



## YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN AFRICA

Youth participation is one of the main governance challenges which are facing African countries. The magnitude of the problem is so important that some observers do not hesitate to call it the 'demographic bomb'. In this short note, we will try to remind the dimension of this problem, its features, some of the efforts engaged to resolve it, and ask some questions that could nourish the thinking about it.

### *Numerous Initiatives Engaged to Solve the Problem.*

Over the past decades, Africa has conducted reflections and took actions in order to address this challenge.

- At national level, several governments showed a lot of activities to improve youth participation such as the 2010 National Youth Policy in Ghana; the **Neighbour's Eye in Rwanda**; **Training camps to promote youth integrity** organized by the Ivory Coast Government with the support of UNDP, and CSOs organizations such as TI; special efforts for job creation through public works programmes or initiatives providing training and entrepreneurship **in different countries...**

- At the regional level, several Regional Economic Communities (ECOWAS, SADC,...) have launched various initiatives to solve the challenges of equity, inclusive participation and promotion of security for youth (rehabilitation and training programs

for former child and youth soldiers; awareness programs on citizenship for young in post-conflict **countries; ...).**

- At continental level, the problem was already a paramount concern in the Organization of African Unity (OAU), whose work led to the adoption of the African Youth Charter in 2006.

- After that, this issue was at the center of the decade of youth and development decided by African Heads of State in Addis Ababa on February 18, 2009. The declaration was reviewed two years later.
- On July 1st, 2011, the Heads of State and Government met in Malabo (Equatorial Guinea) in order to discuss the need to **'accelerate youth empowerment for sustainable development'**. They reinforced the Addis Ababa 2009 declaration and **promised 'creation of safe, decent and competitive employment opportunities; and reinforced the conditions for and inclusive development for a growth in an environment of peace and security'**. The link was therefore clearly established between youth participation, development, peace and security.
- The African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG), recently entered into force and which is one of the most



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recent normative frameworks, confirms this link: its objectives are, among others, to promote and enhance popular participation – including the one of the youth - and the adherence to the principle of the rule of law, the respect for the supremacy of the Constitution and constitutional order in the political arrangements of State Parties. The need to streamline the concerns and perspectives of young people into the discourse on Constitutionalism and Rule of Law in Africa cannot be overemphasised: Disregard for the constitution and non-adherence to the dictates of the law have triggered crises often leading to breakdown of law and order, disruption of institutions and, in extreme situations, undermining democratic practices which mostly put young people at the receiving end. Young people are adversely affected in most of these situations.

- More recently, the draft AU discussion paper on African Agenda 2063 confirmed that youth participation is one of the key drivers of socio-economic transformation of the continent.

### *Contrasted Results.*

These efforts are commendable but they did not produce significant results. The statistics show that the problem of participation largely affects the youth. This situation produces imbalances, exclusion and inequalities that generate **frustrations (like in the so called 'Arab Spring')** and **might threaten Africa's current positive trends** in terms of economic growth (around 5% since 1995) and future socio-economic transformation.

- As reflected in a study published by the Mo Ibrahim Foundation in November 2012, cross checked with the results of a survey conducted by AGI with the support of UNDP from February to **June 2013, around 54% of Africa's youth (who are not a homogeneous group) has a failing belief in democracy.**

- Less than ¼ of African youth surveyed think their country is a full democracy, and less than ½ are satisfied with their democracy.
- Less than ½ of the youth have confidence in the honesty of elections.
- Since 2000, youth voter turnout has declined in most countries, except Tanzania, Uganda, Malawi, Ghana, Kenya, Senegal and Cape Verde.
- In some African Countries, youth have more confidence in the military than in government.
- While a majority of youth believes that violence is not justified in politics, 75% of those surveyed do not exclude the adoption of non-conventional forms of political action (including through violence) if their socio-economic situation is not improving and whether their political voice is not heard. The highest percentages of young people sharing this position are in the countries of North Africa, Central Africa and West Africa.
- 80% of young people surveyed do not consider immigration abroad as a relevant solution, and all insist on the fact that the conditions of their social, political and



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economic integration need to be established in their respective countries and in Africa.

- A second major trend reflected by the studies is that young Africans are rather optimistic, and more interested in the economy than in freedom.

- 56% of African youth are interested in current affair. Urban youth have a higher level of interest than rural youth.
- Across a majority of countries, the economy is perceived by youth as the most important national priority, followed by freedom. This need to be linked with the challenges of unemployment, underemployment and under-utilization of skills and low labor productivity that young people are facing, and their perception that distribution of wealth are more and more unequal.

- Other trend: the median age of African leaders is 3 times the median age of the population.

- Even if there is an increasing number of young people taking leadership position across the continent, and even if legislations changes in many countries have reduced restrictions allowing young leaders (19 years of age in Uganda) to contest for leadership positions, participation in these positions and decision making remain low.

- Last main trend: Africa has a highly connected generation (radio: Much more influential than newspapers; internet: still limited by bandwidth; mobile phone: a striking rise, especially in mobile-banking; other social medias like twitter: African users younger than elsewhere).

### *What Perspectives?*

Given this situation, there is a clear need to reinforce youth participation in African countries and to further think on new democratic tools that can improve inclusivity of this major category of the population of the continent.

In fact, the problem of youth participation raises some fundamental issues that need to be reviewed by all stakeholders involved in developmental governance in Africa: What is the missing link to resolve the problem of inclusive participation of youth in African countries: education, skills, urbanization, truth in the leadership and in the policies, challenge of unemployment, money to finance action plans, health, and consideration of the importance of youth by the elders? What innovative policies should be implemented by African states to solve this challenge? What lessons can we learn from the best African experiences and those of our South partners? What should be the role of our continental instruments dedicated to the developmental governance to deal with these challenges (the African Peer Review Mechanism, NEPAD, the African Governance Architecture and its pillar the African Governance Platform, the African Peace and Security Architecture,...)? How do we deal **with the 'lost generation' from various civil wars?**

It is certainly through the promotion and strengthening of inclusive, just and equitable developmental governance and through the acceleration of regional integration that we can seriously address the challenges of youth participation. The implementation of the policies adopted to this purpose at national level must be monitored and evaluated by the existing regional



mechanisms (the African Peer Review Mechanism, the African Governance Architecture and its pillar the African Governance Platform, the African Peace and Security Architecture, Regional Economic Communities,...) in which the participation and involvement of young people must be strengthened. In the same time African youth need to be co-producer of the 2063 Agenda. This is a major condition of its ownership and for the socio-economic transformation of the continent, an inclusive and developmental growth and for Africa to benefit of its demographic dividend.

To conclude, we can confirm that AGI and its partners will continue the debate on this important issue in the coming months.

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