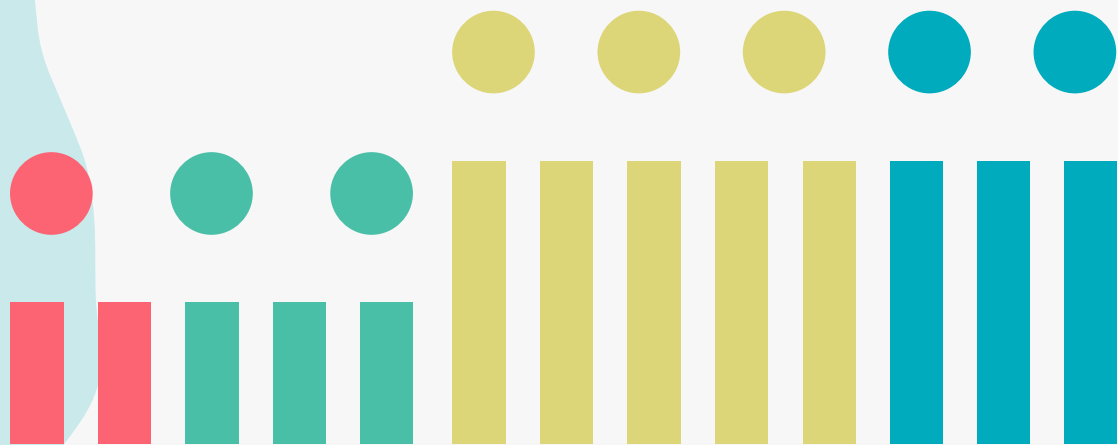




NATIONAL FORUM ON CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS



PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE
IN THE CURRENT CHALLENGING
CONTEXT

MAY 2021





para cada criança

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1. INTRODUCTION

From 19-21 April 2021, UNICEF Mozambique Country Office (MCO) in collaboration with partners organized an online event, the **“National Forum on Children - Prospects for the future in the current challenging context”**.

The forum consisted of presentations from national and international experts in various thematic areas, coming from civil society organizations, academia, practitioners representing different sectors, donor organizations, private sector and relevant UN agencies active in Mozambique. Additionally, participation of adolescents was given particular attention to engage meaningfully with young people. The main thematic areas discussed during the national forum were as follows:

- > Session 1.1: Prospect for children in the COVID-19 pandemic context – global, regional and national outlook
- > Session 1.2: COVID-19 impact on households and families. Policy options
- > Session 2.1: Challenges and opportunities of the youth bulge
- > Session 2.2: Innovative solutions to mitigate risks and accelerate progress for children and youth
- > Session 2.3: Children’s rights and the business sector
- > Session 3.1: Climate change, resilience and sustainability
- > Session 3.2: Cradled by Conflict –Impact of Conflict on Children and collective pathways to resilient communities

2. MAIN FINDINGS

2.1. COVID-19: GLOBAL, REGIONAL, AND NATIONAL OUTLOOK FOR CHILDREN

2.1.1. GLOBAL AND REGIONAL OUTLOOK FOR CHILDREN

- ▶ The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted global progress on child well-being made over the last 20 years.
- ▶ Recovery from COVID-19 will not be equal across countries because of unequal government capability to support recovery with key interventions such as vaccines, social protection, and education recovery plans.
- ▶ COVID-19 has tested the role of the state in delivering essential services. It also opened opportunities through the use technology and increased focus on global health security.

2.1.2. NATIONAL OUTLOOK

- ▶ Mozambique is enduring multiple serious challenges: COVID-19, climate hazards and armed conflicts. Combined, these factors have culminated in social service disruptions and threaten the re-emergence of previously better controlled health threats.
- ▶ High population growth, shifts in urban living and persisting poverty levels have worsened human capital indicators; children with stunting, lack of access to basic skilled birth attendants and lack of WASH services are estimated to be rising in Mozambique.
- ▶ A slow and gradual recovery is expected in the medium-term conditioned to containing new COVID waves and variants, vaccine roll-out and uptake and tackling the insurgency in the north.

2.1.3. DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND AND INNOVATION

- ▶ Mozambique has made great strides in reducing fertility rates over the past two decades. However, big challenges in reducing child marriage and teenage pregnancy remain.
- ▶ Children educational outcomes have remained low. Mozambique requires multiple strategies and investments to maintain students in school and improve quality of teaching for better learning outcomes.
- ▶ Mozambique needs to invest on delivering appropriate higher education courses in the context of the labor market, as well as on scaling up vocational education and access to information for better choices of employment opportunities.
- ▶ There are national and international examples of low-cost innovative solutions for assessment of needs and delivering community focused messages (geospatial data, solar paneled mobile communication, learning on digital platforms). Innovations could be a transformative way for scaling up.

2.1.4 CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND THE BUSINESS SECTOR

- ▶ Mozambique faces a skills gap, notably in basic, technical skills and higher education in technical areas across all sectors. Matching education and skills development with the needs of the private sector will need to be a priority to foster economic development and to address the threat of rising unemployment, given the growing youth bulb in the country.

2.2. CLIMATE CHANGE AND CONFLICT

2.2.1 CLIMATE CHANGE

- ▶ Low completion rate of compulsory education and the persistence of child labour in Mozambique is worrying: about 23% of children aged 5 to 14 work, and 22% aged 7 to 14 combine work and school. High level of multidimensional poverty is one of the causes of child labor, which was exacerbated by covid-19 pandemic socio-economic impacts.
 - ▶ Mozambique is among the countries with the lowest digital and mobile entry penetrations in the world. There is a wide gender gap in ownership of mobile phones (+50% men vs 32% women) and benefits obtained from ICTs.
 - ▶ There is a gender divide in terms of the quality of jobs. Women's more limited access to productive jobs is influenced by important factors such as social norms, differences in skills, capital availability, networks, time availability and family duties, constraints on occupational choices, and safety.
 - ▶ Notwithstanding children represent 51% of the population in Mozambique, they are not yet mainstreamed as a key vulnerable group to protect at the center of public and private development and investment models in the country.
- ▶ Existing geographic and gender inequalities are exacerbated by the recurrent damage caused by extreme natural phenomena related to climate change. Current public climate change agenda is centralized and there is a need for provinces and districts to be more involved in climate change adaptation in Mozambique.
 - ▶ Women, children (particularly under-5), and people living with disability need special attention in the implementation of climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction actions, including in national development programmes.
 - ▶ Growing need for multi-sectoral approaches, innovative and adaptive programming and investing in human capital.
 - ▶ Planning for increased temperature and reduced rainfall in Mozambique will have implications for the type of livelihoods, agriculture programming, food security, WASH and social protection.
 - ▶ Consideration on long-term impacts of children's mental health and well-being as a result of natural disasters and vulnerability

2. MAIN FINDINGS

2.2.2 IMPACT OF CONFLICT ON CHILDREN

- ▶ There is a need to contextualize interventions to understand the drivers of conflict, influencers, stakeholders. Youth must be shield from extremism by finding collective pathways to resilient communities.
- ▶ In Mozambique, participative, gender sensitive, community-based research is equally important to understand regional and cross-border tendencies. Swahili Coast experience in identifying the relevant special dimension - go where the youth spend time and where the influencers are, including IT platforms.
- ▶ Psychosocial support is important to children affected by conflict. It is important to work in community and at family level, not only individual. Lessons learned from Mozambique's past on how clinical psychology and traditional practices can support reintegrating children to society must be taken into consideration.
- ▶ In Mozambique, the current leaders were also children affected by conflict - even child soldiers. When planning and analyzing advocacy and programmatic interventions, this is worth vile to keep in mind.
- ▶ Mozambique's interfaith collaboration has been exemplary and should be considered as a fruitful ground and as call for everyone to be part of this mission to protect children from armed conflict.

3. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. COVID-19: GLOBAL, REGIONAL, AND NATIONAL OUTLOOK FOR CHILDREN

- ▶ **Public Finance for Children:** while budget reprioritization, ensuring value for money and full utilization of budget will help to fund social sectors, but external financing (donor support) is the key angle for fiscal space in the current economic situation.
- ▶ **Social Protection:** expansion of social protection is the most direct and viable tool to protect children and families against risks of poverty, food insecurity and multiple deprivations.
- ▶ **Learning:** get all kids back to the classroom, keep students/teachers safe. Ensure continuous learning by supporting nutrition programmes (school meals, food vouchers, subsidies). In addition, it is important to involve and empower parents to support child's learning as well as provide extra support to teachers.
- ▶ **Children's and Adolescents' Mental health:** stress and social withdrawal of children during COVID is a serious health problem. If untreated, it will lead to mental health issues and associated serious health problems.

3. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

3.2. DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND, INNOVATION, AND THE ROLE OF BUSINESS

- ▶ **Multi-sectorial approach:** coordinated and multi-sectorial approach is needed to prepare for the Demographic Dividend with high level commitment and consistent monitoring and accountability .
- ▶ **Investment in ECE** gives the highest return, need to choose low cost, early grades programmes (recommended 10% of education budget).
- ▶ **Multiple, flexible pathways** to support young people from learning to earning (innovative approaches such as YOMA and local solutions tablet-community).
- ▶ **Research and use innovative technology for scaling** up basic services, understand the needs, and reach the most vulnerable populations (which require tailored approach) in a wide range of communities in emergency and non-emergency settings.
- ▶ UNICEF, Government and partners to **engage with private sector champions** to enhance child-centred investment and development models and improve child rights' protection and respect through stronger human rights policies and standards as core business best practice.
- ▶ **Give adolescents a voice in public-private discussions** related to business that have an impact at the community, environment, marketplace, and workplace level.
- ▶ **Child centred development model related to private sector** that set how private sector complies with specific regulation, how assets are allocated, how different stakeholders interact and how synergies are leveraged towards more efficient resources for children.
- ▶ **Multi-stakeholder approach to achieve the UN 2030 Agenda and SDGs** through partnerships of governments, private sector, civil society and citizens alike to leave no one behind.

3.3. CLIMATE CHANGE AND CONFLICT

- ▶ **Include children** in the whole process of climate change adaptation, they know best their needs.
- ▶ **Education and training programmes** on disaster risk reduction and climate adaptation should be expanded and decentralized across the country and engage children in the design of programmes, solutions and implementation.
- ▶ **Raise awareness and advocacy** to inform populations / communities, particularly children about risks and options for adaptations. Work with children as a channel of communication during natural disasters.
- ▶ **Institutionalize** climate change adaptation solutions and their application on a large scale.
- ▶ **Innovation and technology** for effective adaptation. Use of solutions based on nature and ecosystems for greater resilience.
- ▶ **Re-build with children in armed conflict:** It is necessary to re-establish the modes of projection of the self (of the child) into the future by:
 - Identification of areas of interest for young people – art, music, ...;
 - Professional vocational training and building resilience (life skills);
 - Provision of starter kits of inputs for joint initiatives (encouraging collective work -Cooperatives/Associations);
 - Youth-proofing against manipulation and misleading promises;
 - Rebuilding the social fabric;
 - Psycho-social support and religious counselling (spiritual guidance).