

Policy Paper

Youth in Algeria: Actors, policies and impact of international cooperation.

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Executive summary

The youth of Algeria present numerous strengths: more and more educated, they benefit from good health indicators and constitute an available workforce for the national economy. These characteristics allow Algeria to benefit from the demographic dividend of its youth if the government sets up effective development policies. Youth is undoubtedly an opportunity for the country to progress. But the reality shows that unemployment is very widespread among young people, and most particularly among the most educated. This situation reflects a need for empowerment but also hope for young people, graduates or not, in terms of jobs and living conditions with dignity.

The low attractiveness of university and the perceived chances of finding work after studies seem to explain much of the lack of enthusiasm for the future. A university degree is no longer a key to a job. This situation has been tangible for more than two decades. A significant number of young people are unemployed in the very long term. It provokes great disappointment and strong frustration among them.

This concern leads young people to plan a migratory project as a last resort. Migration (including illegal) is considered when employment opportunities and prospects for a decent life are not possible, especially in terms of work and housing. It is therefore important to emphasise that young people prefer to get a job in the public sector.

I. Introduction

During recent years, the political events within the course of the “Arab Spring” have profoundly upset the MENA region at the political, socioeconomic and even cultural levels. One of the main consequences of this historic period is the emergence of youth as a force for change. These young people are sometimes perceived as a threat by the political powers, sometimes as wealth and an opportunity for development. Both perceptions are eminently political, in as far as development as a target is mainly considered to be an issue of state intervention. Yet, in developing countries, cooperation at international level has been increasing in significance in a way that contributes to the development and more particularly the integration of youth in public policies, not only as a beneficiary of these policies, but also as full actors in the country’s development.

This analysis is clearly valid for Algeria. The country has been confronted over many decades by significant development challenges, and yet it still disposes of numerous potentialities: the demographic weight of youth is very promising (according to the *Office national des statistiques* - ONS), 26% of the Algerian population is aged 15 to 29 years old; the country is rich qualitatively in terms of human resources because of several hundred thousand young graduates every year from about a hundred universities and high schools (where the number of girls exceeds that of the boys); and the country has considerable infrastructure in the fields of education, health services and facilities, transport networks and so on, as well as great natural resources.

The problem is that in spite of this potential, the needs of young people are not met. It leads us to wonder about the efficiency of government policies targeting young people. Considering the social conditions and macroeconomic indicators, which are indeed very favourable to steady socioeconomic growth, it is striking to notice the government’s difficulties meeting young people’s expectations. Apparently, Algeria hardly needs to benefit from high-level expertise through solid cooperation with international partners. To date, the impact of the international cooperation between Algeria and its partners is not tangible. This is due, essentially, to the fact that youth is not a great priority for the Algerian government and for its international partners.

II. Problem definition: The situation and problems of young people in Algeria

Situation of young people

On the demographic level, Algerian young people from 15 to 29 years old represent a quarter of the country's overall population. This category is also more and more educated, with 99% either having been educated or currently in the education system. A very large number have a high academic level, with 41% of boys and 59% of girls in universities and higher education institutions. The main concern for young people is employment, because more than 32% of them are unemployed (SAHWA Youth Survey, 2015). The rate is, according to government sources, about 11.2% for the overall adult population and 29.9% among young people aged 16-24 (Office national des statistiques, 2015). This unemployment rate is at the same level as the regional average in North Africa and the Middle East (ILO, 2013). A very high figure reflects the difficult socioeconomic situation of young people attempting to build their lives at this stage. These difficulties vary according to regions. The future of youth in the isolated areas without developed infrastructure is currently uncertain. This vulnerability is partly explained by the low efficiency of school. Thus, most of the young people who participated in the SAHWA ethnographic field study did not go to university. They are also poorly trained in different professions while many economic sectors in the country seriously lack a skilled workforce. This context makes the situation of young people in such areas even more difficult, because of the risk of not having the essential living conditions.

The SAHWA Youth Survey also reveals that approximately 90% of young people live with their parents (or with one of them). This is a very significant result in terms of the need for autonomy at an age when the demand for emancipation is growing, including that from social control (Addi, 1999). Unemployment and the lack of empowerment are the main factors leading young people to lose hope and feel frustration. In spite of their frustration, the young people show great energy and have a lot of ambitions. They are often project leaders and bearers of new ideas, but they are discouraged by not being listened to, whether by companies or the administration. Young people in Algeria – as elsewhere in the MENA region – face problems with having a job, a salary and having their own money and so being able to afford some of the pleasures of life, which are not easily accessible.

Regarding young people's positions on politics, the majority stay away from the elections and reject even the idea of voting. In the focus groups and interviews, young people expressed their displeasure with Algerian politicians and criticised the practice of politics, both by

political opposition parties and by the government. The SAHWA Youth Survey showed that more than 70% of young people did not vote in the last elections. More than 37% asserted that they are not interested in politics and about 10% declared that voting does not have any effect on their daily life.

Young people's problems

The unemployment rate is a relevant indicator of the insertion of young people in society. The first problem for young people is employment, since they are waiting for this event as the beginning of a new life. This becomes the first priority for young people. They consider it “a door” (in their words) which allows them to build their life.

For young students, finding a job is also a main objective. When they evoke employment prospects after graduation, they show a certain apprehension and expect to experience unemployment. In the SAHWA ethnographic fieldwork, the majority of young people raised the issue of the lack of transparency in the recruitment procedures. They feel that their chances of getting a job that meets their expectations and which corresponds to their degrees are low.

Graduated young people have another source of dissatisfaction: they would prefer to get a job in their area of expertise, which is another concern for their career. This situation is a direct result of the imbalance between the labour market and academic training. A dysfunction is perceived in relation to the university programmes and the requirements of the national economy. The government also acknowledges this gap, but the problem remains.

There is however another social problem. Work in the private sector is precarious and is badly perceived by the population and by young people in particular for several reasons: the insecurity of the employment because of the lack of permanent contracts and the ease of redundancy, the absence of social rights, such as compensation, vacations, welfare and health insurance, etc. Accordingly, young people have two options: create their own activity or enterprise (and then undergo the administrative obstacles); or find an employment opportunity in the public service. Hence, the recruitment operations in the public sector always stimulate a very high demand, especially in the sectors of health, education, the security services and administration, which are the biggest employers in Algeria. This situation often causes nepotism and corruption, regarding the secured jobs “of the State” to paraphrase the young

people. Indeed, a job in the public service allows many advantages that are different from the private sector, and offers social rights and, in particular, sustainable employment.

It is however necessary to mention the existence of an important category among the young people: those who are not schooled, not in training and do not work. They are sometimes without high school diplomas, long-term unemployed and seem to be discouraged from finding a job. These young people spend their time mainly in the streets and are therefore difficult to reach. They are doubtless in a situation of vulnerability, because they are exposed to deviant behaviour such as drug consumption or the attraction to violence. There is another type of vulnerability concerning the environment of residence. Indeed, in the isolated regions of the country where there are fewer opportunities for training and employment, young people are confronted alone with the difficulties of everyday life. This social exclusion is experienced in a more marked way when the young people do not have a social network which can bring them support, in particular in terms of finding work. For these young people, their disappointment towards the government administration is considerable, as it represents their only chance of release in their underprivileged area. This leads us to emphasise the gender dimension of access to work. Indeed, women in such localities live a double vulnerability, one based on gender and the second on the region, where social obstacles are added to the lack of opportunities. In this case, government intervention can give significant support to women's empowerment through work agencies.¹ Gender empowerment within the context of rural society needs more action and advocacy to exploit the existing potential (Laaredj-Campbell, 2016).

Actually, the majority of young people included in the SAHWA ethnographic fieldwork do not intend to migrate as a first option for the future. It is rather a last resort after several attempts to get a job. The lack of job opportunities pushes young people who are losing hope to consider a migratory project, even by illegal means.

On the stakeholders' side, they were unanimous that there is a huge communication failure at all levels, whether in Algerian society as a whole, or between the authorities and society, especially youth. Indeed, there is a strong demand for communication and dialogue among Algerian youth, but this demand is not satisfied. Based on observations in the field, it seems that the traditional tools of communication do not promote dialogue with youth. In fact, young people communicate with each other horizontally, while there is no (or very weak) dialogue vertically between adults and young people and between the authorities and young people.

They are the first, as in the rest of the MENA region, to use web-based tools and channels, which allow the government to interact with citizens and to better understand the needs of young people (OECD, 2015).

III. Discussion: Policy responses to the problems of youth at the national level

Youth policy in Algeria

The Ministry of Youth and Sports is the main governmental agency for youth issues and partner for international cooperation. Other governmental partners may be involved in the implementation of youth cooperation programmes, considering the transversal character of youth and certain actions in the field: the Ministry of Health, the Ministry in charge of Security and Local Administration, the Ministry of Culture, etc. Though essential, the cross-cutting nature of the actions targeting young people causes them to lose efficiency and the results are not always satisfactory. It shows, for Algeria, as for other countries in the region, the importance of the current approach in terms of policy and management as regards youth. These gaps were indeed underlined on a regional scale (EuroMed III Report, 2010).

However, national policies targeting young people have numerous limits. For the Algerian government, the top priority regarding youth is employment. Except for this objective, it is very hard to identify other significant programmes intended exclusively for young people.

Indeed, for about fifteen years, the Algerian government has had a policy of promoting employment among young people. Thus, colossal budgets were assigned to this strategy that was led on the ground by an administration created for that purpose. The principle of this system, implemented in the 2000s, consists of encouraging young people to create their own company by facilitating the access to credit. It is, however, difficult to establish an evaluation of this mechanism, to measure its impact on the employability of young people and to know, for example, the rate of companies which really work. Therefore, numerous criticisms were made of this mechanism, such as the lack of support for young people after the creation of their company, but also of the field of activity, as the majority of young people opt for the services sector. Other weaknesses underlined concern the absence of skills related to the activity, their misunderstanding of the market and their lack of capacity to manage a company, added to the difficulties of bureaucracy.

More recently, as regards the new budgetary orientations of the government due to lower financial resources, which are essentially based on the export of hydrocarbons, questions are posed about the sustainability of government actions for young people's employment.

On the governmental side, the Ministry of Youth and Sports seems to have limited capacities in terms of human and material resources, which results in low impact of its actions on the real life of young people. In addition, the field of the ministry's intervention is limited to the activities of leisure and sport (mainly sport).

In Algeria, there is no national youth policy and that is the same situation in other Mediterranean countries (Rapport du Programme Euromed, 2010). In the governmental programme, only certain objectives relating to the improvement of the socioeconomic insertion of young people, especially through employment, are mentioned. For the last decades, this focus of the Algerian government on the issue of the employment of young people has led them to overlook other dimensions such as culture and civil participation. Given the fact that government policies fall short of the planned goals and as needs persist, young people lose confidence in government policy when they observe the lack of transparency or mismanagement. They perceive these policies as acts of exclusion (Musette, 2004). Young people are ruled out of the sphere of decision-making. Nevertheless, they were often the accelerators of the political transformations in Algeria, such as those of October 5th 1988, which led to political pluralism (Rouag, 2014). The main conclusion that arises from several interviews and meetings with young people and stakeholders within the context of SAHWA research is that the empowerment of young people and their integration in society is a complex issue. This reality needs a global and comprehensive response, taking into account the needs as expressed by young people themselves.

Cooperation with international actors in the field of youth

Algeria's international partners on youth issues are mainly represented by: i) the United Nations agencies, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the World Bank (WB); ii) diplomatic representations (the European Union, the embassies of certain countries such as Canada, USA and Japan with cooperation programmes; iii)



international development organisations, such as the GTZ (the German federal cooperation enterprise).

In fact, the most important partnerships for the Algerian government are with the agencies of the United Nations (UN) System. These programmes are regular, cooperative and based on cost-sharing by both parties. Cooperation between the Algerian government and the United Nations began in the 1970s and was focused on technical assistance in certain domains such as health or economic issues. Over recent years, the cooperation has changed as the Algerian government is not asking for UN funds, because of the availability of resources in the country. Thus, the cooperation is about high quality expertise according to the priorities of the country.

The Algerian government is more sensitive to the results-based management of these joint programmes. Also, a joint evaluation is done by both parties during the cooperation cycle along with a final evaluation over a five-year period. The method with which these programmes are managed is interesting and deserves some attention. It consists, first, of an analysis of the socioeconomic situation of the country and the identification of priorities and fields of intervention. An action plan is elaborated. This action is to be implemented according to the objectives predefined with determined budgets. Various activities stemming from these programmes are implemented together with the UN agencies and their respective partners: the ministry serves as the central administration or appropriate partner at local level, as well as the partners representing civil society (NGOs, labour unions, etc.).

In 2006, a first programme of cooperation between the United Nations System and the Algerian government was developed with the main objective of promoting the employability of young people. Unfortunately, this project was not carried out following the murderous attack which affected the United Nations offices in Algiers in 2007.

Within the context of the international cooperation initiatives, it is possible to observe that the cooperation programmes attribute a secondary place to actions for youth and, accordingly, the funds allocated for youth activities are very low. An international partner whose main responsibility is young people does not exist. A multiplicity of international partners with different objectives, different programmes and different working procedures does not favour efficient cooperation and does not facilitate the coherence of the interventions. In addition, the transversal character of the action for young people favours the fact that efforts for youth are scattered between several sectors, which makes follow-up and evaluation of this activity

difficult. Indeed, it is hard to evaluate the small actions that are implemented for youth under the umbrella of international cooperation.

There is a European Union youth programme, namely the Euro-Med Youth Programme, in which Algeria is a partner country. However, SAHWA Youth Survey data shows that the majority of young people are not aware of the EU programmes in the country. Indeed, only 2.2% of them declared having any idea about EU programmes in Algeria.

IV. Conclusion and recommendations

For Algeria, it is time to take care of the needs of young people and to answer their high expectations, not only in terms of employment and housing but also adaptation and improvement of the living environment in a more general way. It requires a policy towards young people which must be ambitious, coherent and adapted to the reality. It seems fundamental for the Algerian government to be inspired by experiences in other countries and to improve its own method of planning for young people. Strengthening of international cooperation, in particular through some key actions, would be very helpful in this regard. Accordingly, it is possible to make the following recommendations.

A substantial revision of the mandate of the Ministry of Youth and Sports in such a way as to adapt it to the current reality of young people and in particular to widen it in all the aspects that are linked to young people (without forgetting adolescents) would be a strategic change.

It is also strategic to develop a national youth policy, in such a way as to satisfy certain conditions: young people themselves have to contribute significantly to its production and implementation. It has to cover all the needs of young people; must be practicable, and contain accurate objectives in the highest priority aspects; and it has to benefit from government support for all the necessary means required for its implementation.

As regards youth employment, it is fundamental that the Algerian government works to change the current situation which leads young people to prefer a job in the public sector. It is thus imperative to develop the private sector and to change the negative perception of society in order to increase its capacity to absorb unemployment. Furthermore, it is crucial to enhance policies to ensure equal access to work between citizens, including between men and women.

In order to increase participation in policymaking and implementation, it is necessary to identify and involve all the actors who may make a significant contribution to actions carried out in favour of young people, including the non-governmental organisations who are very close to young people in the field. It is also essential to develop the ability to listen to young people within the various governmental structures. This must lead young people to change their attitudes towards the government and towards the political world in a more general way. Indeed, the SAHWA Youth Survey showed, in particular, the great distrust and the lack of confidence young people have in the political world. It is also fundamental to develop spaces allowing young people to express themselves, including access to the internet and to other media such as the radio and television. As regards governance, it is important to improve the representativeness of young people in the decision-making institutions.

Regarding international cooperation, it would be more productive to harmonise the cooperation in the field of youth and to improve the management of international cooperation to unify efforts – and funding – around common objectives.

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Youth in the Mena Region: How to bring them in – Preliminary Version © Oecd, 2015.

Endnotes

1. In Algeria, there are two main governmental institutions created to enhance employment. Both agencies are present throughout the whole country. ANEM: Agence Nationale de l'Emploi (National Agency for Employment) has the principal duty to manage recruitment procedure. ANSEJ: Agence Nationale de Soutien à l'Emploi de Jeunes (National Agency for Youth Employment's Support) has the principal duty to enhance jobs through enterprise creation among young people.



Researching
Arab Mediterranean Youth:
Towards a New Social Contract



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