



Working Paper

On the success and failure factors of Youth Employment Programs in Niger: An empirical review

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Abstract

Young people constitute a paramount share of the population of Niger. Most of them are exposed to underemployment and unemployment. This paper analyzes success and failure factors of interventions to support youth employability. Using a qualitative approach, it relies both on a desk review and primary data collection conducted through focus groups discussions and interviews about the actual implementation of projects and programs. The results show that the main obstacles to the implementation of actions dedicated to youth employment are the failure of monitoring mechanisms, the weakness of information and communication mechanisms, as well as the weakness of the level of young people initiatives and of the job offer. Ongoing technical support for graduate entrepreneurs seems to be the most successful solution. However, vocational and technical training for young people who have dropped out of school or are not attending school needs to be stepped up to empower them.

Key words: Youth, employment, entrepreneurship, vocational training

Résumé

Les jeunes constituent une frange importante de la population Nigérienne et sont en majorité exposés au sous-emploi et au chômage. Le présent papier étudie les facteurs de succès et d'échecs des interventions de soutien à leur employabilité. A partir d'une approche qualitative, elle se fonde aussi bien sur une revue documentaire que sur une collecte de données primaires menée à travers des focus groups et des entretiens sur la mise en œuvre des projets et programmes. Les résultats de l'analyse montrent que les principaux obstacles à la mise en œuvre des actions dédiées aux jeunes sont la défaillance des mécanismes de suivi, la faiblesse des mécanismes d'information et de communication, et celle du niveau d'initiatives des jeunes et de l'offre d'emploi. Le soutien technique continu aux diplômés entrepreneurs semblent être la solution la plus probante. La formation professionnelle et technique pour les jeunes déscolarisés ou non scolarisés mérite cependant d'être renforcée pour leur autonomisation.

Mots clés : Jeunes, emploi, entrepreneuriat, formation professionnelle

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I. Introduction

In Niger, numerous projects and programs have been implemented over the past decade to support youth¹ employment and facilitate their participation in economic development. The initiatives reflect the Nigerien government's ambition to provide 50,000 jobs each year, with a 40% employment rate for young people in rural areas². Yet, the results have not met the expectations, and the few existing studies do not provide the public authorities with necessary information about their effective implementation or the success or failure factors that have marked them.

The question therefore arises as to what factors have contributed to this partial success or failure of initiatives aiming at youth employment in Niger. To provide valuable answers, this study uses a desk review and primary data collection to assess the relevance of the interventions, the effectiveness of their implementation and their ability to solve the issue of youth employment. The results highlight the important role of upstream communication of interventions before the beginning of activities, while the weakness of monitoring and control mechanisms severely hinders the achievement of objectives.

Interest in the issue of youth employment is widespread in Africa and stems from the assumption that the employment conditions faced by young people will influence the continent's economic, political and social situation in the coming decades (Houngbedji and Zanusso, 2021).

After a brief presentation of the situation of young people in the labor market and a review of the literature in sections 2 and 3 respectively, section 4 describes the methodology adopted. The results are then analyzed in section 5.

II. Youth in Niger and the labor market

2.1. The paramount weight of youth in Niger's demography

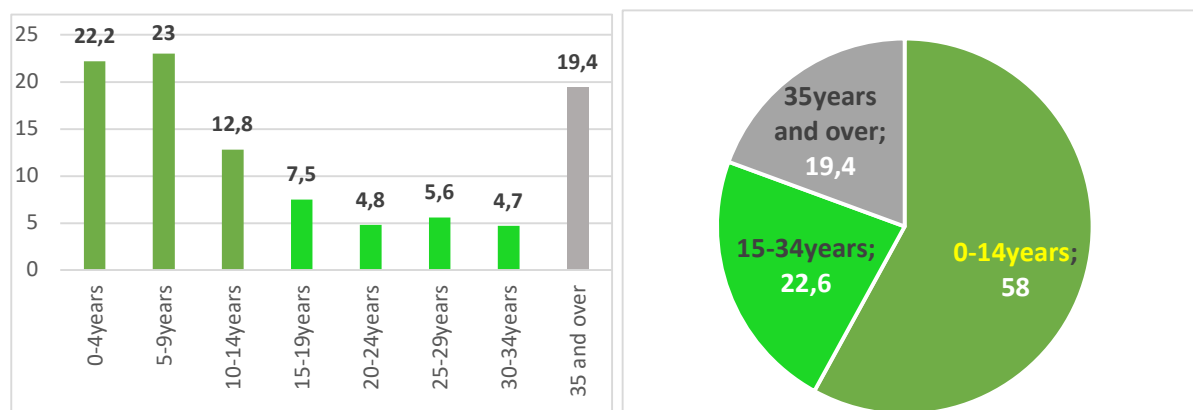
According to the United Nations (2022), Niger is the country with the highest fertility rate in the world in 2021, with an annual demographic growth rate of 3.7%, which implies a doubling of the population in only 18 years. This high demographic growth rate (3.81% for young people), combined with a demographic profile that is predominantly young (Graph 1), makes the socio-economic challenges even more crucial.

¹ Individuals aged between 15 and 35 according to National Youth Charter of Niger.

² According to the Economic and Social Development Plan (PDES) 2017-2021, which is a five-year plan for the operationalization of the Sustainable Development and Inclusive Growth Strategy (SDDCI) "Niger 2035".

In 2019, around 20% of the population is aged between 15 and 24, and more than 80% of them live in rural areas.

Graph 1: Population structure by age



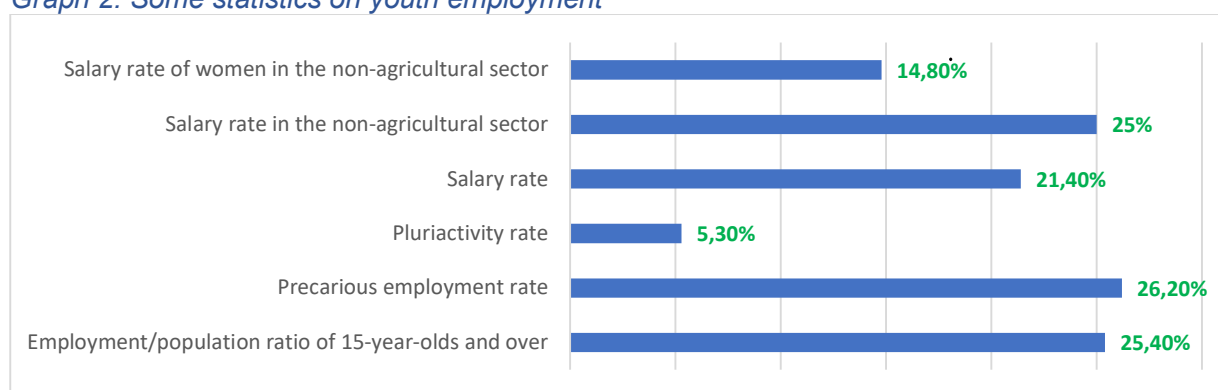
Source: INS and AFRISTAT (2019)

2.2. Youth difficulties in gaining access to decent works.

Underemployment affects around two out of three young people with job opportunities in the primary sector predominating (83.01% of young people work in this sector, according to National Institute of Statistics (INS, 2016), while about one in four young people aged between 15 and 29 is unemployed (Ministère du Plan, 2017). It is more pronounced among women (28.9% compared with 4.4% among men in 2014) but also among young people (23.7% of 15–29-year-olds). According to the INS and AFRISTAT (2019), the average duration of unemployment is around 8 years for first-time applicants. Young people aged 15–34 are more affected by unemployment in the ILO sense, since they account for 62.5% of all unemployed people.

Statistics show that labor supply is growing at an annual rate of 23.4%, while the demand is growing at a yearly average of less than 2% (INS, 2020). The job placement rate for young people is low and follows a downward trend (from 45% in 2010 to 30% in 2015 and just 16% in 2019). The vast majority of young people fall back on the informal private sector, where they receive mediocre and often irregular pay that barely covers their subsistence needs (INS, 2016). Statistics in Graph 2 show how precarious the employment conditions of young people are in Niger.

Graph 2: Some statistics on youth employment



Source: INS and AFRISTAT (2019)

Young people are mainly involved in trade and service activities to the detriment of industrial activities that create more value added (Ministère des Enseignements Professionnels et Techniques, 2016).

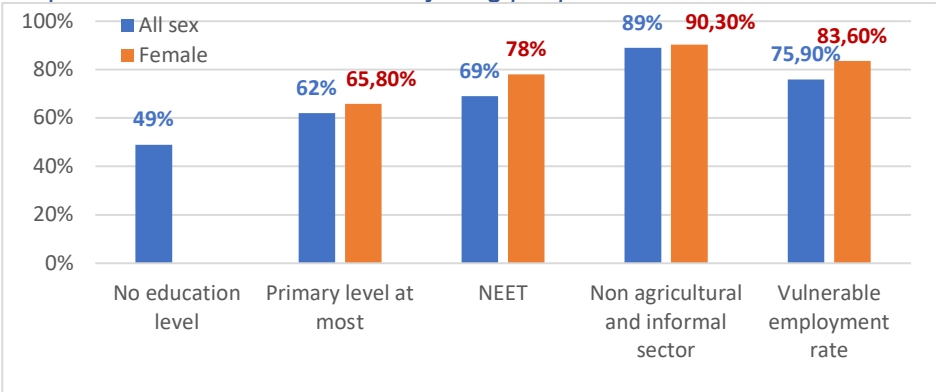
According to Viard-Cretat et al. (2019), this structure of the labor market justifies the persistence in Niger of economic and social issues such as poverty, illiteracy, begging, delinquency, exodus and so on, in both urban and rural areas.

2.3. The issue of youth training and education level

The difficulties experienced by young Nigeriens in entering the job market or in getting a decent job are also, for many, the consequence of their low level of education and training. Very few young people complete their schooling at secondary level or above. Graph 3 shows that almost one in two young people (49%) has no education at all, and 62% of 15–35-year-olds have an education level of primary school or less. Graph 3 also highlights the significant proportion of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET). Between 2005 and 2018, the proportion of NEETs aged 15-24 rose drastically from 23% to 69% (World Bank, 2020). So, it is unfortunately hardly surprising that so many young people are in vulnerable employment. This is even more compelling when adding to the above, that even the education or training of young

people is often mismatched with the real needs of the job market, as evidenced by ONEF (2017).

Graph 3: Some characteristics of young people

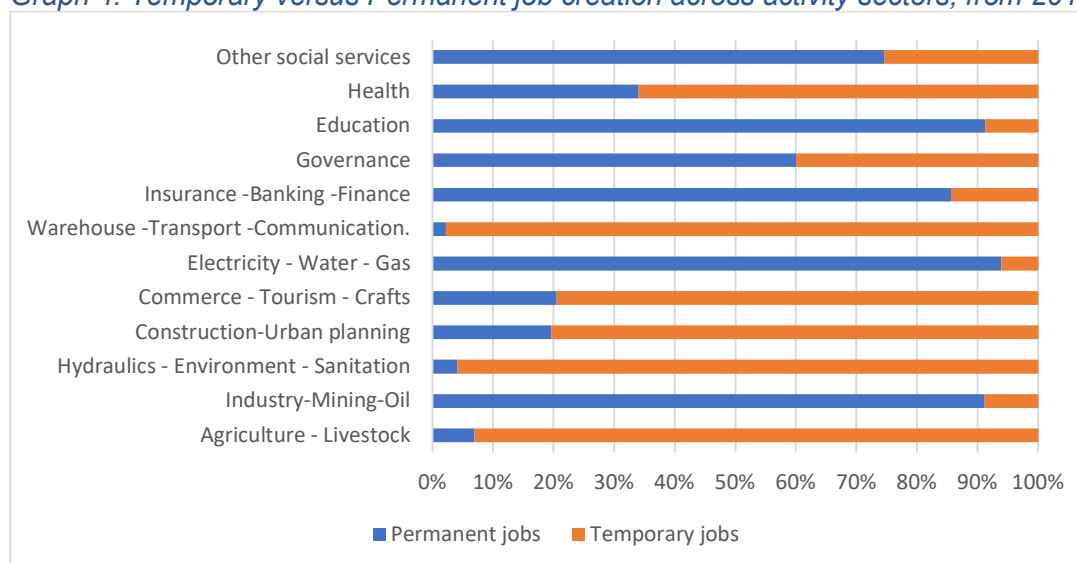


Source: INS 2017 ; (World Bank, 2020).

2.4. The challenge of a narrow production base

The structure of the country’s economy is characterized by a narrowed production base, clearly dominated by the primary sector which accounted for 38.8% of GDP in 2020. The secondary sector is very underdeveloped [17% of GDP, half of which is accounted for by the extractive industries (Ministère du Plan, 2017)]. The low capacity of the economy to generate sustained economic growth is a major handicap. It may explain the low creation of decent and sustainable job opportunities in most of the sectors. Overall, permanent job creations represent only 21.3% over the period 2011-2020. Graph 4 shows the breakdown between temporary and permanent job created during the period, by activity sector.

Graph 4: Temporary versus Permanent job creation across activity sectors, from 2011 to 2020



Source : CAPEG, 2021.

III. Literature review

3.1. A general overview

Recent literature on youth employment, particularly in Africa, focuses on the challenges and structural constraints to the economic integration of young people. The pre-eminence of the youth employment crisis, with its unemployment, but above all its underemployment, vulnerable or precarious employment and alarming working conditions, income and poverty, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, is developed in several works (Kamga, 2019; O'Higgins et al., 2020; Mueller, 2021; Mutenyo, 2022). According to Kamga (2019), the proposed responses, drawn from theoretical reflections, can be divided into four types of programs: intermediation, training, job creation and information, to which Mueller et al. (2019) add the areas of labor market institutions and regulation, and social and political dialogue.

Training initiatives are in line with human capital theory (Becker, 1994), which argues that the knowledge and skills acquired are likely to increase workers' future productivity. Similarly, the importance assigned to professional experience is driven by Spence's (1978) theory of signaling or screening. The author shows that previous experience serves as a signal of unobserved abilities and aptitudes for employers seeking to minimize unnecessary investment in selection. There are also contributions from social network theory showing the positive effect of investing in the accumulation of social networks and personal relationships on labor market outcomes (Seibert et al., 2001). The results obtained vary depending on the context, but the beneficial effect of participation in a support program offered by the public employment services has been verified in many countries (Kamga, 2019).

Furthermore, despite the primacy given in Africa to policies focused on labor supply (internship and training programs, self-employment and entrepreneurship programs), supply-side constraints persist (O'Higgins et al., 2020; Mueller, 2021). The lack of diversification, poor quality of training courses and the inadequacy of post-training support in a context of lack of opportunities and access to productive assets are blamed. But the main challenge for many young Africans today is access to a decent, quality job rather than the absence of a job (O'Higgins et al., 2020; Dedehouanou et al., 2021; Mueller, 2021; Omolo, 2022).

3.2. On the case of Niger

There are very few studies on the effectiveness and relevance of interventions to promote youth employment on the case of Niger. The few existing studies generally focus on improving household welfare (increasing incomes or improving human capital), rather than improving young people's economic perspectives. Several authors noted the difficulties relating to the availability of data and evaluation documents (Gado et al., 2019; Viard-Cretat, 2019). Their analyses often highlight the mixed results of multiple and diversified interventions, which they attribute to uncoordinated dispersion of public and private sector actors (Bissonnais, 2010; Gado et al., 2019; Viard-Cretat et al., 2019; Corta et al., 2021) or the absence of a guidance information system related to training courses and the qualification needs of young people (Bissinais, 2010; Gado et al., 2019). For Gado et al. (2019), this is linked to the objective of these programs, which is not directly to support youth employment but rather to reduce poverty or food insecurity.

Looking at the relevance of investment policy choices and their impact on young people's well-being, Dedehouanou et al (2018) find that promoting non-agricultural self-employment opportunities is more conducive to lifting young Nigeriens out of poverty. Moreover, several authors (World Bank, 2017; CAPEG, 2018) have highlighted the attraction of non-agricultural jobs for young people and the mismatch between their aspirations and the direction usually taken by interventions.

A study on the effectiveness of 50 youth employment projects in Niger from the period 2007-2018 carried out in 2019, attempted an assessment of the success of youth employment programs. The results show that, due to strong demographic dynamics, 1 in 13 young people entering the labor market receives individual support, while only 8% of the projects examined explicitly seek to create jobs (Gado et al., 2019). The main limitation of this research is that it is based on existing evaluations that are not scientific in nature. The authors pointed out that these

evaluations are limited in terms of information on lasting effects and changes in young people's lives. As a result, they do not help to answer the following important questions asked in the decision-making process: what really worked? what innovative options with real impact should be promoted?

To our knowledge, this gap has not been covered by any other research until now. In other words, there is a real need for a scientific evaluation of youth employment projects and programs, which would provide information on the real changes brought about and enable a thorough rethink of the direction to be given to future interventions.

IV. Methodology

We use an approach combining desk review and analysis of primary qualitative field data. The desk review is developed on the basis of available program documents and various reports relating to youth employment in Niger. It is intended to help characterize the situation of young people in the labor market, and to describe youth employment policies, projects and programs in both their design and implementation.

The purpose of collecting and analyzing primary data is to understand how youth employment projects and programs actually work, and to gather the perceptions that different profiles of young people have of these interventions. This was carried out in two main phases: an initial phase of consultation and engagement with stakeholders (decision-makers, influencers, beneficiary representatives) and the proper survey phase.

The initial phase was used to identify key informants and focus groups, and to validate the survey tools. It led to agreement with various stakeholders that, among the Youth Employment Programs/policies (YEPs) for this survey, the focus will be on job placement initiatives, supports for vocational and technical training, and supports for entrepreneurship. Within each of these YEP categories, the emphasis is on a specific project chosen in consultation with key stakeholders for its consistency, its national coverage and its relevance and scope. This initial phase also helped to agree on the survey locations, in this case the Regions of Niamey, Dosso, Tahoua, Maradi and Zinder. According to World Bank (2017), these regions are home to more than 85% of the population of young people aged 15-24. In each region, program implementation processes are analyzed at the level of the region's capital and two strategic communes.

The survey itself consisted of a series of semi-structured Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Groups (FGs) (Table 1). A total of 86 KIIs and 14 FGs were conducted, the later involving around 212 young people (141 men, 71 women). Out of the 86 KIIs, 42 were carried out in Niamey, the capital, which encompasses over 70% of the institutional players. The later are represented by project and program managers, public implementing bodies, executives from the Ministries of Community Development and Planning responsible for monitoring the implementation of projects and programs, labor inspectors, civil society organizations, employers' organizations, trade unions and the media. The rest of the interviews were spread across the four target regions, with an average of 11 interviews per region (see Graph 5 for some survey statistics).

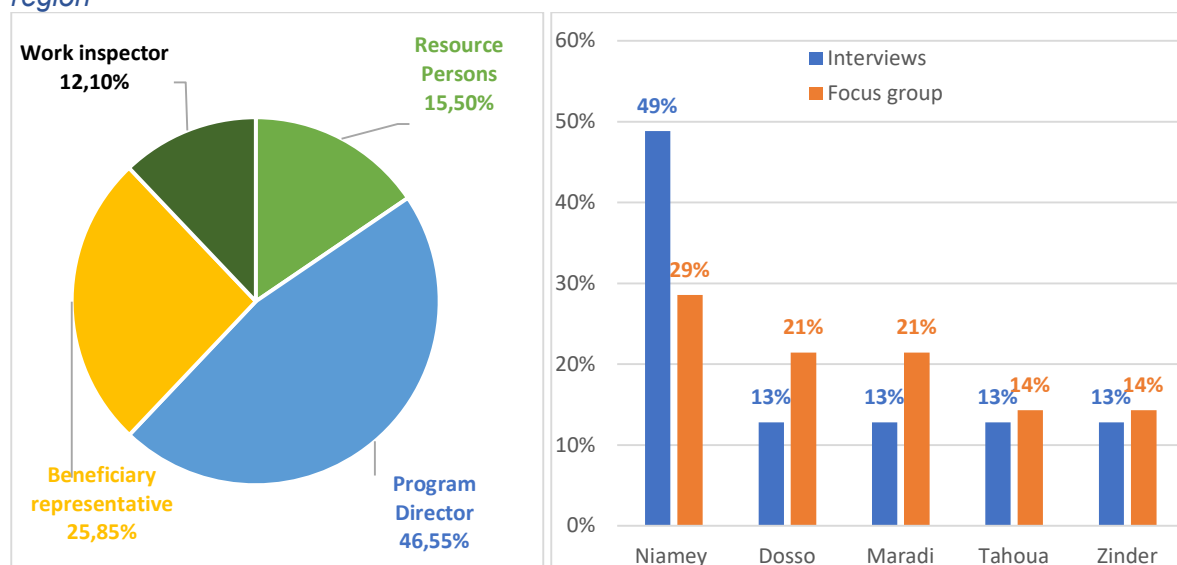
The focus groups were directed at program beneficiaries, in particular young people, with the aim of capturing the short- and long-term effects of the interventions, but also considering various social strata, specifically the marginalized.

Table 1: Collection tools and targets

Tools	Targets	Information sought
Semi-structured Key Informant Interviews	- Project managers - Executives from executive bodies or key ministries - Local administrative and customary authorities - Employers' organizations	- Implementation and programmatic gaps - Beneficiary selection criteria - Methodology for implementing interventions. - Obstacles to the smooth running of operations - Good practices - Potential levers/opportunities to promote effective implementation and generate greater impact
	Labor inspectors	- Compliance with regulations - Better understanding of the institutional environment.
	- Civil society organization (CSO) representatives - Trade unions - Media	Various opinions on the design and implementation of YEPs
Discussion with Focus Groups	- Young beneficiaries, - Non-beneficiary applicants - Non-postulants	Perceptions on design and implementation of YEPs (match with young people's aspirations, effectiveness/ efficiency and inclusiveness)

Source: Authors, based on survey design

Graph 5: Weight of interviewees by profile and breakdown of interviews and focus groups by region



Source: Authors, based on survey data

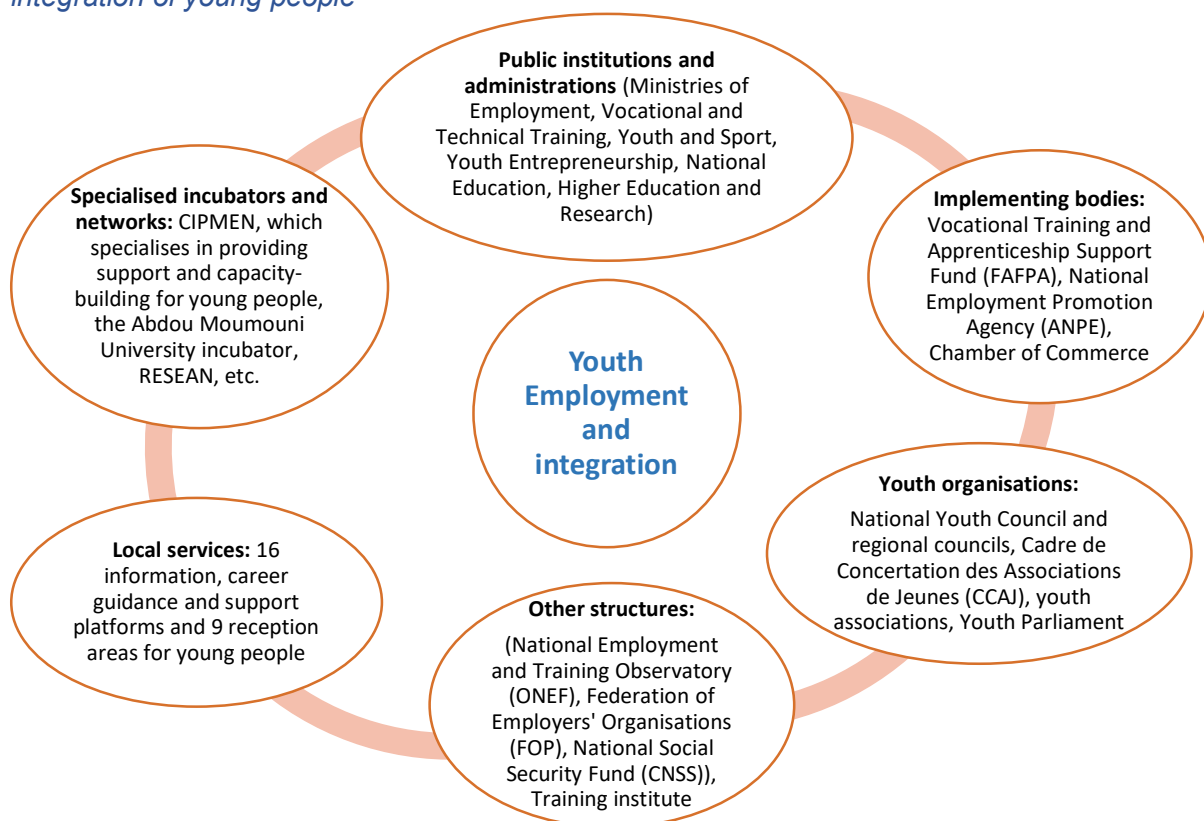
V. Results of the analysis

5.1. Institutional framework for youth employment policies

In Niger, the national strategies for promoting youth are linked to the Economic and Social Development Plan (PDES) 2017-2021 through its second strategic axis, which focuses on the human capital development program, with a view to improve the level of education and training of the population in order to better qualify the available workforce.

The current institutional framework for youth employment and economic integration involves a multiplicity of national and international actors, as summarized in Graph 6.

Graph 6: Overview of stakeholders involved in promoting employment and the economic integration of young people



Source: Authors

It is important to point out that policies to promote youth employment are indirectly impacted by policies to boost and modernize rural areas under the National Strategy for Food Security and Sustainable Agricultural Development. The interventions defined are not aimed at youth employment but contribute to it, through growth and diversification of agricultural and fisheries production, and the regular supply of rural and urban markets (HCI3N, 2021).

5.2. Results on program implementation

The consultations on the field show that vulnerable groups are not systematically taken into account in programs (63% of interviewees confirm this), while more than three quarters (77%) of interviewees agree that there is no manipulation in the beneficiary selection process. The evaluation of projects and programs is common practice (according to 93% of interviewees). It is often driven by the technical partners, but the reports produced are not always accessible to the public. In addition, it is worth emphasizing that most of the interventions are not aimed at

integrating young people in employment, and the political orientation seems to favor managing youth employment issues in the short-term rather than the medium- and long-term.

5.2.1. Financing and technical support projects

This type of initiative targets young people who have recently started their own businesses or young people with project ideas. However, while the results appear satisfactory for the first type of initiative, the same cannot be said for the interventions aimed at those with project ideas, of which there are the most. With regard to support for young entrepreneurs, the stakeholders consulted attribute the positive results obtained to a suitable procedure for targeting beneficiaries. The latter is built around a mapping and diagnosis of young people's existing micro-businesses, carried out upstream with the aim of assessing their technical, financial and commercial capacities and their difficulties (example of the IOM's IDEE³ project in 2017).

The young beneficiaries consulted were unanimous about the relevance of the integrated business assistance system (incubator, micro-credit, equipment and specific and technical training) and the strengthening of young people's entrepreneurial capacities, which perfectly meet their priority needs. Project evaluation reports provide statistics on the effects in terms of job creation. However, they should be put into perspective, as it is not certain that these evaluations comply with scientific standards for impact assessment.

As part of the IDEE project, the microcredit fund set up for the benefit of beneficiaries includes a microcredit component⁴ (100% interest-free) and an equipment/materials purchase component (50% interest-free). For more than 50% of entrepreneurs, the conditions for access are deemed acceptable, not very restrictive and easy to meet. The training and ongoing mentoring approach has been beneficial in boosting the dynamism of entrepreneurs and making the investments made on their behalf profitable.

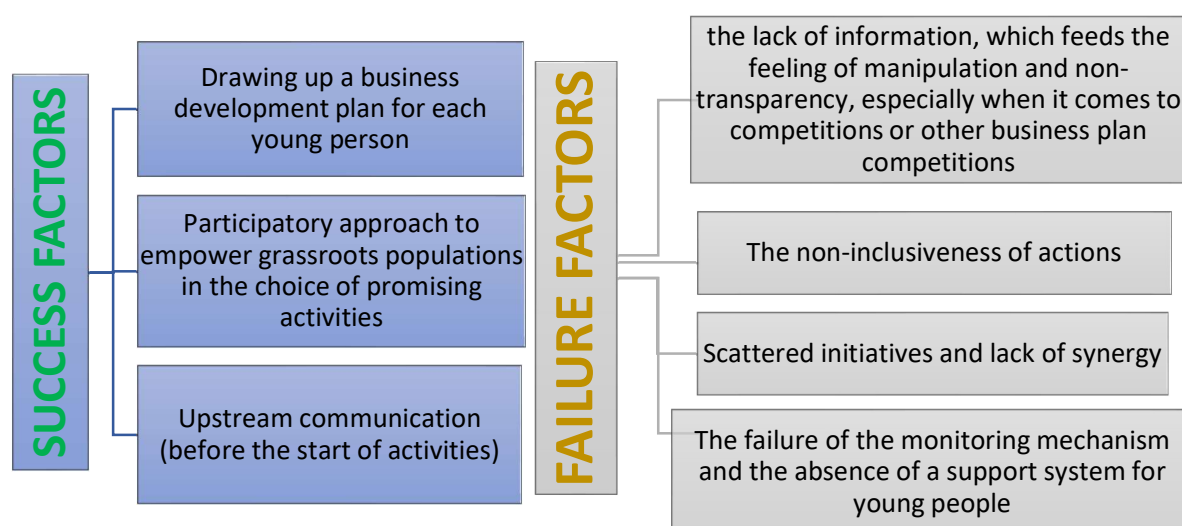
As far as young urban graduates with project ideas are concerned, all the initiatives undertaken through public implementing bodies (Business Creation Assistance Program (ANPE), Chamber of Commerce) or private NGOs have had mixed results, if not very inadequate. However, young people recognize the perceived benefits in terms of training and the acquisition of certain skills.

³ Business Development Initiatives.(IDEE : Initiative pour le Développement de l'Entreprise)

⁴ It is between FCFA 200,000 and FCFA 2,000,000 for around 45% of beneficiaries, and more than FCFA 2,000,000 for the 55% of entrepreneurs.

In addition, the financial and technical support (integrated training approach and support for the emergence of micro-enterprises) provided to young rural people, which aim at the emergence and consolidation of income-generating activities or very small businesses, is struggling to produce satisfactory results due to several issues. The PACE⁵ program run by the ANPE and funded by the PRODEC⁶ project, or the support initiated by the Niger Chamber of Commerce is a perfect example. Nevertheless, the integrated approach of training and support for the emergence of micro-enterprises is favorably appreciated by the beneficiaries in particular and rural populations in general. The success factors identified are the empowerment of local players and businesses in identifying promising economic activities, and the establishment of communal employment advisers responsible for raising young people's awareness of local market opportunities. These success and failure factors for technical and financial support are summarized in Graph 7.

Graph 7: Factors in the success and failure of technical and financial support



Source: Authors based on survey data

5.2.2. Vocational training and capacity-building initiatives

These are the most widespread types of support, as they target the largest group of young people, those who have dropped out of school or are not in school. They are selected in collaboration with local actors and, in most cases, the results are close to the target often based on specific criteria (such as poverty or insecurity). However, some interventions are limited

⁵ Business Creation Assistance Program (Programme d'Aide à la Création d'Entreprises)

⁶ Skills Development Project for Growth (Projet de Développement des Compétences pour la Croissance)

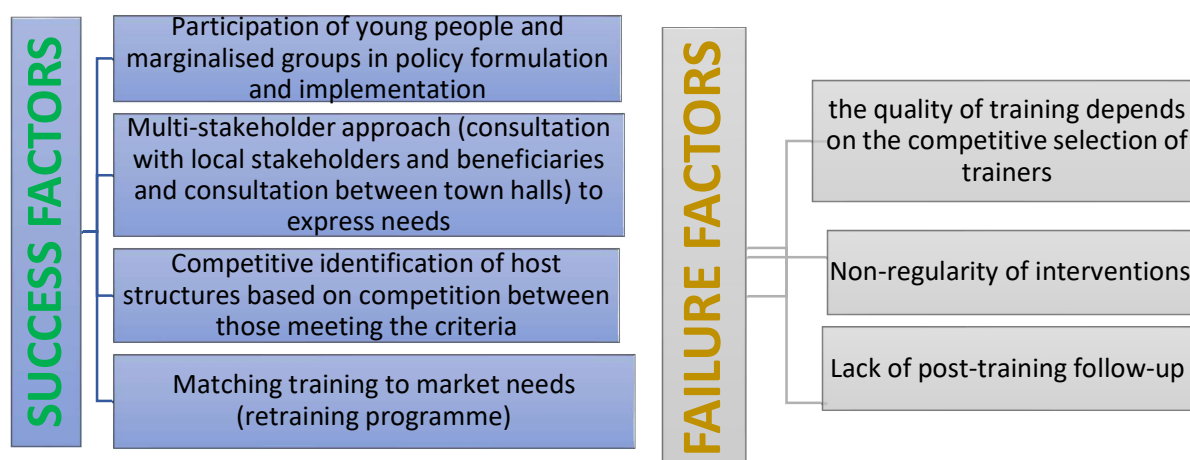
geographically to urban areas (as in the case of retraining initiated by the ANPE). There are no specific measures to encourage the enrolment of women or marginalized groups, but a quota of women is predetermined in some cases (e.g. 30% as part of FAFPA training activities). In addition, young women are given priority in jobs that are stereotyped and perceived as jobs for men. Manipulation and interference by special interest groups is plausible.

These interventions have made it possible to improve the management of Vocational and technical education and training at local level, and to increase the number of young people qualified in various promising occupations. However, it has to be noticed that although preparing young people for work by acquiring skills is beneficial, it does not in itself create jobs. The young people trained are not systematically put to work, even though the mid-term integration survey carried out at the end of 2018 by the Luxembourg agency for development cooperation 2016-2020 found that 44.86% of the young people trained had a job in a workshop or production/service provision unit (Lux Dev, 2019), representing an achievement rate of around 90% compared with forecasts. Other stakeholders consulted questioned the quality of the training. The other positive effects of these initiatives relate to the construction and equipping of several training centers and the creation of a pool of specialists in training engineering, the guidance and integration of young people in localities where the initiatives are implemented, through training advisers and integration advisers.

Most of the young people consulted considered the interventions to be relevant in terms of the value added they received in terms of knowledge or skills. Many of them acknowledged the efforts made as part of the interventions, although they perceived them as insufficient. They were particularly critical on the fact that they were not always involved in the design of the projects, or only involved through their representatives. Young people in rural areas, on the other hand, greatly appreciate interventions that make local actors responsible for selecting beneficiaries, that they are transparent.

Graph 8 gives a synoptic view of the success and failure factors of these initiatives.

Graph 8: Factors in the success and failure of vocational training and capacity-building initiatives



Source: Authors based on survey data

5.2.3. Placement, guidance and professional integration initiatives for young people

These programs are few in number and are generally run by public bodies, in particular the ANPE, and a few international institutions. The selection of beneficiaries is decentralized at the regional level, but not to the municipal level, so that young people have to travel to access them. Under the ANPE's COSIVIP⁷ contract (work experience contract), for example, the agency is responsible for finding work placements, but young people are given the option of looking for their own placement. Discussions with beneficiaries show that in the first case, the wait can be long for some young people (several months or even years before they are placed). *"I waited three years to get my current placement"*, said one young beneficiary. The placement process is theoretically carried out in order of arrival, to ensure equal opportunities.

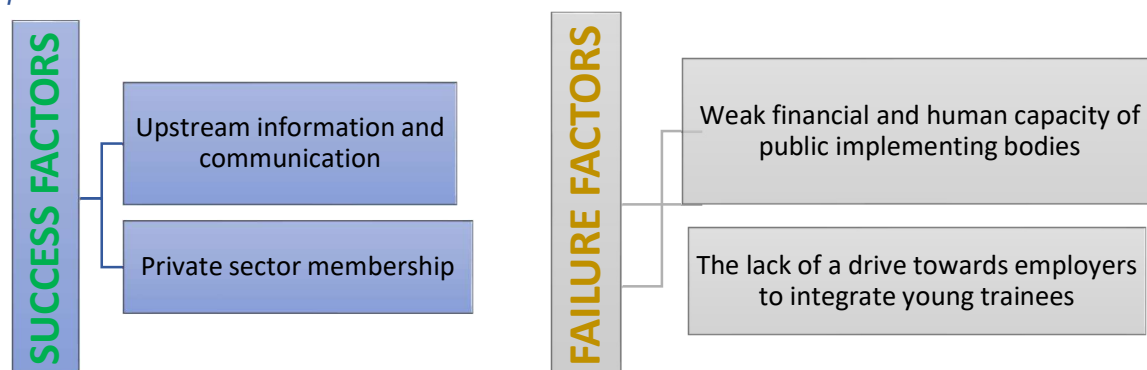
In terms of results, the participation rate of women in training courses provided under the COSIVIP program was estimated at 43.8% in 2017, while it was 36% for training in entrepreneurship under the Business Creation Support Program. In 2021, an internal evaluation estimated that 46.8% of beneficiaries had been able to access employment (64.3% men and 35.7% women, 38.3% of medium level and 61.7% of higher level). Average integration rates are generally low, around 25%, as these programs are not primarily designed to integrate the young people promoted.

However, the young people placed on work experience placements are generally satisfied with the offer: *"Doing a work experience placement in a large garage enabled me to familiarize*

⁷ Initiation to Professional Life Internship Contract (Contrat de Stage d'Initiation à la Vie Professionnelle, COSIVIP)

myself with the world of work"; "I learnt a lot of things in practice, which theory didn't teach me because I'm in a hydraulic drilling company".

Graph 9: Factors in the success and failure of initiatives to place, guide and integrate young people into the labor market

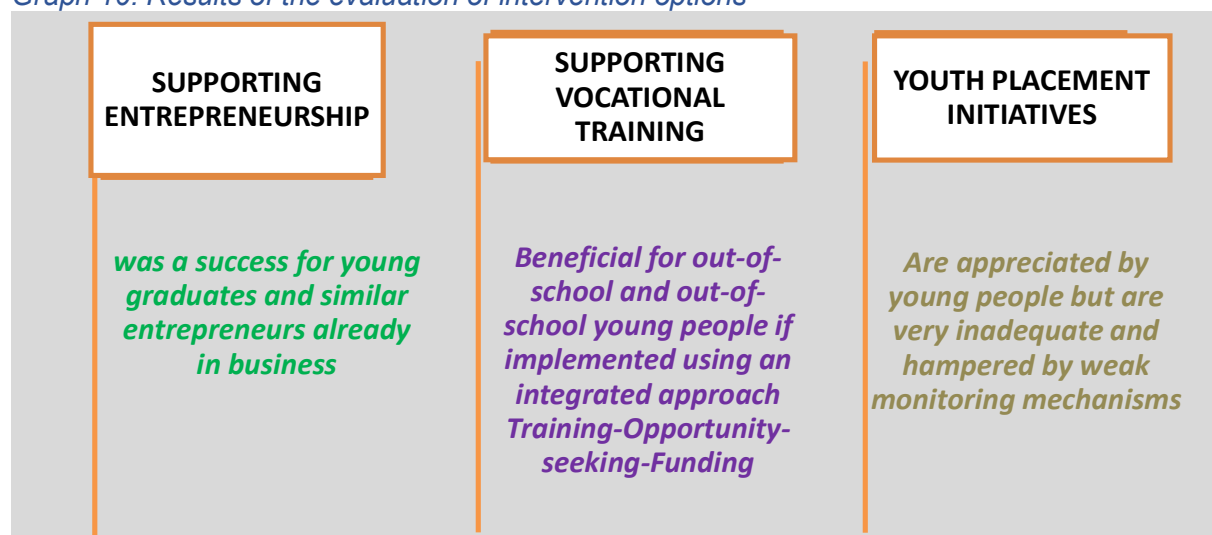


Source: Authors based on survey data

5.2.4. Results of the evaluation of projects and programs

The scientific evaluation of policy options according to the criteria of relevance and effectiveness/efficiency highlights the most optimal option for each type of intervention (Graph 10).

Graph 10: Results of the evaluation of intervention options



Source: Authors

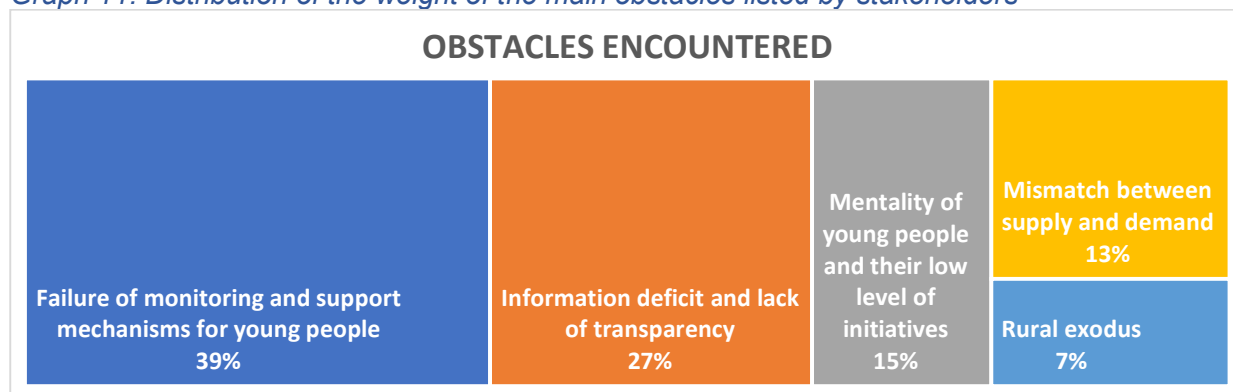
5.3. Obstacles and constraints identified

The thematic analysis of the responses provided by the young people and other stakeholders interviewed enabled us to identify the main obstacles to the implementation of youth employment projects and programs.

5.3.1. Constraints identified by stakeholders

From the interviewees point of view, the failure of the mechanisms for monitoring and supporting young people is the main obstacle to the implementation of projects and programs (Graph 11). During the intervention, it is reflected in the irregularity of visits on the field or the inadequacy of the support and monitoring of young people, even though this was planned at the design stage. This is justified by the weak human and financial capacities of the implementing bodies, and also the lack of financial support earmarked for this purpose. But, post-intervention monitoring is also non-existent in many cases, mainly in training or entrepreneurship support initiatives. Very few projects continue to support young people after they have received funding. A few private initiatives are trying to fill this gap (*Réseau des Structures d'Accompagnement à l'Entreprenariat*, RESAEN⁸) by setting up platforms for the exchange of information between member structures and for dialogue with national authorities, the financial sector and development partners.

Graph 11: Distribution of the weight of the main obstacles listed by stakeholders



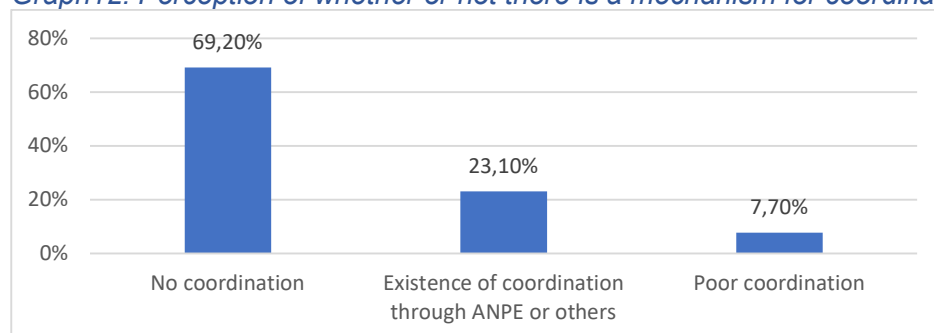
Source: Authors based on survey data

The second perceived obstacle is linked to shortcomings in the guidance and communication systems, which do not guarantee wide dissemination of information. Many of the young people interviewed complained about inadequacies in the delivery of information in a fair and

⁸ This network is made up of incubator centers and others. It is financed by technical and financial partners.

transparent manner. This situation gives rise to feelings of discrimination, injustice, and lack of transparency in the implementation of interventions. In addition, the communication deficit is also maintained within the public bodies responsible for youth employment issues. The majority of institutional players confess to the lack of mechanisms for coordinating actions due to the absence of an operational consultation framework (Graph 12).

Graph12: Perception of whether or not there is a mechanism for coordinating actions



Source: Authors based on data collected in the field

The mentality of the youth and their low level of initiative is also an obstacle cited by many interviewees. This is due in particular to: (i) the low level of qualification of the majority of them and their poor preparation for activities, (ii) the absence of an entrepreneurial culture in the family upbringing of a good number of Nigerien communities, (iii) the non-inclusion of entrepreneurship in the curricula of other education and training frameworks, even at vocational education level and the social valorization of the civil service, to the detriment of self-employment (Ministère de l'Entreprenariat des Jeunes, 2020). Almost half of the youth (49.0%) have no level of education and 16.67% of them have only attended *Coranic* school (Ministry of Youth and Sport, 2017), a situation that does not encourage the development of a spirit of innovation.

The lack of genuine commitment on the part of most young people reduces the effectiveness of entrepreneurship support interventions, particularly in a context where post-program follow-up is weak. There have been several reports of young people receiving financial support who have disappeared into thin air without any trace of their projects actually being implemented.

Many young people are uncomfortable with some of the conditions proposed by project promoters, partly because of their limited ability to provide collateral and partly because of their aversion to credit. In addition, the wait-and-see attitude of young people when it comes to starting up their businesses is another indicator of their lack of entrepreneurial initiative. Finally, the mismatch between labor supply and demand also remains a major obstacle.

5.3.2. Constraints reported by young people

The main constraints reported by the young people concerned the non-inclusiveness of the initiatives and the small size of the funding budget. Support for the economic integration of young people is not inclusive and covers less than 20% of villages. The structures responsible for promoting youth employment and economic integration are geared more towards promoting employment in urban areas than in rural areas, where the majority of young people live (PNE, 2020).

The non-inclusiveness of interventions is also due to the fact that situations of vulnerability specific to certain groups are not taken into consideration. For example, although the retraining courses initiated by the ANPE in urban areas are accessible to all young people who meet the conditions, regardless of where they come from, no provision is made for young people from distant regions to travel to attend the courses. A regional manager from the "*Maison de l'Entreprise*" explains that *"all young people receive the same travel expenses of 3,000 francs, regardless of where they come from"*.

Limited access to finance is seen as an obstacle to young people's empowerment, which corroborates the findings of previous studies in other countries (UNDP Swaziland, 2013). Young people, especially those living in urban areas, criticize the fact that funding is capped, but also the conditions under which it is granted, such as the multiplicity of formulas used by project promoters (full subsidy, reduced-rate micro-credit backed by a 50% subsidy or reduced-rate micro-credit with or without matching funds), which fuels young people's confusion and their reluctance to take out loans. In practice, however, it is difficult to decide on the most appropriate formula. While the full subsidy is the most popular with young people, the other two help to reduce the asymmetry of information relating to their real commitment to setting up a business. Many young people give up if the funding is conditional on a guarantee or is in the form of a loan with interest. According to young people, the factors leading to failure are the long lead times for granting tranches of finance and the ceiling on funding.

At local level, where funding is not very substantial, most young beneficiaries manage to set up their activities and repay the loan. The main challenge at this level is sustaining the activities after the interventions, which can be overcome where community self-help systems (such as tontines) have been set up.

VI. Conclusion and policy implications

The results show that efforts to support youth employment have little impact on their economic integration. The failure of monitoring mechanisms, the weakness of communication systems, the lack of funding opportunities and access conditions, and the low level of initiative among young people from non-cooperative educational backgrounds are all obstacles to promoting the economic integration of young people. Added to this is the lack of an offensive in terms of demand for labor.

The main recommendations for improving the economic integration of young people are as follows:

- Prioritize entrepreneurship support for promoters who have already started a business, using a continuous technical support approach aimed at developing their business.
- Rethink the criteria for granting funding for project ideas and standardize the conditions of access to funding/coaching for young people by making the guarantees and interest rates on the loans granted more flexible.
- Give priority to integrated approaches, combining interventions aimed at training, the search for employment opportunities and support for financing.
- Develop a guaranteed employment program to create a threshold for the remuneration of casual workers and increase professional opportunities during the dry season.

Specifically, for project and program promoters

- Capitalize on relevant innovations developed by the various stakeholders, share best practice and develop synergies between projects.
- Strengthen the monitoring mechanism during and after the intervention by strengthening the human and financial resources of the public implementing agencies (ANPE, FAFPA, etc.);
- Define a communication plan when designing projects and programs, taking into account the poor development of public information and guidance platforms and integrating communication actions upstream of the project.
- Improve the inclusiveness of actions by including quotas for marginalized groups in the design of projects and programs.

To the public authorities of Niger

- Increase the budget allocated to public institutions promoting youth employment.

- Stimulate the entrepreneurial awakening of young people by systematizing entrepreneurship training at all levels in school curricula and by promoting peer testimonies.
- Plan initiatives to stimulate the supply of jobs by finding incentive mechanisms to encourage employees to work together or by introducing regulations requiring companies of a given size to take on trainees in return for tax breaks.
- Scale up information and guidance platforms for young people by increasing the number of youth guidance centers and diversifying communication channels.
- Create a single fund for the integration and promotion of young people into employment, with specific windows for the nature of the interventions, in order to strengthen the transparency and coordination of the actions of the players.

From an operational point of view, good documentary conservation and good evaluation practice are essential for a realistic and effective assessment of the performance of government action or that of partner institutions. The National Employment and Training Observatory or any other institution with the necessary skills could be responsible for this. Finally, an in-depth study of business opportunities on a national scale could be carried out soon, to identify innovative niches for growth that are currently non-existent, considering the socio-cultural realities of each locality.

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