

# A Holistic Approach to Preparing Youth for Success

## Programa Para o Futuro

**1.8 billion.** That is the number of young people between the ages of 10 and 24 on the planet today. There are more youth now than ever before, and the majority live in developing countries where they face a unique set of challenges during adolescence. This phase of development is the time when youth make choices—for better or worse—that can determine the trajectory of their entire lives. Their experiences as teens and young adults can directly impact their transition to healthy, productive, and independent adults

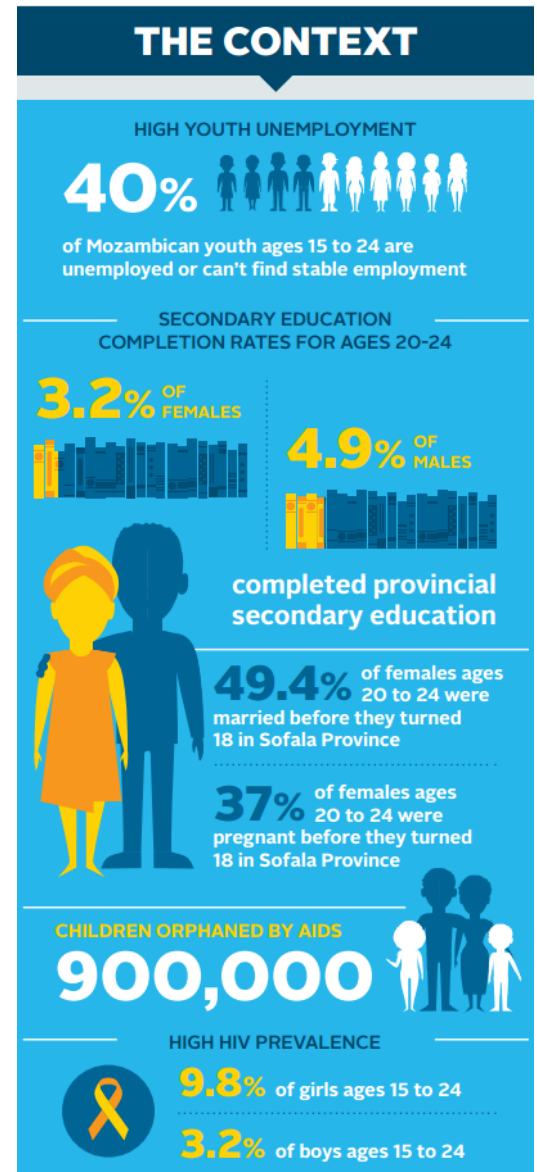
To address the specific needs of youth in developing countries, FHI 360 created Programa para o Futuro (PPF), or Program for the Future. This evidence-based youth employability program uses a Positive Youth Development approach to help young people acquire skills that lead to improved livelihoods, health, and civic engagement. This includes giving them the opportunity to learn valuable social-emotional skills, make decisions, build positive relationships, contribute to their communities, and feel a sense of belonging and connection.

With funding from the US Agency for International Development and President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, FHI 360 most recently implemented PPF in Mozambique, where it worked with hundreds of orphans and vulnerable youth between 15 and 17 years old in the city of Beira. The program has been so successful that the Government of Mozambique requested training in the PPF methodology. They observed that PPF youth had the attitudes, behaviors, and skills for the workplace, unlike graduates of their vocational education program who had good technical skills but didn't know how to behave in the workplace. Currently, PPF is expanding in Beira and has launched a new program in Maputo, the capital city.

### SKILLS THAT LEAD TO SUCCESS

FHI 360 tailors PPF so that it responds directly to the target population and the local labor market. The program's holistic curriculum covers a broad range of knowledge and skills—both technical and social-emotional—that are essential to successful employment. PPF's integrated curriculum covers:

- **Soft skills**—critical thinking, teamwork, and problem solving
- **Financial literacy**—family budgets, business plans, loan costs, and entrepreneurship
- **Communication**—public speaking, negotiating, and giving and receiving feedback
- **Social, life, and health issues**—gender-based discrimination, stigma, family planning, proper nutrition, sexual health and sanitation
- **Information and communication technology**—computer maintenance, creating graphics and videos, and installing software
- **Employability and networking**—professional language and relationships, résumé preparation, and resources for starting a business



Young people learn best when tasks are challenging, relevant, and interactive. Lessons should also require critical thinking and provide them with the opportunity to set goals and reflect on their progress. To ensure these conditions are met, FHI 360 utilizes project-based learning for all of PPF’s skills-building lessons. During PPF lessons, students are presented with real-world challenges and must work together to conduct research and find solutions. Research has shown that project-based learning has the potential to develop skills such as problem-solving, higher-order thinking, communication, negotiation, and collaboration.

Project Based Learning helped youth know how to find information, how to research and investigate, and how to apply learning in a new situation

## CREATING A SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

To learn the soft skills they need to succeed, youth must have a safe and supportive educational environment in which they feel at ease to express themselves, take risks, and make mistakes. To achieve this, at the beginning of PPF, students and facilitators together develop a code of conduct and youth learn how to give feedback and treat everyone—both boys and girls—with respect. The **safe space** PPF creates for its participants helps youth build strong bonds with one another and develop feelings of **belonging**, which are essential to the Positive Youth Development approach.

In Mozambique, the safe spaces helped youth feel comfortable when talking about difficult subjects. “When we learned about reproductive health, it was like talking to friends,” said graduate João Mazembe. “In our culture, we don’t talk about these things with our mothers and I don’t have a father. PPF made us more open [to talking about these things].”

Facilitators are critical to creating this supportive environment. PPF uses facilitators to enable communication between participants, guide learning through strategic questions, frame activities as learning experiences, allow learners to take active roles, and focus on feelings and attitudes as well as information. The facilitators form close connections with the young people while at the same time holding participants accountable for their attendance and having **high expectations** for their performance. These relationships are even more important for participants who lack steady support from other adults in their lives. In focus groups, youth reported that relationships with facilitators were essential to their success.

*“The facilitators never used threats like the teachers did. They gave hints and help.”*  
--PPF Participant

PPF uses a multi-disciplinary staff that corresponds to the curriculum. For example, PPF’s staff includes an employability specialist, an Internet and Communication Technology specialist, and a social worker. The social worker leads sessions on gender equity, social issues, and healthy behaviors and can identify youth who appear to have psycho-social difficulties and provide them with additional counseling and support.

Candidates for PPF facilitator positions participate in a three-week training program where they interact with youth. Only those who interact respectfully with youth and show a passion for working with young people are selected. The program also includes “junior facilitators,” PPF graduates who help with classroom lessons and act as role models for the students. Having youth like them who have already gone through the program with success is reassuring for the youth and helps them see their own potential for growth.

The **intensity and frequency** of the program establishes a stable routine, which is especially important for youth who often live in unsafe and unpredictable environments. Youth attend three-hour sessions every weekday for four and half months, they find security in knowing they have a supportive adult, and circle of friends. They also share a daily meal when they reflect on their lessons and build social skills. In Mozambique, many of the youth learned to use utensils and eat in front of others for the first time—essential skills for entering the world of work.



## PUTTING YOUTH IN THE LEAD

Providing youth with opportunities for decision-making helps them develop agency and confidence. In the classroom, PPF students are given “voice and choice” through the project-based learning approach. This requires youth to figure out what questions they need to answer and which methods they will use to complete their projects—the same skills they need to be successful in their professional and personal lives.

*“If I had stayed with that group of lads, I would have been lost by now. Some of those boys are in prison now, and I would have been one of them. I would have ruined my life! So PPF taught me to be social with the right people.”*

*-PPF Youth*

On weekends, youth participate in “replication” activities to share their lessons with friends. During this time the youth transition from learners to those who share knowledge. Because of the relevant and important skills the youth acquire in PPF, they often become sources of information and **role models** in their communities.

PPF also helps youth contribute to their communities through “youth clubs” that they create. These clubs continue after the program ends and members define priorities and interests. In Mozambique, for example, graduates raised awareness about reproductive health and HIV/AIDS prevention. PPF partnered with another NGO that hired forty graduates to participate in a program that used mobile phones to disseminate messages and promote discussions about reproductive health.

## DRAWING EXPLICIT LINKS TO EMPLOYMENT

The youth who participate in PPF often have limited access to adults outside of their social circles, which can make it challenging for them to connect with those who can help them learn about different careers. For this reason, PPF includes an **eMentoring** activity that connects youth with professionals with different backgrounds, ages, positions, and experiences. Once a week for at least three months, the youth connect online with these volunteer professionals to learn

first-hand how to behave and communicate in the workplace. Through these interactions, participants gain access to **professional networks** they can use to refine their skills and learn about employment opportunities.



Youth put their newly acquired skills to work through **internships** with companies, community organizations, and government agencies. This direct contact with employers helps young people, especially orphans and vulnerable youth, gain the experience and confidence they need to obtain paid employment. It also shows employers that these youth—who are often stigmatized and discriminated against—are competent and prepared to enter the workforce.

## REINFORCING FAMILY CONNECTIONS

Families and home environments greatly influence the behavior and attitudes of young people. PPF reaches out to parents and caregivers through family meetings to discuss the program and provide education about the best ways to support youth at home.

In Mozambique, PPF tapped into an established network of *activistas*, or community outreach workers, who visit families, identify their specific needs and help them access government service and serve as a link between families and PPF.



*Family members and teachers saw increases in self-esteem, responsibility, and communication among youth participants.*

## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE: SUSTAINABLE SUCCESS

Because of its roots in the Positive Youth Development approach, Program for the Future achieves lasting results. Graduates in Mozambique overwhelmingly reported positive changes in their lives that continued well after the program ended. In terms of education, nine out of ten continue their education for at least one year. In a province where less than 5% of youth complete secondary education, 67% of female and 72% of male PPF graduates have already completed secondary. Most are earning an income with 25% having formal employment. This success extended not only to education and employability, but also to healthy behaviors. For example:

- the majority of graduates gained a high level of understanding about the dangers of drugs and alcohol
- three-quarters of respondents believed youth between the ages of 14 and 18 years old should not be engaging in sexual intercourse
- 85 percent disagreed that it is acceptable for a boy to force a girl to have sex, and
- 85 percent of girls said they would refuse to have sex without a condom
- 91 percent understood that condom can protect against HIV

According to a study of PPF participants conducted several years after they graduated from the program, the bonds that youth made through PPF lasted after graduation and continued to positively influence their behavior. Graduates said that they had no desire to engage with groups of people who drink or use drugs. Instead, they continued to engage and work through problems with the friends they made in the program. None of the graduates selected for in-depth interviews have children and at least half indicated that they had decided to delay marriage and parenthood in favor of pursuing a career.

For many graduates, it was not just the employability skills they learned in PPF that made the biggest impact their lives, but also the confidence and self-reliance they gained through the program. "The presentations I had to do at PPF helped me," reported one participant. "I was scared at first but I am not scared today."

### ABOUT FHI 360:

FHI 360 is a nonprofit human development organization dedicated to improving lives in lasting ways by advancing integrated, locally driven solutions. Our staff includes experts in health, education, nutrition, environment, economic development, civil society, gender equality, youth, research, technology, communication and social marketing — creating a unique mix of capabilities to address today's interrelated development challenges. FHI 360 serves more than 70 countries and all U.S. states and territories.

