

POLICY BRIEF

THE RESILIENCE PARADOX

Education, Energy and the Economic Reality of Zambian Youth – a condensed evidence brief drawn from KATT Legacy Three, for policymakers, partners and youth advocates.

At a Glance

Zambia's youth are educated, climate-aware, and resilient – yet structurally excluded from the economic, infrastructural, and civic gains their qualifications should unlock. This brief summarises the evidence from the KATT Country Issue 2025 Mapping exercise (n=161 young Zambians) and sets out five priority actions for policymakers and partners.

72.67%
completed tertiary
education

48.45%
live on <US\$2.15/day

98.14%
note national
energy
disruption

95.03%
rate mental wellbeing
good+

67.08%
say GBV is "very likely"
locally

62.73%
report "few" civic
opportunities

58.21
/100 local community
safety score

14%
have Universal Health
Coverage access

*Zambian youth demonstrate high aspiration, awareness, and psychological resilience – yet remain constrained by economic and institutional conditions that limit their capacity to thrive. This is the central **Resilience Paradox** policymakers must address.*

The Issue

Over 60 per cent of Zambia's population is under 25, and the KATT survey cohort mirrors this: 83.23% of respondents are aged 18–34, nearly evenly split by gender, and overwhelmingly qualified – 72.67% tertiary-educated, 13.66% holding a Master's degree. Zambia's Eighth National Development Plan (2022–2026) and Vision 2030 both commit to translating this human capital into economic transformation and improved livelihoods.

Yet the evidence shows a persistent gap between these national ambitions and youth lived experience: high educational attainment has not translated into economic security, basic public services remain largely out of reach, and climate shocks are actively disrupting livelihoods through drought and hydropower-driven energy shortages.

Key Findings Snapshot

Economic Exclusion

Despite high qualification, **48.45%** live on under US\$2.15/day and **35.40%** survive on two meals a day. Good roads (4.34%) and safe transport (4.14%) are the scarcest public goods.

Climate and Energy Shock

98.14% report active national energy disruption to daily life; drought-driven hydropower "load-shedding" is choking youth-led enterprise and agricultural livelihoods.

Gender and Safety Gaps

59.01% see no equal opportunity across genders; **67.08%** say GBV is "very likely" locally. National peace (68.75/100) masks a lower local safety score (58.21/100).

Civic Exclusion

62.73% report "few opportunities" to participate in local decision-making, and 9.32% report none at all – despite legal provision for youth seats on Ward Development Committees.

Five Priority Actions

1

Absorb the Demographic Dividend

Build formal transition pathways from higher education into green tech, digital entrepreneurship and specialised industry; invest urgently in roads and public transport to unlock youth-led commerce.

2

Diversify Energy Away from Hydropower Risk

Prioritise decentralised solar, wind and thermal investment to break the drought → load-shedding → business-closure cycle; expand climate-smart agriculture and water harvesting.

3

Scale Community-Level GBV Prevention

Fund local protection mechanisms, legal enforcement and safe shelters, while ensuring gender programming does not sideline young men from the equity conversation.

4

Rebalance Local Security with Rehabilitation

Pair strict local law enforcement against street crime with funded rehabilitation – substance-abuse counselling and technical skills training – to address root causes.

5

Institutionalise Youth Voice in Governance

Open formal youth seats within Ward Development Committees and strengthen transparency and anti-corruption mechanisms across decentralised development structures.

A Call to Action

Zambian youth are not asking to be rescued – they are asking to be equipped, protected, and heard. This brief distils citizen-based evidence from 161 young Zambians into a practical agenda for state, non-state, and international partners.

Grounding policy advocacy in lived experience is how KATT, EWEI, and partners move from rhetoric to evidence-informed action, towards “The Africa We Deserve.”

– KATT Legacy Three, The Resilience Paradox



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Zambia Youth. Africa's Future

Read the full Legacy:

www.kabilunafricathinktank.net/katt-legacies