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# Work Attitudes and Life Goals of Zambian Youth

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## ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on work attitudes and life goals of youth in Zambia. More specifically the discussion deals with whether the youth have their own goals or accept societal ones, what they consider to be important means to success, and whether these are in line with societal prescriptions and norms, and their feelings about work and their general occupational preferences. The main concern was to ascertain whether there is inconsistency between culture and the social structure, ie between the cultural goals of material success and culturally approved means to achieve those goals (Merton, 1968).

## Introduction

The theoretical framework utilised in this study is Merton's (1968) anomie theory. According to Merton deviation from societal values, attitudes, and goals is a result of imbalances in the social system. This deviation occurs when there is a discrepancy between socially approved goals and socially approved means for achieving those goals. Therefore deviation from societal values, attitudes and goals is located within culture and social structure. Merton identifies five responses that people make to the demands of social situations, institutionalised opportunities and goals. These are:

*Conformity*, which refers to adherence to social norms in achieving socially approved goals using prescribed means.

*Innovation*, which is the deviation that occurs when people accept socially approved goals but resort to socially unapproved means of achieving those goals.

*Ritualism*, which refers to deviation involving the abandonment of social goals but compulsively following the approved means of achieving them

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*Retreatism*, which occurs when people reject both socially approved goals and the means for achieving them.

*Rebellion*, which is deviation occurring when people reject both approved social goals and means, and even substitute new disapproved goals and means.

This paper investigates the adjustments Zambian youth make to the circumstances of living, with respect to conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism and rebellion.

## **Methodological issues**

### *Sample design*

Youth is an ambiguous term with different meanings in different contexts. In Zambia, the ruling party defines young people between 10 and 35 years of age as youth. The Commonwealth and the United Nations define youth as those between 15 and 25 years. This paper considers youth as those between 10 and 33 years of age.

A cross sectional multistage sample survey of male and female adolescents (youth) presently residing in Zambia was used in this study. The sample size of 1 200 took into account the value of increased information (ie additional subjects/respondents) and the cost (in terms of money and time) involved in gathering data. It was considered important that the sample be countrywide to assure representativeness and to establish adequate baseline data. Zambia has nine administrative provinces which meant 133 respondents from each province. Each province was further classified into three locales - urban, peri-urban and rural - which were all sampled. In total 1 101 individuals were interviewed, with 99 questionnaires not administered because of problems of communication or because they were spoilt.

The first stage developed the Primary Sampling Units (PSUs) within the three locations (urban, peri-urban and rural) in each province. The second stage identified the actual places or institutions from which the youth were selected. Stage three was the actual list of male and female individuals to be interviewed. The sampling frame included school/institutional records of individuals, labour office records of job seekers, party (UNIP) records of those patronising markets, and records of various agencies and training centres. The SRS was used to determine the number of male and female respondents from each institution or place, to specify the chances of inclusion of respondents in the sample, and to provide a degree of confidence for estimates from the sample.

### *Characteristics of the sample*

Interviews were conducted in all the nine provinces of Zambia. Of the total respondents, 667 (60,6%) were males and 434 (39,4%) females. The institutions sampled were dominated by males, and as most females tend to be confined to households they are disproportionately under-represented in the sample.

The majority of the sample were in the age group 22-27 years, ie 503 (45,7%) respondents, including 336 males and 167 females, see Table 1). Most male respondents were in the 22-27 year old group, while the majority of the females were in the group 16-21 years.

Table 1				
Respondents by Age and Sex, By Order of Magnitude				
Age Group (years)	No	(%) of Respondents	Male	Female
22-27	503	(45,7)	336	167
16-21	380	(34,5)	193	187
28-33	171	(15,5)	116	55
10-15	47	(4,3)	22	25
	1 101	(100)	667	434

An overwhelming majority of the sample, 1 075 respondents (97,6%) had been to school. Of these 166 (15,1%) had been only to primary school, 630 (57,2%) to secondary school, 240 (21,8%) to college, and 39 (3,5%) to university. A majority of the respondents had at least secondary education. Most respondents were single, 762 (69,2%), with 303 respondents (27,5%) married, and more or less equally distributed between males and females. Most respondents, 530 (48,1%), were either formally employed or self employed. However, a significant number, 472 (42,9%), were unemployed.

### *Findings*

#### *Life Goals of Youth*

Life goals in this paper are the individuals' conception of what they would like to be or achieve in the future, and their conception of the proper means for achieving this. Life goals normally reflect societal objectives, societal prescriptions of the means for achieving the objectives, and the degree of individual acceptance of both the means and goals. The extent to which individuals accept the prescribed goals and prescribed means reflects the degree to which they are integrated into society.

Respondents were asked if they shared life goals such as: to get rich quick; to enjoy without sweat; to acquire social position; to have a big family and support

it; to live as they like; to work on behalf of society; and to respond to national call. In reference to factors that may be important in becoming successful (ie in achieving goals), respondents were asked whether the following were relevant or had a bearing: witchcraft and medicine; family position (nepotism); social position (ascription); tribalism; personal abilities; good education; luck or fate; and city life.

A majority of the youth sampled indicated that they wanted to live as they like (70,8%); work on behalf of society (68,3%) and respond to national call (60,3%). Very few respondents expressed the wish to enjoy without sweat (19,8%); get rich quick (38,1%); have a big family and support it (44%); or acquire a social position (46,3%). In regard to 'getting rich quick' the older age group, and the more educated, were less interested in this, though not significantly - similarly for sex and residence groups. There were no differences in terms of age, sex or residence group for the objective of 'enjoying without sweat'. Those with no education at all were more interested than groups with education in enjoying without sweat.

There were no differences in terms of sex, residence or education in relation to the objective of 'acquiring a social position', although fewer older individuals were interested in acquiring a social position, probably because they had come to terms with reality.

The very young, those with primary education, and those in rural areas were more interested in the objective of having a big family and supporting it. The very young have no experience of maintaining a family, while those with little education, like those in rural areas, were more likely to stick to traditional values, with an emphasis on many children. There were no age, sex, education or residence differences relating to the objective of 'living as I like'. This also applied to the objective of 'working on behalf of society', with the exception of those with no education. Urban respondents were less likely to respond to national call than rural or peri-urban ones. Similarly, the less educated were substantially less interested in national call. There were no differences on the basis of age and sex in this regard.

### *Important factors in success*

An overwhelming majority of the youth indicated that they believed in society's prescribed means for achieving objectives. While 88,5% of respondents indicated a reliance on personal abilities and 87,5% faith in good education, 50% indicated their belief in social position as a way of achieving success. There was little belief in luck or fate (29,9%), family position (25,1%), city life (15,9%), or witchcraft and medicines (9,8%) as means to success.

There appeared to be no discernible differences on the basis of age, sex or residence with regard to witchcraft and medicine as a means to success. However, most of those with no education believed in witchcraft and medicine as the means

to success, with the more educated being more doubtful of the value of these. Younger age groups tended to believe in family position as a means to success, probably reflecting their own circumstance of dependency. The less educated also tended to believe more in family position. There were no differences on the basis of sex and residence groups. The less educated reported greater belief in social position as a means to success. There were no substantial differences based on sex, age or residence. Most of those in the 10-15 year age group, and the majority of those who had never been to school, saw tribalism as a factor of success. It seemed that the less educated the respondent the greater the belief in tribalism as a factor of success. No sex or residence differences were discernible.

**Table 2**  
**Life Goals of Youth (%)**

Youth Variables	Important Factors for Becoming Successful							
	Witchcraft & medic	Family position	Social pos	Tribalism	Personal abilities	Good educ	Luck or fate	City Life
<b>A. Age</b>								
10-15	13	43	51	28	74	78	30	28
16-21	9	30	50	9	89	89	31	20
22-27	10	10	49	15	90	87	29	9
28-33	10	9	47	12	89	86	30	7
<b>B. Sex</b>								
Male	10	23	52	15	90	88	29	15
Female	10	28	46	15	87	87	32	17
<b>C. Education</b>								
None	58	58	88	69	58	50	77	4
Primary	17	45	63	27	85	76	48	23
Secondary	8	23	47	12	90	90	29	18
Post- sec.	5	16	43	11	90	91	16	9
<b>D. Residence</b>								
Urban	9	24	52	15	88	91	17	
Peri-urban	12	27	46	17	87	84	30	14
Rural	8	25	51	13	90	88	34	17

Older groups, and the more educated, believed more in both personal ability and education as a means to success. With regard to personal ability there were no differences based on sex and residence, but rural respondents tended to see luck or fate as important in success. The older the individual the less the belief in city life as a means to success. The very educated and the least educated did not think of the city as a means to success. No sex or residence differences were discernible.

On the whole the data suggested that youth cherish the traditional values of hard work, personal ability and a good education as means to achieving life goals. While youth are interested in such traditional life goals as working on behalf of society and responding to national call, the values of independence and 'free spirit' are also held. Most respondents indicated that they would prefer to live as they like.

### *Feelings about work*

#### *1. Why people work*

The survey posed the question: Why do people work? A slim majority indicated that their reason for working was to take care of family and relatives (33%), to earn money (31%), self-fulfilment (16%), and duty to society (14%). Individuals were understood to work in order to fulfil both family and individual obligations. Enjoying work for its own sake (ie self fulfilment) was a strange concept in this context. Earning money was probably the simplest way of fulfilling obligations. All age and sex groups agreed that the major reasons why people work was to earn money and to take care of family obligations. For the most educated all these reasons were important, but those with less education mostly believed in earning money and, to a lesser extent, taking care of the family. To them self fulfilment was not an issue. A substantial number of urban respondents believed they work to earn money whereas ruralites strongly believed in taking care of family and relatives. Attachment to family and related obligations may still be very important values in rural areas.

#### *2. Money and attitudes to work*

Since a manifest reason for working is to earn money, the survey investigated the attitudes of respondents to work if they had enough money. Of the respondents, 70% indicated that they would still work even if they had enough money to live comfortably, 26% said they would not work at all, while only 4% believed in spending the money first before resuming work. There were no differences based on age, sex or residence. The significant difference was that those with no education at all reported that if they had money to live comfortably, they would not bother working, or, for a substantial portion, they would spend the money first and work later.

Youth unemployment is a serious problem in Zambia. A sizable number (34%) of the respondents were not working. However, for those who were working there was a general satisfaction with place of work. Specifically, the greater the age the higher the satisfaction with place of work. There were no substantial differences on the basis of sex, education and residence group. A majority of respondents (55%) also indicated that they received satisfaction from both work and non-work.

Those who indicated that they got satisfaction exclusively from work and those who said they got satisfaction exclusively from non-work were almost evenly split, with no major differences on the basis of age, sex, education or residence group.

### *Occupational preferences*

The data indicated that white collar jobs were preferred over others. First choice occupational preferences for the youth were ranked as follows (see Table 3): Professional/technical (30,3%), administrative/managerial (22,3%), agricultural/animal husbandry/forestry (21,3%), service (8,8%), sales (6,9%), production and transport (5,3%), and clerical jobs (4,5%). Second choice occupational preferences of respondents also showed white collar jobs having more prestige than non white collar jobs. Administrative/managerial jobs, professional/technical jobs, and agricultural/animal husbandry/forestry jobs, in that order, were the top three preferences of the youth. Service jobs were the least preferred second choice.

However, third choices showed a different picture. The most preferred third choice jobs were non-white collar. Production/transport jobs, agricultural/animal husbandry/forestry jobs, and clerical jobs were the most preferred third choice occupations. Again the least preferred third choice jobs were in the service sector.

**Table 3**  
**Occupational Preferences of Youth (%)**

Occupational Preference	First Choice	Second Choice (Rank)	Thirld Choice (Rank)
Professional/technical	30,3	15,9 (2)	10,4 (5)
Administrative/mangerial	22,3	16,2 (1)	8,8 (6)
Agricultural/animal husbandry/forestry	21,3	14,5 (3)	12,6 (2)
Service	8,8	4,5 (7)	7,2 (7)
Sales	6,9	7,8 (5)	10,7 (4)
Production/transport	5,3	10,7 (4)	13,0 (1)
Clerical	4,5	6,4 (6)	10,8 (3)

### *1. Age and occupational preferences*

All age groups were consistent in preferring professional/technical jobs as their first occupational choice. However, for the youngest group (10-15 years), agricultural/animal husbandry/forestry jobs were just as popular as professional/technical jobs. The least preferred jobs in these groups were in service, ie clerical and production/transport. For the 16-21 year group their second and third first-choice preferences were in administrative/managerial and agricultural/animal husbandry/forestry occupations respectively. However, the 28-33 year group preferred agricultural/animal husbandry/forestry occupations as their second



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choice jobs. Administrative/managerial occupations were listed as the third first-choice job preference. Clerical, production and transport were the least preferred jobs in the first-choice category.

All the age groups were consistent in choosing administrative/managerial occupations as first second-choice job preferences, with the exception of the 22-27 year olds who chose professional/technical and agricultural/animal husbandry/forestry jobs as their first second-choice job preference. In all the age groups professional/technical jobs and agricultural/animal husbandry/forestry jobs were listed as either second or third second-choice job preferences. Among the 10-15 year olds, production and transport occupations were also listed as second second-choice job preferences. Among the 22-23 year olds, production and transport occupations were listed as third second-choice job preferences.

Clerical, sales and production and transport jobs were more highly valued as third choice occupational preferences.

## 2. *Sex and occupational preference*

Whereas males indicated professional/technical occupations (37%) as their first first-choice job preference, females indicated administrative/managerial occupations (ie 29%) as their first first-choice job preference. Males went on to indicate agricultural/animal husbandry/forestry jobs (23%) and administrative/managerial jobs as their second and third first-choice job preferences respectively. Females reported both professional/technical and agricultural/animal husbandry/forestry jobs as their second first-choice preference, and reported service occupations as their third first-choice, and were least interested in production/transport occupations as first-choice jobs. For females this might reflect the fact that they occupy jobs in the service sector rather than in the production and transport (ie manual/industrial) sectors. The picture appears to support traditional gender expectations of what women may or may not do.

For both males and females the three top second-choice job preferences remained administrative/managerial, professional/technical and agricultural/animal husbandry/forestry occupations. For both males and females the least preferred occupations in this category were service jobs. In the third-choice category males preferred production/transport jobs as first choice; agricultural/animal husbandry/forestry jobs as second choices; and sales jobs as third choices. On the other hand, females first preferred professional/technical jobs; then, clerical jobs and agricultural/animal husbandry/forestry jobs.

## 3. *Education and occupational preferences*

Most notable in regard to education and occupation, those with primary education chose agriculture as their first first-choice occupation and those with no education

chose service occupations as their first first-choice job. Respondents with secondary and post-secondary education chose administrative/managerial and professional/technical jobs as first first-choice preferences.

In the second choice category it appeared that professional/technical jobs, administrative/managerial jobs, and agriculture/animal husbandry/ forestry jobs remained the most popular. However, there was a tendency for groups with lower education (ie primary school and below) to list production/transport, sales, and clerical jobs as preferable. In the third choice category production/transport and sales occupations proved to be popular preferences.

#### 4. *Area of residence and occupation preferences*

In the first-choice category the comparison of residence and occupation preferences showed a repetition of the pattern seen in the general occupational preferences of the youth. All the residence groups chose professional/technical occupations as first-choice occupations; administrative/managerial jobs as second-choice occupations; and agriculture/animal husbandry/forestry occupations as third most preferred occupations. Manual jobs were least preferred.

In the second-choice category, for rural and urban dwellers, administrative/managerial, professional/technical and agriculture/animal husbandry/forestry jobs remained the most popular preferences. However, for peri-urban respondents production and transport took the place of agricultural/animal husbandry/forestry jobs, behind administrative/ managerial and professional/technical jobs. For all areas of residence the least preferred were service jobs.

In the third-choice category, for urban and peri-urban dwellers the preference was agricultural/animal husbandry/forestry jobs; sales; clerical; and production/transport jobs. Rural respondents preferred, in place of sales, professional/technical jobs.

### Discussion

As noted earlier, the findings of this survey on *Zambian youth* could be discussed in relation to the themes of conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism and rebellion put forward by Merton.

In terms of conformity, the youth seem to have accepted both the cultural goals and the institutionalised means for achieving the goals. The majority of the youth preferred work with responsibility and authority. In terms of specific occupations, they preferred professional/technical and managerial administrative jobs. In *Zambian society*, these are the kinds of jobs which spell material success and command respect. To get these jobs society demands higher formal qualifications. In conformity with this demand, the youth rely on personal ability

through good education to achieve life goals. To this end, there was very little indication of reliance on witchcraft, luck, fate or nepotism as means to achieving goals. Conformity is also shown in terms of occupational preferences. In *Zambian society* the jobs which are equated with success are professional/technical and administrative/ managerial ones. Youths in this survey have understood the societal goal of securing these jobs. The government has been urging diversification from white collar occupations to manual, especially agricultural ones. The increased interest of youth in agricultural jobs can also be interpreted as conformity. The stigma that was associated with agriculture and rural occupations is eroding as the government intensifies its efforts to promote them, and formulate policies that make agriculture more lucrative.

A degree of innovation among the less educated (ie primary school and below) was identified, ie while they accepted socially approved goals they also accepted both socially approved and disapproved means to achieve them. While they thought personal ability, good education, and family help were important means to success, they also approved of socially disapproved means such as tribalism, witchcraft and medicine. This finding was interpreted in terms of the groups lack of exposure to western culture (through lack of schooling), and because the occupations required credentials these disadvantaged youth were less likely to use personal ability in competing for success.

From the data *Zambian youth* did not show ritualism, retreatism, or rebellion, in the traditional Mertonian sense, as ways of adjusting to their circumstances of living. All youth had opted for the socially disapproved goal of living as they like but it was not possible to tell from the data the extent to which they rejected or substituted new means to achieving that goal. In view of this, there is need for further research to understand the dynamics of retreatism, ritualism and rebellion among *Zambian youth*.

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