lost their sources of livelihood. As the world seeks to recover, it is important that these recovery efforts cut across and benefit everyone because the pandemic itself did not spare anyone.

Young people constitute the most productive group in most economies and countries worldwide. As the pandemic took effect, they lost their jobs, dropped out of school, and experienced losses in their businesses. As the world seeks to recover, African young people are faced with various challenges as most of them have been utterly forgotten in the recovery process. For some, these recovery efforts have remained a mere story as they have not benefited in any way. The Africa Youth Partnership Project is anchored on the fact that young people form the backbone of society and should be considered in every COVID-19 recovery effort. This project is implemented by Restless Development and Youth Opportunity and Transformation in Africa (YOTA) with funding from the Ford Foundation in ten African countries namely; Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Sierra Leone, Kenya, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Gambia, and Uganda. Restless Development focused on 6 of the 10 countries. The focus of this project is to advocate for an equitable recovery from the pandemic that incorporates every member of society regardless of socioeconomic status.

Using a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods, YTT members sought to ascertain the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on the focus countries, understand recovery efforts taking place at the community and country levels, establish the involvement of young people in the processes, and identify gaps and opportunities in the recovery efforts. Acting as agents of change in response to their findings, the YTT developed policy briefs that they shared with decision-makers while at the same time participating in high-level international conferences to convene conversations for action.

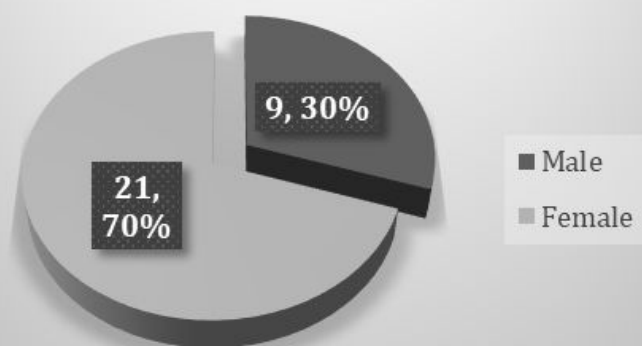
Bearing in mind that young people are best placed to collect and gather information from their peers, this research was youth-led. The YTT members set the research framework, designed the research questions, collected insights, analysed and validated the data, and finally convened conversations for action. The YTT members played an active role in developing this report.

Research Methodology

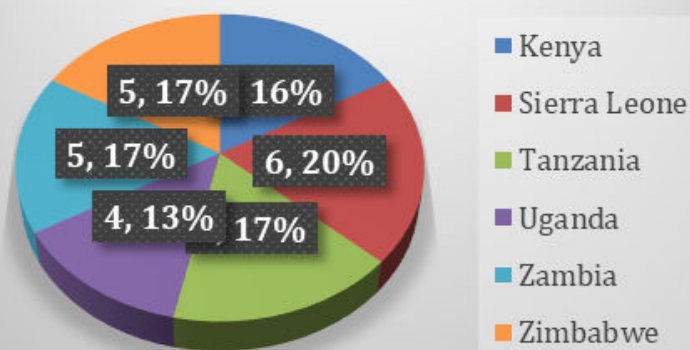
Research Focus

Youth Leadership is at the heart of Restless Development work. This research, therefore, used the Restless Development participatory youth-led research approach led by 30 Youth Task Team (YTT) members from Kenya, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Using this technique, the YTT members collected high-quality data on the socio-economic impact of Covid 19, recovery efforts including gaps in their implementation, youth engagement in economic recovery efforts and transparency, and accountability in the disbursement and usage of Covid-19 funds. Conversations for action were convened in relevant spaces that allow young people to raise their concerns whilst ensuring that there is equitable recovery from the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Breakdown of YTT_Gender



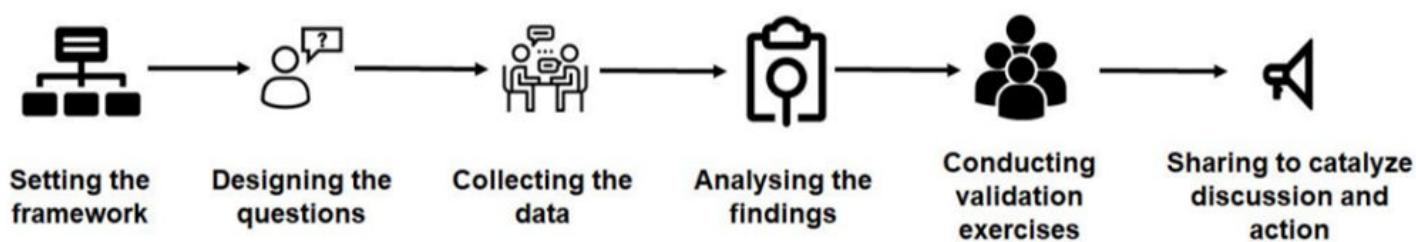
Breakdown of YTT_Country



Design, Sampling, and Data Collection

Youth Led Research Approach

The research took on a sequential mixed methods research design drawing on insights captured through Key informant Interviews (KIIs), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), Survey and a desk review. The findings from the desk review largely fed into the design of the KII and FGD guides as well as the online survey. Our research approach is a peer to peer approach which empowers young people to drive the inquiry process, where they are uniquely able to capture the perspectives of young people like themselves. Our model is designed to maximize youth leadership at every stage of the research process. The six-step approach has a clearly defined role for young researchers and staff in each step. Young people, therefore, played a leading role in conducting the research – framing the questions; collecting data, and identifying the core insights as illustrated below.



A 30 –person YTT was recruited and meaningfully engaged throughout all six steps illustrated above. To effectively achieve this, the same 30 person YTT underwent a foundation training on research methodologies, ethics, safeguarding, data protection, equity and inclusion among other critical research related modules meant to increase their capacity. This was held in person over a one-week period in Lusaka, Zambia.

Data Collection Methods

- Desk Review – The YTT members carried out a desk review to map government efforts on Covid-19 Socio-economic recovery and analyse gaps. Using the research questions, inclusion criteria, and search strings provided.
- Key Informant Interviews – The YTT members consulted Key informants from both the public and private sectors as well as Civil Society to get a sense of how Covid-19 affected various sectors of the economy. This was a chance to get preliminary data on Government efforts on Covid-19 Recovery. A total of 30 key informant interviews with strategic individuals from various sectors were consulted.
- Focus Group Discussions – The YTT carried out a total of 30 FGDs to determine the extent of youth engagement in the economic recovery efforts by Government. Through these focus group discussions the YTT also sought to establish the effects of the pandemic on young people’s lives in the focus countries
- Online Survey – The YTT carried out an online survey with 316 young people to validate the findings from the Focus Group Discussion and determine the extent to which there has been youth engagement in the economic recovery efforts by governments from spotlighted countries.

Table 1: Summary of survey respondents per country

Country	No. of Respondents	Location (Rural/Peri-Urban/ Urban)			Sex		
		Rural	Peri-urban	Urban	Female	Male	Non-Binary
Tanzania	105	17	16	71	39	65	
Uganda	65	5	23	37	30	35	
Zambia	111	10	18	83	45	66	
Zimbabwe	35	2	5	28	25	9	1
Total	316						

Data Management and Analysis

Data Management

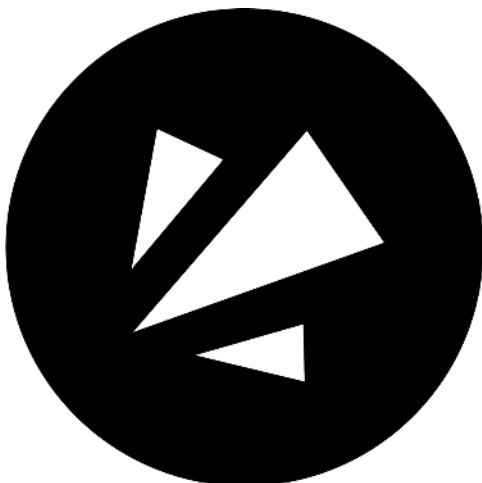
All data (quantitative and qualitative) collected from target respondents was treated with utmost confidentiality. Data was backed up and stored online with password-protected Google Drive folders. To ensure awareness of responsibilities to confidentiality, YTT were trained on this as part of their foundation training on research and ethics.

Data Analysis

- Desk Review Based on the search criteria YTT members will collate, compare and assemble key findings based on the search criteria. Data analysis will take on a deductive approach, through which emerging themes will be identified from data, based on codes of interest.
- Key Informant Interviews and Focus group discussions – Data analysis took on a deductive approach, through which emerging themes were identified from data, based on codes of interest. Key themes were condensed into specific findings, supported by the evidence of direct quotations. The YTT took part in a participatory analysis workshop where they were supported to conduct deductive thematic analysis of the qualitative data.
- Online Survey – Following data collection, the raw survey results were downloaded from the Survey into an Excel file for quantitative analysis with young people providing their interpretation of the data.

Validation

Validation is conducted as part of ensuring that the findings emerging from the data collection and analysis accurately reflect the perspectives of the participants and ensure the integrity of data. Failure to conduct a validation exercise leads to imperfect data which does not represent reality. The researchers conducted a validation exercise with randomly sampled respondents that were initially engaged through the FGDs and KIs. Through interviews, the researchers presented initial findings to the sampled respondents. Through these discussions, respondents had an opportunity to comment on emerging findings, critiquing whether it accurately reflected their perspectives and providing clarifications on our interpretation. This was a unique time for the researchers to reiterate the purpose of the study as well as next steps in the research process. Additionally, this report was also co-created and validated by the YTT so that it accurately narrates their research journey.



Limitations

With every research there are some factors that inhibit the research team to gather nuanced data from a certain demography or location, this is based on various contextual scenarios that are mostly beyond the purview of the research team. The following are some of the limitations of this research.

Inclusion

10% of the survey respondents were young people with disabilities. Even though current estimates suggest that people with disabilities make up 10% of the general African population, a bigger sample size of this demography would have been crucial to redress how they have been underserved in the past. This however did not compromise the quality of the research because the percentage of young people with disabilities does not fall far short of the approximated percentage of people with disabilities globally. Additionally, 11% of the survey respondents were from rural areas. Covid -19 disproportionately affected people living in rural and underserved areas particularly because of their proximity to health care.

Geography

This research was only done in 6 countries i.e. Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Sierra Leone, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Covid-19 affected young people across the continent. Getting insights from all 54 countries in Africa would have given a clearer picture of the extent to which young people were affected by the Covid -19 pandemic. Budgetary constraints confined the research to these 6 countries. This however does not compromise the quality of the research because the 6 countries selected represent geographical locations which are unique in the sense that 3 regions are represented in the research. Sierra Leone is in West Africa, Zimbabwe and Zambia are from Southern Africa whilst Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania are countries in the East of Africa which gives us a mix of perspectives and lived experiences from 3 of the 5 regions in Africa.

Contextual and logistical challenges

A multi-country project is brilliant in the fact that it brings to the fore numerous diverse insights into the research questions. Logistically it also presents a nightmare with contextual challenges that range from connectivity for virtual meetings to in-country coordination and bureaucratic clearances. Even though this did not affect the quality of the data, navigating through these contextual challenges affects research timelines especially when the findings are supposed to contribute to subsequent processes. In this light, the Survey was only done in 4 countries i.e Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, and the KIs and FGDs were done in all 6 countries including Sierra Leone and Kenya. There was a delay in the recruitment of YTT members in both Sierra Leone and Kenya, so because of the sequencing of data collection and the fact that it had to contribute to subsequent processes Kenya and Sierra Leone YTT were recruited after the Survey had already been administered.



Key Findings



Economic impact

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated major economic and social disparities across the globe. In Africa, young people, especially vulnerable youth, are facing the devastating effects of the pandemic. Disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have amplified many of the challenges already facing the continent's youth. The spread of COVID-19 was devastating for the millions of people who were infected by the virus and lost their lives, and the tens of millions of people who have lost their work and livelihoods. In all countries more vulnerable groups were disproportionately affected by Covid-19.

“The rich became richer while the poor became poorer, orphans and other vulnerable individuals including those with disabilities were affected the most”

Among those who lost their lives were breadwinners, worsening the economic realities of their dependents. Even though it seemed as if mortality rates did not matter about social status, if you survive, recovering from the pandemic was more certain for those that were financially stable from the onset. Although lockdowns in Africa have been effective at mitigating the spread of COVID-19, they have had severe economic consequences for the most vulnerable.

In a bid to curb the spread of the virus whilst keeping the economy moving, some governments including the Government of Zimbabwe introduced travel exemption letters for personnel from key sectors crucial to the smooth running of the economy like banking and retail. These exemption letters were not for everyone. This made the whole system vulnerable to abuse. Exemption letters ended up being given to people who did not fit the criteria, there were now being given based on who you know. Some young people in the urban areas reported that they could access these letters from the authorities with little to no effort allowing them to go about their regular business. Young people in the rural areas on the other hand had little to no access to these exemption letters throwing them deeper into poverty because they could not travel in any way to continue with their source of livelihood. Despite the issue of exemption letters given only to the elite and connected in some of the spotlighted countries, lockdowns generally hindered young people from travelling or engaging in their day to day business.

The pandemic itself remains a continued threat to debt sustainability. To date, unemployment in the region remains high, and there is underinvestment in business and health care. The countries that were spotlighted in this research are deep in debt from the Breton wood institutions and other similar lending agencies, the coming in of the Covid-19 pandemic threw these countries deeper into poverty. Through this research, we found out that it was harder for the government to sustain the livelihoods of their people because they under-invested in their own health structures and systems, they could not go back to lending institutions for additional funds.

Key Findings

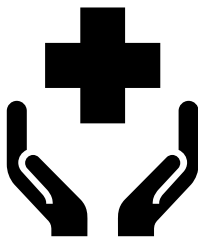


Impact on Education

One of the major sectors that was also affected by the pandemic was education. Learners' performance declined because of the years they spent outside the school system (in most instances 1–2 years). School closures were instituted across many countries in Africa between March and June 2020 and remained closed for prolonged periods with the longest closure of 22 months and a predicted learning deficit of 2.8 years in Uganda. Those that were in rural and marginalized areas with no access to online lessons were left far behind in completing the syllabus as they had limited access to digital technologies. Online lessons further marginalized underserved communities. An estimated 89% of learners in Sub-Saharan Africa do not have access to household computers, while 82% lack access to the internet.

“Those who could afford private tutors and to buy gadgets as well as data for online classes carried on with learning whilst for the already underserved who could not afford ICT and data in their schools and homes lockdowns meant a halt in schooling”

“I had already dropped out of school before Covid-19 so that I could try to do ‘piece’ jobs and raise school fees. When the pandemic came with the lockdown no one was allowed to travel and nobody wanted anyone to work for them, I don't know if I am ever going to attend school again”



Health Impact

Low to middle-income countries reallocated most of their health budgets to the fight against Covid-19 putting a huge strain on the already struggling health systems in the focus countries. Young people who had other health issues struggled to get medical attention because of the limited accessibility brought about by restrictions on movement, and the closure or repurposing of health facilities. Young people interviewed also mentioned that being infected by Covid-19 was similar to a death sentence because it was extremely expensive to get medication. With a Covid-19 test costing between 20–60 USD young people struggled to get tested let alone get medication if found positive.

The coming of the pandemic also saw some health care workers being allocated extra duties or being reassigned to try and contain the pandemic, this caused burn out amongst the workers. Young people who had other non Covid illnesses failed to get assistance because some health care workers had to be reassigned to Covid related roles which was deemed high priority at the time leaving a vacuum on other non Covid related illnesses. Additionally, the countries spotlighted in this research were caught off guard, with minimal disease profiling and research capabilities and ill-equipped health care centres.

Key Findings



Social Impact

Child marriage is a violation of human rights. Every child has the right to be protected from this harmful practice, which has devastating consequences for individuals and for society. An estimated 650 million girls and women alive today were married before their 18th birthdays. Over 50 million of them reside in Eastern and Southern Africa. Nearly one third (32%) of the region's young women were married before age 18. With the coming in of Covid-19 the issue of child marriages and gender based violence got worse.

“When schools closed because of the shutdown, most girls became exposed to sexual abuse and a lot of girls got married, men were taking advantage of them, because they were out of school and stayed at home”

Closure of schools because of the pandemic meant young girls stayed at home. Most of them ended up engaging in sexual activities some out of lack of better things to do and some as a means to try and run away from poverty which was catalysed by the shutdown brought by Covid. Learners who historically found a safe space in schools were left facing the perpetrators both at their homes and communities.

Anti-corruption bodies should ensure that projects benefit the public.

Call to Action

We call on Governments spotlighted in this research to have zero tolerance for corruption involving all funds meant to benefit the public.

“

Power reconfiguration is key. We call on all Governments spotlighted in this research to ensure that young people are decision-makers and are at the centre of making decisions on issues that concern them.



Country spotlights

Spotlight on Kenya



- The pandemic had a negative impact on the mental health of youths in Kenya. The isolation, fear, and uncertainty caused by the pandemic increased anxiety, depression, and stress levels among young people
- The pandemic led to an increase in gender-based violence with young women and girls being subjected to abuse and violence. The lockdown measures and restrictions on movement made it harder for victims to seek help and support.
- The pandemic led to unemployment in Kenya, with many youths losing their jobs due to business closures and reduced economic activity. Youth unemployment was already a major challenge in Kenya before the pandemic, and the crisis worsened the situation.
- The closure of schools to curb the spread of COVID-19 disrupted the education system in Kenya. Many students missed out on months of learning, and some dropped out of school altogether. This disruption particularly affected disadvantaged youths who do not have access to online learning resources.

Spotlight on Tanzania



- Before the onset of COVID-19, most youths who were running their businesses employed other youths, unfortunately, COVID-19 made these youths close their businesses and as a result, most of them lost their jobs.
- Reduced access to health care for non Covid related illnesses. Covid-19 was given priority by the authorities.
- Increased inflation rate from 3.46% in 2019 to 4.9% in 2022 accelerated by limited movement of people and goods globally, this affected underserved groups of people like people with disabilities (PWD), youth and other people with no source of income.



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Tanzania YTTs conducting a feedback session on radio

Spotlight on Uganda

- The health sector was greatly affected as the existing facilities were overstretched due to insufficient human resource to respond to both Covid and other none Covid related illnesses.
- The education sector was among the most hit (in fact the most affected sector) as the school lockdown brought about school dropout cases which in turn caused child marriages.
- Climate change was accelerated during lockdown as wetlands and forest cover were encroached more in this period coupled with increased cutting down of trees for charcoal as a means of survival.
- Loss of lives. People lost lives to Covid19 while others due to other diseases as they could not access medical care.

Spotlight on Zambia

- There were myths and misconceptions surrounding the vaccine being peddled on social media that the vaccine is dangerous. This led to vaccination apathy amongst young people.
- There was disruption of school which affected syllabus completion both in primary and tertiary institutions. Learners with special education needs (young people with disabilities) were not spared out. As it is known these learners require special treatment during the teaching and learning process.
- They require a teacher to be present physically for learning to take place smoothly and this was very challenging.
- Female young people got pregnant and dropped out of school, some even got married during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Young people in the communities started to engage in illicit behaviours such as armed robbery and drug abuse
- The healthcare system, particularly in rural areas, was strained. There was reduced access to health care for non Covid related illnesses and the toll and strain was heavily put on the poor as they could not afford private health care which is generally more expensive.
- Many young people rely on farming both as producers and employees and were heavily affected. A national drop in demand for produce from hotels and restaurants saw prices of agricultural commodities drop.

Spotlight on Zimbabwe

- Informal markets were closed up and livelihoods were affected. Youth entrepreneurs, who are usually into informal trading, were hard hit as they could not survive because of the lockdown.
- Families had more expenses feeding the household and those who were unfortunate to get a COVID 19 case in their homes were faced with huge hospital bills that were unjustifiable.
- There was no government accountability and transparency in public finances meant for Covid -19. For some social grants that were available some youths were recorded as beneficiaries but they never received the grants.
- Reduced access to health care for non Covid related illnesses. The pandemic exposed the inequalities that existed in our health systems. It exposed the exclusion of certain groups of vulnerable people from accessing care.

Spotlight on Sierra Leone

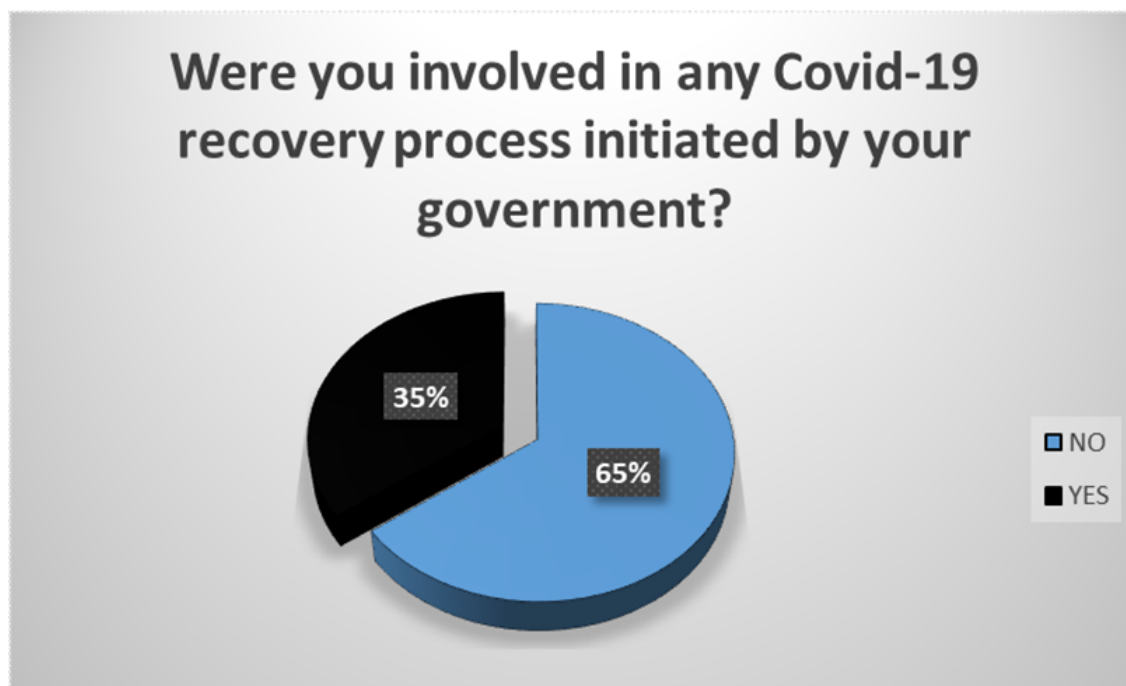
- The older segment of the population were prioritised to be vaccinated. Vaccine rollout to young people, particularly in rural communities, was slow, resulting in their vulnerability.
- Access to food was very challenging due to the impact on the global supply chain.
- There was generally a phobia on the part of sick citizens to report for medical screening at health facilities lest they be withheld for COVID. Most people ended up dying at Home.
- Unemployment increased for young people as some companies either suspended or restructured their operations by laying off staff.



YTTs during a foundation training in Lusaka, Zambia

Country Efforts

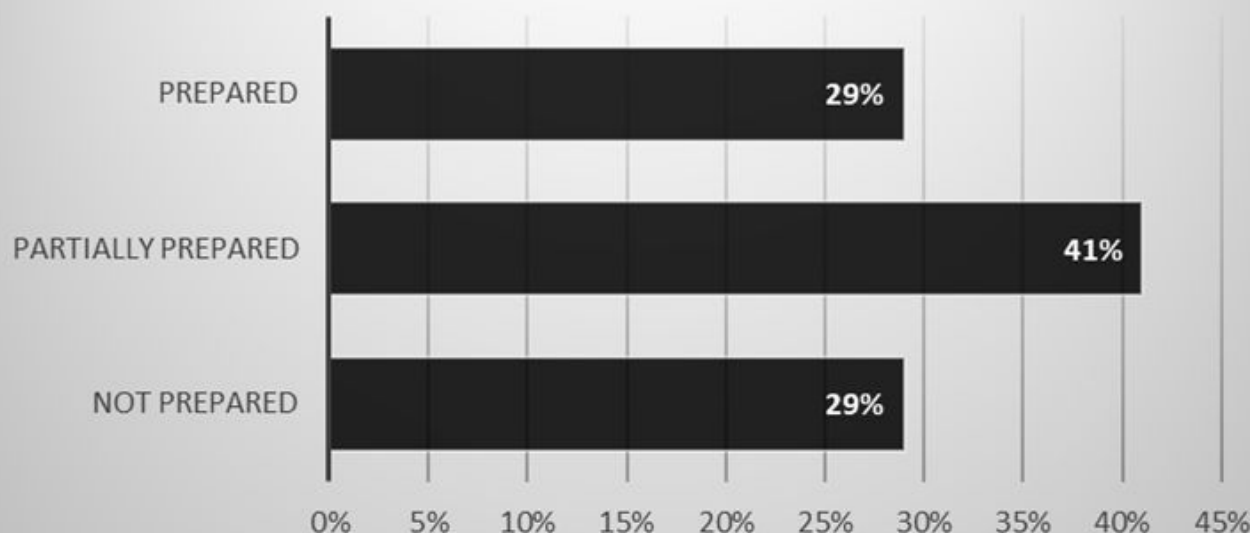
65% of the young people interviewed mentioned that they were not involved in any Covid-19 recovery process. Of the 35% that said they were involved 90% of them live in either the Urban or semi-urban areas. This gives a clear picture of how young people who are in rural, underserved hard-to-reach areas are always left out on crucial empowerment and decision-making processes and projects that target the young people. Those that mentioned that they were involved, were only involved in consultations and not in implementation, planning, or Monitoring and Evaluation of the efforts.



“Covid-19 was part of a scheme by politicians to take advantage of the poor and squander funds”

70% of the young people engaged in the survey mentioned that their governments are investing in Training and education as part of their plans for building the capacity of young people to respond better to future pandemics. However, when asked about the confidence that they had in their current governments in handling future pandemics, 29% mentioned that based on the current recovery efforts their governments will not be able to withstand future pandemics. 41% mentioned that they are partially prepared based on some of the commendable efforts by the spotlighted governments, for instance, the Tanzanian and Kenyan Governments that did well in creating an enabling environment for youths to recover and revive economically and employ themselves and others. For instance the Tanzanian government in collaboration with civil society organisations initiated employability Skills Development Programme to strengthen the youth’s workforce in the employment market. The programs targeted young women and men, people with disabilities, people who are unemployed and those looking for jobs.

How prepared is your government to withstand future pandemics?



The response of SADC Member States to the pandemic was, by and large, quick and decisive. In addition to the national health policies and strategies in place before COVID-19, all Member States defined essential health services that were to be maintained during the pandemic through national COVID-19 health response strategy documents.

Through COVAX, a global initiative whose objective is to provide affordable COVID vaccine coverage to the poor countries of the world, sub-Saharan Africa has had access to vaccines. Most Governments benefited from this and it has cushioned the burden to some extent. In addition to the 'jabs,' the Governments spotlighted in this research have also gone a step further in supplying face masks and other sanitary ware to avoid the spread of Covid-19.

"Immediately after covid-19, there were teaching and learning material supplies, even up to now we still have some of the supplies which the government provided. Another is the provision of face masks, soap for hand washing, and buckets which were provided by the government"



**We are in it together
We listen and learn**

Spotlight on Kenya



- Many organizations are offering digital skills training programs to help young people acquire skills that are in demand in the digital economy. These skills include digital marketing, data analysis, and web development.
- The Green Jobs Initiative is a government-led program aimed at creating employment opportunities in the green economy. The program focuses on sectors such as renewable energy, waste management, and sustainable agriculture.
- To engage young people in economic recovery efforts, various organizations have also created platforms and forums to facilitate their participation in policy and decision-making processes. For example, the Kenya Youth Employment and Opportunities Project (KYEOP) has established youth-led advisory groups that work with government agencies and other stakeholders to promote youth engagement in economic recovery efforts.
- The government set up a Ksh 3 billion (\$30 million) fund to provide affordable loans to small businesses, including those run by young people.
- The Youth Enterprise Development Fund (YEDF) provides financial and business support to young people starting or expanding their businesses. It also offers training programs and mentorship opportunities to young entrepreneurs.

Spotlight on Tanzania



- The Government in collaboration with civil society organisations initiated employability Skills Development Programmes to strengthen the youth's workforce in the employment market. The programs target young women and men, people with disabilities, people who are unemployed and those looking for a job
- In September 2022, under the prime minister's office, the government began providing loans from the Youth Development Fund to. This is a response to create an enabling environment for youths to recover and revive economically and employ themselves and others.
- In the financial year budget 2022/23, the government allocated 1.3 billion Tanzania Shillings for agricultural training to 12,000 youths in 24 councils for them to employ themselves and others and improve their livelihoods. This is the initiative to attract youth in the agricultural sector in Tanzania.

Spotlight on Uganda



- Skill Development Program. The government, through the ministry of education and the office of the president undertook an initiative to provide vocational skills to young Ugandans through the Presidential Skills Initiative
- Business stimulus funds. The government of Uganda along with other development partners set up various business stimulus fund packages for businesses. Other development partners such as the MasterCard Foundation through the Private Sector Foundation Uganda provided Covid-19 recovery grants to SMEs
- Parish Development Model. PDM is a flagship presidential initiative aimed at improving household and personal economic status of local Ugandans. The funds under this program are channelled to local groups at Parish level.

Spotlight on Sierra Leone



- The government provided face masks, soap for hand washing, and buckets.
- With the help of the radio discussions and talk shows, young people were able to learn and understand the effects of Covid-19 and some of the precautionary measures to take to ensure the safety and well-being of young people and the community in general.
- Healthcare workers visited communities and interviewed them on how COVID-19 affected and offering free testing.

Spotlight on Zimbabwe



- Through the COVAX facility and through donations from partners like China the government has managed to get vaccination for its citizens. As of 18 March 2023, a total of 13,649,717 vaccine doses have been administered.
- Government has donated sanitizers to schools to ensure safety from Covid.
- The government unveiled an ZWL\$18 billion Economic Recovery and Stimulus Package aimed at reviving the economy and providing relief to individuals, families, small businesses and industries impacted by the economic effects brought by Covid-19.

Spotlight on Zambia



- Financial literacy among the youth is being implemented through programs such as the financial literacy campaign to help youths know how to have an emergency fund during times emergencies like a pandemic.
- Zambia received a US\$10 million Covid-19 emergency grant for the year of 2020-2022 from GPE to support interventions that are fully aligned with this educational contingency plan.

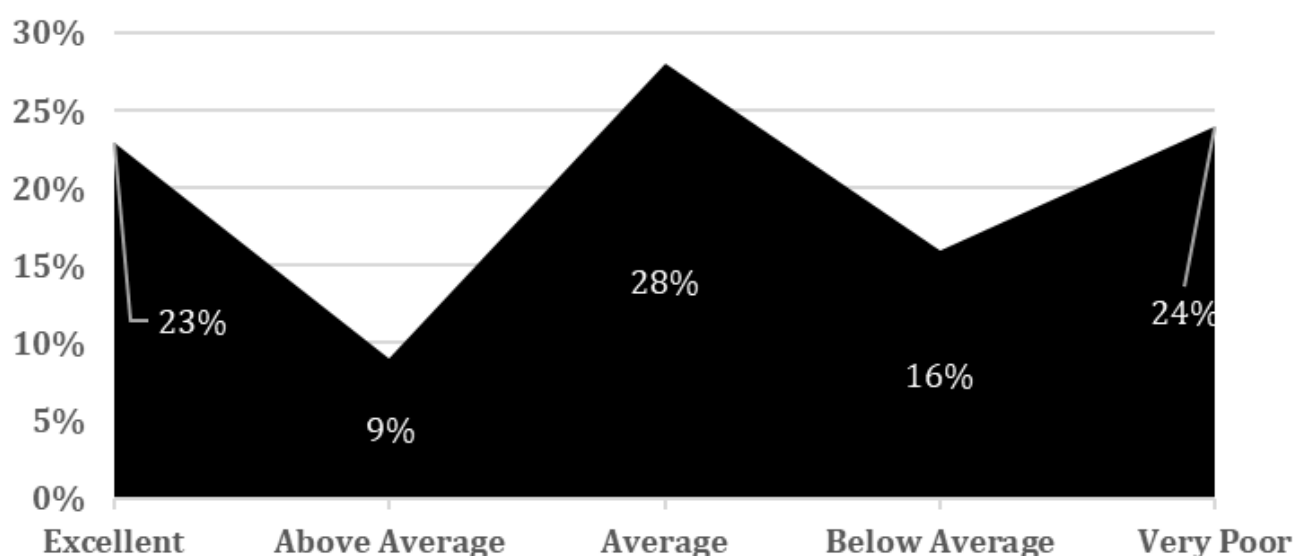
Gaps in Covid-19 recovery efforts

African governments dealt with critical issues of vaccine access, uptake, and distribution and are yet to address growing concerns regarding authoritarianism, mismanagement of Covid-19 funds, and the reallocation of resources meant for interventions in education, and infrastructural development. Corruption, demonstrated by the lack of transparency and accountability during the pandemic, is affecting inclusive and sustainable recovery for youth and other marginalized groups.

In as much as there were some commendable efforts, the acquisition and distribution of most Covid-19 material were marred with corruption and fraud. 68% of the young people in this research mentioned that their governments' transparency and accountability around Covid-19 support grants/funds was between average and very poor. Zimbabwe's Minister of Health was arrested over alleged corruption related to the awarding of a USD \$60 million contract for Covid-19 supplies. Uganda's ambassador and her deputy were found strategizing how to pocket money allocated for the Covid-19 response and the head of Kenya Medical Supply Authority and other officials were suspended over suspicions of corruption in the procurement of personal protective equipment (PPE).

Africa has the youngest population in the world, with 70% of sub-Saharan Africa under the age of 30. Such a high number of young people is an opportunity for the continent's growth – but only if these new generations are fully empowered to realise their best potential. They have a high appetite for leading continental pandemic recovery efforts. Many have already emerged as active agents in the fight against COVID-19 by volunteering as front liners in essential services, while others are constantly innovating to meet the emerging demands for essential products. Youths should therefore be at the centre of recovery efforts on the continent but this has not been the case.

Country Governments transparency and accountability around Covid-19 grants/funds



Young people have the right to participate in decisions affecting their lives and expect that decision-makers will listen to and consider their views. The international, regional, and national normative frameworks on children and youth reinforce and build upon this right. Despite this, young people were by and large not given a seat at the table when Covid-19 decisions were made in the spotlighted countries.

65% of the young people interviewed mentioned that they were not involved in any Covid-19 recovery process. Of the 35% that said they were involved, 90% of them stay in the urban areas and were only involved at the consultation stage only.

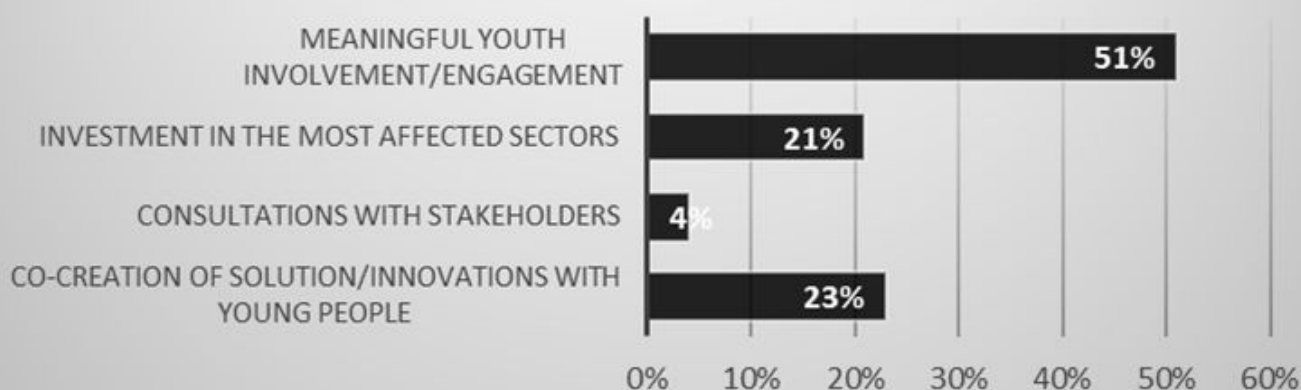
Young people are agents of change uniquely placed to engage with their peers on issues that matter to them, they are also full of innovative ideas which have the capacity and capability to change the world for the better. Yet, they are still left out because of their presumed lack of experience by adults. This put a serious dent on the equitable recovery from Covid-19 in the spotlighted countries.

75% of the young people engaged in the study reiterated that the only way to ensure a sustained and equitable recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic is to co-create solutions with young people and foster meaningful youth engagement/participation in the implementation of the same.

With great strides on the Covax, a large number of adults in the focus countries remain unvaccinated and this is the case with the majority of Africa. Of the 2.1 billion COVID-19 vaccine doses administered worldwide so far, COVAX has been responsible for less than 4%. With a likelihood of a resurgence, Africa remains vulnerable because Covax fell short of the vaccination target. In response, many countries in sub-Saharan Africa resorted to increased borrowing to acquire additional doses of Covid-19 vaccines.

“As Young people we want to be in more spaces where decisions are made, they want to be more connected to people doing Covid19 recovery projects but sadly they are being side-lined”

What should be done better to ensure a sustained and equitable recovery of your country from the Covid-19 pandemic?



Spotlight on Kenya

- There is a lack of coordination and collaboration among stakeholders involved in economic recovery efforts for youth in Kenya. This has led to duplication of efforts, inefficient use of resources, and limited impact of interventions.
- Youth in Kenya are often excluded from decision-making processes that affect their economic prospects. This limits their ability to contribute to economic recovery efforts and to shape policies that affect their lives.
- Some of the existing programs and initiatives are not effectively implemented or monitored, leading to inefficiencies and limited impact. There is a need for more robust implementation and monitoring mechanisms to ensure that economic recovery efforts reach the target beneficiaries and achieve the desired impact.
- While there are digital skills training programs available, there is a need for more support for young people who want to start and grow digital businesses. This includes access to technology, mentorship, and funding for start-ups.
- Marginalized youth, such as those living in rural areas, face additional barriers to accessing economic opportunities. There is a need for targeted interventions that address the specific challenges faced by these groups.

Spotlight on Uganda

- Young people felt that they are discriminated against in their quest to access recovery programs as they are not part of the decision-making bodies and their proposals are often rejected.
- Information on economic recovery efforts is not widely shared. Young people are not aware of the programs at all, or they have distorted information about them.
- Corruption is rampant when it comes to access to government led recovery projects. Some youths reported that they were asked to pay some money so as to be registered for a government project.
- Recovery efforts are hindered by limited infrastructure, financial and human resources. The health sector in particular faces shortage of medical workers and critical supplies.

Spotlight on Tanzania



- Corruption and misuse of youth development funds among government officials is a serious challenge in implementing youth development programmes. Even though the government has good intentions of improving youth livelihood by providing youth loans, there are still serious reported cases of corruption and misuse of youth funds
- There are established tailored funds and programs managed by the government which would have effectively supported youth, women and PWDs such as Youth Development Fund, Women Development Fund, unfortunately, the majority of youths are unaware and/or have insufficient access to knowledge and understanding about these opportunities.
- Insufficient engagement of youth in recovery programs. The youth population that comprises more than 60% of Tanzania population has not been well represented in recovery efforts. This is because of the absence of a national youth body/council that could potentially and meaningfully represent youth in policy planning and holding the government accountable in economic recovery efforts.

Spotlight on Sierra Leone



- There was no evidence of proper accountability on Covid-19 funds in the Rural and underserved areas by the Government.
- Young people were not involved in the design or implementation of economic recovery projects that concern them.

Spotlight on Zambia



- The eLearning programme introduced by the government disadvantaged the underserved communities who had no phones and internet in the rural areas. ELearning was difficult even those in the urban areas, those that had access to smart gadgets could not afford to purchase data.
- There was out right exclusion of young people in the planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of Covid-19 recovery programs
- Young people want to be in more spaces where decisions are being made, they want to be more connected to people implementing economic recovery efforts but sadly they are being side-lined.

Spotlight on Zimbabwe



- People/Youths in different regions were affected differently by the COVID-19 pandemic highlighting the socio-economic inequalities within the populations. Recovery efforts are not addressing the various inequalities
- Recovery efforts and information were not easily accessible to young people, this shows ineffectiveness of youth targeting on the part of policymakers and youth programming partners.
- The only information available about the recovery efforts is a call for applications. There is no transparency regarding whether or not the funds were distributed to the intended recipients
- Young people have no confidence in the government's efforts to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conversations for action – Inform and Influence

The Africa Youth Partnership research was conducted on the premise that research should not be conducted for the sake of research but rather as a contribution towards both advocacy and programming. After completing the research process the YTT members carried out various multi-country advocacy and campaigning activities to inform decision makers on key contextual facets of young people's lived experience, and young people's priorities on Covid-19 and Influence key decision makers to do better in supporting young people's needs. Below are some of the key activities carried out by the YTT members based on the final and preliminary findings of the research.

Africa Youth Coneckt

Youth Coneckt Africa (YCA) is an African home-grown solution positioned to provide relevant solutions to support the implementation of relevant South-South initiatives to empower youth. The platform seeks to empower young people by enhancing their knowledge, experiences and skills while investing in their ideas, innovations and initiatives. Its vision is to connect African youth for socio-economic transformation. 10 representatives from the 30 member YTT attended the Africa Summit to lobby for an inclusive, sustainable, and equitable recovery of African economies from the Covid-19 pandemic.

International Family Planning Council– Intersecting Climate Change and Family Planning

YTT members attended the International Family Planning Conference that was held in Pattaya Thailand. Young people convened to innovate, collaborate, & accelerate progress toward achieving universal access to [Family Planning](#). The conference was a strategic inflection point for the YTT members, providing a global stage for countries, organizations, and individuals to make important commitments and celebrate achievements at the world's largest scientific conference on family planning and reproductive health. Whilst Covid-19 is a health issue this was a perfect chance for the YTT members to be able to connect and collaborate with other young people across the globe and also lobby for an inclusive, sustainable, and equitable recovery of African economies from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Hackathons and Policy Briefs

Youth Task team members developed 6 policy briefs which were published across participating countries to highlight key findings from youth-led accountability assessments and offer youth-inclusive policy options for recovery efforts in 6 countries. The briefs were also be published on the [Africa Youth Partnership](#) website with key recommendations based on young people's needs regarding certain policies or strategies. 5 online and 2 physical Hackathons were held across 6 participating countries to cement the development of policy briefs or policy statements. This was a deliberate attempt by the YTT to lobby for an inclusive, sustainable, and equitable recovery of African economies from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Parliamentary Portfolio Committees Engagement

The Zimbabwe YTT held a parliamentary engagement meeting with 4 Parliamentary portfolio committees. The committees that were engaged include the Health and Child Care, Youth Sports Arts and Recreation, Women Affairs Gender Community Small and Medium Enterprises Development and Budget, Finance and Economic Development. This was a unique opportunity for the YTT members to engage the policy makers on key issues that surfaced through the research. Some of the key issues that were discussed and had commitments from the policy makers include. Promoting Transparency and Accountability because lack of transparency and financial accountability may result in funds failing to meet their objectives. Another issue was around strengthening Livelihoods opportunities for young people through start-up capital for young people's enterprises. There is a lack of resources and funding to support more livelihood options for young people. It was reiterated by the YTT that training and start-up capital is needed for young people to diversify their livelihood options.

Conclusion

This research carried out by 30 YTT members in 6 countries shows beyond doubt how the covid-19 pandemic affected many young people in so many ways. Despite the virus killing many people and making others incredibly sick, its impact had serious repercussion on many other socio-economic spheres like education, livelihoods and mental health among others. Young people ordinarily depend on jobs, entrepreneurship, and farming to make a living, but when the pandemic came it brought all of this to a halt, in the process plunging young people further into poverty. Despite the various projects initiated by country governments critical issues of social and economic inequality were escalated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Duty bearers and stakeholders have much more to do in response to young people's voices and engagement through increased attention and investment in projects that matter to them.

Findings from the research show that the authorities in the focus countries engage young people in a tokenistic fashion when it comes to covid-19 recovery programs. When they are engaged it is only in consultation and never in the design, implementation, and monitoring of these processes. The Africa Youth Partnership project gave young people a unique chance to design, conduct, and package research results convening conversations for action in spaces that foster impactful discussions. Additionally the project, through this research has invested a lot in the YTT members who have been key in the successful delivery of this research. Now we have a set of trained young thought leaders with a comprehensive set of skills built to deliver rigorous peer-to-peer research around the world.



Recommendations

The recommendations outlined below are directed to the Governments where this research was conducted.

- There indeed for the Inclusion of all youth groups by providing them with requisite skills and capacities in planning, implementing, and monitoring COVID-19 recovery programs (education and skills, and economic).

We call on all stakeholders including the Governments of all the countries spotlighted in this research to prioritize youth leadership in the planning, implementing, and monitoring of projects that affect them, this includes supporting them with pre-requisite skills and platforms to design road maps of what should be done to better support young people's needs.

- Providing tailored entrepreneurship skills for youth with disabilities so they to break out of social exclusion, financial dependence, and inequality

We call on stakeholders including the Government to prioritize and mainstream gender, equality, and social inclusion principles in all public programs. This will be key in redressing previous inequalities and injustices that young people continue to face

- Inclusion of entrepreneurship and life skills in the education curriculum from primary to higher education level.

We call on Government and stakeholders in the education sector to reconfigure the curriculum of primary, secondary, and higher education so that entrepreneurial and life skills follow the current trends and context.

- The government should collaborate with development practitioners and mass media in providing information about government youth-tailored funds and collaterals to youth.

We call on Governments spotlighted in this research to ensure that all information on youth empowerment processes is tailored to reach and benefit all young people regardless of geo-location

- There is a need to have more youths in the government offices at district levels, people who can still reason like young people because the ones that are currently there cannot understand the problems faced by young people today.

Power reconfiguration is key. We call on all Governments spotlighted in this research to ensure that young people are decision-makers and are at the centre of making decisions on issues that concern them.

- Government and development partners should enhance access to vocational training to cater to those that dropped out of school due to Covid19.

Covid-19 has taught us a lot we call on Governments to be better prepared for future pandemics by ensuring that there is a full proof fall-back plan that allows learners to continue with their education regardless of the prevailing context.

- There is need to bridge the digital divide and ensure universal access to the internet in partnership with the private sector.

The internet was a source of verifiable credible information around Covid-19 but the young people in rural and underserved areas were the last to get information because of lack of access. Additionally young people in urban areas continued with lessons virtually whilst those in underserved areas struggled. We, therefore, call on Governments to ensure universal access to the internet to all young people so that they have access to vital life-saving information

Looking forward

This research unearthed some solid information about Covid -19 recovery efforts in the 6 countries where this research was done. However there is a need for a further nuanced comparative study between Africa and other continents putting together best practices and lessons learned. This will go a long way in creating more sustained, impactful, and meaningful data with global influence and footprint. Additional research into the various intersectionalities of Covid-19 will be important with a bigger sample size of young people with disabilities, women, sexual and gender minorities and those from rural and underserved areas.

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