Youth and policy processes

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Introduction: Youth bulges, employment and insecurity

The rapid and sustained increase in the number of young people in the global south is one of today's most significant demographic trends. Around 90 percent of young people reside in developing countries (Shankar 2010). By 2030 Africa is projected to have as many youth as East Asia and by 2050 could also exceed the youth population in South Asia (Garcia and Fares, 2008). Young people make up approximately 30 percent of the total population in African countries, and this is increasing fast (Panday 2006). Growing numbers of young people entail a process of demographic change within societies; 'rejuvenation' in a literal sense. Thus, in 2005, 76 percent of the Zambian population were under 30 years of age, with those between 20 and 29 years accounting for a mere 18 percent (CSO 2007, p.12 in: Locke and Verschoor 2007).

Whereas some expert commentators are pessimistic about the prospects for economic growth and poverty reduction in Africa (e.g. Collier 2008), youth bulges are recognised by many as a window of opportunity. They are seen to potentially offer a *demographic dividend*: where a larger workforce with fewer dependents could generate strong economic growth (Fares and Garcia, 2008; Gunatilake et al, 2010). Yet, experiences to date are mixed: while in East Asia, the policy and institutional environment facilitated the harnessing of the demographic dividend to achieve strong growth, similar demographic dynamics in Latin America failed to yield better economic outcomes (Fares and Garcia, 2008).

Youth bulges are however also associated with severe levels of unemployment and youth are seen as amongst the 'most vulnerable and most powerless [groups, ed.] in labour markets' (Youth Employment Network undated, p.12) and the recent global economic crisis has hit youth hardest (Shankar 2010). The problem of youth unemployment has been particularly severe in Africa, where at 21 percent it is much higher than the world average (14.4 percent) (UNECA 2005). Moreover, young people experience disproportionately high levels of unemployment, and often experience age-based discrimination in labour markets (UN, 2005). Thus, in Sri Lanka, youth made up nearly 80 percent of all unemployed in 2006, and were almost eight times more likely to be unemployed than adults. Thailand's ratio of unemployed youth (15–24 years) to unemployed adults was 6 to 1; Indonesia's, 5.6 to 1; and the Philippines', 3.4 to 1 (Gunatilake, 2010, p.1). Also in Africa, 'young people have much higher unemployment rates, operate more in the informal economy, have lower wages, and have more precarious jobs than adults' (Keune and Monticone 2004). Ironically, while both health and educational status of African youth are better than ever (Garcia and Fares, 2008)[1] the 'educated unemployed' are now seen as a new and distinct social category (Jeffrey 2008; Jeffrey 2010).

As urbanisation processes are accelerating in much of sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, the combination of youth bulges and widespread unemployment are also often associated with insecurity, urban social unrest and political instability (Panday 2006; Urdal and Hoelscher 2009; Frederiksen 2010).[2] Thus, a UN Security Council mission to West Africa reported in 2003 that 'In every county visited, the mission heard about the problem of unemployment, particularly among young people, and how this was a perennial source of instability in West Africa'. Furthermore, a report of the UN Secretary General (S/2006/922) stressed that in Sierra Leone the problem of youth unemployment and marginalisation remained the most immediate threat to the country's stability, while President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal called youth employment a 'matter of national security'. Similarly, a Rwandan State Secretary argued that 'A lot of Rwanda's problems in the past have had to do with young people who are uneducated, unemployed, and unemployable. This meant that they were fertile ground for manipulation and for misuse by the selfish politicians that led to the 1994 genocide' (Youth Employment Network undated). Undoubtedly, the 2011 Arab Spring has reaffirmed such perspectives on the threat of large numbers of unemployed and impoverished youth to prevailing political orders.

Consequently, there is growing recognition that developmental policies must, at a minimum, cater to the needs and aspirations of youth. Thus, the UN has declared the period from 12 August 2010 – 11 August 2011 as the International Year of Youth, with as its slogan 'Our youth, our voice'. Similarly, 2008 was the African Youth Year, while the African Union declared 2009-2019 as the decade of youth development in Africa. Moreover, young people's effective engagement in policy processes is seen as a means to channel their energy, passions and frustrations in a more beneficial manner. This paper accordingly aims to assess the extent of, roles and experiences of young people's involvement in policy processes in sub-Saharan Africa. While from a Future Agriculture Consortium perspective the ultimate interest is in relation to policy processes associated specifically with the agri-food sector, such sector specific information is very limited. The paper therefore assesses young people's involvement in policy processes in sub-Saharan Africa more generally.

Definitional issues around youth are addressed in the next section, and then the paper moves on to discuss national youth policy; the issue of and dominant arguments used to promote youth involvement; and the extent and effects of youth involvement in policy processes. The paper then reflects on the ways in which policy processes are conceptualized in some dominant policy discourses in international arenas, and how this may limit the focus on some forms of youth politics. Finally a number of questions are identified that may need more foregrounding in order to enhance understanding of youth in policy processes.

Children, youth and young people

While youth is increasingly seen as a specific social category 'laden with risk and uncertainty' (UNESCO 2004, p.6), there are no internationally agreed definitions that clearly identify which people should be considered to be youth, and how they are distinguished from children and adults. A bewildering range of definitions and

working definitions are used, often organised around age but sometimes around alternative sets of culturally specific criteria. Consequently, one needs to be very cautious about such definitional intricacies when comparing studies and reports.

Where youth is defined in age based terms actual age ranges vary. For instance, the official UN definition of youth refers to people in the age bracket 15-24 years, while UNESCO defines 'young people' to be between 10-19 years old (UNESCO 2004). UNICEF identifies 'adolescents' (10-18 years), while the UN Convention on Child Protection considers all people up to the age of 18 as 'children'. Thus, someone in the 15-18 age range, can be considered a 'youth', a 'child', but also a 'young person'. The African Youth Charter promulgated in 2006 by the African Union considers that youth are people between 15 – 35 years of age. Moreover, various other definitions abound. Some countries define youth from birth while others apply the term up to the age of 40 (UNESCO 2004). Similarly, the academic literature employs a range of definitions. For instance, whereas Arunatilake and Jayawardena, 2010 (in Gunatilake et al, pp. 19-48) define youth as persons aged 15 to 29, and adults as persons aged 30 and over, Jeffrey (2009, p.2) defines 'children' as those aged 5–15, 'youth' as those aged 16–30, and use the term 'young people' to refer to children and youth collectively.

Moreover, definitions organised around the principle of age may be insensitive to culturally specific notions of youth, childhood and adulthood. Thus, Kallio and Hakli (2010) argue that 'we can not define children or childhood on the basis of age because a 'child' is not the same everywhere. Childhood may be universal as a phenomenon but the position of a child is formed in relation to culturally and geographically specific institutions, traditions and forms of family life' (Kallio and Hakli 2010, p.357).

While recognising that definitions of who counts as youth need to refer to local cultural notions and may thus be country specific, international bodies still like to assume that countries' adoption of definitions in policy is guided by age, e.g. the average age at which people are expected to play adult roles in their communities (Youth Employment Network undated). Moreover, it has been suggested that at least one common and universally shared element is that youth is a transitional concept (UNESCO 2004).

Yet, even this may require contextual nuance. A recent literature review on transitions to adulthood in developing countries (Lloyd, 2006, p.1; UN, 2005) shows that this transition should not necessarily be seen as linear, and may need to be more dynamically defined. It recognises that a young person's transition to adulthood takes place on multiple axes through 'boundary events', concerning: school/occupation[3], family/matrimony (Galland, 1996 in Calves et al, 2009; MacDonald et al, 2001) and citizenship (Lloyd, 2006). A critical observation in this respect is that the very social, matrimonial, family, residential and citizenship factors that condition an individual's passage to adult life have recently shown great fluidity. For instance, Lloyd (2006, p.2) notes that compared to the early 1990s, young people in developing countries are nowadays: entering adolescence earlier and healthier; more likely to spend their adolescence in school; more likely to delay marriage and childbearing; and more likely to have a postponed entry to the labour force. With respect to the latter, an emerging literature on young people's transition from school to work (e.g. Garcia and Fares, 2008; World Bank, 2009) notes the range and the lengthening of the duration of the period between the end of education and first paid work for young Africans. This process may take anything from one year (Côte d'Ivoire) to five years (e.g. Cameroon, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Kenya, Malawi and Zambia) or more (e.g. seven years in Mozambique - Garcia and Fares, 2008, p. xxviii).[4]

Consequently, recent studies have argued that transitions to adulthood now show greater variety between individuals (or cohorts) than ever before, with highly individualised and fuzzy trajectories, and are often partial, iterative or delayed (Calves et al., 2009). Hence, a 34-year old unemployed and unmarried man living with his parents may be seen as a 'youth', implying that cultural notions of youth become less compatible with age-based definitions. Moreover, some critiques have made the case for abandoning the life-stages notion that underpins much thinking around youth and adulthood (Johnson-Hanks 2002). In her ethnography of the Beti community in Cameroon, Johnson-Hanks shows how adulthood is negotiable and situation/domain specific, such that a young girl may be deemed an adult by her parents in one domain (e.g. finding her way around town) but simultaneously youth in another (in terms of choosing a school for secondary studies) (Johnson-Hanks 2005).

In the remainder of this paper, no further attempt is made to disentangle categories, or to come to any sort of definition. However, it is prudent to once more state the imperative of being very cautious about such definitional intricacies when comparing findings on youth engagement in policy processes from various studies and reports.

Youth in policy processes

Generally, under-age people are recognized as both objects of policy making (i.e. policy *for* children and youth), and as more or less empowered participants in civic activities and political practices (Kallio and Hakli 2010). The following sections discuss youth as an object of policy, and consider their engagement in policy processes, while a later section returns to the issue of youth politics.

Youth policy

In the last decade and a half, many governments in sub-Saharan Africa (and elsewhere in the developing and developed world) have promulgated national youth policies, set out national action plans for youth, and set up new institutions to work on 'youth issues'. For instance, the governments of Kenya, The Gambia, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania and Zambia have initiated national youth policies and action plans, while the governments of e.g. Lesotho, The Gambia, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa and Zambia have established national youth councils. Thus, Mozambique set up a National Youth Council in 1996, with the 'aim to provide

a structured orientation and harmonisation of different activities developed by youth organised in associations, and to serve as a legitimate interlocutor between youth and Government' (Commonwealth Secretariat 2010). The government of Tanzania is in the process of developing a national youth participation strategy, while Nigeria created a Youth Parliament in 2008 which is to be replicated across the 36 States and 774 Local Governments (Commonwealth Secretariat 2010). Some examples of typical youth policy goals and vision statements are presented in Box 1.

Some consider that the creation of 'youth' as a category in Africa is a post-colonial phenomenon promoted by ministries of 'Youth Sports and Culture' and youth wings of political parties, while being nowadays further underwritten by a global consumption-oriented youth culture (Frederiksen 2010, p.1078). However, it is unclear to what extent youth policies are 'home-grown' through the interactions between various domestic interest groups. It is likely that international organizations have had a role in these policymaking processes. Thus, multilateral and bilateral donor agencies have promoted certain discourses, framings and narratives regarding youth. Notably, they have identified youth as a 'specific social category' that is facing risk, uncertainty and pronounced difficulties in terms of their socio-economic, political and cultural inclusion (UNESCO 2004). Moreover, they have strongly promoted the formation of national policies, which have been presented as 'indispensable', a 'symbol of society's commitment to its young citizens' and as 'one of the highest priorities of society' as they shape the present and future of a country (UNESCO 2004, p. 35; p.6; p.5). More so, UNESCO has argued that:

> "Every country thus needs effective strategies able to help young people to make the right choices, protect them from exploitation and neglect and ensure their participation in all spheres of society. To address some of these issues and, more importantly, to take a strong stand in support of their young people, each country is urged to develop **a long-term, consensus-based, integrated and cross-sectoral youth policy** (UNESCO 2004, p.6, emphasis in original).

The African Youth Charter of the African Union created a legally binding framework for governments to develop supportive policies and programmes for young people (Panday 2006). Article 12 sets out that 'Every [sic] State Parties shall develop a comprehensive and coherent national youth policy' for subsequent enactment into law (African Union 2006).[5] The UN has published biannual World Youth Reports since 2003, and the World Development Report 2007, entitled *Development and the Next Generation*, argues that public policy can expand the perceived opportunity sets of young people who during adolescence take crucial decisions with regard to their path in life (World Bank 2007).

Youth participation in policy processes

Internationally, there is growing recognition of the importance of youth participation in decision-making, for both practical reasons and as a political right (UNESCO 2004; Youth Employment Network undated). For instance, the International Labour Organisation of the UN considers that 'Youth participation must lie at the centre of the creation of policies for youth' (Youth Employment Network undated) and the Commonwealth Secretariat considers youth participation as 'cardinal to development programming' (Commonwealth Secretariat 2010, p.7). *United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has declared that* **'Youth should be given a chance to take an active part in the decision-making of local, national and global levels'.**[6] UNESCO posits that national youth policy strategies that are effective and beneficial for youth are above all, those that empower them to actively influence and shape the political agenda. Progressive policies, on all sorts of issues (not merely those deemed 'youth issues') thus need decision-makers to work not only for, but with young people, and let their experiences inform the development of appropriate interventions and services (UNESCO 2004). This requires the creation of manifold 'spaces of participation', fostering exchange between generations, languages, cultural groups, generations and different religions (UNESCO 2004). These may take many institutional forms, including youth organizations; youth and school councils; youth forums and youth parliaments, but also refer to more one-off events and activities, such as youth hearings and workshops; volunteering; youth information services; training in youth participation in schools; participation in and use of media; and employing ICTs for information and participation purposes[7] (UNESCO 2004). More so, formalised ongoing processes which bring youth and decision-makers together are seen to have significant advantages over informal and ad-hoc consultations. The former facilitate the building of mutual trust and inspire constructive engagement for improved policy-making (Youth

Employment Network undated, p.28). One such form is the National Youth Council, which have now been set up by over a 100 UN Member States.

Since the International Youth Year in 1985, the UN General Assembly has defined youth participation as comprising four components: economic participation, relating to work and development; social participation, relating to community involvement; cultural participation, relating to the arts, cultural values and expression and finally, political participation, relating to decision-making processes. All four elements are reaffirmed in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and are central to the creation of a culture of respect for children and young people. The convention promotes the principle that they are entitled to express their views on all matters that affect them and to have those views taken seriously. Article 12 sets out participation as a procedural right – it represents the means through which they may take part in and influence processes, decisions and activities in order to achieve justice, influence outcomes, expose abuses of power and realize their rights (United Nations 2003, p.271).

Moreover, youth participation has been encouraged by a number of UN General Assembly Resolutions:

- The World Programme of Action for Youth to the year 2000 and beyond (WPAY) (A/RES/50/81) considers that the active engagement of young people themselves is central to its successful implementation and, accordingly, affirms the full and effective participation of youth in society and decision-making as one of its ten priority areas for action. This resolution asks policy makers to 'Take into account the contribution of youth in designing, implementing and evaluating national policies and plans affecting their concerns'.
- The UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/57/165 (December 2002) on Promoting Youth Employment 'Encourages Member States to prepare national reviews and action plans on youth employment and to involve youth organizations and young people in this process'.
- The Commission for Social Development Resolution 2006/15 on Youth Employment and the UN General Assembly Resolutions A/RES/60/2 (2005) and A/RES/58/133 (2003) on Policies and Programmes involving Youth have various references to youth participation in policy making (www.un.org/youth, last accessed December 2010)

The African Youth Charter[8] also sets out in article 11 that State Parties shall take measures to promote active youth participation in society, amongst others to (African Union 2006):

- Guarantee the participation of youth in parliament and other decision-making bodies in accordance with the prescribed laws;
- Facilitate the creation or strengthening of platforms for youth participation in decision-making at local, national, regional, and continental levels of governance;

- Ensure equal access to young men and young women to participate in decision-making and fulfil their civic duties.

Moreover, young people are given the right to be integrally involved in poverty reduction through their active participation in the design, implementation and evaluation of development strategies and policies (Panday 2006).

Besides participation in youth councils, several African countries have experimented with other forms of involvement. In Malawi, young people participated in governance and development processes as board members of the National Youth Council, National Aids Commission, Youth Enterprise Development Fund, Malawi Development Advisory Council and Malawi Development Fund. Zambia's Fifth National Development Plan included a chapter on Youth and Children, and this was drafted with inputs from young people and youth organizations (Commonwealth Secretariat 2010). Moreover, some African heads of state express clear support for youth involvement. For instance, Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan encouraged fellow Commonwealth officials to 'Continue making the case for our young people - their meaningful participation in decision-making' and 'to mainstream youth development in our work at every level … placing youth development at the centre of development planning and focus' (Commonwealth Secretariat 2010, p.18, 19).

This recognition of the importance of young people's engagement with policy extends to the agricultural sector. For instance, a communiqué issued at a recent workshop in Accra involving 30 young people from Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific highlights the need for the meaningful institutionalisation of young people's involvement in agricultural policy making, giving full consideration to the varying needs of young men and women and the different demands they face (CTA 2011). Already young people are engaged to some degree in consultative exercises regarding agricultural policies in sub-Saharan Africa. Thus, Zimmermann et al (2009) reviewed the policy processes around CAADP and the African Peer Review Mechanism – two key NEPAD initiatives aimed at improving the performance of agriculture – and conclude they have a good record on stakeholder participation, including youth. The governments of Ghana and Kenya for instance created national councils or commissions with considerable autonomy to manage these processes. Whilst it is true that youth (and other) groups from remote rural areas may be left out, others note the potential that a deepening of decentralisation processes can have for empowering such groups (Mokwunye 2010).

The argument for youth participation in policy processes

In this section we analyse the case that is made for youth participation in policy processes. One critical finding is that the arguments in favour of youth participation often intertwine normative and empirical arguments regarding

its beneficial effects, and it is not always easy to disentangle these, or to assess the latter's validity.

Involving young people in policymaking is seen to enhance ownership, legitimacy and durability (UNESCO 2004). A participative process of formulating national youth policy thus has the potential to identify the distinctive needs and concerns of youth and to promote youth integration into society (UNESCO 2004). Hence, the UN World Programme of Action on Youth considers that the earlier young people are provided with opportunities to participate, the greater the benefits to both themselves and the wider society (United Nations 2003). Moreover, it is argued that consulting young people and drawing on their perceptions, knowledge and ideas are essential to both the development of effective public policy and the achievement of positive outcomes (United Nations 2003, p.275). Thus, in case of information provision young people may be better able to identify appropriate communication formats and channels. Consulting young people on how public services are made available could ensure the identification of effective means to catering to their unique needs and challenges (Yeo 2008).

Another argument put forward is that young people should be seen as part of the solution to the difficulties they face, not merely a problem to be resolved by others. They are social actors with skills, capacities and willingness to bring about constructive resolutions to their own problems, drawing on a unique body of experience (United Nations 2003, p.274, 278; Youth Employment Network undated). Young people, it is suggested, can contribute a tremendous amount of energy, passion and creativity (United Nations 2003; Yeo 2008). Furthermore, it is claimed that where governments successfully engaged youth, these efforts have led to better policy formulation, implementation and evaluation (Youth Employment Network undated).

This argument is built on several premises. Firstly, it posits a strong disconnect between the life-worlds and life-experiences of adult decision-makers and youth, such that the former do not know what is best for the latter. Thus, young people have a body of experience unique to their situation, and they have views and ideas that derive from this experience (United Nations 2003; Youth Employment Network undated). However, 'much of government policy has a direct or indirect impact on young people, yet it is developed and delivered largely in ignorance of how it will affect their day-to-day lives or their present and future well-being' (United Nations 2003, p.275). Young people lack access to most of the processes through which adults can articulate their concerns. In very few countries are youth under the age of 18 given the right to vote; they lack access to media and the courts and are rarely members of trade unions or professional associations that could negotiate on their behalf (United Nations 2003, p.272).

One consequence of this assumed disconnect is that adults within both the public and private spheres will not necessarily ensure adequate representation of young people's best interests in law, policy and practice. Therefore, public policy often gives precedence to the rights and interests of parents over those of children and young people, even when the consequences of doing so may be detrimental to their welfare (United Nations 2003, p.272).

Moreover, growing societal complexity, due to immigration, mobility and greater variety of youth lifestyles has been argued to make it 'ever more difficult for those in authority to adequately understand youth'. Such arguments have also linked to demands for a more representative bureaucracy – suggesting that governments could hire young civil servants as a way to increase their understanding and input into policy-making (Yeo 2008). However, how representative such new employees would be of wider youth populations is neither clear, nor guaranteed.

More generally, youth participation is often presented as a 'citizen-making device', and in this respect, youth are considered as distinct from other (adult) groups. It is thus seen to teach (moral) responsibility, civic values, a greater understanding of human rights and encourages them to 'become active members of a democratic society' (Youth Employment Network undated, p.11) and to provide role models to other youth. Moreover, where youth organizations are involved, it is deemed important that these observe the principles of transparency, accountability, non-discrimination and mutual respect (United Nations 2003, p.283). Thus, the strategic goals of youth programmes run by the Commonwealth Secretariat include: 'To strengthen the contribution of youth in peace building, democracy and development' (Commonwealth Secretariat 2010, p.6). Moreover, involvement in political processes is seen to allow youth opportunities to develop important skills and improve self-confidence (United Nations 2003; United Nations 2005; Youth Employment Network undated, p.11). Similarly, the African Youth Charter outlines that alongside granting numerous rights, young people also have responsibilities to bear towards their families, society and the state. It deems of 'paramount importance that young people become the custodians of their own development, partake fully in citizenship duties, and contribute towards the economic development of states and Africa as a whole' (Panday 2006). Such arguments show a distinct republican (rather than liberal) notion of citizenship.

Finally, the argument is advanced that a failure to enhance youth participation in policy processes risks policy failure, crime, violence and intergenerational discord. Thus, successful youth policy is posited to depend on effective representation (Youth Employment Network undated, p.15). If 'young people's voices are not heard and the impact of public policy on their lives is not discussed in decision-making forums, their concerns [will] never reach the top of political agendas'. Moreover, 'if young people are not involved in the development of the laws, policies and programmes that affect them, even well-intentioned actions on the part of adults will often fail to protect their best interests' (United Nations 2003, p.274). However, youth participation is also portrayed as being in the interest of the rest of society: exclusion from policymaking processes and power structures can create significant tensions in society which can manifest itself in forms that represent a serious threat to the social fabric, such as crime and violence. Thus, participation is needed to counteract the 'immense potential social costs

that can be created through apathy, frustration and social exclusion of young people'. In the worst cases, a poor economic and/or social environment can foster conditions in which youth without prospects are manipulated by leaders, and are recruited or forced into armed conflicts, both within their own borders and also in neighbouring countries (Youth Employment Network undated, p.12).

The extent and effects of youth involvement in policy processes

Too often youth policy and legislation is piecemeal, lacking a comprehensive approach to the challenges faced by the younger generation (UNESCO 2004). A recent review of 41 National Action Plans on youth employment noted that some governments had created sustainable interaction mechanisms, such as youth advisory groups or a youth 'seat' in national coordinating structures that allowed for the expression of young people's views and opinions in the design and implementation of policies (Youth Employment Network undated, p.11). Yet, 'Far too often, the roles played by youth in policy processes are marginal, (Youth Employment Network undated, p.9). The review thus concluded that the majority of governments do not involve youth in the preparation of youth employment policy nor in its implementation. Indeed, it highlighted that only eight countries even mentioned the involvement of youth in their plans.

Moreover, where consultations had taken place, these were often passive, giving youth the opportunity to offer their ideas and opinions but rarely involving them further in the policy process (Youth Employment Network undated). Thus, while governments have started to open up new communication channels with young people, more accountability and transparency is needed in how their suggestions and opinions are acted upon (Yeo 2008).

In practice, youth are often not given equal standing with other stakeholders in defining policies, while very limited attempt is made to ensure their participation on a long-term basis (Youth Employment Network undated). Moreover, despite the broad recognition of the importance of active participation of young people in the process of decision-making and implementation, only

a few countries have so far made it an integral aspect of national politics (UNESCO 2004, p.16). Yet, some countries are successfully engaging youth in policy formation processes (Box 2).

Moreover, the existence of a National Youth Council (now in over 100 UN Member States) is no guarantee of adequate, effective and independent youth representation. Political linkages and financial dependence on state funding make youth councils vulnerable to interference, and being staffed with members from youth wings of ruling political parties (Youth Employment Network undated). Furthermore, resource constraints and logistical considerations often mean youth consultations have a strong urban bias, while proceedings may only be conducted in the official administrative languages of the country, for example English rather than Swahili in East Africa. Consequently, the views of rural and uneducated poor youth (and other subgroups) may not be heard. Similarly, where youth consultations use particular means such as an e-consultation (e.g. one study of 350 youths in 75 countries – Yeo 2008) this is bound to privilege the voices of particular 'e-literate' groups. Such bias may be further reinforced by the composition of youth associations involved in consultations. Indeed, too often youth movements are 'dominated by the most articulate and socially engaged young people, while the more marginalized groups are excluded. In addition, there is a danger that youth movements may replicate the approach of many adult organizations in working for disadvantaged young people rather than empowering those groups to articulate their own concerns' (United Nations 2003, p. 283).

In this respect, it may be instructive to point out that while the concept of youth posits a common denominator it simultaneously glosses over very real differences. After all, youth are not a homogeneous group. Differences in age, sex, experience, marital status, interests and preferences, family background, income and religion, amongst others, can create wide gaps between the needs, aspirations and expectations of youth even within a relatively small geographical location. The opportunities and constraints they face vary widely as well, and these particularities could be legitimately reflected in public policies (Commonwealth Secretariat 2010; Youth Employment Network undated, p.14).

Box 2. Developing a national youth policy in post-apartheid South Africa (1996-97)

- **Establishment of a National Youth Commission, charged with the elaboration of the policy and an action plan. All commission members were youth (14-35 years). It conducted sectoral workshops and focus groups to consider strategic policy areas and invited written submissions from various stakeholders and drew from a range of research conducted by other organisations.**

- **Organisation of a National Youth Summit, drawing together more than 200 delegates from major youth, political and community associations to discuss the framework and policy direction.**

- **Launching an extensive process of consultation consisting of 35 Youth Hearings in rural and urban settings all over the country and Provincial Youth Summits involving more than 1,400 people.**

- **Initiating a meeting of some 167 representatives from major youth and political organizations and government bodies to review the first draft of the national youth policy and make amendments based on their recommendations.**

- **Drawing on international experience for a holistic national youth policy.**

Source: UNESCO 2004, p.15

Even those international bodies that promote youth participation sometimes struggle to uphold their own ideals. For instance, a review of the youth programme of the Commonwealth Secretariat also noted that 'There is currently limited direct youth connectivity with CYP programme areas. Youth must be at the centre of CYP work and not just as beneficiaries' (Commonwealth Secretariat 2010, p.7). Similarly, a leader of a youth inter-faith group reported that at the 2010 United Nations Alliance of Civilizations Forum youth engagement was a focal point. Financial support for attendance was provided and a Youth Forum organized in the days leading up to the conference. The recommendations from the Youth Forum were to be read during the main plenary session, addressing the present world leaders, such as UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon, President Lula da Silva of Brazil, Prime Minister Erdogan of Turkey, who in their speeches heralded the voice of the youth. However, to the outrage of youth participants, a decision was suddenly made to cancel the youth recommendations at the end of the session. The world leaders essentially said, 'We need to listen to the voice of the youth' to blatantly ignore it only minutes later, affirming a sense among the youth that they were being patronized and disregarded (Fredericks 2010).

Young people themselves also identify barriers to participation that exist within cultures, within governments, and among young people themselves. They consider that there are few genuine opportunities for participation, that many adults harbour stereotypes of youth as apathetic and lazy and that governments and adults often do not consider them ready to contribute constructively to policy design and development (Yeo 2008).

Effective participation is often hindered by engrained attitudes to policy processes as expert driven and by institutionalised prejudice by governments and policy-makers towards youth as lacking expertise, experience, capacity or drive (Youth Employment Network undated, p.9). This problem may be particularly severe for 15–18-year-olds, who further lack an electoral franchise in most countries. Respecting the right of this younger group to be heard represents an enormous challenge to traditional attitudes in most societies (United Nations 2003), and particularly in those that are highly patriarchal or highly stratified (Youth Employment Network undated). Cultural notions that emphasise a close relationship between seniority and authority may thus militate against more egalitarian notions that often underpin the argument for youth participation in policy processes.

Moreover, when willing, decision-makers may lack knowledge and skills about how to increase involvement of young people in the institutions and decisions that affect their lives (Youth Employment Network undated). Effective youth participation requires changes in how societies perceive young people (United Nations 2005) and adults thus need to learn to work more closely in collaboration with youth to help them articulate their needs and develop strategies to enhance their well-being (United Nations 2003, p.272). In the words of one youth leader: 'until more non-youth leaders turn to the youth as equitable partners in addressing religious and cultural tension on a global scale, youth involvement will be limited to unproductive demonstrations instead of powerful movements' (Fredericks 2010).

Such barriers to meaningful participation may also be reflected in the institutional structures through which various national youth policies organize participation processes. Policies may embrace models that to varying degrees transfer control and power to youth (United Nations 2003). In practice, levels of youth engagement range from manipulation and tokenism at one end, to full-fledged youth-designed and implemented programmatic responses at the other (United Nations 2005). Levels of participation may be distinguished as follows (Youth Employment Network undated):

- Level 1 – Information providing: youth are informed of the policy and activities that have been decided on by decision-makers.
- Level 2 – Consulting, decision-maker-initiated: decision-makers decide when and on which topics youth are consulted.
- Level 3 – Consulting, youth-initiated: youth can put subjects forward, but have no decision-making powers.
- Level 4 – Shared decision-making or co-management: elders and young people share decision-making powers.
- Level 5 – Autonomy: young people take initiative and conduct projects themselves.

Moreover, governments can grant different participation statuses to youth organizations, with attendant 'stages' of involvement (Figure 1).

Efforts to include youth in decision-making must also recognize the changes occurring in the nature and structure of youth movements. Accordingly, governments and international organizations could seek to work with a broad range of the youth sub-populations, including those in formal youth organizations and those who are

Figure 1. A stage and status model of youth participation in policymaking processes	
Stage	Status
Getting a foot in the door Lobbying and campaigning for social change	Recognition
Getting into the room Partnership and networking models for successful youth participation	Partnership
Getting a permanent seas at the table Capacity building and skills development to participate effectively and to create sustainable partnerships	Participation

not. These should take into consideration emerging structural forms based on networks of collaboration and common interests. One example that seems to reverse the decline in traditional participation and civic engagement by youth is internet-based activities. Such new modes of participation may provide novel and additional opportunities for more young people to become active in decision-making and in shaping their societies (United Nations 2005, p.52).

The structures of participation are likely to have important implications for the influence that young people can wield in policy processes and in affecting their outcomes and impacts. However, evidence on these is not well documented. Thus, the UN's World Youth Report noted that there had been too little independent evaluation of youth participation and its direct impact on the young people themselves and on other elements of society including legal and policy reforms, public awareness of children's and young people's rights, community improvements, and service provision for young people (United Nations 2003, p.285). Information on basic indicators for international comparisons is not available. According to the United Nations (2005) these might include:

- The level of youth participation in local decision-making
- The number or percentage of young people who vote in national and local elections
- The level of participation in school governance
- The right to and level of freedom of association for young people

This brief, selective review comes to similar conclusions. The normative argument for the desirability of youth participation in policy processes is often mixed up with thin supportive evidence. A better understanding of the nature and effects of youth participation thus requires a much harder empirical look at the dynamics of policy processes, with specific attention to aspects such as power, politics, discourses and diversity of representation. As the next section will show, some conceptual approaches to policy process are more suited to this task than others.

Further unpacking youth policy processes

The way in which the policy process is conceptualized strongly steers the type of research questions that are asked about youth within these processes. In this respect it is useful to briefly distinguish the traditional stages model of the policy process from alternative conceptualizations.

The stages model essentially considers that the policy process is made up of a sequence or cycle of successive stages. Usually these are set-out as: agenda setting; policy formation (policy formulation and decision-making); implementation and evaluation. This model is rooted in a normative understanding of the separated nature of Western democratic institutions. It assumes a hierarchy, with a primacy of politics over, and its separation from administration (Hill and Hupe 2009). It posits the policy process as a rational and technocratic problem solving

exercise, where values are exogenous: thus, politicians decide, and the bureaucracy executes policy. Here, scientific knowledge is seen to allow politicians to make better decisions, i.e. 'truth speaks to power' (Burton 2006). It considers a quite strict separation of state and society – where the latter only provide inputs through the election of politicians but are otherwise standing at a distance from the policy process. Whilst this model has been much critique for its empirical lack of fit, the linearity and lack of explanatory potential (e.g. Howlett and Ramesh 1998; John 1998; Sabatier 2007), as a heuristic device it is widely used and is reflected in commonly held beliefs about the policy process (deLeon 1999; Hill 2009).

Yet, the stages model is not particular useful if we want to understand the contested nature of policy processes. Alternative conceptualizations of the policy process emphasise the relationship between knowledge, power and policy; processes of bargaining; the social construction of policy problems and solutions through particular narratives, framings and discourses that are furthered by particular social and state actors, actor-networks and coalitions, and the roles of ideas, interests, values and beliefs in these.

Two such approaches concern the Advocacy Coalitions Framework and a set of 'argumentative turn' analyses. Whilst having distinct epistemological positions, they both emphasise the importance of understanding interactions between state and societal actors throughout the policy process. The argumentative turn in policy studies comprises a range of analyses (e.g. Hajer, Roe, Fischer and Forrester, etc.) grounded in a constructivist epistemology. They share a concern with the role of power in policy processes; its relation to discursively produced knowledge and an outspoken normative concern with strengthening deliberative democracy. Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith use a neo-positivist epistemology. They argue that their Advocacy Coalition Framework offers an alternative view of the policy process, with a particular emphasis on explaining policy change. The ACF particularly focuses on strong interactions between coalitions of state and non-state actors grounded in particular sets of beliefs/values that shape the way in which these actors construct social problems and attendant solutions.

Such alternative conceptualizations of the policy process are better suited to address questions about the dynamic nature of 'youth' as an object of policy, and as subjects within these processes. They allow us to focus on questions such as: who is a 'youth'? Why is this defined in such different ways in different places? Why are some issues 'youth issues' and others not? What is the role of particular constellations of actors within and outside the state in these processes?

Moreover, such 'non-stagist' approaches are better able to deal with the move 'from government to governance' – as reflected in the enormous changes in and the growing complexity of governance arrangements seen over the last three decades. These involve, firstly, the growing complexity and intertwining of state, market, and voluntary arrangements. Secondly, the shift in the locus of decision-making away from central governments: upward (global or regional institutions: e.g. WTO; UNFCC; African Union; EU); downward

(decentralisation) and sideways (involvement of private and non-profit sectors in public service delivery) (Pierre and Guy Peters 2000). Thirdly, the consequent growth in the type and number of non-state actors and their varied roles in decision-making and delivery processes.

However, in the documents reviewed for this paper, in particular those relating to international organizations, it is not unusual that discussions about youth in policy processes reflect the stages model of policy processes[9], although some attention is given to the involvement of young people in lobbying, advocacy, research, etc (United Nations 2003). Take for instance some of the better documented advocacy efforts of youth groups that are part of the Youth Employment Network (YEN). YEN is a collaboration of the ILO, the UN and the World Bank that attempts to give youth employment issues more prominence in policy agendas, and for countries to commit to certain principles and become Lead Members of the network. YEN is active in many developing countries, and successfully works together with local youth organizations. Several countries have 'joined the network primarily through the lobbying work of active youth, who armed with the facts presented strong cases to senior officials in their countries, outlining existing and unmet commitments and convinced their governments of the urgency of action on youth employment' (Youth Employment Network undated, p.23). Thus, in Georgia it was an active member of the Scout Movement, in Iran and Rwanda country co-ordinators of the international civil society organisation and YEN partner, the Youth Employment Summit (YES) Campaign. In Nigeria it was largely the result of persistent lobbying by a young civil society activist (Youth Employment Network undated). Three cases of YEN in sub-Saharan Africa are presented below.

Case 1: Congo DRC

YWCA-Congo has been leading an extensive lobbying campaign since 2004. It has also partnered with a number of youth organizations to form a national coalition on youth employment which has continued to lobby the Congo DRC Government to move on its commitment as a YEN Lead Country and to develop a National Action Plan. The coalition has reached out to stakeholders via print media and radio, though seminars, through a recent survey on youth attitudes to work, and through meetings with government ministers. As a result of these interventions, youth employment has risen up the political agenda. Most recently the YEN's Core Agencies – the ILO, the UN and the World Bank's offices in Congo DRC – have come together to develop a joint proposal to support to the Ministry of Labour in developing a National Action Plan (Youth Employment Network undated, p.23).

Case 2: Ghana

The YES Ghana Network, in partnership with other Ghanaian youth and civil society organisations, has been carrying out a major advocacy campaign to alert the government of Ghana to the importance of the youth employment issue and to highlight the need for a comprehensive youth employment strategy for the country. They have urged the Government to step forward to join as a Lead Country of the YEN. This campaign has involved a series of events and meetings with youth organisations, the World Bank and the UNDP, as well as awareness raising activities with the media (Youth Employment Network undated, p.26).

Case 3: Namibia

The Government of Namibia, led by the Ministry of Youth National Service, Sport and Culture, established a National Task Force on Youth Employment in 2004. The Task Force includes representatives of the Government, international institutions, worker and employer organisations, civil society and youth groups, including the National Youth Council. It was given the task of developing Namibia's National Action Plan on youth employment. Based on the work of the Task Force, the Ministry developed a preliminary outline for the NAP in December 2005, outlining a variety of Government-supported initiatives. However, between 2004 and 2008 progress towards finalizing and implementing the NAP stalled (Youth Employment Network undated, p.30).

Each of the cases above clearly suggests the existence of actor networks. However, actual analysis of the nature, extent, means and dynamics through which policy influence was (or failed to be) established, the experiences of modes of participation and actual policy outcomes and impacts achieved is very limited.

Accordingly, 'non-stage' approaches suggest a range of questions that could be fruitfully explored to obtain a better understanding of youth in policy processes. These include:

Emergence of youth policies

- How can we explain the explosion of youth policies during the 1990s and 2000s throughout much of sub-Saharan Africa?
- How distinct are various country policies (in SSA) in terms of objectives, instruments, institutional structures and policy visions?

Impacts

- What are the achievements and failures of youth policies, with reference to stated objectives; unintended outcomes; and youth wellbeing in general?
- How successful have youth policies been in improving developmental outcomes for marginalised sub-groups within a wider youth population?
- In cases where young people have felt to have meaningfully engaged in policy processes, has this been accompanied with attitudinal changes amongst adult decision-makers about youth participation?

Structures and experiences of participation

- What structures, 'formulas' for and terms under which participation occurs have enabled high levels of youth engagement in, inputs to and where relevant, control over deliberative and decision-making processes?

- Where these have been initiated, what processes facilitated their emergence and sanction?
- Where youth participation occurs, who is it that participates, and to what extent social, economic, gender, and other profiles represent divergent and vulnerable youth populations?

Levels of a staged policy process
- Where youth organisations have been involved in the implementation of government policies, has this been a route through which influence on decision-making could be achieved? If so, why (not) and how?

Role of knowledge
- What evidence exists of young people having successfully produced new forms of knowledge that have been influential in changing youth policies?
- What evidence do we have of a posited disconnect in knowledge of youth issues amongst adults and youth themselves? Are there issues that are particularly sensitive to this?

Discourses, narratives, storylines and framings

- What narratives of youth (participation) in policy processes are used by different actors within government (from multilateral donors to local governments) and outside government? How do these compare to narratives used by sub-groups of youth themselves, a shown in their various organisations and efforts at collective action?
- How can we explain the various framings and definitions of 'youth' across countries, and within these?
- Through what kind of processes do particular framings of youth and youth issues become dominant, lodged in official policy discourses?
- Do such processes obscure other issues that could be of relevance?

Actors and actor networks

- Who are the actors that are involved in different levels of youth-related policy processes (agenda-setting; policy formulation; implementation; evaluation; etc)?
- What is the role of multilateral and bilateral international donors – and do these differ significantly in contexts of varying aid dependencies?
- Is there evidence of actor networks or advocacy coalitions that successfully engage in long-term coordination of action to influence policymaking? What roles do ideas, interests and values/beliefs play?
- Can examples be found where actor networks that involve or are led by youth organisations have achieved policy influence? What role was there for actors within the media, academia, civil society, bureaucracies and politics?
- Within national and cross-national contexts, what roles were played by policy entrepreneurs and or critical events in changing youth policies?

Other question:

- How do the intricacies of defining youth (different age-based as well as more socio-anthropological definitions) affect what aspects of political mobilisation and engagement in policy processes are made possible and (in)visible?

Youth politics outside policy processes?

Finally, questions may be asked to what extent and in what ways do particular conceptualisations of policy processes fail to engage with certain forms of youth politics that have important implications for youth well-being and possibly also for youth policies?

Theorisations of the policy process are firmly embedded in western notions of liberal democracy and modern states. Discussions of the postcolonial state have long assumed that post-independence African countries carried forward colonial institutions and practices organised around principles of the modern state and rational Weberian bureaucracies. However, there is a growing recognition that the dynamics of state formation in sub-Saharan Africa are distinct from such liberal democratic models/ideal types. One important challenge is the importance and extent of neo-patrimonialism (e.g. Chabal and Daloz 1999) as a key driver of state formation. Moreover, Frederiksen's study of the Mungiki youth group in Kenya notes the importance in Africa of alternative, non-civic forms of politics, often driven by disenfranchised youth (referred to as 'lumpen' and 'rebels') who are excluded from and opposed to formal politics (Frederiksen 2010). In this vein, Watts has noted the critical role of youth organizations in the violent politics of oil in the Niger Delta, and demonstrates that their role is certainly not limited to simply acting on adults' instructions (Watts 2003). Many other examples can be given in this respect (e.g. Richards 1996).

This raises the question how well contemporary conceptualizations of the policy process are able to capture these types of youth politics, or conversely, how notions devised to analyse these politics (for instance, 'public authority' (Lund 2006) and 'political society' (Chatterjee 2004)) relate to the former.

Whilst these certainly warrant analysis, it may however be useful to point out that these may not be the only dynamics worthy of attention, and that the analysis of policy process can still make valuable contributions to our understanding of (aspects of) state formation processes. Thus, Gould's study of a coalition of various churches, NGOs and lawyers in constitution-making processes in Zambia highlight the importance of particularly framed liberal notions of the rule of law (Gould 2006).

Finally, Kallio and Hakli's discussion of child politics raises a fundamental question. They note that what is meant by 'the political' is often left unspecified or is defined in terms of events or topics that are deemed politically significant from *an adult perspective* (Kallio and Hakli 2010). Accordingly, the suggestion is that there is a realm of politics happening in addition to, and with some linkages with, adult politics. Key conceptual issues including the meanings of 'children's politics' and 'children's political agency' remain unresolved. These authors hence argue that more work is needed to clarify the

concept of politics as it relates to children, and as emerging in the specific contexts of childhood. Could a similar argument be made for sub-groups of youth, or youth in its entirety? Some studies of youth culture in global cities certainly suggest that distinct groups of youth, such as the 'educated unemployed' (Jeffrey 2010) or 'urban loafers' in Tanzania (Weiss 2009) are engaged in producing new and distinct forms of meaning and geographies, and that this involves various class, gender, and other forms of politics. Accordingly, this raises further questions about how comparable or how distinct youth politics and youth political agency may be from adult politics.

End Notes

[1] A notable exception is Zambia where neoliberal economic during the 1990s led to a lack of employment and massive public disinvestment in education, resulting in a dramatic decline in human capital: the young in Zambia are now less-educated than older groups (World Bank 2005a).

[2] But note that Urdal and Hoelscher's study of 55 cities rejects the argument that youth bulges and unemployment are likely to lead to political and social disturbances (Urdal and Hoelscher, 2009).

[3] As for instance illustrated by a measure for transition like the duration of the period between youth's end of education and first paid work (Garcia and Fares, 2008).

[4] Moreover, significant variations occur by gender (often, young men stay in school longer, achieve higher qualifications and start working later than women), and location (urban youth start working later and achieve higher educational attainment than rural youth) (Garcia and Fares, 2008).

[5] The status of its ratification is not known to the researcher.

[6] http://social.un.org/youthyear/, accessed 29 November 2010.

[7] For instance, Tele-democracy is a Finnish internet-based channel for influencing local matters, which includes the Idea Factory. This gives local youth an opportunity to share their views with the governing authorities of their city. An idea submitted is for discussion on the Internet turned into a practical motion by a moderator and then taken to the local Youth Council, which in turn hands it over to the governing body of the locality. Source: European Commission (2001): Study on the State of Young People and National Youth Policy in Europe. Part 1 (Executive Summary) IARD, in: (UNESCO 2004), p.30.

[8] The process of drafting the Charter itself was started by the Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa upon invitation, and followed by national consultations with youth at country level, while in May 2006 the African Union convened a Youth Forum, a youth expert's meeting and a Ministers of Youth meeting as part of the review process (Panday 2006).

[9] For instance, this is reflected in a recognition that young people are active in 'Programme design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation' (United Nations 2003), p.280, or when emphasising youth involvement in setting national policy, in 'the next step' of drafting action plans, and subsequently carrying out specific projects (UNESCO 2004), p.24.

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