Youth in Africa: A Major Resource for Change

I.   Introduction

To define the people of a country, a common starting point is to examine their characteristics, determine what groups exist, and what are the largest groups, and the characteristics that they share. Age is a particularly important characteristic in classifying populations, and when used as criteria to define the population of any African country, the most salient fact is that the largest groups are the young. In all African countries, the median age of the population is 20 years or less- that is, that half or more of the population are under 21 years of age, and up to one fifth between 15 and 24.

Africa is a continent of young people, whose demographic structure demands a socio-political transformation. It is a continent of youth who aspire to forms of modernity-in terms of education, employment and family. But for most of them the reality is of marginalisation in rural settings in the context of a patriarchal and gerontocratic socio-political order, in which males achieve true adulthood only after marriage and economic independence, and women, usually not at all.

The experience of African youth is one of instability and uncertainty, exacerbated by war, displacement, economic crisis and the HIV/AIDS pandemic. They are part of a socio-political category that emerged from the collapse of traditional societies under the impacts of colonialism and the post-colonial mobilisation of young people for a range of power struggles in which they have often been the major victims.

Africa's young people are often frustrated by their environment. This contributes in many cases to militancy, impatience and risk-taking. Some governments, and their opponents alike, have exploited these tendencies to mobilise youth along militaristic and violent lines, for use in their own struggles. Different forms of organised religion, often of fundamentalist orientation, are also seeking to mobilise and capture the allegiance of youth.

Young people are also seeking their own alternatives. They present the vision of a social order struggling to emerge despite repression and economic hardship, and seeking to have a voice in societies whose basic structures are not conducive to listening to young voices. Nevertheless, the reality is that today's youth no longer accept or respect those structures and increasingly demand a voice of their own. African youth are numerous, energetic, and increasingly, seeking alternatives.

This can be a problem for governments who often become the targets of their frustration. Everywhere, young people are a force for social and political change, but in a demographically very young continent, such as today's Africa, they represent immense potential, as both threat and opportunity. Both those demanding change and those seeking to defend the existing order, seek to mobilise young people to their side.

This makes the vital problems of youth, their role in governance, their struggle for a livelihood, and the overwhelming threat of HIV/AIDS, key issues for governance in Africa. African Governments need to find solutions for this youthful majority of their populations, that is rapidly growing larger, poorer, more discontented, and occasionally, more militant.

The Youth Agenda adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1995 recognised the critical importance of youth to development, and the need for young people to have the opportunity to participate fully in their societies. It also called on UN Member States to formulate national youth policies.[1] But operationalising the UN Youth Agenda requires that the youth voice should be increased through meaningful representation and participation in community and political decision making bodies.

Governments and policy makers need to focus on the theme of youth and governance with three priority areas: political participation, livelihoods/employment, and HIV/AIDS; and the development and propagation of policies aimed at mainstreaming youth issues into all government ministries and programmes.

II. Background: Youth and Governance in Africa

In traditional African society, 'youth' were seen as 'children' and therefore, subordinate. This concept continues in many contemporary rural settings and influences the roles, expectations, problems and potential of youth in Africa. Young people, though a demographic majority are marginalised in terms of the modern as well as traditional governance systems.

In a continent of countries where youth are the largest group, youth and governance can hardly fail to be a key issue. In a range of countries moving at differing rates towards some measure of democracy, public participation and civic engagement and the like, it will be increasingly difficult, and counter-productive as well, to ignore this majority, or other large groups when assessing the problems and needs of governance.

The protracted political and economic crises affecting Africa for more than a generation that have left many of the continent's youth frustrated and disillusioned. They see little hope for the future through education or sustainable employment. At the same time they have little voice in governance. Most political systems condescend to young people, relegating their concerns to the margins of debate and bracketing them exclusively with such issues as school and sports.

But the challenges however, are significantly greater. The continent's protracted political and economic crises have left many young people so frustrated, disillusioned and discouraged, that they seek any change at any cost and become easy prey for mobilisation into armed groups or by extremist forces.

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[1] Divyakriti, V. "Rural Development, p.30

Others are gripped by despair and a sense that there is no future for them – at least in thir own countries – an attitude that for some contributes to a fatalistic refusal to take the trouble to protect themselves against HIV/AIDS and for others – to throw themselves into desperate, costly, and often dangerous attempts at illegal immigration to more developed, or at least, richer countries outside the continent, in search of employment.

One of the important challenges facing governance in Africa is how to mobilise the energies of the young, and how to transform governance systems so that young people feel themselves adequately represented by political systems and so able to work within those systems towards the changes they see as needed. Failure to adequately address this challenge, and the failure of African political and economic systems to provide for the young, has contributed to governance crises in a number of African countries.

Most political systems condescend to young people, sidelining and marginalising their concerns. They tend to ignore the real challenges of youth and governance, particularly as concerns listening to the views and experiences of Africa's young people and integrating them into governance processes. This leads to missing the opportunity to address or avert causes of governance crises through the active engagement of young people.

The need is to bring a set of young peoples' issues to the governance agenda and to make governance issues accessible and relevant to young people. At present, few have concrete ideas about how to address youth and governance from the perspectives of the young. This shows the need for exploratory work on the issue, to identify those perspectives and examine governance issues of particular relevance to youth, in the context of youth perspectives. This could be timely, relevant and potentially path-breaking, particularly if it provides a framework to facilitate the integration into governance processes of issues of special relevance to youth.

In any society, political energy usually emanates from a narrow segment of the population. Effective leadership from this segment can mobilise much more widely, once it identifies and takes up the key concerns of their peers. Most societies have a basic tendency towards remaining politically inactive and governments often find this preferable, as activism may be seen as a threat. But, such activism usually arises from concrete problems that impact on a particular constituency and when properly addressed can be defused and channeled along constructive lines.

Typically, a society's political energy is found mostly among the young, especially the educated and ambitious youth. If a country's leadership sees any form of political organisation that it does not control, as a potential or actual threat, it may tend to discourage it, rather than bringing it into the system, encouraging dialogue and channeling it along constructive lines. This however, may lead to ignoring real problems that left un-addressed may, and often do, contribute to future crises.

The reality is that the special challenges of Africa's development and political renewal demand a high level of political energy, which can only be found through the mobilisation of the young. If young people are provided channels to develop and express

their issues and pursue their special needs within existing systems and frameworks, they may contribute positively to the enhancement and stability of those systems. But there is a pressing need to address the challenges of youth and governance, based upon listening to the views and experiences of Africa's young people, and engaging them in examining the issues and seeking solutions.

The basic challenge is how to reform of governance systems so as to provide a voice and, better and more effective representation to young people, women and others, who may not be adequately represented; to determine ways in which this can be achieved, what such representation should comprise, and at what level.

This brings the question of whether there may be a need for special mechanisms for the representation of youth. The experiences of several countries suggests that this can be an effective means of ensuring a voice to minorities, women or other disadvantaged groups that might otherwise be marginalised, voiceless and un-represented in the disposal of matters that affect their interests.

Such mechanisms are used in various forms and countries. They may take the form of special seats for youth representatives in parliaments, local councils or other elective governance bodies. Another mechanism used, has been the lowering of the voting age, but this may not necessarily ensure the election of youth representatives to positions where they might provide an effective voice for young people.

Youth in Africa face a range of critical problems that fall into three main areas: one area is their marginalisation from governance, and thereby from the making of decisions that affect their lives. In a different context, this marginalisation also impacts on their struggle for a livelihood. And it may adversely affect their capacity to be knowledgeable about, understand, and cope with, the looming threat of HIV/AIDS.

In some cases the consultations undertaken at local and other levels in the formulation and monitoring of a country's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) might serve as a good entry point for youth voices in areas of particular concern, such as governance, livelihoods and the HIV/AIDS pandemic. PRSP is a new instrument approved by the World Bank and IMF as a framework document and basic requirement for poor country access to debt relief under the Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) Initiative, and to further concessional lending.

The PRSP is an instrument requiring consultation, broad participation and 'ownership,' with significant governance implications. For instance, a government's PRSP is supposed to guide its development investment over a three-year period. This can be an important area for the voices of youth to be heard, and the needs of youth made known.

It is widely recognised that participation plays an important role in poverty reduction and development. Consultation and participation of youth in PRSP has implications for a wider role in governance, and eventually through PRSP, an upcoming role in the New

Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) in which participation is also recognised as an important component.

Gender issues are important to governance, development and respect for human rights. Some governments therefore may need to take measures to enable the effective participation of young women. There are different ways of doing this, in some cases it might be sufficient for governments to simply enforce the provisions of their own constitutions. In others, more proactive measures might be required, such as quotas or other provisions to ensure the representation of women in governance bodies from which they might otherwise be excluded; and reform of legal systems to ensure equitable protection of the law.

An effective youth policy should include the engagement of youth, including young women, in local consultations on development and poverty reduction. Particular attention needs to be given to ensuring that PRSP consultations engage young people and enable them to put forth their own views on poverty reduction and related issues of governance and development.

Regional initiatives such as the African Union (AU) have already recognised the need for civil society or public participation to enhance public 'ownership' of these initiatives, increase their legitimacy and open ways for implementation of their programmes. This could open the way to contributions by youth organisations through such AU mechanisms as the CSO Desk of the Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa (CSSDCA) and the AU's upcoming Economic Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC), both of which are expected to emphasise civil society participation.

Key Issues

Youth and governance are key issues in Africa and the basic challenge is how to provide better and more effective representation to young people, so they can have a voice in the policies that affect them. Could this best be done through:

i. reducing the minimum age for voting;
ii. setting up special mechanisms to ensure representation and a voice in governance for young men and young women;
iii. reserving special seats in parliaments and local governance bodies for young men and young women to provide a voice to youth and integrate them into the governance process;
iv. encouraging political party youth wings to provide a voice for youth; or
v. enhanced involvement of young men and young women in the consultative processes around the PRSP in their countries.

IV. HIV/AIDS

About 29 million Africans are infected with HIV and most of them are young. Between three million and four million people are dying each year from AIDS-related diseases. The HIV/AIDS pandemic is the foremost threat to young Africans. It is imperative that they become knowledgeable about HIV/AIDS and the threat it poses, and effective means of preventing infection, so that they can respond accordingly. Effective HIV/AIDS education leading to behaviour change is the single most important agenda for institutions concerned with young people in Africa.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic is changing young Africans' perceptions of themselves and their future. The fact that so many young adults are dying is creating changed expectations among many young people. In many cases this leads to feelings of hopelessness and fatalism, seeing the HIV/AIDS pandemic as something beyond their power to change and prevent. This sense of fatalism and powerlessness, and the limited opportunities that youth perceive for employment or livelihoods, may also affect their perceptions of their future and lead them to live for the present, with less thought to preparing for what they see as an uncertain future.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic has already had taken a huge toll of youth and young adults in sub-Saharan Africa, with devastating impacts on the economies of much of the region. Africa continues to register alarming rises in the size of the affected populations, with HIV prevalence in some cases exceeding one-third of the adult population. These rises appear certain to further affect their economies and all the systems necessary to building secure and stable states, strong economies and sustainable livelihoods; and reducing poverty.

The current 'creeping famine' in Southern Africa is a tragic example of this. South African scientist, Alan Whiteside and development expert Alex de Waal, draw attention to the linkages between AIDS-related sickness in rural households and diminishing incomes and food production.[2] According to Alex de Waal, "AIDS has disabled the body politic…the worst-hit African countries have undergone a social breakdown."[3]

This social breakdown has struck a dramatic blow at, among others, youth livelihoods across southern Africa, and the economies that supported those livelihoods. It has also struck at the future of those countries, in the form for example, of some 2.5 million AIDS orphans in six countries of the sub-region, who are particularly vulnerable. [4]

Gender inequity plays an important role in the spread of the pandemic. Women and girls are disadvantaged and disempowered in host of ways that prevent them from having control of their own sexuality. This is particularly the case with girls and young women, who are often forced through various pressures into sex with older men. These are often men with some power or responsibility over them, who may in some cases, be teachers in

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[2] Economist: "Cursed Twice Over," The Economist, February 15-21, 2003, London, p60.
[3] *Ibid* p60.
[4] *Ibid.* p60.

their schools or supervisors in their workplaces. This helps to explain why the rate of HIV infection among girls is usually much higher than among boys. It also indicates some of the areas that need to be addressed by youth policies towards reducing factors underlying the rapid spread of the pandemic.

Other poverty-causing epidemics

While HIV/AIDS may be the most dramatic threat, it is far from being the only one. Malaria is also a mass killer of young Africans, with children and pregnant women among its major victims. It is endemic across most of the continent, affecting a large proportion of the population. It is also a major cause of days lost from work, contributing to low productivity and higher levels of poverty.

It is imperative that policy makers identify corrective mechanisms to address these health concerns. To achieve this, the first step is to identify and establish the link between health concerns and youth (and family) livelihoods. The impacts of health conditions on any economy varies across countries, depending on a variety of factors including the availability of the financial and infrastructural capacity to take effective action, and the political will to do so.

Key Issues

Is there a need for youth input in formulating policy to address the HIV/AIDS pandemic among African youth, and could this need best be met through"

i.   addressing gender issues that disempower young women and make them especially vulnerable to HIV/AIDS risk behaviour of others;
ii.   providing leadership roles to young people in the fight against HIV/AIDS;
iii.   peer education and influence to change young people's behaviour; and if so, what lessons are available to show how this might be done?
iv.   what other governance needs might prove effective in raising the HIV/AIDS understanding of youth and providing the leadership needed towards behavioural change?

V.   Employment and Livelihoods

Livelihoods are a key issue for African youth, perhaps the most critical after HIV/AIDS. The majority of African youth are faced a struggle for a sustainable livelihood and see little hope of finding one. For them, this is the major issue and they need the help of their governments to address it. Formal employment is increasingly unlikely to provide practical solutions. The hard fact is that the availability of jobs, has long since been outpaced by the numbers of people seeking them. In most of the continent, the largest sectors for livelihoods are those of farming, pastoralism, and the informal economy.

The majority of African youth, now and in the foreseeable future, must seek their livelihoods in the rural areas where they mostly live. Most will have to be engaged in

farming in view of the limited opportunities in other areas. However, off-farm employment, largely in the informal sector is an increasingly important means of increasing rural incomes and reducing poverty, and likely to be more so in future.

Increasing numbers of young people, especially in the urban areas, will be self-employed in the informal economy, as gaps in the availability of formal employment continue to widen in many African countries. Literacy will be an important need for them as it opens the way to learning processes with potential to increase productivity and thereby, incomes. For most youth, in Africa, there is no easy transition from school to a career, and even those who complete their schooling, often find that it has little relationship to the demands of the labour market.

Youth employment and livelihoods are closely connected to issues of education and human resource development. Youth are more likely than adults to be unemployed. Their unemployment rates exceed those of adults for various reasons, including lack of working experience. Their efforts to enter the labour market are often hindered by lack of necessary occupational skills and on the job training, which may make it less expensive for employers to hire adults with the required expertise and experience.[5]

Poverty, illiteracy and health conditions are among the major problems that must be considered in addressing questions of youth and sustainable livelihoods. Policy makers need to give priority to these issues in youth development programmes and initiatives. Poverty is linked to lack of access to resources, including land, skills, knowledge, capital and social connections; results in limited access to institutions, markets, employment and public services. Young people are the most likely to lack access to such assets, and so, are particularly vulnerable to poverty.

According to UNESCO, about 96 million young women and 57 young men are illiterate, most of them in developing countries.[6] Illiteracy rates are highest in northern and sub-Saharan Africa and south-central Asia.[7] There is also a significant gender differential - women are more likely than men to be illiterate. Education is a powerful instrument for reducing inequality in the size and distribution of income and increasing the productivity and earnings of the poor. It also offers an access route to training, which in turn is a way to better jobs with higher incomes.

Illiteracy remains a significant obstacle to livelihood expansion and poverty reduction in many African countries. Addressing it through expanded primary education and literacy training is an important part of the development equation. Universal primary education could be an important step for African governments desirous of enhancing their peoples' productivity towards accelerating economic growth. Universal primary education is costly for poor governments, but there is much to suggest that its absence may be even

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[5] Youth Employment Summit 2002: The State of Youth Employment Report, 2002 Education Development Center, Inc., p.19.
[6] UNESCO: cited in Youth Employment Summit 2002: The State of Youth Employment Report, 2002, Education Development Center INC., p22.
[7] *Ibid.* p22.

more costly in terms of lost development and poverty reduction opportunities. It is also achievable in Africa as witnessed by the example of Uganda. In 1996, Uganda introduced universal primary education as a priority goal to be achieved by the year 2000. It subsequently invested a large part of the additional resources made available through debt relief under the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative, to expand and improve primary education as part of laying the groundwork for development.[8]

Globally, policy makers have increasingly been emphasizing sustainable development in designing and implementing youth development programmes. Such programmes need to address the major socio-economic factors that hamper youth development, including poverty, illiteracy and other youth issues. They also need to build youth capacity for entrepreneurship, as youth unable to find formal employment will increasingly need to find their own livelihoods outside formal employment.

Measures may also be introduced to promote self-employment by facilitating establishment of new business through reforming institutional and legislative frameworks that may act as impediments to business startups, and addressing key needs such as access to credit and training in business skills.

Many young entrepreneurial businesses are blocked by legal/administrative/bureaucratic practices from growing and entering the mainstream economy, this needs to be addressed; A major hurdle for young entrepreneurs is lack of access to resources, credit etc., when starting out. The provision of a supportive environment through enhanced access to training and to micro-credit etc for feasible projects, is particularly important.

Policy development for sustainable youth livelihoods

Traditional youth development programmes often focus on youth as a separate development niche. But this overlooks the reality that youth livelihood systems are part of a wider diverse and complex set of economic, social and physical strategies and inherently inter-connected with their communities and the surrounding social, financial and ecological environment.

Aggregate economic conditions are the major cause of youth unemployment and therefore governments need to adopt macroeconomic policies which encourage overall economic and employment growth. This must largely take place in the private sector.
An important element of this is linked to removing the regulatory and institutional impediments to the start-up and growth of small and medium enterprises, and providing access to credit and training in business skills.

Youth employment policies therefore need to be integrated into the more general employment creation strategies of countries. They also need to be coordinated with and integrated into other policies regarding youth. An integrated youth policy can serve the

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[8] Uganda, MFPED: Uganda Poverty Status Report 2001, Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, Kampala, March 2, 2001, p.44.

needs of clearly defining areas of action, responsibilities of the different actors, and the means of coordinating their actions to achieve a common goal.

Gender perspectives are often neglected by policy makers in youth development initiatives and programmes. This ignores the fact that young women face still higher unemployment rates than young men.[9] According to ILO , out of 97 economies considered in a recent global study, 62 of them showed higher unemployment rates for females than for males.[10]

Gender equity is an important element that needs to be effectively addressed and built into the policy framework. Gender perspectives are often neglected by policy makers in youth development initiatives and programmes. This ignores the fact that young women face even higher unemployment rates than young men. According to ILO, out of 97 economies considered in a recent global study, 62 of them showed higher unemployment rates for females than for males.

Effective policy response requires fundamental shifts in approaches to the challenge of providing livelihoods for young people. For instance, through a sustainable livelihood approach, recognising and taking account of the complex nature of youth livelihood systems. This approach has four core principles that can be used to make policy more responsive to young peoples' interpretations of, and priorities for their livelihoods. The focus should be on (i) youth assets and strengths; (ii) entitlements; (iii) macro-micro linkages; and (iv) the holistic nature of livelihood systems and sustainability of poverty outcomes.[11]

Effective policy responses aimed at sustainable youth livelihoods need to take account of gender issues and the reality that gender inequities often have negative impacts on attempts to develop sustainable livelihoods. This draws attention to the need for a balanced integration of gender consciousness into sustainable development initiatives and for the integration of gender equity into the policy framework.

Consultation, participation and empowerment are critical to the formulation of effective youth policy. A key factor in policy and subsequent action, must be the empowerment of youth at the community level. Traditional youth development programmes often focus on youth in isolation as a separate development niche. But this overlooks the fact that youth livelihood systems are inherently linked to the surrounding social, financial and ecological environment and community; and comprise a diverse and complex set of economic, social and physical strategies. Policy makers need to use a sustainable livelihood approach that can help in making policy more responsive to young peoples' own interpretation of and priorities for their livelihoods, by focusing on youth assets and strengths, entitlements, macro-economic linkages; and the holistic nature of livelihood

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[9] ILO: Key Indicators of the Labour Market: www.1lo.org, cited in Youth Employment Summit 2002: The State of Youth Employment Report, 2002 Education Development Center, Inc., p.28.
[10] *Ibid.* p28.
[11] Youth Employment Summit 2002: The State of Youth Employment Report, 2002 Education Development Center, Inc., p26.

systems and sustainability of policy outcomes. Consultation at the community level has potential to provide a strategic entry point for youth input into local decisions that may impact on youth livelihoods.

The potential contribution of this might be enhanced by youth policies encouraging greater engagement of young people in policy consultations, for example in the context of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSDP) that many African countries must prepare as a prerequisite for access to debt relief and concessional lending. The PRSP could be a key strategic entry point for participatory identification of the poverty reduction and development needs of youth and their incorporation into country development programmes.

A country's PRSP serves to guide its development investment programme over a three-year period and ensure that resources made available through debt relief are used for poverty reduction activities. Youth engagement in participatory PRSPs could provide a mechanism to address a range of youth governance, health and livelihood issues with a view to seeking investment in measures to reduce youth poverty.

In future, the PRSP could also be a potential vehicle for youth input into the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). PRSP is seen as a significant source for a type of information that NEPAD will require, but may not have the infrastructure on the ground to collect. Youth input through PRSP could help draw the attention of policy makers to key matters that can contribute towards sustainable youth livelihoods and poverty reduction. For instance it might help to establish the need for a general legislative framework conducive to the development and growth of small and medium business enterprises and supportive of development of the private sector, an imperative for expansion of employment.

Effective policy responses aimed at sustainable youth livelihoods needs to take account of gender issues and the reality that gender inequities often have negative impacts on attempts to develop sustainable livelihoods. This draws attention to the need for a balanced integration of gender consciousness into sustainable development initiatives, and, for the integration of gender equity into the policy framework.[12]

Key Issues

How do current trends of education and human resource development fit the real livelihood needs of youth, and can these best be addressed through:

    i.   reform of the existing academic orientation of most primary and secondary education systems;

    ii.   increasing interest and investment towards achieving universal primary education as in the case in Uganda, Tanzania and some other developing countries affected by huge youth unemployment problems;

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[12] Youth Employment Summit 2002: The State of Youth Employment Report, 2002 Education Development Center, Inc., p46.

iii.   focusing on expanding literacy and marketable employment skills among youth; and

iv.   focusing on providing youth with skills that will better fit them for self employment in farming or the informal sector?

VI.   Conclusions

1.   Need for a youth policy

Youth are an important part of the population of any African country, usually with half or more of the population under 21 years of age, and up to two-thirds under 30. The youth, usually defined as young people between 15 and 24, are among the most dynamic sectors of the population, as well as those facing the greatest problems. They face greater problems than previous generations, in terms of finding a livelihood; in terms of dealing with the threat of the HIV/AIDS pandemic; and in terms of seeking change and a voice in governance.

Governance, unemployment, and the HIV/AIDS threat are key concerns of young people in most African countries. These are national issues that affect large sectors of the population, and that, governments need to address and resolve. They are complex issues and unlikely to be effectively resolved on an ad-hoc basis. Governments need to determine their goals for youth, and draw up their policies and plans to guide their actions in order to more effectively pursue those goals. This requires government leadership based on defined goals, policies and plans.

For African governments, youth are an important constituency, with potential to offer opportunities as well as problems. Viable youth policies, formulated with youth participation and input, can help bring the opportunities to the fore and address the crucial problems of today's youth, thus leading towards solutions, rather than crises.

Governance is a key issue, often with significant bearing on how other important issues are addressed. There is a need for policy makers need to focus on the theme of youth and governance with three priority areas: political participation, livelihoods/employment, and HIV/AIDS; and the development and propagation of policies aimed at mainstreaming youth issues into all government ministries and programmes.

This puts the vital problems of youth, their role in governance, their struggle for a livelihood, and the overwhelming threat of HIV/AIDS, among the key concerns of young Africans that need to be addressed and for which policy frameworks are needed. This youthful majority seems set to grow larger and probably poorer over the coming two decades, and needs to find solutions now.

The challenge of governance is the reform of governance systems so as to provide better and more effective representation to citizens, including young people, to determine ways in which this can be achieved, and what such representation should comprise. This has

further implications. Youth need a seat at the table in order to introduce their own input into the policies and plans to address youth issues, ranging from governance to unemployment to HIV/AIDS.

The importance of youth to development is widely recognised. Without youth, there will be little sustainable development and probably little reason for it. But, increasingly, in sub-Saharan Africa, what African youth have to look forward to, is a declining spiral of poverty and decreasing expected life span. The role of government is fundamental to effectively addressing this situation. Policies affecting youth need to changed or new ones developed to better reflect the governance and development needs of African youth.

Effectively addressing youth livelihood and employment issues requires policies that take account of issues of governance and youth and encourage the participation and consultation of youth on their livelihood perceptions and priorities. Youth views and representation in governance can make significant contributions to effective youth policy making aimed at addressing the problems that impede the development of sustainable youth livelihoods.

These include such factors as lack of access to resources, illiteracy and lack of productive skills. They also include health problems and constraints including the impacts of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, a major threat to youth livelihoods and to the economies that sustain them. Other factors undermining the development of sustainable youth livelihoods include the lack of a youth voice in governance and lack of consultation of youth by the makers of development policy.

Some of the gaps could be addressed fairly easily. For example by engaging youth representatives in consultations on their country's PRSPs. The PRSP is a critical strategic document, guiding as it does, a country's development investment planning over a three-year period. The inclusion of youth concerns in local level development planning could have potential for significant measures to address the sustainable development and employment needs of youth.

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Summary

Youth in Africa: A Major Resource for Change

Youth are an important part of the population of any African country, usually with half or more of the population under 21 years of age, and up to two-thirds under 30. But youth is often perceived differently, not only as young people between 15 and 24, but, in much of Africa, a broader group of young people who have not married and become economically independent, and are therefore not seen as full adults. These young people are often marginalised and alienated from the governance systems controlled by their elders, in which they lack a voice.

Governance is a key issue, with significant bearing on how other important issues are addressed. Governments and policy makers need to focus on youth from the perspectives of three priority areas: political participation; livelihoods and unemployment; and the HIV/AIDS pandemic; and how to mainstream these key youth issues into all government ministries and programmes.

1. The basic challenge is how to reform governance systems to provide better and more effective representation to citizens, including young people so that they can have a voice in the policies that affect them; to determine ways in which this can be achieved, and what such representation should comprise. Youth need a seat at the table in order to introduce their own input into the policies and plans to address youth issues, ranging from governance to unemployment to HIV/AIDS, and to help make those policies work. Can this best be done through:

   vi. setting up special mechanisms to ensure representation and a voice in governance for young men and young women, for example reserving special seats in parliaments and local governance bodies for young people to men and young women to provide a voice to youth and integrate them into the governance process;
   vii. reducing the minimum age for voting;
   viii. encouraging political party youth wings to provide a voice for youth;
   ix. developing and enhancing 'children's parliaments' serve to raise the concerns of young people and provide training for a fuller and more effective future political role; or
   x. enhanced involvement of young men and young women in the consultative processes around the PRSP in their countries?

2. Is there a need for youth input in formulating policy to address the HIV/AIDS pandemic among African youth, and could this need best be met through"

   v. addressing gender issues that disempower young women and make them especially vulnerable to the HIV/AIDS risk behaviour of others;
   vi. providing leadership roles to young people in the fight against HIV/AIDS;

vii. using peer education and influence to change young people's behaviour; based on existing examples;

viii. identifying and meeting other governance needs that can help in raising the HIV/AIDS understanding of youth and providing the leadership needed towards behavioural change?

3. How do current trends of employment, education and human resource development fit the real livelihood needs of youth, and can these best be addressed through:

v. reform of the existing academic orientation of most primary and secondary education systems;

vi. increasing interest and investment towards achieving universal primary education as in the case in Uganda, Tanzania and some other developing countries affected by huge youth unemployment problems;

vii. focusing on expanding literacy and marketable employment skills among youth; and

viii. focusing on providing youth with skills that will better fit them for self employment in farming or the informal sector?