

# **Poverty, unemployment and youth at risk in Arusha, Tanzania....and what can we do about it?**

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## **1. Introduction**

This paper explores the everyday risks facing young men and women living in a low-income ward of Arusha. It analyses the school-to-work transition of young people in this deprived area in a context in which the city's development has been accompanied by high levels of informality and unemployment rather than job creation. Youth here are broadly perceived as criminals, drunkards and hooligans. This research situates the risk of young people getting drawn into gangs and criminal behaviours within the bigger picture of their poverty and marginalisation. Hopes and aspirations quickly become a distant dream for young people from poor family backgrounds. Jobs are scarce, exploitative and low paid, rarely offering a platform to more stable opportunities. This paper will explore the multiple obstacles that youth here face during their school-to-work transition, before discussing a simple and sustainable programme that we have started as a result of these research findings.

## **2. Exploring the school-to-work transition for low-income youth in Arusha**

This findings we present here are based upon a three-year research project called *Youth, Poverty and Inequality in urban Tanzania*. Our focus groups have explored what living in Arusha means for youth, and the opportunities and challenges that city life brings. We have also conducted a survey to create an accurate portrait of youth across the ward's six streets, looking at education, employment and marital status. The main component of the research has focused on the school-to-work transition of youth who have finished school, exploring differences in employment outcomes by age, gender and educational qualifications (whether young people leave with primary or secondary qualifications). We have conducted 96 in-depth interviews across two streets in this low-income, high-density ward, exploring young men and women's school-to-work transitions, their family backgrounds, their hopes and aspirations, and their expectations of whether or not they think they will achieve them. This section will explore findings from these interviews, exploring how young men and women navigate the school-to-work transition amidst these difficult environments. Here in this abstract I provide a brief overview of the key issues we will discuss. In the final paper this will be extended to i) include more detail and analysis of these key issues ii) clearly differentiate between the strategies pursued and outcomes of the school-to-work transition for young men and young women and iii) highlight the risk factors associated with an inability to find work in terms of both causes and consequences.

Only 45 percent of school leavers on our street leave school with lower secondary qualifications, and only 3 percent have made it to further education for degrees or diplomas. Nearly 60 percent of youth in this community are neither in school nor work, and on leaving school young people face the pressure of becoming financially independent in an environment where jobs are scarce and – where accessible – poorly paid. High levels of bad behaviours and criminality (and for young women, prostitution) are one of the first associations people in the community make when they talk about youth. This research situates the risk of young people getting drawn into bad groups or risky behaviours within the bigger picture of their poverty and marginalisation. Despite coming from poor family backgrounds, young people leave school with hopes and aspirations. The problem is that these become a distant dream very quickly. Even if they are the few lucky ones to get a job, incomes are not enough for young people to look after their own costs and support their households, let alone to accumulate capital to pay for further education or invest in businesses. Jobs (for those who can get

them) are insecure and often exploitative. Where young people can start to save, savings often have to be diverted to react to emergencies or changing family situations. Parents or family members may become sick, requiring medical costs and family care. Early motherhood means priorities shift from investing in their own futures to investing in their futures. Looking closely at livelihoods opportunities for young men and women in this deprived area highlight the complex picture that programmes for youth development must take into account and address, including; a lack of opportunities that dampens aspirations; a lack of local role models to demonstrate what is possible with hard work and innovation; and a lack of support or guidance that could help a greater number of youth follow similar paths.

### **3. From knowledge to action: How we have used these research findings to implement a programme for youth development.**

Having explored the multiple obstacles that young people in this deprived area face during their school-to-work transition, the paper will move on to discuss a simple and sustainable programme that we have started as a result of these research findings. As the previous section has outlined, one of the major obstacles young people face to better future outcomes is the fact that the low-paid and insecure employment opportunities they can secure do not provide a stable foundation that allows them to invest in further skills development, assets, or businesses. Many young people see their current jobs as a means of ‘getting by’ until they can return to education or move into better employment. As one young man explained,

*“I’m fighting hard to get what I need so that I can get enough to start a family when the time is right. I am not happy with my current work as a motorcycle taxi driver, because this is not a destination or a dream. Hopefully this is just a passing stage that will get me somewhere else in the future. I’d like to study information technology at university. I think I will achieve this in the future. If you desire something, you have to work to achieve it. It doesn’t matter what age I am when I go back to school, I will do it when I achieve it”*

Despite displaying defiant hopes and aspirations, however, whether and how this young man was going to be able to reach these goals was unclear. After paying rental fees for his motorcycle, his income just wasn’t high enough to meet his living costs and obligations with enough left over to save for college fees, since he gave most of his monthly income to his grandfather to help pay the household’s living costs and education fees for younger relatives. This doesn’t mean he wasn’t trying. Together with five friends he had set up a daily savings group, with each month one member taking home a lump sum of 120,000 shillings (around £37). Given the small returns, however, this was a means of getting by, rather than getting ahead, not being enough to invest in anything more substantial.

The lessons we have learnt from these findings led the research team (led by the University of Manchester, in collaboration with Arusha’s Shack/Slum Dwellers International Federation (SDI), and *Tamasha Vijana*, a participatory youth development centre) to reflect upon how programmes can better help young people like this to achieve their goals – both more effectively and at a greater scale. Together, we co-designed a simple and sustainable programme: a revolving motorcycle scheme that will help this saving group’s members to become owners of their motorcycles, tripling their take-home income and providing a stronger foundation for them to plan for and invest in their future goals. The design makes some simple adaptations to the Rotating Savings and Credit Associations (ROSCAS) that have proven to work well for groups with similar goals and aspirations. The project was designed on the basis of two important premises. Firstly, that the savings group would do all of

the hard savings work themselves, so that by the end of the project each would have bought their own motorcycle. Secondly, that the programme would be sustainable and its benefits would pass onto another group once the group were all owners themselves.

To fulfil these premises, we decided to provide the group with one motorcycle (bought as a private charitable donation). The first member to receive the motorcycle would save daily the 6,000 shillings he would otherwise pay in rent into a group savings account until there was enough to purchase a second bike. These two drivers would save until there was enough to buy a third motorcycle, and so on, until all six drivers own their own bikes. Once all six members have bikes, they will continue to save their rental payments until a seventh motorcycle is bought. This is passed onto another savings group for the process to start again. Although we outlined these broad parameters of the programme, the group themselves designed their exact rules and regulations. They decided that even members who hadn't yet received a motorcycle would each save 2,000 shillings a day, speeding up the savings process. They also set rules about what to do if people cannot pay in, about the ordering of who would get motorcycles, and about how members could borrow money from group savings to meet emergency costs (as well as how these would be paid back). The group benefits from the programme being embedded within the institutions and structures of SDI, offering members an important platform for participating in community events and development activities, and for building social support networks and competencies like leadership skills, self-esteem and confidence. The regular mentoring they will receive from *Tamasha Vijana* staff will complement these.

The group received their first motorcycle in early June, in an event hosted by SDI that included the Ward Executive Officer and Chairmen from each of the six streets in the ward. All of these stakeholders praised the members for their commitment and offered their support as the programme progresses. Despite paying the equivalent of rental fees into the group savings account, the first driver has already enthusiastically reported back to us that he has increased his income substantially. He is working longer hours and finding it easier to make relationships with customers now he has a clean and good quality motorcycle. He contributes 2,000 shillings each day to his household, has paid examination costs for his younger sister in primary school, and has bought his first mobile phone. Group members report feeling recognised and respected by the community and local leaders, and other young people have asked whether and how they can join such a group. We will reflect on both the opportunities and challenges that have emerged for the group and its members in the first few months of the project, and their implication on programmes for youth development.

#### **4. Conclusions**

To conclude, we will return to our key argument that 'protecting' at-risk youth from low-income communities and deprived areas requires looking beyond attempts to reduce youth participation in bad behaviours, bad gangs and criminal activity. These consequences are symptomatic of much deeper-rooted problems facing low-income youth in Arusha. Protecting at-risk youth requires first and foremost addressing these deeper obstacles: the lack of social and economic opportunities for youth that dampens aspirations; the lack of local role models and mentors to demonstrate to youth what is possible with hard work and innovation; and the lack of support and guidance that could help young people plan and move towards a better future. Programmes need to take note of these challenges in designing more effective youth development programmes that can assist a greater number of low-income youth to improve their future life chances.