

## **GLOBAL DEMANDS, REGIONAL CONFORMITY: UNDERSTANDING THE CONTESTATIONS IN YOUTH POLICY CONSTRUCTION IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA (SSA)**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Contemporary youth development agenda has prompted a demand for global youth policies that closely intersect regional and national policy dictates in attempts to address the problems and potentials of the growing youth population. Whilst the consensus of the global development goal ‘to eradicate poverty’ as underpinned by the recently concluded Millennium Development Goals(MDGs) and reinforced in the 2014 Colombo Declaration which seeks to mainstream youth as an integral aspect of the post-2015 sustainable development goals (SDGs), criticisms on impact of neoliberal globalization continue to suggest that in the African context, youth policies are simply mimetic – reproducing global best practices without critical evaluation of the regional differences and local national realities that explain youth development. This paper begins by highlighting the contestations associated with differential age-related definitions of youth on a global policy context in order to identify a gap in literature that enables for an in-depth understanding on how social constructions of youth by age, is undermined in the implementation of action plans and policy programmes in Africa. In this context, this paper maps out the global youth policy demands as defined by charters, declarations, resolutions, action plans, strategies and reports on youth development that have in-turn shaped regional approaches to youth development, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). This paper argues that, beyond broad global policy goals and targets and regional conformity to the dictates of youth development, is the need to critically examine and understand the differing age-related social constructions and how this impacts on youth research, policy and practice in Africa. This paper further contends that whilst there is a greater regional and local youth policy conformity to fit the global development demands on youth development, the plausible reality of ‘conceptual and normative blackbox’ of young people – that may never be counted youth in the design and implementation of development policies, programmes, action plans, and so on, may prove insightful in challenging the social phenomenon of waithood that plagues the African youth.

**Keywords:** Youth, Youth Policy, Youth Development, Global Development Goals, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),Regional Conformity, Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA).

## INTRODUCTION

Youth, like numerous concepts in social theory, is a highly contested term. The construction of this social category defies homogenous interpretation as the meaning of youth differs depending on the purpose of usage (e.g. for development planning purposes) and the context in which it is defined (social, cultural, political, economical, legal and so on). These varying social constructions of youth especially in the analysis of cross-national development policy practice, presents an unspoken assumption that the global, regional and differential national interpretations of youth are universal. Youth policies indeed differ in their philosophies of interventions (conception of youth; aim of intervention; problems associated with youth), target groups (age-groups; sub-groups of youth) and these policies are strongly influenced by policy makers' conceptualizations of youth (Wallace and Bendit, 2009; Ansell et al., 2012).

On a global level, while youth are socially constructed both as problem and a resource, the characterization of this category is often explained through challenges such as poverty, unemployment, homelessness, health care challenges, delinquency, lack of quality education, poor skill base and so on. Other regional challenges such as inter-regional and ethnic conflicts, generational disconnects between the adult and youth populations, violent conflicts, and many other socio-economic disjunctures, threaten not only the daily lives of young people, but also undermines positive strides made in youth development (Hilker and Fraser, 2009). Debatably, these challenges coupled with increasing anger, anomie, anxiety, and alienation have equally informed the growing wave of youth uprising, occupy movements, social unrests and civil protests as the younger generations demand power, more inclusion and participation, as well as empowerment to become part of, and co-partners in the development planning process in different nation states (Standing, 2011; Sukarieh and Tannock, 2011; 2015). In this light, it becomes apparent that youth positions in society as well as their transition patterns in contemporary times, are no longer linear; but are contingent on the complex interactions between youth decision freedoms, the support structures provided by different stakeholders, and the opportunity structures that often create multiple transition pathways (Heinz, 2009; Furlong et al., 2011).

Suggestions on how Africa's demographic dividend can be realized reveal measures that seek to: strengthen entrepreneurial capacity; support decent and well-paid jobs; increase access to finance; promote participation in political processes; eradicate human trafficking, and; eliminate child labour (UNECA, 2014; UNFPA, 2014). Indeed, with the demand for a global consensus for the adaptation of the 17 post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Africa's conformity and regional articulation of interests, issues and priority areas related to development has reproduced 12 specific goals that are geared towards a people-centred approach – in which youths are central to, that is aimed at addressing problems of sustainable development for economic growth, social development, environmental sustainability, good governance and effective institutions (UNECA, 2014; Urama et al., 2014). However, with the lived experiences of this current youth generation anchored on the backdrop of political instability, bad governance, pervasive corruption, failed neoliberal youth development policies, and a fragile global economy, the imperative to reconceptualise youth as a distinct development category and challenge conditions that protract youth transition patterns to adulthood (Heinz, 2009; Lintelo, 2012; Sukarieh and Tannock, 2015), is paramount to effective implementation of development policy, research and practice.

Debatably, with the completion of the 8 MDGs and the recent adaption of the 17 SDGs by the United Nations and affiliated Member States, youth are seen as critical partners for the implementation of the SDGs. The UNDP (2016)

contends that of the 165 SDGs targets, 65 reference young people explicitly and implicitly with a broad thematic focus on empowerment, participation and/or well-being. The UNDP (2016) further stresses that as part of the SDGs there are 20 youth-specific targets spread over six (6) key SDGs which include: goal 2 (hunger), Goal 4 (education), Goal 5 (gender equality), Goal 8 (decent work), goal 10 (inequality) and goal 13 (climate change).

In hindsight of lessons and challenges from the MDGs planning era and with the emerging SDGs, several authors (Giroux, 2009; Sukarieh and Tannock, 2011; Pritchett et al., 2013) argue that, not only has the implementation of global development goals, created a dependent system of policy imposition of dominant models of western policy cultures on the global south, the regional conformity to global policy demands create mimetic institutions that ignore the indigenous specificities that shape local national development contexts. Indeed, with the complex phenomena of youth waithood (Honwana, 2013) that are further compounded by persistent institutional failure (Pritchett et al., 2013), the prospect of building strong African institutions that is cognisant of the importance of youth partnership for the execution of for instance the SDGs, will prove insightful in challenging global and regional policy contestations that undermine local realities of youth development. Against this backdrop, this paper will provide answers to the following research questions. What are the conceptual contestations that shape the understanding of youth and youth-hood in society at large – that is on a global and regional Sub-Saharan African (SSA) context?. What are the global policy demands for youth development? What are the regional youth development policy initiatives in SSA? How does the implementation of the global and regional youth development policies impact on national development plans.

## **YOUTH CONCEPTUAL AND POLICY CONTESTATIONS**

Depending on the time in social history, the concept of youth has been considered as either non-existent, newly constructed or emergent. Also, depending on the context of interpretation and/or time in social history, the concept of ‘childhood’, ‘adolescence’, ‘teenager’, ‘young people’, ‘young adults’ and most recently ‘emerging adulthood’, are fluid concepts – used interchangeably to either describe the social category of ‘being’ youth or a process of ‘becoming’ an adult (Arnett, 2000; Ansell, 2005; Ezeah, 2012). The youth concept, especially when understood in the context of life-course and transition theories, describes an ambiguous and ‘semi-dependent’ social category, or a position of ‘being’ that is ‘betwixt and between’ childhood and adulthood but neither both (Best, 2007). Although the concept of youth has always had dual meanings – representing both ‘a person’ and ‘a period in life course’, the social construction of ‘youth-hood’ in comparison to other definitive constructs like childhood and adulthood remains unclear (Jones, 2009). In contemporary youth studies discourse, the meaning of youth remains an amorphous concept with differential meanings that is often underpinned by the philosophical paradigms that define it (France, 2009). Even within particular cultures, the interpretation of who can be considered a youth, is often informed by the purpose of usage and the contextual policy specificities that are bound to the cultural, socio-economic, political and legal frameworks that define the meaning of youth (Ismail et al., 2009). Perhaps, when the understanding of youth is examined as transition or a rites of passage towards adulthood, then the conceptualization of ‘being youth’ or ‘becoming’ and adult, allows youth to be socially constructed as a ‘transitional period’ that ignores the choice biographies and multiple transition patterns (Wyn and Dwyer, 1999). Osorio and Arruda (2014:p.4) opine that:

Throughout human history, the age of reason, or adulthood, came right after that of childhood, normally accompanying physiological transformations of puberty or the acquisition of socially valued skills. Becoming

an adult was simply a matter of surviving enough to become one, often marked by the rite of passage clearly demarcating the change from childhood to adulthood. People considered to be children today were known to be fully fledged adult members of societies in these other contexts. However, in the contemporary world the transition to adulthood is not performed in a single event, it unfolds during a separate stage of life: youth.... Therefore, today, youth can be defined as a transformational stage of the life cycle when individuals experience transition to adulthood.

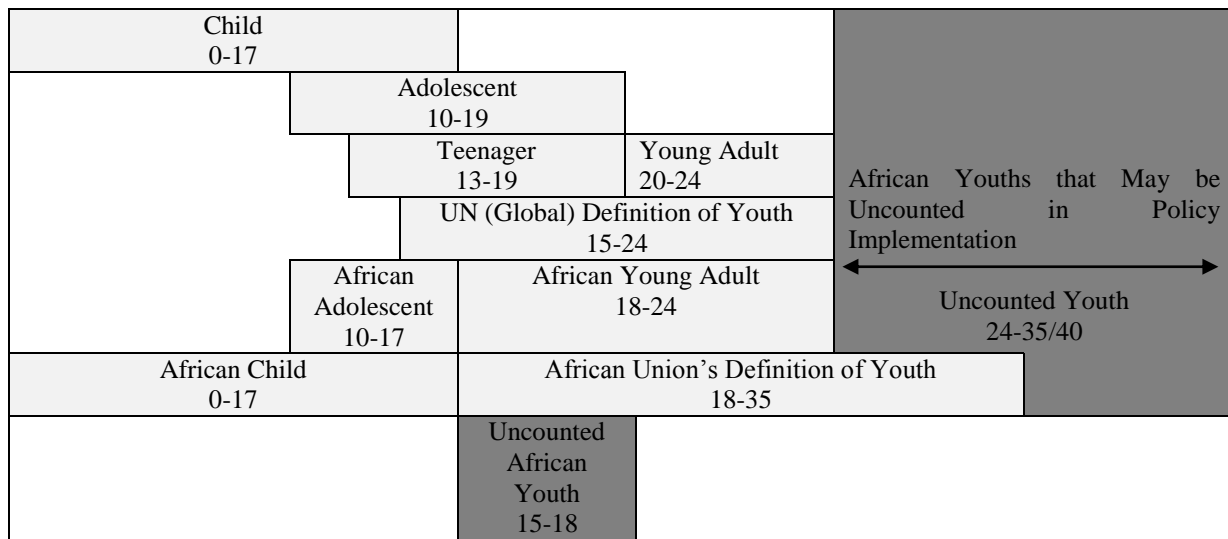
As contemporary research has pointed out, there is a growing need to move beyond linear conception of 'growing up' so as to appreciate the effects of traditional social divisions such as gender and class, that ensures youths become co-constructors of their identities (Wyn and Dwyer, 1999). Deconstructing further the concept of youth in national development planning and policy context is a definitive construct that is reproduced through age-related definitions (White and Wyn, 1997). For instance, The 2003 World Youth Report (WYR) concept of youth as modelled by the United Nations and its affiliated agencies, is a statistical entity of people between ages 15 and 24. This global construction of youth is aimed at providing a comparative premise for appreciating some of the challenges and opportunities that offer themselves to youth across the world. Nevertheless, several scholars (Ansell, 2005; Spence, 2005; Hine, 2009) contend that the interpretations of youth is not static but are relational on the subjective realities that shape the socio-cultural and spatial meanings of youth. Arnett's (1999, 2000, 2007) theory of emerging adulthood suggests that youth-hood as an extended period (18-25 year of age), provides a critique to the global definition of youth. This theory contends that, given the contemporary and haphazard subjective experiences of individuals aged between 18 and 25 years, that the global age-related interpretations of youth are too narrow to capture to socio-economic, political and economic dilemmas that affect young people across their life course. As can be seen in recent times, factors like globalization, technological advancements that is fast changing society from an industrialized to an information-based economy, the uncertainty of a definitive age-related definition of youth that is further limited by challenges of hybrid identity explorations, instability, and feeling 'in between' (Bynner, 2005; Tanner and Arnett, 2009).

Despite these theoretical suggestions of hegemonic global interpretations, the plausibility of other regional and emerging understanding of differential age-related constructs depend on the geopolitical complexities that define the youth bracket. In reinforcing this argument, Ismail et al (2015) contend that in Africa, youth and their transition to adulthood, appears to be more chaotic and distorted; subject to fragmentation, interruptions, and reversals, and; vulnerable to socio-economic shocks. As such, the concept of youth is viewed both as an intermediate age group and a social rank of powerful significance that collides with social issues that define youths social reality (Ismail et al, 2009). The World Bank (2009, p. 1) observe that:

Young people in Africa are not a homogeneous group and their employment prospects vary according to region, gender, age, educational level, ethnicity, and health status, thus requiring different sets of policy interventions. However, the typical African youth, as given by medians, is easily identifiable: she is an 18.5-year-old female, living in a rural area, an literate but not attending school.

This assertion, provides several policy contestations to global interpretations of youth that suggests a contemporary imperative in reconceptualising youth and young adulthood (Furlong, 2009; Ismail et al., 2009; Ismail et al., 2015) in a way that suits the African youth policy narrative. As Ansell (2005) aptly observed the broad construct 'young people', can be interpreted to mean either: a child – a person aged between 0-17 years of age ; an adolescent aged (10-19) years; a teenager aged (13-19) years; a young adult aged (20-24) years; or a youth – aged (15-24) years as defined by the United nations. Figure 1 expands on this global policy and age-related interpretations of youth as articulated by Ansell (2005), in order to provide further contestations associated with understanding African contextual interpretation of youth.

**Figure 1: Youth Concept and Contestations**



Sources: Ansell, 2005; Ismail et al., 2009; UNDESA, 2014

These conceptual contestations within policy discourses of age-related difference between the ‘global’ and ‘African’ meaning of youth appears to be reproduced through social markers (defined by age) and conditioning factors that explain youth freedoms of how children become youth, youth become adults and adults become elders. In a complex and uncertain world of technological advancements, the paradox of globalization suggests that the process of ‘becoming an adult’ for youths in the developing world, is indeed different in comparison to youth cohorts in the developed world who encounter less competition for jobs, education opportunities, support mechanisms, and other basic amenities (Curtain, 2001). Understanding these age-related policy contestations from a global context, then it becomes apparent that in the implementation of youth-specific policies, projects and programmes in sub-Saharan Africa, a category (aged 15-18 and 25-35/40 depending on the country-specific context) of young people may be unaccounted for in research, policy and practice. This disparity between the global youth and the African youth as captured in figure 1 could insightful in explaining protracted youth livelihoods and the social phenomenon of youth waithood in Africa. Findings from Honwana (2013) research reveal that:

Young Africans are living in *waithood* – a prolonged period of suspension between childhood and adulthood. It describes a prolonged period of suspension when young people’s access to social adulthood is delayed and denied. While their chronological age may define them as adults, they have not been able to attain social markers of adulthood: earning a living, being independent, establishing families, providing for offspring’s and becoming taxpayers. They are consigned to a liminal space in which they are neither dependent children nor autonomous adults..... Waithood involves a long process of negotiating personal identity and financial independence; it represents the contradictions of a modernity, in which young people’s expectations are simultaneously raised by the new technologies of information and communication that connect them to global cultures, and constrained by the limited prospects and opportunities in their daily lives.

Rethinking the policy ambiguity that have surrounded the interpretation of youth in the then MDGs planning era, and how the understanding of youth are reinterpreted to reflect Sub-Saharan African specificities by differing age-related constructs, will not only help channel large uncounted youth cohort capabilities towards formal sector jobs, but in the SDGs planning era, it will also address the growing challenge of out-of-school youth population, who despite their educational advancement and qualifications cannot seem to get sustainable employment (Ismail et al., 2015).

## THE GLOBAL DEMANDS FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

The global policy demands as defined by consensus, resolutions, action plans are informed by the intergovernmental organizations like the world bank, ILO, IMF, the United Nations and other affiliated agencies (Ansell, 2005; Chaaban, 2009). In contemporary youth research, the impacts of the growing youth population on a global<sup>1</sup> and regional African level<sup>2</sup>, express how the dividends of these demographics need to be explored to maximize the economic growth potentials of youth capabilities (Bloom et al., 2013). In this regard, global responses to the challenge of youth development in Africa have been based on the four “e” target that includes, education, equal opportunities, entrepreneurship and employment creation (UNECA, 2011). Other areas of the global youth development focus are enshrined in the World Action Programme for Youth for the year 2000 and beyond (WPAY). Across social history discourses of inclusion, participation, empowerment, and youth mainstreaming both in the MDGs policy framework and the contemporary post-2015 sustainable development goals (DFID-CSO Youth Working Group, 2010; Lintelo, 2012; WYC, 2014), appear to define the broad global youth development agenda. Indeed, embedded in the global philosophical frameworks of human rights and social justice, is the need for more youth capability freedoms (Selvam, 2008; Chiaperro-Martinetti and Sabadash, 2014).

The foregoing global youth development policy frameworks have been designed to put pressure on regional governing bodies for instance like the African Union, that in-turn pressure and monitor the ratification of these global policies. For instance, regional conformity that informs national ratification seeks to ensure that national youth policies (NYPs) and action plans for executing policy interventions as well as institutional bodies like specific Ministries of Youth Development (MYD), National Youth Council Parliaments (NYCPs) and National Youth Service (NYS) are established to address issues of youth inclusion, participation, empowerment and development (AU, 2010; UNFPA, 2010). This will also ensure that youths are active partners in decision making processes especially in development planning (WDR, 2006). Similarly, the mainstreaming of youth in the sustainable development goals as enshrined in the 2014 Colombo Declaration (WYC, 2014), reinforces the aphorism that indeed, youth partnership in the implementation of the global development goals will help build a peaceful, just and inclusive societies. Criticisms however surround discourses of youth inclusion, participation, empowerment and mainstreaming, because over the years, instead of creating ‘good citizens’ it has created ‘neoliberal subjects’ (Clark, 2008; Sukarieh and Tannock, 2011). For instance, recent data on the global strides made in mainstreaming youth development policy into national development frameworks reveal that by the end of 2014, 62% of the world had an operational youth policy (Table 1).

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<sup>1</sup>With approximately 1.8 billion youths aged (10-24) residing in the developing world, the dividends of either harnessing the skills and capabilities or the cost of ignoring of this growing population, has implications as to whether Africa produces vanguards – of developmental change or vandals – of societal destruction (Abbink, 2005; WDR, 2006; Luqman, 2010; UNDP, 2016)

<sup>2</sup>The African Human Development 2012 Report contends that the African Population has expanded at a staggering 2.5% average annual rate for the past 6 decades – i.e. from 186million in 1950 to 856million in 2010. It further argues that by 2050, not only would the Sub-Saharan African region population would have reached 2 billion – with 1 in 5 people in the world been African (AHDR, 2012)

<b>World</b>		<b>Existing National Youth Policy between 2013 and 2014</b>			<b>Revised National Youth Policy between 2013 and 2014</b>		
<b>Continent</b>	Total No. of Countries N	Exists in Full or as a Draft 01.2013 N and %	Exists in Full or as a Draft 04.2014 N and %	Change in 15 Months 2013-2014 N	Revised or Developed 01.2013 N and %	Revised or Developed 01.2013 N and %	Change in 15 Months 2013-2014 N
<b>Africa</b>	54	21 39%	23 43%	+2	16 30%	14 26%	-2
<b>Americas</b>	36	17 47%	22 61%	+5	14 39%	6 17%	-8
<b>Asia</b>	49	23 47%	28 57%	+5	14 19%	11 22%	-3
<b>Europe</b>	44	27 61%	35 80%	+8	4 9%	1 11%	-3
<b>Oceania</b>	15	11 73%	14 93%	+3	4 27%	1 7%	3
<b>World</b>	198	99 55%	122 62%	+22	56 28%	37 19%	-19

Source: YouthPolicyPressReport (2014:16)

The implementation of global youth policy across regions, also seeks to ensure that young people, escape poverty, illiteracy and unemployment traps that impede their agency of their capabilities to drive national development (Holmes et al, 2012; Perezniето and Harding, 2013). Youth mainstreaming in this light, which is often used as a two-fold strategy, seeks to ensure that: (1) youth perspectives are integrated in policy and project stages in various sectors, and (2) that there are specific policies, projects and/or action plans, aimed at narrowing the gap in specific areas of youth empowerment (Commonwealth, 2008). However, it is not that the global dictates of youth development do not offer best practice models – as the MDGs have offered since the 2000s and as the SDGs will offer till 2030, but most often, the contestations between the global and regional implementation gaps of global policies in developing south, are often due to poor policy infrastructure, perverted political actions, that undermine efforts towards youth development in Africa.

### **REGIONAL YOUTH POLICY: THE STATE OF THE AFRICAN YOUTH AND IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES**

The contemporary state of young people below the age of thirty (30) is that they constitute approximately 70 percent of the entire population of Africa, with approximately 200 million people within the age bracket of 15-24 years (United Nations International Youth Year Report, 2010; Azeng and Yogo, 2013). By 2050, this population is expected to have doubled with approximately one-third of the total world youth population, residing in Africa (UNECA, 2011; ILO, 2012; Cunha-Duarte et al., 2013). In Africa, though youth make up approximately 37 percent of Africa's total labour force 60 percent of this proportion are unemployed (OECD, 2011; Page, 2012). In absolute terms, while the working-age population in Africa grew by 96million, the number of available jobs was pegged at 63million in 2012 (African Economic Outlook [AEO], 2012). With approximately 600million jobs needed in the next 15years, Africa in terms of job creation appears to be lagging behind the global mandate for youth development. Consequently, with 10 to 12 million youth entrants into the African labour market every year – of which 5million are graduates, there is an urgent call to

address the Africa's poor absorptive capacity to manage the burgeoning youth population (AfDB, 2011; AEO, 2012; Filmer and Fox, 2014). Indeed with the jobless growth phenomenon in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), there appears to be growing youth class of 'educated unemployed' who are restricted by poverty traps, with limited socio-economic and political opportunities (Assad and Levison, 2013; Filmer and Fox, 2014). Cunha-Duarte et al., (2013) estimates that in Africa, there are approximately 72 percent of the youths live on less than \$2 per day. This compounds youth vulnerability to poor health and increases their susceptibility to traps of conflict and violence that informs the 'ticking time bomb' characterisation of this demographic group (Page 2012; Urdal, 2012). As several scholars argue, if the demographic dividends and capabilities of the remain underutilized, then, the intergenerational clashes and violence in the Middle East and North African (MENA) countries (Urdal, 2012), would be infinitesimal in comparison with what may occur in SSA countries. The paradox of youth development in Africa is such that, despite these robust policy frameworks, the state of youths is remain dismal. In this regard, the critical questions remain, to what extent do regional and national youth development frameworks converge with global best practices of youth development reinterpreted, and how do they capture the specifics of youth in Africa.

In the African continent, the adaptation of the global human rights policy frameworks was reinterpreted to fit the realities of the African child. This is enshrined in the Banjul Charter on Human and People's Rights and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (AU, 1986; 1990). Building on these two Charters', the 'New Partnership for Africa's Development' (NEPAD) framework articulated Africa's broad position on human rights, with specific focus on child and youth development (NEPAD, 2001; UNICEF, 2004). Reinforcing this framework and philosophical position, is the African Youth Charter (AYC) that defined the regional strategic intent and policy direction that focused on, but is not restricted to: mainstreaming of youth in the MDGS; addressing issues of social protection and skills development; the 10 priority areas as articulated by the WPAY framework. Consequently, the need for African Nation States to adapt an integrated approach that fully comprehends the complexities of youth shared experiences, was also envisaged as platform for recommending empowerment and development strategies for young people's development in the African continent (Mac-ikemenjima, 2006, 2009; UNFPA, 2010). In this regard, Lintelo (2012) argues that the state of NYPS in various African states are either shaped by sustainable mantra that 'youths are the future of tomorrow' or by a deficit narrative that 'youths are problems or agents of destruction' (Abbink, 2005; Luqman, 2010). The combination of these futuristic characterisation and problematic discourses that relegate the immediate impact young people's capabilities can have in national development, have in-turn informed the cautionary approach to youth development in Africa.

However, in attempts to address the challenges to sustainable and inclusive development in the post-2015 era, Gyimah-Brempong et al (2013) recommends that as a positive and holistic approach to youth development in Africa, policy makers need to: improve the investment climate for youth entrepreneurship to thrive; expand on rural development to boost employment opportunities; ensure an innovation-driven youth capability development model, and enhance institutional quality. Against this backdrop, the increasing realization by African governments and advocacy for youths to be central to the global development agenda (AU, 2010) has further being strengthened by policy forums like the African Development Forum (AfDF, 2006); regional declarations like the establishment of an African Youth Decade (2009-2018) , the SDGs as well as African's vision 2063 are concerned (UNECA, 2015), youths development is given priority towards advancing the African renaissance (AU, 2014).



Further analysis on the impact of regional declarations, policies and resolutions that structure youth policy in Africa suggests that in rethinking the position of youth in development research, policy and practice, certain conditions must be met. These include.

1. Development of National Youth Policies (NYPs) and National Youth Action Plans (NYAPs) as guiding principles for youth development planning
2. Harmonization of the NYPs and NAPs with fiscal budgets so that the socio-economic wellbeing of youths are catered for and in-line with the regional focus on inclusive development.
3. Establishment of political platforms like National Youth Council Parliaments (NYCPs) and exclusive ministries of youth development (MYDs) seek to ensure that youth voices are part of the development planning and policy making processes
4. Establishment of national youth services (NYS) agencies and development platforms that can provide clear pathways towards improved inclusion, participation, empowerment and mainstreaming in the political economy of development
5. Adapting a youth development index (YDI) to measure the state of youths at any given time in the national development chain (MDGs Youth Working Group, 2005; Commonwealth, 2008a, 2008b; UNFPA, 2010).

Despite positive strides made in youth mainstreaming<sup>3</sup> in regional (Sub-Saharan African) development agenda, the state of youth in African is yet improve. Further analysis on 24 selected countries as adapted from several studies (Innovations in Civic Participation[ICP], 2010; Bodley-Bond, 2013; YPPR, 2014) that evaluated the extent to which national governments in Africa have met some of the conditionality's of global youth development, it revealed that despite the growing presence of MYDs, NYPs, NYCPs and an emerging phenomenon of NYS programmes in selected SSA countries, the state of NYAPs in Africa remain dismal (see Table 2) .

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<sup>3</sup> For instance youth mainstreaming from a Nigerian perspective suggests that the aim is to: integrate relevant policy areas into programmes of relevant agencies; ensure that certain percentage of the Nigerian budget focuses on programmes and initiatives of relevant and non-governmental agencies targeted at young people, and; ensure that young people are beneficiaries of private sector-led development initiatives.

S/N	Country	Exclusive Ministry of Youth Development (MYD)	National Youth Policy (NYPs)	National Action Plans (NYAPs)	National Youth Service (NYS)	National Youth Council Parliament (NYCPs)
1	Angola	x	x	N/A	X	X
2	Benin	x	x	N/A	N/A	N/A
3	Botswana	x	x	x	N/A	X
4	Burkina Faso	x	x	N/A	X	N/A
5	Burundi	x	x	N/A	N/A	N/A
6	Cote d'Ivoire	x	N/A	N/A	X	X
7	DR Congo	x	x	N/A	N/A	X
8	Gambia	x	x	N/A	X	X
9	Ghana	N/A	x	N/A	X	X
10	Kenya	x	x	x	X	X
11	Lesotho	x	N/A	x	X	X
12	Liberia	x	x	x	X	N/A
13	Malawi	x	x	N/A	N/A	X
14	Namibia	x	x	N/A	X	X
15	Niger	x	N/A	N/A	N/A	X
16	Nigeria	x	x	x	X	X
17	Rwanda	x	x	N/A	X	N/A
18	Senegal	x	N/A	N/A	X	N/A
19	Sierra Leone	x	x	N/A	N/A	X
20	South Africa	x	x	x	X	X
21	Uganda	N/A	x	N/A	N/A	X
22	Tanzania	x	x	N/A	N/A	N/A
23	Zambia	x	x	x	X	X
24	Zimbabwe	x	x	N/A	N/A	X
	<b>Total (%)</b>	<b>22(92%)</b>	<b>20(83%)</b>	<b>7(29%)</b>	<b>14(58%)</b>	<b>17(71%)</b>

Sources: Adapted from ICP (2010, 2013); Bodley-Bond and Cronin (2013); YPPR (2014)

In reality, it can be revealed despite budgetary affirmative action towards youth-friendly policies (see Arubayi, 2015), and the ratification of global and regional, policies, programmatic and institutional developmental actions, only about a third of the 24 countries that were examined, have functioning action plans to execute already existing policy intent (Table 3). Even with countries that have ratified the aforementioned global and regional policy frameworks like Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, and Zambia, the state of youth livelihoods in terms of unemployment, poverty, lack of education, access to support and opportunity structures, remains alarming. What is often the case for countries is the developing south especially SSA countries, is that, rather than a lack of existing national youth organizations<sup>4</sup>, there appears to be an inadequate policy implementation plans, inconsistent aged-related interpretations and reinforcing perverted political will that continue to reproduce differential contestation of how youths are interpreted in the global, regional and local social spaces and what actions/programmes should be employed to alleviate their poor living conditions. This challenge creates a paradox – that despite the regional conformity to global policy dictates, and responses through increased investments in human capital development (with a youth focus) that the realities of young people in SSA continues to be plagued with a growing intergenerational disconnect between youth and society that now explain the contemporary phenomenon of youth waithood.

<sup>4</sup>YPPR (2014) defines national youth organizations as associations, councils, platforms, or bodies responsible for youth development.

## Conclusion

Whilst global youth policy demands have on the one hand suggested the need for regional governments to adapt/adopt best practice models that can inspire developmental change and improve the living conditions of youth in Africa, the responsibility of projecting the how conceptual realities of youth in Africa differ from the homogenous interpretation of youth on the global level is down to the endogenous interpretations by African governments and research-led institutions that shape the youth development narrative. Indeed, this is not to downplay the nuanced global youth policy contributions and efforts made by regional governmental agencies towards adapting best-practice models of youth development, but in the current post-2015 sustainable development goals era, in order for Africa to maximize the potential and dividends of its growing youth potentials, it needs to avoid the reality of isomorphic institutional and policy mimicry that often ignore the endogenous social dynamics and characterization of the youth population in the developing SSA region. Furthermore, in order to adapt a holistic approach and meet the challenges of a plausible unaccounted youth population especially in the implementation of youth-specific policies, programmes, projects and action plans in the SDGs planning era, policy makers, researchers and governments need to be kept abreast of the conceptual differences between the global, regional, and local (African) meaning of youth development is not overlooked. This will prove insightful in challenging the social phenomenon of youth waithood by narrowing youth transition gaps that were protracted and prolonged for young people in SSA that may aid the implementation of the SDGs framework.

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