Unspoken assumptions: youth, participation and the African policy process [1]

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Contents

Introduction

Demographic change, persistent and disproportionate unemployment and their feared implications for political disorder are key drivers of growing donor attention to youth as a development category. Bi and multilateral donors thus increasingly seek to mainstream youth related goals on health, education, employment and governance into development policies that cater to youth needs and aspirations (GSDRC 2011). While youth participation in policy processes has potential to channel their energy, passions and frustrations, it often turns out to be deficient, tokenistic, or too episodic to be meaningful (SPW/ DFID-CSO Youth Working Group 2010; GSDRC 2011; McGee and Greenhalf 2011). Donors thus increasingly seek mechanisms to enhance youth participation (GSDRC 2011), raising questions such as what is meaningful participation? How can voice be extended into influence? Who should participate, through what forms, and how can participation be appropriately institutionalised?

This paper argues that answering these important questions will require donors to pay greater attention to existing national youth policies (NYPs).[2] NYPs were established throughout Africa from the early 1980s, and have mushroomed since. They express African governments' ideas on the youth development challenges, on

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[2] Although youth issues may also be addressed in other policies (e.g. poverty reduction strategy papers; education; employment; and sexual and reproductive health strategies), this paper focuses on national youth policies.

how to address these, and suggest more or less explicit theories of change. This paper analyses the national youth policies of Tanzania, Nigeria and Zambia, whose selection was driven by availability of secondary material. It is recognised that in coming years, they are likely to be influenced by the African Union's African Youth Charter (AYC, 2006), which became legally binding in 2010. The analysis of NYPs also provides a perspective on the direction in which African nations are likely to use policies to address a widely perceived 'youth in agriculture problem'. In a nutshell, this asserts that youth labour, energy and enterprise is essential to successful agricultural growth and transformation, yet young people lack motivation for a career in farming (Anyidoho, Kayuni et al. 2012).

The paper analyses the NYPs with reference to contemporary debates on youth in policy processes, and focuses on two aspects of the policy environment. First, it analyses philosophies of intervention of the NYPs, through an assessment of target groups; roles assigned to urban and rural youth; the social construction of the 'youth development problem' and youth images; and the institutional organisation of the sector (cf. Wallace and Bendit 2009). Second, it considers how policy documents assert particular models of the policy process, to suggest a propensity for particular forms of youth participation. Accordingly, we assess how NYPs incorporate normative and empirical perspectives on the policy process, in particular regarding the role of evidence, knowledge, expertise and collective action by state and non-state actors.

In the first section, the paper discusses youth policies in international arenas to note the great variation in the ways in which youth is conceptualised and operationalised in policy and legislation. The next section explores policy discourses to assess the unspoken assumptions that underpin youth policies in Nigeria, Tanzania and Zambia. We first summarise key debates in the international development community, and then analyse the philosophies of intervention of case country youth policies. Next, the paper places the NYPs within the context of academic debates on youth participation. The last section offers a conclusion and reconnects the discussion to the theme of youth in agriculture.

The growing momentum of youth policies in (inter)national arenas

Although youth has been part of the international community's policy agenda at least since 1965, it gained particular momentum from the mid 1980s onwards. The UN declared 1985 as the first International Youth Year, and a decade later saw the initiation of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 (WPAY). WPAY sought to encourage youth participation and suggested a blueprint for development action.[3] The subsequent Millennium Development Goals (no. 8) aim to integrate alienated youth in the global economy, and sets out 'Developing and implementing strategies for decent and productive work for youth' (Target 16) (Chaaban 2009, p.35). The UN has published biannual World Youth Reports since 2003, and the World Development Report 2007 was entitled *Development and the Next Generation*. The UN declared 2010 as another International Year of Youth, with

[3] Key issues addressed concern: education, employment, hunger, poverty, the environment, drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, leisure time activities, girls and young women.

the slogan 'Our youth, our voice'. Similarly, the African Union had designated 2008 as the African Youth Year, and has declared 2009-2019 as the decade of youth development (African Union 2011). The table below shows how international engagement with youth development has intensified in the last decade or two.

Table 1: Youth Development on the international agenda

Year	Event	Institution(s)
1965	Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples	Member states of the UN
1985	Resolution on the International Youth Year	UN General Assembly
1995	World Programme of Action for Youth for the Year 2000 and Beyond (WPAY)	UN General Assembly
1997	Resolution on Policies and Programmes Involving Youth	UN General Assembly
1998	Lisbon Declaration on Youth	Ministers Responsible for Youth
1999	Resolution on Policies and Programmes Involving Youth	UN General Assembly
2001	Special Session to review progress achieved over the last decade and outline a future vision for young people	UN General Assembly
2001	Youth Employment Network Launch	UN Secretary General jointly with the World Bank and ILO
2003	Resolution on Policies and Programmes Involving Youth	UN General Assembly
2003	World Youth Report	UN General Assembly
2005	World Youth Report	UN General Assembly
2005	GA Resolution on tenth anniversary of WPAY	UN General Assembly
2006	Commission for Social Development Resolution on Youth Employment	UN General Assembly and ILO
2007	World Development Report: Development and the Next Generation	The World Bank
2010	UN International Year of Youth	UN General Assembly
2011	World Youth Report	UN General Assembly

Source: adapted from (Chaaban 2009, p.34)

UN bodies like ILO, UNDP, UNICEF and UNESCO have long encouraged national policymakers to cater to youth, promoting national youth policies as 'indispensable', a 'symbol of society's commitment to its young citizens' and as 'one of the highest priorities of society' (UNESCO 2004, p.5,6,35). The African Union and regional bodies such as the East African Community also increasingly aim steering domestic youth policy agendas. For instance, Article 12 of the African Youth Charter sets out that 'State Parties shall develop a comprehensive and coherent national youth policy' for subsequent enactment into law (African Union 2006). As the Charter was activated in August 2010, and with ratification processes ongoing in countries, the AYC can be expected to increasingly drive youth policy reforms.

How policies identify youth

Some consider that the creation of 'youth' as a category in Africa is a post-colonial phenomenon promoted by ministries of 'Youth Sports and Culture' and youth wings of political parties, while being nowadays further underwritten by a global consumption-oriented youth culture (Frederiksen 2010, p.1078). Donor agencies consider youth a specific social category "laden with risk and uncertainty" (UNESCO 2004, p.6). Yet, for all its intuitive appeal, a clear distinction between youth, children and adults is less straightforward than it appears. A bewildering range of definitions and working definitions are used for youth, often organised around age but sometimes around alternative criteria, hindering comparative research.

Where youth is defined in age based terms actual age ranges vary. The African Youth Charter considers youth as people between 15 – 35 years of age**.** Some countries, like the DR Congo, define youth from birth while others apply the term up to the age of 40 (UNESCO 2004). The official UN definition of youth refers to people in the age bracket 15-24, while the Commonwealth definition ranges from 15-29 years. UNESCO defines 'young people' to be between 10-19 years old (UNESCO 2004), while the World Health Organisation opts for 10-24 years (Blum 2007).[4] UNICEF identifies 'adolescents' (10-18 years), while the UN Convention on Child Protection considers all people up to the age of 18 as 'children'. Thus, someone in the 15-18 age range, can be considered a 'youth', a 'child', both, but also a 'young person'. In our case study policies of Tanzania and Zambia youth is defined in accordance with the UN definition (a person between 15-24 years of age). Nigeria defines youths as persons of ages 18-35 and (confusingly) speaks of 12-17 year olds as 'pre-youths'. Further, even within countries, administrative parts of the state do not necessarily define youth in the same way (Wallace and Bendit 2009). Thus, while legal systems depend on clear cut definitions, legal minimum ages may vary by gender, and by purpose, for instance for marriage, voting rights, criminal responsibility, military service, access to alcoholic beverage, and consent to medical treatment or sexual intercourse. E.g. in South Africa, a young person can legally consent to sexual intercourse at the age of 16, can obtain a driver's licence at the age of 17, can vote at the age of 18 but can only own land at the age of 21 (Mkandawire and Chigunta, 1999, in:Curtain 2001). Similarly, in Tanzania, the NYP considers people between 15-18 years of age as youth but its Children Development Policy (1996) considers this group as children.

One drawback of age based definitions is that they can be insensitive to culturally specific notions of youth, childhood and adulthood. Thus, 'we can not define children or childhood on the basis of age because a 'child' is not the same everywhere. Childhood may be universal as a phenomenon but the position of a child is formed in relation to culturally and geographically specific institutions, traditions and forms of family life' (Kallio and Hakli 2010, p.357). Moreover, even though youth's transitional nature is universally accepted (UNESCO 2004), transition processes and foci vary and are subject to change. While some donor agencies focus on particular transitions, e.g. the transition from school into work (e.g. Garcia and Fares 2008; UNECA 2009); this makes up only one part of a multi-layered and often gendered[5] transition to adulthood. Sociological understandings highlight that a young person's transition to adulthood takes place on multiple axes (MacDonald, Mason et al. 2001), through 'boundary events' concerning:

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[4] In contrast, Jeffrey (2009, p.2) defines 'children' as those aged 5–15, 'youth' as those aged 16–30, and use the term 'young people' to refer to children and youth collectively.

[5] For instance, employment seeking strategies may be gendered, as cognitive perspectives of what work is acceptable or not, and what constitutes success may well differ for men and women within and between cultural contexts (Silberschmidt 2001; Jeffrey 2008).

school/occupation[6], family/matrimony (Galland, 1996, in: Calves, Bozon et al. 2009) and citizenship (Lloyd 2006). However, such transitions are increasingly understood as being non-linear (UN 2005; Lloyd 2006), as the social, matrimonial, family, residential and citizenship factors that condition an individual's passage to adult life are more and more fluid. For instance, Lloyd notes that compared to the early 1990s, young people in developing countries are nowadays: entering adolescence earlier and healthier; more likely to spend their adolescence in school; more likely to delay marriage and childbearing; and more likely to have a postponed entry to the labour force.[7] There is greater variety between individuals (or cohorts) than ever before, with highly individualised and fuzzy trajectories, that are often partial, iterative or delayed (Calves, Bozon et al. 2009; Locke and te Lintelo 2011). For instance, a 36-year old unemployed and unmarried Tanzanian man living with his parents may be seen as a 'youth', despite having passed the age range identified in the national youth policy.

Some national youth policy documents reference both an age-based and more culturally sensitive identification of youths. Tanzania employs an age based working definition, but also explicitly recognizes that youth concerns a transition period from childhood to adulthood. It acknowledges a variety of community specific understandings of what youth entails, and notes that commonly, in this period, young people are expected *to start* participating in various development activities. Youth are expected to begin to show maturity in thought and reasoning, decisiveness in action, and gain a certain measure of self-reliance (Government of Tanzania 1996). Its cultural sensitivity makes the policy potentially amenable to the growing fluidity in youth transitions.

While some youth policies identify target groups, recognising that youth are not homogenous, targeting often involves the identification of very broad categories. Nigerian policy thus lists as targets: students in post-primary schools; students in tertiary institutions; out of school, unemployed youth; female adolescents; youths with disabilities; youths with health problems and youths engaged in substance abuse, cultism and delinquency (chapter 1).[8] The Government of Zambia identifies two priority groups: rural youths and the disabled (1.8). The Tanzanian youth policy does not identify specific priority targets, but direct the ministries to develop particular programmes. For instance, the ministry of agriculture is directed to prepare farming and livestock programmes (5.8.1) and to develop strategies to train youth in modern agriculture (5.8.2). More generally, it is important to note that

[6] As for instance measured by the duration of the period between youth's end of education and first paid work (Garcia and Fares 2008).
[7] With respect to the latter, an emerging literature on young people's transition from school to work (Garcia and Fares 2008; World Bank 2009) notes the range and the lengthening of the duration of the period between the end of education and first paid work ranges for young Africans. This process may take anything from one year (Côte d'Ivoire) to five years (e.g. Cameroon, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Kenya, Malawi and Zambia) or more (e.g. seven years in Mozambique. Moreover, significant variations occur by gender (often, young men stay in school longer, achieve higher qualifications and start working later than women), and location (urban youth start working later and achieve higher educational attainment than rural youth) (Garcia and Fares 2008).
[8] It thus caters to 'youth' (ages 18-35) and 'pre-youth' groups (ages 12-17).

youth policies have wellbeing rather than anti-poverty objectives, i.e. they tend not to prioritize the poor.

Youth policies: philosophies of intervention

In this section, we explore policy discourses on the nature of the problems to be addressed by youth development interventions. We first summarise key debates in the international development community, and then discuss issues identified in national youth policies.

Problems, images, and policy aims

(Inter)national youth policies typically discuss themes such as (sexual) health; employment; education; armed conflict; globalisation; poverty; culture etc (e.g., UN 2005; UNECA 2009).[9] Increasingly also, they highlight a role for youth in policy processes . However, dominant issues identified concern the interlinkages of demography, unemployment and political insecurity.[10]

The rapid and sustained increase in the number of young people in the global south is one of today's most significant demographic trends. Around 90 percent of young people reside in developing countries (Shankar 2010). By 2030 Africa is projected to have as many youth as East Asia and by 2050 could also exceed the youth population in South Asia (Garcia and Fares 2008). Young people make up approximately 30 percent of the total population in African countries, and this is increasing fast (Panday 2006), with concomitant growth in (even higher) shares of the working population.[11] The growing number of young people entails a process of demographic change; societal 'rejuvenation' in a literal sense. For instance, in 2005, 76 percent of the Zambian population were under 30 years of age, with those between 20 and 29 years accounting for a mere 18 percent (CSO 2007).

Whereas some commentators are pessimistic about the prospects for economic growth and poverty reduction in Africa (e.g. Collier 2008), youth bulges are recognised by many as a window of opportunity. They offer a *demographic dividend*: where a larger workforce with fewer dependents could generate strong economic growth (Garcia and Fares 2008; Gunatilake, Mayer et al. 2010). Yet, experiences to date are mixed: while a conducive policy environment in East Asia harnessed the dividend to achieve strong growth, similar demographic dynamics in Latin America failed to yield better economic outcomes (Garcia and Fares 2008).

Youth bulges are however also associated with severe levels of unemployment and youth are seen as amongst the 'most vulnerable and most powerless [groups, ed.] in labour markets' (Youth Employment Network undated, p.12). Recent global economic crises have hit youth hardest (Shankar 2010) and their impacts are not even included in youth unemployment figures which already show that Africa, at 21 percent is more severely affected than the world at large (14 percent) (UNECA

[9] For instance, the Nigerian policy identifies education; employment; health; sports and recreation; environment; arts and culture.

[10] The forthcoming World Development Report (2012) looks at employment.

[11] Insert the more nuanced analysis from UNECA 09 – p.14/15

2005). Ironically, while both health and educational status of African youth are better than ever (Garcia and Fares 2008)[12] social scientists note that the 'educated unemployed' as a new social category (Jeffrey 2008; Jeffrey 2010). Young people experience disproportionately high levels of unemployment, and often experience age-based discrimination in labour markets (UN 2005; Gunatilake, Mayer et al. 2010).[13] Compared to adults, African young people have much higher unemployment rates and operate more in the informal economy on lower wages and in more precarious jobs (Keune and Monticone 2004).

Growing youth bulges and widespread unemployment are often associated with insecurity, urban social unrest and political instability (Urdal and Hoelscher 2009) (Frederiksen 2010).[14] Thus, a UN Security Council mission to West Africa reported in 2003 that 'In every county visited, the mission heard about the problem of unemployment, particularly among young people, and how this was a perennial source of instability in West Africa'. Furthermore, a report of the UN Secretary General (S/2006/922) stressed that in Sierra Leone the problem of youth unemployment and marginalisation remained the most immediate threat to the country's stability. President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal called youth employment a 'matter of national security", whereas a Rwandan State Secretary argued its implication the Rwandan genocide (YEN undated). Undoubtedly, the Arab Spring reaffirms perspectives on the threat of large numbers of unemployed and impoverished youth to prevailing political orders.

National youth policy discourses in Nigeria, Tanzania, and Zambia dating from the 1990s, show the enduring appeal of such images. They situate analyses of youth needs, problems and responsibilities within contexts of societal change, political order, social breakdown and economic decline. Unemployment is a key concern, and the NYPs recognise that some groups are particularly at risk. For instance, in Tanzania and Zambia, 60-65% of unemployed people are youth, with girls disproportionally affected. Youth unemployment means greater dependency on parents for urban youth (Tanzania 1.3.4). The Nigerian policy notes that one in three disabled people is a youth, and disability profoundly affects economic opportunities. The policies further note that although the majority of youth is based in rural areas, many migrate in search of urban livelihood opportunities, despite having limited education, capital, equipment and technical skills.[15]

[12] A notable exception is Zambia, where neoliberal reforms involved massive public disinvestment from education, resulting in a dramatic decline in human capital: the young in Zambia are now less-educated than older groups.

[13] In Sri Lanka, youth made up nearly 80 percent of all unemployed people in 2006, and were almost eight times more likely to be unemployed than adults. Thailand's ratio of unemployed youth (15–24 years) to unemployed adults was 6 to 1; Indonesia's, 5.6 to 1; and the Philippines', 3.4 to 1 (Gunatilake, Mayer et al. 2010).

[14] Their study of 55 cities however rejects the argument that youth bulges and unemployment are likely to lead to political and social disturbances (Urdal and Hoelscher 2009). While urbanisation continues, the reason for this may not be the commonly posited rural migration, as natural population increases (Potts 2012).

[15] Tanzania's 2001 agricultural sector development strategy also notes that migration from rural areas is increasingly problematic due to an absence of urban jobs (Dahl Jensen 2010).

Existing youth policies do not yet reflect a growing recognition that African governments must give greater priority to youth transitions to adulthood (Sommers 2010).[16] However, they occasionally reference notions of transition. For instance, Zambian policy stresses the importance of growing up to full adulthood "in consonance with contemporary social, economic and political ideals" (1.3.2), while Tanzanian policy notes the transition problems of unemployed urban youth, who continue to depend on their parents (1.3.4). Much concern is expressed about unemployment leading to idleness. Within contexts of weakening social ties, this produces promiscuous behaviour; unsafe sex; prostitution; early pregnancies; substance abuse; thievery and robbery; and political alienation (Government of Tanzania 1996, section 1.5; Government of Nigeria 2001) (Government of Zambia 1994). These concerns underline a tension in the youth policies of Nigeria, Tanzania and Zambia between hope, prospects and expectations and a fear of their lack of fulfilment that serves to justify patronising policy approaches.

Young people are often perceived as either passive clients of government services, as constrained decision makers, or as autonomous agents able to shape their own destinies (White and Wyn 1998, in: Curtain). The NYPs not only emphasise the first two, but also assert strong normative aspirations for young people. The Tanzanian policy for instance wants youth to assume responsibilities as citizens, parents and leaders (3.1), to support local communities with social, defence and security services, and to preserve Tanzanian culture (2.0). Furthermore, Nigerian, Zambian and Tanzanian policy express that youth have to make important contributions to nation building projects. The Nigerian policy considers youth as the "foundation" and Nigeria's "only real hope for a great future". Their "energy, inventiveness, character and orientation define the pace of development and the security of a nation" (preface).

In some case the policies acknowledge that young people are already living up to some of the expectations, such as taking on political leadership roles in Tanzania. Yet, in many cases, the policies portray youth as deficient, complicit victims failing to exercise a sufficient level of responsibility and they are therefore in need of protection by a paternalist state. Here, the nation-building narrative seems a particularly double-edged sword, as it carries a strong normative load: unemployment is not just undesirable from a poverty or wellbeing perspective, but speaks of individuals' moral deficiency towards community and nation. In a context of extreme scarcity of jobs in the formal economy and tremendous competition for these in the informal economy, young people are thus doubly victimised. Moreover, policies that strongly emphasise young people as deficient risk institutionalising such negative views (Checkoway 2011).

The NYPs note that not only young people fail to discharge their obligations. Parents, guardians and society at large fail to protect a group characterised by 'tender age', limited life skills and economic needs. The Tanzanian policy thus emphasizes that fast-changing economic, cultural and social environment drive

[16] Policies that stymie youth efforts to become adults include overly strict regulation of informal economies and restrictions on access to land and housing in urban areas (Sommers 2010).

rapid changes in youth aspirations, orientations, culture, values and lifestyles. Foreign culture (and 'modem technology') is seen as implicated in the decline of established community systems of youth upbringing and responsible parenthood. Zambian policy notes a lack of guidance, counselling, recreational facilities and disintegrating families, while the Nigerian policy lists inadequate parental care; moral decadence in society; breakdown of family values; indiscipline; a lack of appropriate role models; religious fanaticism and cults, and limited access to leisure and sports facilities as key social factors (Ch. 1.3). The Nigerian youth policy (2000) is particularly ambivalent. It offers a eulogy to youth as "energetic, active and in the most productive phase of their life as citizens" but also considers them "the most vulnerable segment of the population socio-economically, emotionally, and in other respects" (1.2). Youth are "sensitive" (chapter 1), "most volatile" and "bedeviled, disoriented and dis-empowered" (Ch 8.0). The schizophrenic imagery sets up a policy that emphasises the need for handholding and a paternalistic promise of social engineering. Young people need to be protected from themselves. The policy thus seeks to "inculcate … the virtues of patriotism, discipline, selfless service, honesty and integrity"; "inculcate leadership and make youth socially responsible and accountable"; and conduct socialisation programmes, "so that they can become good and productive citizens" (2.5). As Nigerian youth may "constitute a threat to national stability, even survival, if allowed to drift, remain unemployed, and misguided" (1.6), they need to be "correctly guided, adequately mobilized and fully integrated into the fabric of society". Similarly, in order to offset negative economic, social, political and cultural influences (3.3), Tanzanian policy asserts the need for education and media messages that teach "acceptable morals in accordance with the culture of Tanzanians" (5.6.6; 5.12.2). Cultural conservatism involves a move by adults to reclaim youth who deliberately seek the modern as a relatively ungoverned space for exploration and expression (De Boeck and Honwana 2005). Moreover, invoking traditional tenets at a time when youth transitions are increasingly untenable, and more and more fluid in practice, raises the question whether youth policy risks reinforcing social stigma associated with incomplete transitions to adulthood? One study in Tanzania noted how impartial or failing transitions, and an inability for men to fulfil traditional breadwinner roles effected social disempowerment and was implicated in domestic violence against women (Silberschmidt 2001).

Interestingly, the youth policies also reference failure by the state. In Zambia's case, the NYP is presented as a response to the state's failure to produce jobs and foster economies in the wake of neoliberal structural adjustment. As in Tanzania, state retrenchment is seen as an important cause of youth unemployment, while youth services were cut simultaneously (Government of Zambia 1994). The Nigerian youth policy (2001) explicitly critiques two decades of military rule, noting that youth policy[17] 'suffered tremendous neglect' and ineffective implementation (1.4).

[17] Nigeria already had a National Youth Policy in 1983, which remained in place during the period of military rule (1984 until 1999). The national youth policy (2000) was devised by the newly elected democratic government and was revised in 2009 (the 1983 and 2009 documents were not available for analysis, so analysis here is of the NYP 2000).

Remarkably, it argues that a weak policy environment has *caused* growing un(der)employment, youth crime, illness and reduced school enrolment (1.4).

Accordingly, the state is situated at the very heart of youth development, as both cause and solution. This informs a strategic policy perspective that aims to empower youth (1.1)[18], but in a disempowering top-down and highly directive manner. Youth is the passive recipient, it is 'being trained' (4.4.1), receiving moral and ethical instruction by religious and community leaders (6.3.1), and mobilized, rather than enabled or encouraged to mobilize themselves. Policy seeks to *tap* and channelize youth energy, and to *make* youth active participants in the shaping of the destiny of the nation (ch.1). The policy "aims to correctly guide, *adequately mobilize* and fully integrate youth into the fabric of society to support the goal of national development". Its mission statement (2.2) sets out to

> "*build* a youth with a sense of hope, self-confidence, imagination, creativity and pride in the nation's heritage; youth who represent hope in the future of Nigeria; youth who are disciplined, well-focused, law-abiding and good citizens; youth full of the spirit of entrepreneurship, self reliance, mutual cooperation, understanding and respect; youth who are not corrupt and self-serving; youth with equality of opportunity, free from gender and other forms of discrimination, exploitation and abuse; youth who imbibe a culture of democracy and good governance; youth who take pride in our diverse cultural heritage and geographic conditions; and youth committed to the ideal of national unity and development as enshrined in the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria" (Government of Nigeria 2001)

Youth policies are thus as much about disciplining undesirable behaviour and attitudes as it is about developing skills, and advancing youth wellbeing.

Institutional organization of the youth sector

Youth development issues are cross-sectoral. They include health; education; employment, etc., and thus require a coordinated approach (UNESCO 2004). This section accordingly assesses the ways in which national youth policies express visions and put in place institutional mechanisms facilitating a cross-sectoral approach.

The NYPs of Nigeria, Tanzania and Zambia recognise a clear need to coordinate across government agencies at central and decentralised levels. Typically, a central ministry (or department) of youth development is responsible for policy formulation and for coordinating and monitoring its implementation. The policies direct ministries to incorporate youth issues in their sectoral policies, programmes and projects. For instance, the Tanzanian Ministry of Labour and Youth Development directs the Planning Commission to incorporate the programme of implementation into national development plans (5.14.1). Similarly, the Zambian Ministry of Agriculture is directed to provide guidelines for youth enterprises in small-scale agricultural, food processing and marketing enterprises. However, NYPs narrowly

[18] While in the 1990s youth development came to be increasingly equated with sporting activities and competition (1.5) the NYP seeks to empower the youth to take charge of their own destiny, to realize their potential in order to make positive contributions to community, societal and national development.

predefine such roles for various ministries and thus unnecessarily restrict their scope for policy innovation and for mainstreaming youth development.

Moreover, the NYPs advocate involvement of civil society and private sector actors in their implementation (in Tanzania this includes families), although it is not always clear how this will be coordinated. In Tanzania, Youth Development Committees at regional, district, ward and village levels are accorded responsibility for coordinated policy implementation. In contrast, this is centralised in the Zambian Department of Youth Development, and the National Youth Development Council. Functions, composition and powers of such bodies are however vaguely defined in the NYPs.[19]

In Nigeria, the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Youth Development (FMWAYD) formulates and reviews policy, designs programmes and issues broad guidelines for youth development to implementing agencies at federal, state and local levels. It also supervises various specialized youth agencies. The National Youth Development Council aims to give greater strategic coordination to youth issues on inter-ministerial development agendas. Chaired by the President, the Council comprises chief executives of core ministries[20] and specialized youth agencies, with "adequate" youth representation (7.2.2). Such coordination seems essential considering the proliferation of agencies: the National Youth Development Council, National Youth Advisory Committee, National Youth Service Corps scheme, a National Youth Development Agency and a National Youth Development Fund (7.2.1). Moreover, the FMWAYD oversees the establishment of regional Youth Development Centres (6.8)[21] and financially supports the National Youth Council. This elected umbrella organisation of voluntary youth NGOs initiates and executes activities in consonance with National Youth Policy goals (7.2.11).[22] While several of these bodies benefit from senior political and administrative membership to facilitate high level coordination of youth development issues, their mandates and division of labour are poorly defined in the policy, and their number and composition suggest a rather unwieldy apparatus. E.g. the National Youth Advisory Committee is chaired by a Minister of State and comprises 311 (!) State Commissioners in charge of youth affairs. Such unwieldiness will hinder its tasks such as proposing policy recommendations, or providing a link between government and private sector/NGO implementing agencies.

Conceptualising the policy process

Having explored the formal organisational set up of the youth sector, this section analyses how national youth policies may tell us something about how policy

[19] For instance, the Tanzanian NYP (5.17.3) sets out the role of the Youth Development Committees as follows: "To assist in starting and developing soft loan funds in their localities in order to enable youth to benefit from loans"; "To act as Trustee to the youth economic groups so that groups can get various assistance from donors, organisations, banks, etc." and "To assist youth programmes on various issues as they arise."

[20] Ministries of Women Affairs and Youth Development, Education, Employment, Labour and Productivity, Health, Sports, Culture and Tourism, Agriculture and Industry;

[21] Envisaged to provide training and leisure facilities

[22] The youth development sector in Zambia suffers from limited resources and a lack of operational capacity.

makers envisage the policy process to function. We look at three dimensions: the role of knowledge and evidence; the role of collective action and advocacy; and the role of participation. We argue that the particular ways in which policymakers think about the nature of the policy process has important implications for the ways in which youth policies structure opportunities and constraints for meaningful youth participation.

The policy process literature identifies three distinct analytical approaches. The stages model essentially considers that the policy process is made up of a sequence or cycle of successive stages. Usually these are set-out as: agenda setting; policy formation (policy formulation and decision-making); implementation, evaluation and termination. This model assumes a hierarchy, with a primacy of politics over, and its separation from administration (Hill and Hupe 2009). It posits the policy process as a rational and technocratic problem solving exercise, where values are exogenous: thus, politicians decide, and the bureaucracy executes policy. Here, scientific knowledge is seen to allow politicians to make better decisions, i.e. 'truth speaks to power'. Experts play a critical role as generators and conduits of appropriate knowledge. Higher quality and more robust knowledge generates better policy decisions in a rational policy process, and the role of non-bureaucratic actors in shaping policy content is de-emphasised. It considers a quite strict separation of state and society – where the latter only provide inputs through the election of politicians but are otherwise standing at a distance from the policy process. Whilst this model has been much critique for its empirical lack of fit, the linearity and lack of explanatory potential (Howlett and Ramesh 1998; John 1998; Sabatier 2007), as a heuristic device it is widely used and is reflected in commonly held beliefs about the policy process (deLeon 1999; Hill 2009).

Yet, the stages model downplays the contested nature of policy processes. Alternative conceptualizations of the policy process emphasise the relationship between knowledge, power and policy; processes of bargaining; the social construction of policy problems and solutions through particular narratives, framings and discourses that furthered by particular social and state actors, actor-networks and coalitions, and the roles of ideas, interests, values and beliefs in these.[23] The Advocacy Coalitions Framework and a set of 'argumentative turn' or deliberative analyses have distinct epistemological positions, but both emphasise the interactions between state and societal actors throughout the policy process.[24]

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[23] Such alternative conceptualizations of the policy process are better suited to address questions about the dynamic nature of 'youth' as an object of policy, and as subjects within these processes. They allow us to focus on questions such as: who is a 'youth'? Why is this defined in such different ways in different places? Why are some issues 'youth issues' and others not? What is the role of particular constellations of actors within and outside the state in these processes?

[24] The argumentative turn in policy studies comprises a range of analyses grounded in a constructivist epistemology. They share a concern with the role of power in policy processes; its relation to discursively produced knowledge and an outspoken normative concern with strengthening deliberative democracy. Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith use a neo-positivist epistemology. They argue that their ACF offers an alternative view of the policy process, with a particular emphasis on explaining policy change. The ACF particularly focuses on strong interactions between coalitions of

They emphasise the role of collective action, and the ways in which civil society groups continuously aim to engage with and influence policy, throughout the policy cycle (although they argue that strictly, there is no such thing as neatly defined cycles or stages).[25] Policy processes are thus not seen as involving the best technocratic decisions, but rather as involving contestation and power struggles. Whereas an advocacy coalition approach argues that these contestations need to be empirically established, a deliberative approach emphasises the normative requirement for the state to foster ongoing participation and actively involve non-state actors (Sabatier 1998; 1999; Burton 2006).

Knowledge, evidence and collective action

Good youth policy should be based on facts and research on young people rather than assumptions and speculation (European Youth Forum 2001). Comparative high quality data is an enduring concern and is hindered by the variation in definitions employed. Thus, while the African Union adopts the 15-35 years of age definition, UN bodies and various African countries collect data only for the 15-24 years age group (UNECA 2009), even though this may not cover the groups defined in the NYPs.

An assessment of the NYPs of our case countries does not provide sufficient material to justify strong conclusions on the role of evidence and knowledge. Some passages hint at a technocratic policy process perspective. Both Tanzanian and Nigerian policies offer a situational analysis of the nature of the youth development challenge. The Zambian policy does not, but recognises that its efforts have been "seriously affected by lack of data to gauge with precision and certainty the nature, extent and magnitude of youth problems. There is insufficient disaggregated data useful for planning (1.3)." It accordingly identifies regular research; the collection and storage of disaggregated evidence in data banks; and the establishment of a sound management information system as strategic choices for better policy and planning. Similarly, the Tanzanian policy acknowledges the importance of data for informing policy and planning, and plans for research and data collection on youth and youth activities (4.2.1). The Nigerian policy envisages the establishment of research programmes at the local, state and federal levels and the development of a data base on youth development issues (6.7.1). It commissions universities and research institutes to monitor and evaluate implementation of the National Youth Development Policy (6.7.2) and envisages data analysis to "provide useful guidance" for policy review and "enhance the process and machinery of implementation" (7.4).

In our analysis, we considered how the policies express a more or less explicit vision on the role of non-state actors from the private sector and civil society in the policy process. One of the overarching findings is that such actors are recognised and

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state and non-state actors grounded in particular sets of beliefs/values that shape the way in which these actors construct social problems and attendant solutions.

[25] 'Non-stagist' approaches are better able to deal with the 'governance turn'; the growing complexity and intertwining of state, market, and voluntary arrangements; the shift in decision-making power away from central governments; and the consequent growth in the type and number of non-state actors and their varied roles in decision-making and delivery processes.

promoted, yet predominantly allocated roles as service deliverers rather than as active, (semi-) independent contributors to policy deliberation, formulation and review. The Tanzanian policy seeks to enable youth and community mobilization for youth rights (3.2) yet is quiet about youth associations could engage with the formulation or implementation of policy and programmes. The NYP notes that representatives of Youth Economic Groups will be involved in Youth Development Committees, but what these groups comprise of, do and how they are involved is not clarified.

The Nigerian policy also promotes fora for regular consultation between student unions and the school management (6.2.2), encourages the formation of youth organisations through liberal registration procedures, leadership training and financial support (6.6.2). Such associations, churches, mosques, community youth development clubs; and scouts and guides organisations are to provide services and promote group based activities for young people (sections 6.2.2. and 6.3.1-2). Successful policy implementation "depends very much on mutual cooperation, partnership and solidarity of action among the various stakeholders" and on their effective coordination (7.1).[26] While this suggests a less stagist approach to collective action, the NYP nevertheless offers a dirigiste, top-down vision. It expresses a concern that youth associations are subject to political manipulation[27] and perhaps for this reason it sets up a local government "overseer/office system" to monitor and guide youth organisations (6.6.2) and identifies specific activities to be promoted (e.g. youth fairs in particular fields: information technology, motor engineering and astronomy (6.2.2)). In general, the vision is that "the Federal government will provide direction and leadership, other stakeholders such as local and state governments, non-governmental organisations, and private-sector entities *must play their assigned partnership roles* (6.1, italics DT)".

Perhaps the strongest expression of a stagist conception of the policy process is made in the Zambian NYP (section 1.8): "One of the most critical determinants of successful policy and programme implementation in general, and solution to youth problems in particular, is the strengths of the organisations entrusted with the responsibility of addressing youth matters. Experience drawn from implementation of youth projects and programmes has shown that policy success depends on programme/project formulation, implementation and co-ordination, all of which in turn depend on the institutional capacity of the implementation organisation."

Participation

Youth participation in policy processes is receiving more and more recognition, as a political right (SPW/ DFID-CSO Youth Working Group 2010)[28] and for programming

[26] Other factors identified include: sufficient resources; "appropriateness, viability, efficiency and effectiveness of the implementation mechanism"; active involvement of target groups; and committed leadership of implementation agencies (7.1).

[27] These groups may however graduate into powerful political manipulators themselves (Watts 2003).

[28] The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child Article 12 states that children up to 18 years of age have the right to participate in decisionmaking processes relevant to their lives, to express their views, to be listened to and to influence decisions taken in their regard, especially in schools or communities, even though they lack voting rights. Article 15 states that children have the right to

reasons[29] (UNESCO 2004; YEN undated). It is central to efforts at mainstreaming youth-related goals into donors' core development policy (GSDRC 2011). As a cross-cutting objective, youth participation may assist coordinating sectoral interventions (education, employment, health, etc) and governance challenges (SPW/ DFID-CSO Youth Working Group 2010; African Union 2011; GSDRC 2011). Donors thus call for greater youth involvement in formulation, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of development strategies, programmes, plans and instruments from the global to the local level (SPW/ DFID-CSO Youth Working Group 2010; UNICEF 2010; African Union 2011; UNDESA undated).[30] The African Youth Charter obliges State Parties to take measures to guarantee youth participation in parliament and other decision-making bodies, ensure gender equality of access (article 11) and to grant a right to actively participate in the design, implementation and evaluation of development strategies and policies (African Union 2006; Panday 2006).[31]

Internationally, youth policies aim to develop strategies that "help young people to make the right choices, protect them from exploitation and neglect and ensure their participation in all spheres of society" (UNESCO 2004, p.6). Similarly, the policy aims of our case studies stress empowerment (Nigeria), realization of rights; enhanced youth welfare and quality of life, opportunities for self-actualisation and human development (Tanzania, Nigeria and Zambia) and effective participation in (national) socio-economic development (Tanzania, Nigeria).

Arguments in favour of youth participation intertwine normative and empirical arguments regarding its beneficial effects. There is a clear need to gain a stronger empirical understanding of youth participation in policy processes, not least because mass media, social science, and professional practice tend to emphasize their deficiencies and disengagement (Checkoway 2011). Few independent evaluations have assessed youth participation and its impacts (UN 2003, p.285) and information on basic indicators[32] for international comparisons is not available.

Proponents of youth participation emphasise its potential to promote personal development, substantive knowledge and practical skills, facilitation of the exercise of civic rights, and contributions to a more democratic society (UN 2003; 2005;

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create and join associations and to assemble peacefully. A further right recognizes that children should have the necessary information about options that exist and the consequences of such options so that they can make informed and free decisions (DANIDA 2007; Checkoway 2011).

[29] For instance, the Commonwealth Secretariat considers youth participation as 'cardinal to development programming' (Commonwealth Secretariat 2010, p.7).

[30] Political and social participation are majors aim of youth policies in EU countries (Wallace and Bendit 2009).

[31] These commitments are echoed, for instance by Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan, who argues the necessity to "continue making the case for our young people - their meaningful participation in decision-making" and the need "to mainstream youth development", placing it at "the centre of development planning and focus' (Commonwealth Secretariat 2010, p.18,19).

[32] According to the United Nations (2005) these might include:

- The level of youth participation in local decision-making
- The number or percentage of young people who vote in national and local elections
- The level of participation in school governance
- The right to and level of freedom of association for young people

Checkoway 2011; YEN undated). Young people's participation in electoral processes is positively correlated with voting later on in life, and vice versa (World Bank 2007). Participation may improve policy processes by bringing a 'user perspective' (young people's knowledge, experience and commitment) to policy issues (UN 2003; Williamson 2007; SPW/ DFID-CSO Youth Working Group 2010; YEN undated). It enhances policy ownership, legitimacy and durability and promotes youth integration (UNESCO 2004) and thus benefits both the young people and society at large by contributing to economic and social development (UN 2003).

As social actors with skills, drive and capacities, young people should be seen as part of the solution to the difficulties they face. They can draw on a unique body of experience and a tremendous amount of energy, passion and creativity (UN 2003; Yeo 2008; YEN undated). Failure to do so risks weak policy because of a disconnect between the life-worlds and life-experiences of adult decision-makers and youth (UN 2003), particularly as migration, mobility and a greater variety of youth lifestyles generate growing complexity. Some have accordingly called for a more representative bureaucracy (Yeo 2008). Finally, the argument is advanced that a failure to enhance youth participation in policy processes risks policy failure, crime, violence and intergenerational discord (YEN undated).

Agreement on the need for participation is one, consensus on its purpose, and forms another. Is participation about "community service," or "social action," or "civic engagement" (Checkoway 2011, p. 340)? The UN General Assembly defines (and encourages[33]) youth participation as involving: economic participation, relating to work and development; social participation, relating to community involvement; cultural participation, relating to the arts, cultural values and expression and finally, political participation, relating to decision-making processes. These four elements are reaffirmed in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), which promotes the principle that children and young people are entitled to express (and have taken seriously) their views on all matters that affect them. Article 12 sets out participation as a procedural right to take part in and influence processes, decisions and activities (UN 2003).

Often, youth participation is presented as a 'citizen-making device', teaching (moral) responsibility, civic values, human rights, and an encouragement to 'become active members of a democratic society' (McGee and Greenhalf 2011; YEN undated,

[33] For instance, the World Programme of Action for Youth to the year 2000 and beyond (WPAY) (A/RES/50/81) considers that the active engagement of young people themselves is central to its successful implementation. It accords full and effective participation of youth in society and decision-making as one of its ten priority areas. UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/57/165 (December 2002) on Promoting Youth Employment 'Encourages Member States to prepare national reviews and action plans on youth employment and to involve youth organizations and young people in this process'. The Commission for Social Development Resolution 2006/15 on Youth Employment and the UN General Assembly Resolutions A/RES/60/2 (2005) and A/RES/58/133 (2003) on Policies and Programmes involving Youth also have various references to youth participation in policy making (www.un.org/youth, last accessed December 2010)

p.11).[34] The NYPs studied also use such rhetoric, and the African Youth Charter expresses a republican notion of citizenship. It sets out a "social contract between the State and the Youths" that "addresses the rights and obligations of young people" towards their families, society and the state (African Union 2011, p.1). It deems of 'paramount importance that young people become the custodians of their own development, partake fully in citizenship duties, and contribute towards the economic development of states and Africa as a whole' (Panday 2006). Yet, the emphasis on citizenship *development* has a discriminatory tinge – after all, such demands are rarely made on adults.[35] Emphasising citizenship deficiencies hence may perversely legitimate young people's unequal treatment.

While there are no shortages of positive examples[36], too often youth policy and legislation remains piecemeal (UNESCO 2004) and involvement in policy processes marginal (YEN undated).[37] Few countries have made youth participation an integral aspect of national politics and policy processes (UNESCO 2004). Where they have, more accountability and transparency is needed in how suggestions in youth participation forums are acted upon (Yeo 2008).

Nevertheless, a growing number and variety of institutional forms provide 'spaces of participation', enabling exchange between generations, languages, cultural groups and religions (UNESCO 2004). National Youth Councils (umbrella organizations for youth organizations) have been set up in over a 100 UN Member States, sometimes as a statutory body (e.g. Uganda, Malawi). Youth boards, associations, networks, NGOs and other forms operate across sub-Saharan Africa. Ghana has a Young Female Parliament, Lesotho a Shadow Children's Parliament, Mali a Children's Parliament and Zimbabwe Youth Village Assemblies (see various contributions in: SPW/ DFID-CSO Youth Working Group 2010; McGee and Greenhalf 2011). Nigeria created a Youth Parliament in 2008 which is to be replicated across the 36 States and 774 Local Governments (Commonwealth Secretariat 2010). The government of Tanzania is in the process of developing a national youth participation strategy and also reserves 10 seats in Parliament for the youth wing of the leading CCM party (Dahl Jensen 2010). In Malawi, young people participate in governance and development processes as board members of the National Youth Council, National Aids Commission, Youth Enterprise Development Fund, Malawi Development Advisory Council and Malawi Development Fund.

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[34] For instance, strategic goals of youth programmes include: 'to strengthen the contribution of youth in peace building, democracy and development' (Commonwealth Secretariat 2010, p.6).

[35] More so, where youth as a category is defined as a wide age range (e.g. up to 40 years) it sits uneasily with statutory electoral rights.

[36] For instance, Ghana and Kenya have a good record engaging young people in agricultural policy review processes such as CAADP and the African Peer Review Mechanism (Zimmermann et al, 2009) and a chapter of Zambia's Fifth National Development Plan on Youth and Children was drafted with inputs from young people and youth organizations (Commonwealth Secretariat 2010).

[37] A review of 41 National Action Plans on youth employment noted that a majority of governments does not involve youth in the preparation of youth employment policy and implementation. Only eight countries mentioned youth involvement and where consultations had taken place, these were often passive, giving youth the opportunity to offer their ideas and opinions but rarely involving them further in the policy process (YEN undated).

Successful institutionalisation of processes which bring youth and decision-makers together has significant advantages over informal and ad-hoc consultations, as they help to build mutual trust and inspire constructive engagement (YEN undated). Besides platforms for exchange, institutionalisation may also take the form of the allocation of a proportion of relevant budgets to youth development; the systematic application of a youth assets rather than youth problems perspective across policies; regular monitoring, data collection and reporting of youth development efforts, outputs and outcomes (SPW/ DFID-CSO Youth Working Group 2010).

Yet, questions about appropriate and meaningful youth participation remain. In some countries, National Youth Councils are key stakeholder in decision-making on youth issues, in others they have purely symbolic status (UNICEF 2010), or are dysfunctional. Dependence on state funding makes youth councils vulnerable to political interference (Maguire 2007, p.34; YEN undated). In Tanzania, the National Youth Council was never functional due to a civil society boycott in protest to its membership being dominated by youth wing members of the leading political party (Dahl Jensen 2010).[38] More so, the decentralised Youth Development Committees at regional, district, ward and village levels that were to coordinate NYP implementation efforts were dominated by non-youth.[39] One unanswered question then is under which conditions innovative forms of governance become institutionalised.[40]

Moreover, questions remain about the nature of participation, and over who participates. By artificially clustering a wide variety of young people with diverse needs, desires and problems, the 'youth' terminology involves a serious oversimplification, and policy risks becoming insensitive to difference such as gender, class, geographic location, etc. For instance, poor young Africans face diverse sources of marginalisation. Poverty and youth often intersect with identity aspects (ascribed or otherwise) that confer disadvantage, such as gender; rural residence; ethnicity/caste; disability or being a migrant (SPW/ DFID-CSO Youth Working Group 2010, p. 8-9). Diverse youth representation in participatory forums hence is by no means assured. Resource constraints and logistical considerations often mean youth consultations have a strong urban bias, while proceedings may only be conducted in the official administrative languages. Consequently, the views of rural and uneducated poor youth (and other subgroups) may not be heard.

Youth leadership is often fragmented, uncoordinated, and in mainstream civil society tends to be composed of well-educated men, with limited experience and

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[38] A 1994 government directive mandated that 5% of revenues were to be allocated to youth development issues through revolving youth funds at the local level. However, their performance is not transparent (Dahl Jensen 2010). The Nigerian youth policy (2000) also indicates that in the long run, the Federal, State and Local governments will be required to allocate at least 10% of their annual budgetary expenditures on youth development programmes.

[39] Although membership comprises 'youth economic groups', other members are voluntary organisations and individuals dealing with youth issues, and politicians such as councillors and members from village, community, ward, district and regional committees (5.17.4.1).

[40] And for instance, what role donor funding plays.

understanding of marginalized urban youth needs. Such leaders are unlikely to represent the views and needs of the non-elite, under-educated youth majority (Sommers 2010). Youth movements thus risk replicating the approach of many adult organizations in working for rather than empowering disadvantaged young people (UN 2003).

Perhaps no population group is more at-risk as well as overlooked than adolescent girls and young women. The relatively few youth programs and organizations that exist are dominated by male youth, while existing women's programs and organizations are often dominated by more senior women (Sommers 2006, summary). Marginalized female youth are under-represented in all forms of civil society, while marginalized male youth may be involved in forms of civil society distinct from mainstream forms (Sommers 2010).[41] The strength of the 'youth and political disorder' discourse is implicated; even in donor programming "vigilance is needed to ensure that 'youth' does not start to mean only boys and young men" (Maguire 2007).[42]

Our case country NYPs advocate a 'participation light' approach with little attention to political participation, integration into adult society, and fostering youth autonomy.[43] They insufficiently address a meaningful form of participation that can help to bring about youth engagement in policy processes on their own terms.[44] Tanzania thus argues for participation, but not as a cross-cutting imperative (only in a few ministries), not in village government, and suggests its purpose is to prepare youth for leadership roles. In Zambia, policy implementation is argued to need national, not local advocacy on youth matters. One of the Nigerian NYP policy objectives is to involve youths in decision making at all levels of government in all matters affecting them (2.5). It considers that already youth benefit from a tradition of self-help and mass participation in community decisionmaking (4.4.2).The policy itself is the outcome of nationwide consultations with youth organisations, administrators, and non-governmental organizations through Zonal Youth Summits and is monitored by 5-yearly reviews involving young people. Nevertheless, the document exudes a strong top-down ethos and a very passive role for youth that sits uneasily with a more substantial form of participation.

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[41] Studies of urban youth culture note their involvement in the production of new, distinct forms of meaning, geographies and class and gender politics (Jeffrey 2010). Frederiksen's study of the Mungiki youth group in Kenya notes the importance in Africa of alternative, non-civic forms of politics, often driven by disenfranchised youth excluded from and opposed to formal politics (Frederiksen 2010). In this vein, Watts has noted the critical role of youth organizations in the violent politics of oil in the Niger Delta, and demonstrates that their role is certainly not limited to simply acting on adults' instructions (Watts 2003). This paper does not interrogate these processes in detail, but suggests this as a subject for further study.

[42] "As an organisation, DFID has yet to be systematically explicit about its approach to youth as an asset or resource. It has more of an explicit commitment to working on youth where youth are addressed as a threat to security or peace" (Maguire 2007, p.35).

[43] These are for instance promoted in EU countries (Wallace and Bendit 2009).

[44] This is not something limited to NYPs. The understandings of youth development of development partners often fall short of an assets-based or participatory approach (SPW/ DFID-CSO Youth Working Group 2010, p.20).

Having voice hence does not necessarily translate in having influence. Indeed, often 'youth advocacy' is constructed as a process in which adults represent the interests of youth without any mechanisms of accountability by young people themselves (Checkoway, Allison et al. 2005, p.1158). Young people themselves often view engagement in governance processes as flawed: they feel treated as a 'token' young person, condescended to and are present but not heard (McGee and Greenhalf 2011, p.22). This incentivises withdrawal, but also risks reinforcing negative perceptions of piecemeal youth engagement (SPW/ DFID-CSO Youth Working Group 2010). Moreover, the issues expressed by youth may be the ones given to them by adult authorities who care about them, such as parents and teachers. In contrast, when young people identify their own issues it can inspire and move them into action. After all, "young people are experts on being young people, regardless of what others think" (Checkoway 2011, p.342). Moreover, government officials that have direct experience of working with young people are often more open to involving them in decision-making processes (McGee and Greenhalf 2011).

Nevertheless, entrenched socio-cultural norms can systematically devalue young people's participation in decision-making. Notions that emphasise a close relationship between seniority and authority may militate against more egalitarian notions that underpin the argument for youth participation in policy processes. In particular, respecting the right of 15–18-year-olds represents an enormous challenge to traditional attitudes in most highly patriarchal or highly stratified societies (UN 2003; YEN undated). Adults may see themselves as somehow better than youth because of their age and therefore feel entitled to act upon them. They see youth as "troubled and troubling" and as passive recipients of government services rather than as competent citizens. Where youth internalise these conceptions, the potential of participation weakens (Checkoway 2011). Assumptions about youth as immature, unproductive and ignorant constrains youth's access to decision-making spaces (McGee and Greenhalf 2011). Adult authorities' fear of youth can also undermine public participation (Checkoway 2011). Local (adult) leaders in Tanzania are thus reported to perceive youth participation as bringing chaos, too demanding and not rightful (Human Development Trust 2010). Moreover, a culture of not speaking up is an important obstacle to young Tanzanian women's participation in decisionmaking, from the family to the public sphere (Dahl Jensen 2010). Engrained attitudes to policy processes as expert driven also tend to devalue young people's inputs (YEN undated).

It is not unusual that participation in public affairs attracts particular youth groups. Many studies note that young people are uninvolved or minimally involved, while small groups that are typically not representative of the general population are extremely active. Income, education, and socioeconomic status all correlate with individual participation (Checkoway 2011). Limited education and training inadequately equips young people to confidently participate in decision-making, and this is exacerbated by social exclusion and inequality (Maguire 2007; SPW/ DFID-CSO Youth Working Group 2010). While lower income people may participate less than higher income people in formal politics, this should not be interpreted as disengagement from democracy. Rather, it should be noted that the poor tend to participate in ways that are more appropriate to their situation (Checkoway 2011).[45] As such, it would be interesting to assess whether and how poor youngsters are involved in social accountability mechanisms, which are an increasingly popular response to disillusionment with formal accountability mechanisms (McGee and Greenhalf 2011).

Besides social factors, institutional features of the polity influence which youth participate. Civil society in African countries enjoy substantial variation in political freedoms, and this frames the possibility for, and the organizational shapes that youth participation may take. In Tanzania for instance, the 2002 NGO Act makes critical youth groups vulnerable to censorship, and they thus have to very carefully navigate government sensitivities when expressing political or policy critiques (Dahl Jensen 2010). Some young people lack access to the processes through which adults can articulate their concerns. In very countries, the 15- 18 year old have voting rights. Moreover, youth lack access to the courts and media. Trade unions and professional associations often focus on the formal economy, in which few young people are employed (UN 2003; Maguire 2007).

Supportive, co-ordinated legal and policy frameworks are thus key to enhance meaningful youth participation and to foster youth as partners and leaders in development (SPW/ DFID-CSO Youth Working Group 2010). They should support young people's skills, capabilities and capacity to act on their own lives, and aim to remove barriers to their agency generated and maintained by social power inequities. Above all, effective strategies empower youth, in all their diversity, to autonomously and actively influence and shape the political agenda (Checkoway 2011). This requires decision-makers to develop policy and programmes *for* the benefit of youth (as beneficiaries), *with* youth (as partners), and be shaped *by* youth (as leaders) (SPW/ DFID-CSO Youth Working Group 2010, p.3).[46] Such policies can legitimately employ diverse, culturally sensitive and age appropriate forms of participation (Checkoway 2011).

Overcoming obstacles to meaningful youth participation hence requires transforming values, and fostering self-esteem and confidence. Meaningful participation requires equal opportunities; proper resourcing; and may be institutionalised through participation policies and standards (SPW/ DFID-CSO Youth Working Group 2010).[47] It is an ongoing process, involving information sharing, consultation, decision making and initiating action, with an aim to progress from consultation and dialogue towards engagement in the planning,

[45] A conceptualisation of youth participation beyond electoral processes helps to see how young people are involved in the topical and social identity based institutions and decisions that affect their lives (education, environment, housing, race, ethnicity, class, gender, etc), regardless of geographical or administrative scale (Wallace and Bendit 2009; Checkoway 2011).

[46] DFID has now adopted a 'three lens approach' to youth participation that works for the benefit of youth (as target beneficiaries), with youth as partners, and is shaped by youth as leaders (SPW/ DFID-CSO Youth Working Group 2010).

[47] Some argue that 'Institutionalizing collaboration requires the establishment of a formal relationship in which mutual rights and responsibilities are legally defined and social sanctions are imposed if such engagement fails to occur' (UNDESA 2010, p.69).

implementation and co-management of development interventions (SPW/ DFID-CSO Youth Working Group 2010).[48] High quality youth programmes are characterised by effective alliances of youth leaders and adult allies. The former serve as bridging persons across generational boundaries, while adults can reach out, nurture young people's ideas, and build support for their work (Checkoway 2011). Youth policies should thus increasingly enable young people to organize around issues of their choice, enable adults to engage young people in community agencies, and enable youth and adults to join together in intergenerational partnerships (Checkoway, Allison et al. 2005). This requires building both the capacity of young people to engage with adults[49] and the capacity of adults to foster youth-adult partnerships (SPW/ DFID-CSO Youth Working Group 2010; UNDESA 2010). "Until more non-youth leaders turn to the youth as equitable partners… youth involvement will be limited to unproductive demonstrations instead of powerful movements" (Fredericks 2010).

Conclusion

Demographic change, persistent and disproportionate unemployment and their feared implications for political disorder are key drivers of growing donor attention to youth as a development category. The recognition that development policies, strategies and programmes must cater to young people has been accompanied by a clarion call for appropriate institutional forms and practices that can foster more substantial youth participation in decision-making processes. This paper argues that donors would do well to pay greater attention to existing national youth policies (NYPs). NYPs were established throughout Africa from the early 1980s, and have mushroomed since. They express African governments' ideas on the youth development challenges, on how to address these, and suggest more or less explicit theories of change. They hence provide a broad framework for discussions on 'youth in agriculture'. Accordingly, this paper has analysed national youth policies in Nigeria, Tanzania and Zambia, for both content, and for the ways in which they assert particular models of the policy process.

Youth policies have wellbeing rather than anti-poverty objectives, i.e. they tend not to prioritize the poor. More so, while it is fine for policy to *generically* frame youth

[48] Levels of participation may be distinguished as follows (Youth Employment Network undated):

- Level 1 – Information providing: youth are informed of the policy and activities that have been decided on by decision-makers.
- Level 2 – Consulting, decision-maker-initiated: decision-makers decide when and on which topics youth are consulted.
- Level 3 – Consulting, youth-initiated: youth can put subjects forward, but have no decision-making powers.
- Level 4 – Shared decision-making or co-management: elders and young people share decision-making powers.
- Level 5 – Autonomy: young people take initiative and conduct projects themselves.

[49] Youth tend to have less experience in dealing with decision-makers, can be easily intimidated by the structures and processes of governance and may be used to dealing with authority – or, rather, being dealt with by authority – in a disciplining or restricting context. Youth from poor, rural communities may speak a different dialect from the decision-makers or at least know that their accent 'lets them down'. For effective participation of youth, decision-makers and youth themselves need education, experience and training (Maguire 2007).

problems, needs and solutions, programmatic efforts need to be much more sensitive to difference (gender, ethnicity, etc.). Currently, the NYPs are 'under-operationalised' in this respect. Moreover, NYPs assert strong normative aspirations for young people, but also posit that their failure to live up to these and their inability to protect them from themselves legitimates paternalist state interventions. Although NYPs also identify social factors, they tend to situate the state at the heart of youth development, as both cause and solution. Where empowerment is sought, as in Nigerian policy, it is done in a disempowering top-down manner, with youth as passive recipients.

NYPs also tend to have a stagist conceptualisation of the policy process, with a technocratic view of evidence, limited roles for collective action and a 'participation light' approach. While youth policy would benefit from research, comparative data of good quality is an enduring concern, not least hindered by the variation in definitions employed. Arguments about youth participation thus typically intertwine normative and empirical arguments regarding its effects. Disentangling these requires greater empirical enquiry. In terms of collective action, NYPs recognise and promote a role for private sector and civil society actors in policy processes, yet predominantly as service deliverers rather than as active, (semi-) independent contributors to policy deliberation, formulation and review. Youth themselves also are envisaged as passive clients of government services and seen as constrained decision makers. They are rarely portrayed as or encouraged to be autonomous agents able to shape their own destinies.

The analysis of youth policies hence suggests several implications for the ways in which African states are likely to address the 'youth in agriculture problem'. As long as youth are seen as an undifferentiated and problematic mass that is to be acted upon, to be protected, reformed and directed, state action is likely to take a directive rather than facilitating form. Agricultural policies are thus likely to prescribe one size fits all solutions (e.g. modernisation), that are insensitive to the varied needs and instrumental ways in which young people engage in agriculture (Okali and Sumberg 2012) and unable to fulfil their desire to channel the strengths that young people may offer. Moreover, as entrenched perspectives on the policy process and on particular forms of youth participation may well defy the current flurry of experimentation, and continue to under-prioritise youth empowerment and autonomy. Such perspectives on the policy process could well be more 'sticky' than the content of NYPs or agricultural policies addressing youth.

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Annex: Good practice

In 1996-97 South Africa developed a national youth policy employing a highly participative process:

- Establishment of a National Youth Commission, charged with the elaboration of the policy and an action plan. All commission members were youth (14-35 years). It conducted sectoral workshops and focus groups to consider strategic policy areas and invited written submissions from various stakeholders and drew from a range of research conducted by other organisations.
- Organisation of a National Youth Summit, drawing together more than 200 delegates from major youth, political and community associations to discuss the framework and policy direction.
- Launching an extensive process of consultation consisting of 35 Youth Hearings in rural and urban settings all over the country and Provincial Youth Summits involving more than 1,400 people.
- Initiating a meeting of some 167 representatives from major youth and political organizations and government bodies to review the first draft of the national youth policy and make amendments based on their recommendations.
- Drawing on international experience for a holistic national youth policy.

(UNESCO 2004, p.15)