YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

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Introduction

- Growing global interest in enabling youth participation in decision-making.
- First emphasized in Agenda 21 after Rio Summit. Emphasized that youth should participate actively in all decision-making processes.
- Since then, several international and UN conferences supporting meaningful youth participation in decision-making.
- Importance of youth participation recognized in the African Charter for Participation in Development and Transformation
The Charter for Popular Participation recognized popular participation as the right of the people to participate in decisions affecting their lives.

Young people constitute more than 50% of Africa’s population. Their marginalization in decision-making poses a threat to good governance and development, especially as most of Africa’s development challenges impact on youth – unemployment, HIV/AIDS, poverty, etc.

Importance of youth in Africa’s development emphasized in the African Common Position on Human and Social Development in Africa, prepared for the Copenhagen World Summit in 1995; more recently at the Conference of Ministers to adopt the African Youth Charter (May 2006)
Several definitions of youth. In several African countries, youth defined as those aged 15-30/35 years.

The recent African Youth Charter defines youth as those aged 15-30 years (May 2006).

UNICEF, WHO, UNAIDS and ILO define young people as those aged 10-24 years.

UN defines the youth as those aged 15-24 years.
Models of Participation contd.

- Youth parliaments
- Youth forums/National youth councils
- Municipal junior youth councils
- Youth research as an empowerment tool
- Participation in managing their own organizations
- Participation in conferences – national, regional and global
- Programme design, implementation and evaluation
Participation Versus Engagement – are youth merely participating in governance, or are they fully involved as partners in decision-making? See Table 1 on page 6 which distinguishes between participation and engagement in decision-making.

Youth should be given a voice in national and community programmes and projects. They should be transformed from mere participants into partners, and from beneficiaries of programmes into resources for programmes.
Youth participation in sub-Saharan Africa

- Young people should be seen as an asset to the nation not a problem (Section 3.1)
- Youth Parliaments – Mano River Union Youth Parliament; African Youth Parliament; SADC Youth Parliament.
- Youth Councils – Nigerian Youth Council; South African Youth Council
- Youth Networks – the African Regional Youth Initiative; West African Youth Network, SADC Youth Movement.
Participation contd.

- Participation in regional conferences/summits – Pan African Youth Leadership Summit; All Africa Youth summit, African Regional Youth Network on Population and Development, ECOWAS Youth Forum, etc.
- Participation in national Conferences – Nigerian examples (National Political Reform Conference, etc).
- Participation on Advisory Committees.
Participation contd. – Regional Initiatives

- ECA – organized pre-ADF IV Symposium on Youth and governance (2004), to provide platform for youth to dialogue and make contributions to policy debates.
- African Union - Ministers of Youth in May 2006 adopted the draft of the African Youth Charter.
- NEPAD – has a Youth Desk. The NEPAD e-African Youth Programme launched in May 2006 in Johannesburg.
Constraints on Youth participation

- Barriers relating to demography – age restrictions, gender barriers, cultural factors exclude youth from decision-making. Youth have limited time to develop skills and knowledge for decision-making.
- Barriers relating to economic status – lack economic means/income to participate. Youth organizations have limited funds. Youth preoccupied with academic pursuits or search for jobs.
- Time and location – participation in decision-making part-time activity for youth. Many cannot participate in day-time activities (as students or workers).
Organizational preparedness – Adults resistant, not ready to share power with the youth. Believe youth lack commitment, capacity and temperament to participate in adult decision-making processes. In Africa, women and children often barred from discussions affecting family or community.

In Africa, problems include: lack of space for participation, lack of cooperation among youth organizations, poor discipline and leadership in youth organizations.
The private sector – International Planned Parenthood Federation – youth participate as members of governing Boards.

- Mayor’s Youth Task Force, Markham, Canada
- Environment Canada – Youth Round Table
- City of Toronto – Youth Cabinet
- City of Rotterdam, Netherlands – Urban Youth Policy and Youth Council.
- Barra Mansa, Brazil, City Youth parliament.
- Malindi, Kenya, Youth Council
Policy Options – capacity needs

- Educational empowerment – formal education, education to understand how the economy works and how to influence policy.
- Economic empowerment – jobs
- Social empowerment – civics education to understand their role in society and discuss affecting youth
- Political empowerment – should be mobilized for participation in politics
- Communications skills – develop effective strategy to communicate their messages.
- Mobilization and management of funds.
Roles of different agencies

- National governments – create enabling environment to institutionalize youth participation at all levels. Develop youth policies and youth engagement strategies.
- Regional bodies: African Union, ECOWAS, SADC, etc, should develop strategies to integrate youth in decision-making.
- International agencies – continue to support capacity building for youth participation.
Roles of agencies contd.

- State/regional/local governments – should involve youth in planning service delivery at sub-national levels. Should promote youth organizations an participation

- Adult organizations – should involve youth in governing bodies and activities

- Youth organizations - youth should become more involved; should see themselves as interest groups and not as adversaries; should complement and not compete with each other to be viable
Conclusion

- African youth have only been marginally involved in decision-making, need to be more fully engaged if Africa’s development challenges are to be effectively addressed.

- Challenge is to institutionalize opportunities for youth involvement at all levels – families, communities, national and regional levels.

- The young generation should not only be prepared for the future, they have a role to play today in making decisions which affect the future of the continent.
THANK YOU