

## The Youth Bulge in Papua New Guinea | Key Findings

The youth bulge is a serious development challenge for Papua New Guinea. The demographic shift represented by a large and growing youth population will exacerbate many key challenges that the country faces, particularly in the **economy, civil society and political sphere**.

However, the youth bulge also represents a significant opportunity for the country. If the correct approach is taken, the unique skills, experiences and perspectives of young people can be leveraged to ameliorate challenges faced by the country, and accelerate inclusive, sustainable development.

Oaktree produced this report because we identified a need: decision-makers lack adequate understanding of the impact of the youth bulge on service delivery, human development, governance and security, and because there is a lack of understanding both about the unique skills and experience of young people and the policy responses which are available to take advantage of these.

This report makes the following observations about the impact of the youth bulge:

1. The proportion of youth in the population of PNG is growing, not shrinking.
2. The literature on youth bulges indicates that a large percentage of youth in the population profile of a country is a necessary, but not *sufficient* condition for civil unrest and other forms of political violence.
3. The literature on youth bulges indicates that a large percentage of youth in the population profile of a country is an indicator of the *likelihood* of civil unrest and other forms of political violence.
4. However, the exact interaction between the youth bulge and other factors that contribute to the likelihood of political violence requires further investigation, *particularly in PNG*.
5. The youth bulge has significantly increased pressure on service delivery - in education, health, and justice - and will continue to do so as the population ages.

6. In the short-term, without significant investment with a view to increasing the economic and political opportunities available to young people, the trend towards increasing disengagement, and discontent with, the current political arrangements in the country will increase.

7. It is essential to offer a stake in society to young people, who may otherwise receive more respect and recognition from engaging in armed violence than in lawful activities.

8. The nature of political violence in PNG, which ebbs and flows in relation to the electoral cycle, is a threat to the stability of the country. The potential for political violence to escalate in severity and become more widespread is proportional to young people's share of the population profile of the country.

The report advocates a model of youth participation which is developed in the Oaktree-ACFID Practice Note *Youth Participation in Development*, and highlights **the unique strengths and skills of young people**.

1. *Young people know best* how to craft changes that are appropriate. Young people are best placed to identify their own needs and priorities, and make assessments about whether project or policy plans will successfully address these needs and priorities.
2. *Young people experience connectivity* like no other population group. This connectivity means that young people are well positioned to be responsive and adaptive to changes in their environments.
3. *Young people readily adopt the new*. Young people have an intuitive understanding of, and are readily able to adopt new technologies that can be key to unlocking development gains.

This report also makes the **following policy recommendations**, targeted at both policy-makers and practitioners within government generally, and at the aid sector specifically - with a view to increasing the engagement of young people in social, political and economic life in PNG.

1. PNG's national youth policy should provide clear guidance to actors within the aid sector emphasising the importance of youth participation in decision-making.
2. Organisations working within the aid sector should develop strategies for working more effectively with young people, particularly in contexts where project outcomes are designed to



impact young people, either directly or indirectly.

**3.** Investment should focus on:

**a.** The promotion of effective service delivery in health and education - good health fosters growth, and education provides opportunity.

**b.** Youth-led good-governance initiatives which take advantage of new technologies, such as social accountability programs leading to the development of coalitions for change.

**c.** Priority programs for job creation in the formal sector:

- i.** Transitional employment measures
- ii.** Strengthening links between education and employment
- iii.** Social and cultural activities which promote job creation

**d.** Support for civil society organisations and coalitions of actors that:

- i.** Foster youth leadership;
- ii.** Facilitate interface between young people and decision-makers; and
- iii.** Promote linkages with youth-led movements in the wider Asia-Pacific region for skills-sharing and advocacy on issues of regional concern such as climate change.

**e.** In all areas, an approach is required which takes on lessons from the Doing Development Differently agenda, encouraging experimentation, quick adaptation, and embracing positive deviance.

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