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# YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

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# OUTLINE

- Introduction
  - Models of participation in decision-making
  - Youth participation in decision-making in sub-Saharan Africa and barriers to participation.
  - Best programme practices.
  - Policy options.
  - Conclusion
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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
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## Introduction contd.

- 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)



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# Models of Youth Participation

- ❑ 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.
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# Models of Participation contd.

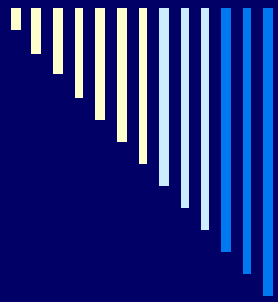
- Youth parliaments
  - Youth forums/National youth councils
  - Municipal junior youth councils
  - Youth research as an empowerment tool
  - Participation in managing their own organizations
  - Participation in conferences – national, regional and global
  - Programme design, implementation and evaluation
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## Models of participation contd.

- 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.
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## 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.





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## 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.
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## 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.
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# 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).
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## Constraints contd.

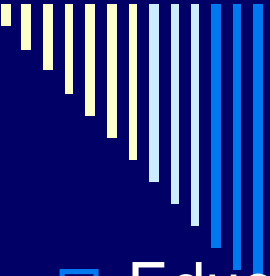
- Organizational preparedness – Adults resistant, not ready to share power with the youth. Believe youth lack commitment, capacity and temperament to participate in adult decision-making processes. In Africa, women and children often barred from discussions affecting family or community.
  - In Africa, problems include: lack of space for participation, lack of cooperation among youth organizations, poor discipline and leadership in youth organizations.
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# Best Programme Practices

- ❑ 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
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# 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 an 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.
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# 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
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## Roles of agencies contd.

- State/regional/local governments – should involve youth in planning service delivery at sub-national levels. Should promote youth organizations and 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
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# 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.
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THANK YOU

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