Youth Participation:
Concepts, Models and Experiences

The African Child Policy Forum

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The United Nations Population Fund (New York Headquarters)
220 East 42nd St.
New York, NY 10017 U.S.A.
Telephone: +1 212-297-5000
Website: www.unfpa.org

"We all benefit by having young people exposed to the 'way things are done' in a democratic society. Isn't it time... to 'tap the power of youth?'" ~ Hans Bernard

Author: Shimelis Tsegaye, The African Child Policy Forum
Editor: Antoinette Powell, The African Child Policy Forum
Designer: Yosef Ali, MDSC

PREFACE

Democratic societies are built by opening opportunities and creating structures to involve all segments of society in matters that affect them. Youth, in whatever age definition one uses, constitute a demographic majority of the world's population that cannot and should not be left out from taking part in society's affaires.

Realising meaningful youth participation in inter-generational structures for debating and taking action on Africa's development is a challenging enterprise that requires profound changes in how societies think about their youth. These changes need to be reflected in new language, in new structures and norms and in appropriate funding that welcome youth voices in the development of relevant policies and actions.

This Review of Literature is prepared by The African Child Policy Forum (ACPF) with the support of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and is undertaken in appreciation of the complexity of the concept and practise of Youth Participation. The document explores the way in which the concept of youth has evolved and the practical implications of shifting perceptions of youth and the role they play in society. It also discusses the barriers to effective youth participation and the possible ways of overcoming them. The publication boldly discusses what adults really feel and do about youth and brings to light some of the adultist sentiments and practices. It provides suggestions to promote youth participation that are sensitive to Africa's various economic, cultural and political contexts.

This Review of Literature also sets the conceptual background to two other youth-related publications by the Forum.

One of these publications, which also is a joint publication of the ACPF and UNFPA, provides information on the legal frameworks, instruments, initiatives, meetings, opportunities and programmes at the UN, global, regional and sub-regional levels on, for and with youth.

The other publication is a Directory of Youth Organizations at National, Regional, and Global levels. The Directory provides the objectives, missions, as well as the electronic and physical addresses of organizations currently working on, for and with youth at these levels.

The Directory can be found on

http://www.africanchildforum.org/whatwedo-project-youth.asp

UNFPA and the ACPF trust that this publication will provide those working with and for African youth with a further insight into the dynamics of youth organizations so that Africa gains access to and benefit from the valuable views and energy of its youth.

Etta Tadesse
UNFPA Representative to the AU and the UNECA

Assefa Bequele, PhD
Executive Director
The African Child Policy Forum

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ACRONYMS

ACPF	African Child Policy Forum, The
ADF	African Development Forum
AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
AU	African Union
CHIP	Childhood Poverty Research Centre
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ILO	International Labour Organization
UN	United Nations
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USD	United States Dollar
WHO	World Health Organization

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Youth have been making enormous contributions to the improvement of life on the planet. There is hardly any function, social, cultural or economic, where youth have not sometime filled from leaders of crusades to nation presidents, from prolific writers to media pundits. Yet the acknowledgment of their contributions to human and societal development has not been full and proper. Their contributions were not also proportionate to their demographic weight as youth have remained mostly excluded from society's important and critical socioeconomic decisions. There are also instances where youth are exploited through their labour and courage in militant and insurgent groups and as instruments of political struggle though they end up being the least benefited.

Thus, one can fairly say that attempts by youth and youth groups at participating in human development has been greeted by barriers that come in varied forms and shapes. The problem starts with the lack of a universal definition of youth and the associated subjectivities and idiosyncrasies.

On the political dimension, youth have become victims of their own cynicism about politics in spite of the fact that politics is the terrain of participation where most influential decisions are made. This cynicism has also its roots partly in the lack of youth-friendly structures and methods of work. Existing political and organizational settings are mostly replete with a culture of patronage and change resistance.

On the economic front, poverty, underemployment and unemployment have barred young people from committing their fresh energy, intellect and force to their own good as well as that of the society. According to an ILO report, halving the world youth unemployment rate would add at least US$ 2.2 trillion to global GDP, equal to around 4 per cent of the 2003 global GDP value. Furthermore, as the report points out, people who get a good start to working life are less likely to experience prolonged unemployment later. "We are wasting an important part of the energy and talent of the most educated youth generation the world has ever had", said former ILO Director-General Juan Somavia. The problem of unemployment and underemployment is compounded by

the lack of access to meaningful and education and training that is oriented to local and global employment markets. According to a study by Chigunta[1], youth unemployment affects youth from low-income backgrounds and those limited education.

Youth are plagued by problems of attitude that can be attributed to the gerontocratic and conservative adults and their patronizing sentiments and also to their own mind set about adults and old people. There are cultural norms that still favour hierarchical relationships between the old and the young. The problem of attitude of adults towards youth has extended into the realm of government operations. Most governments have not only failed to provide constructive outlets such as recreational facilities for youth, but also have proclaimed laws that keep youth from streets as a sorely important sphere of youth social participation and integration and have even taken repressive measures to the effect of detaining youth in their homes.

There is also the problem of lack of access of youth to information as an empowering tool for participation. Whatever information is available for youth is not communicated in a youth-friendly way and is not the plug- and -use type, which is suitable for youth.

The HIV and AIDS pandemic have been taking its toll of the youth population. Besides its adverse effects on the productive efficiency of youth, the costs associated with the prevention and control of the pandemic strain public budgets leaving little resources for addressing youth concerns.

Gender-based discrimination has discouraged girls and young women as an important part of the youth population from taking part in socioeconomic activities. Coupled with violence, this problem has also left them with a sense of mistrust to the mostly *androcentric* and patriarchal world order.

1 Chigunta, F. 2002. "The Socioeconomic Situation of Youth in Africa: Problems, Prospects and Options," Paper presented at the Youth Employment Summit in Alexandria , Egypt.

In a nutshell, the message we want to get across to youth in this review of literature as a way out from the existing sorry state is epitomized in the following words of a philanthropist named Barbara Taveras[2]:

> Don't believe all of the negative perceptions that are out there about youth. You, along with your families and communities can change things. You need to be part of a network of peers and adults who can work together to achieve a vision you may have... Young people are not in a 'waiting period'...waiting to be leaders, waiting to make a difference...young people matter now!"

And to adults our message is similar to that of Mary McLeod Bethune[3], an African-American educator (1875-1955): "We have a powerful potential in our youth, and we must have the courage to change old ideas and practices so that we may direct their power toward good ends."

In fact, encouraged by the growing understanding of their causes, youth are now struggling to emerge as co-operators of a new social order. Today's youth seem to no longer accept or revere the structures that exclude their voices and are increasingly demanding a voice of their own. They no longer consider the systems of adultism and gerontocracy as givens, some things beyond their control and as some things that are irreversible. And there is, on the other hand, increasing degree of awareness among adults that a youth-adult partnership is the best scenario for optimal results. Indeed, as Maureen A. Sedonaen, executive director of a youth-led organization [4] once said, "Youth involvement has moved forward. It is no longer seen as a rebellious act, the way it was a few decades ago."

2 http://www.learningtogive.org/search/quotes/Display_Quotes.asp?author_id=711&search_type=author [accessed March 26, 2006].
3 http://www.learningtogive.org/search/quotes/Display_Quotes.asp?page_num=2&subject_id=46&search_type=subject [accessed March 26, 2006].
4 http://www.whatkidscando.org/WhatsLearned/YouthInvolvement.html[accessed March 27, 2006].

> There is virtually no limit to what young people can do, no social need they cannot at least do something about. With a broad enough perspective, it's hard to think of a positive social role teenagers have not at some time filled: from leading crusades, commanding armies, advising kings – being kings – to making scientific discoveries, composing symphonies, and exposing injustices. What youth can do is limited more by social and political convention than by capacity, energy, or willingness.
>
> Dan Conrad and Diane Hedin, "School-Based Community Service: What We Know From Research and Theory."[5]

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

There are an estimated one billion young people aged 15 to 24 years old around the world today. They are both demographically significant, and an essential and dynamic part of the world's human resources. They make tremendous contributions to society at all levels as actors, players, partners and strategic catalysts.

Yet, in spite of their valuable input to human development, for centuries the contributions of youth have remained unacknowledged by societies that favour those of older people. People have been so distrustful of the youth's capability that they doubted if civilisation could continue. A formidable barrier has been created, which young people must surmount if they are to take on their responsibilities and work in partnership with adults to improve a world that is also theirs.

Alvin Toffler[6] sums up the effects of this barrier:

> *The secret message communicated to most young people today by the society around them is that they are not needed, that the society will run itself quite nicely until they - at some distant point in the future - will take over the reigns. Yet the fact is that the society is not running itself nicely...because the rest of us need all the energy, brains, imagination and talent that young people can bring to bear down on our difficulties. For society to attempt to solve its desperate problems without the full participation of even very young people is imbecile*

5 Conrad, D. and Hedin, D., 1991. "School-Based Community Service: What We Know From Research and Theory." *Phi Delta Kappan* 72, p.

6 As quoted at www.freechild.org/quotations.htm [accessed March 7, 2006].

We must break away from damaging stereotypes of youth and patronising sentiments towards them. We must utilise youth as a force behind the renewal of human society in order to benefit from young people's energy, idealism, unique perspectives and innovative ideas.

This *Review of Literature on Youth Participation* explores the way in which the concept of youth has evolved and the practical implications of shifting perceptions of them. It goes on to discuss how healthy youth participation can be facilitated, and the barriers to doing so. It aims to enrich current discourse on youth participation and to supplement existing information available to organisations about the values and aspirations of young people.

CHAPTER TWO: THE CONCEPT OF YOUTH

For centuries writers and critics have been outspoken in their views of youth. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle wrote: "Young people are in a condition like permanent intoxication, because youth is sweet and they are growing."[7]

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wondered: "How beautiful is youth! How bright it gleams with its illusions, aspirations, dreams! Book of Beginnings, Story without End, Each maid a heroine, and each man a friend!" [8]

Oscar Wilde adds, "Youth! There is nothing like youth. The middle-aged are mortgaged to Life. The old are in Life's lumber-room. But youth is the Lord of Life. Youth has a kingdom waiting for it. Every one is born a king, and most people die in exile." [9]

Recently, academic attempts to conceptualise and define youth as a special group that makes diverse socioeconomic contributions have been made. Yet, some among these recent texts have portrayed youth as deviants, criminals or simply ill-informed. Others portray them as irresponsible and subject to caprice.

The word 'adolescence' was first used by Hall in a 1904 psychology text.[10] Burt first referred to 'the young delinquent' in 1926.[11] The term 'teenagers' was not used until the 1940s when it was coined in the USA to label popular music supporters, and the concept 'youth culture' was first used by Talcott Parsons in 1942.[12]

For all their history, what is meant by these terms is not always straightforward. Webster's Dictionary (1998) defines youth as a "quality or state of being young; youthfulness; juvenility; the part of life that succeeds childhood; the period of existence preceding maturity or age;

7 As quoted at www.quotationspage.com[accessed March 7, 2006].
8 As quoted at http://en.proverbia.net/default.asp[accessed March 7, 2006].
9 Ibid.
10 Cited in Berger, K.S., 1988. *The Developing Person through the Life Span*. New York: Worth.
11 Burt, C., 1926. *The Young Delinquent*. London: London University Press.
12 Parsons, T., 1942. "Age and Sex in the Social Structure of the United States." *American* Sociological Review. 7. Pp. 604-616.

the whole early part of life, from childhood, or, sometimes, from infancy, to manhood." The suggestion is that age is the overriding measure of youthfulness. Others, like Pablo Picasso, claim "[y]outh has no age". As a definition this is perhaps too abstract as it defies any temporal boundaries.

These conflicting definitions may prompt us to ask several questions: Can we define what is meant by youth? Do we mean the same thing every time we use the term? Since the term is applied differently from country to country, depending on the specific socio-cultural, institutional, economic and political factors, this is a legitimate question.

Mudaly goes further, dismissing the idea that youth are a homogenous group and arguing that the concept is flawed because it infers there are more similarities than differences between young people.[13] The concept of youth homogeneity ignores the diversity of their experiences, levels of maturity, gender, sexuality, abilities, and cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Further, the concept overlooks the role relationships between groups of young people, and geographical location, institutions, economics and politics play in forming identity. Youth is therefore more accurately defined as a relational stage, where young people develop into unique individuals.[14] Kenway moves the conceptual discourse forward, arguing that "youth is 'a slippery concept' … When does it start and finish? … Some would say that there is a fluidity that transcends demarcation."[15] Kenway goes on to argue that there are instances in any adult life where behaviour or attitudes could be construed as 'childish' and, in the same way, young people can display remarkably adult actions or perceptions.

Many countries see youth as ending at the age when a person is given equal treatment under the law – often referred to as the 'voting age'. In many countries this happens when the young person is 18 years old. After this age, the young person is considered adult.

13 Mudaly, B., 1999. "Building Capacity in Culturally Diverse Communities to Enhance Resilience in Young People and their Families." *Youth Studies Australia*. 1 (4). P. 41.

14 Wyn, J. and White, R., 1997. *Rethinking Youth*. St. Leonards: Allen and Unwin.

15 Kenway, J., 1993. *Reinventing Youth in the National Interest*. Paper presented at Rethinking Policies for Young People: Towards a National Perspective, April 14-16, 1993. Melbourne: Youth Research Centre, University of Melbourne. P. 10.

In spite of the disparity in these views it is generally agreed that youth is the period that marks the physical, psychological and social transition into adulthood. Based on this characterization, many government policies consider youth to include people aged 13 to 25 years old.[16] The pan-African Youth Charter defines youth or young people as "every human being between the ages of 15 and 30 years." The Charter, however, makes this qualification: "Considering the transitional nature of youth that is influenced by social, economic, political, cultural and others factors, this definition does not exclude youth or young people below and above the specified age-range who may be engaged in this transition.[17]"

The United Nations General Assembly first defined youth as people between the ages of 15 and 24 in 1985 for the International Youth Year. In 1995, when the General Assembly adopted the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, it again defined youth as people aged 15-24-years-old, but acknowledged that the age range included in the term varies among different countries and societies.[18]

Traditionally, the transition from youth to adulthood was marked by indicators including marriage, beginning a job, leaving home, and becoming a parent as well as the successful participation in rites of passage. However, according to Sercombe et al, being perceived as an adult may no longer be important to many young people.[19] They may now seek to define their graduation into adulthood by engaging in adult behaviours such as substance and alcohol use, and sexual activity.

16 Wyn, J. and White, R., 1997. *Rethinking Youth*. St. Leonards: Allen and Unwin.

17 World Family Organization/African Union, 2006. Draft Pan-African Youth Charter. http://www.worldfamilyorganization.org/Africanunion/DRAFT_PanAfricanYouthCharter_en.htm[accessed July 21, 2006].

18 UNDESA, 2004. *World Youth Report 2003* [online]. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Available from: www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/wyr03.htm [accessed February 22, 2006].

19 Sercombe, H, Omaji, P, Drew, N, Cooper, T and Love, T., 2002. *Youth and the Future: Effective Youth Services for the Year 2015. A Report to the National Youth Affairs Scheme*. Hobart, Tasmania: National Youth Affairs Scheme.

Globalisation is reshaping the process of transition between life-phases and relations between generations. The changes that young people must negotiate do not occur as predictably as in the past. Defining all youth around the world according to an exact age range thus becomes ifficult.[20]

Exploring the concept of youth in a 21st century context has led some authors to believe that many of the routes into adulthood that were previously open to young people are no longer available because of social and economic changes. This leads to the period of their dependency being extended. The age of transition from youth to adulthood will thus increase as young people's capacity to achieve adult status by carrying out certain tasks or reaching goals decreases.[21]

20 Sigudhla, M.A., 2004. "Expanding the World of Possibility for Young People." On the Occasion of ADF IV Youth and Governance Symposium, October 11-15, 2004, UNECA: Addis Ababa.
21 *Ibid*.

CHAPTER THREE: CONCEPTUALIZING YOUTH IN TERMS OF THEIR ROLES WITHIN SOCIETY

The roles youth can play are as diverse as the ways in which this group is defined.

Models within developmental psychology view young as persons who are not fully formed and who will not take their place in society until some time in the future when they have developed further. In contrast to this theory, a growing number of social scientists support a view of youth as essential actors in social processes by virtue of the fact that they go to school, work, are members of families, form friendships and make choices. These researchers argue that levels of maturity are biologically determined, but that the ways in which young people's maturity is interpreted, and the actions they are allowed to take and those that are prohibited to them are determined by adults and the socio-cultural context. Studies that apply this perspective view the young as active social agents, and focus on what youth *can* do, rather than what they *cannot* or *are not allowed* to do.[22]

A similar perspective views youth as a resource. This view implies that young people are competent citizens with a right to participate and a responsibility to serve their communities. Proponents of this view want youth to build on their strengths by making a difference in ways that provide them with tangible benefits and develop healthier communities.[23]

A contrasting view sees youth as victims. Young people are assumed to be vulnerable members of society, who are too often victimised by forces beyond their control. Proponents of this view want to defend children and their rights, and protect them from deteriorating conditions.[24]

In diametric opposition to these views, many regard youth as authors and perpetrators of violence. The Roman philosopher, Seneca said,

22 Alison, J. and Prout, A., 1990. *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood*. London: Falmer.
23 Checkoway, B., 1992. *Adults as Allies*. Michigan: School of Social Work, The University of Michigan.
24 *Ibid*.

"It is the failing of youth not to be able to restrain its own violence[25]." More recently the English writer, Anthony Burgess, identified youth with violence, but felt this could be explained by their desire for invention: "Violence among young people is an aspect of their desire to create. They don't know how to use their energy creatively so they do the opposite and destroy[26]."

The view of young people as "exotic deviants"[27] has not yet been totally dispelled. In the closing years of the 20th century, Watts wrote: "[F]rom the perspectives of the major institutions of social order, youthfulness is excess; it is an implicit or incipient disorder; for society it is a 'problem' that requires handling, control, cooperation or channelling in socially approved directions."[28]

Proponents of this view condemn young people for behaving in risky, self-indulgent and anti-social ways. They identify potential perpetrators of destructive behaviours by stereotyping youth. Often the way young people dress is used to support such opinions.

Malone cites a passage in a youth and community newspaper:

> *Most gang members dress in the same manner...the uniform of some local gangs is easy to recognize. It includes white T-shirts, thin belts, baggy or saggy trousers, and a black or blue knit cap. Gang members also like particular brands of shoes, pants or shirts.*[29]

The author argues that these accounts and descriptions play a role in constructing adults' views of young people. However, they often tell us more about adults' fears and anxieties than about youth.

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25 As quoted at http://en.proverbia.net/default.asp [accessed March 7, 2006].

26 *Ibid*.

27 Watts, R., 1994. "One Damnable Simplification After Another: Beyond the Idea of Youth Culture", in Bessant, J.,Cook, S.,Coventry, G.,Maunders, D. and Wyn, J. (eds), *Rethinking Policies for Young People: Towards a National Perspective* Conference Proceedings, Melbourne: Youth Research Centre, University of Melbourne.P.25.

28 *Ibid*. p. 25.

29 Malone, K., 2002. "Street Life: Youth, Culture and Compelling Uses of Public Space." *Environment and Urbanization*. Volume 14, Number 2 (October 2002). P. 157.

Additionally, young people are considered inherently incapable of carrying certain responsibilities and duties. The English philosopher, Francis Bacon, locks youth within a set of certain social and economic functions and declares them unfit for others: “Young people are fitter to invent than to judge; fitter for execution than for counsel; and more fit for new projects than for settled business.”[30]

However, given the perpetually increasing demands for innovation, creativity and energy in this age of globalisation, it is becoming increasingly clear that the positive inputs of youth must be appreciated and properly channelled if society is to develop in a rounded way. Fruitful results are being achieved in many parts of the world through youth-adult partnerships in development.

30 As quoted at http://en.proverbia.net/default.asp [accessed March 7, 2006].

CHAPTER FOUR: DEFINING YOUTH PARTICIPATION

In an era of democratic discontent, it has become standard to expect more and better participation in all decision-making processes. Yet it is rarely clear what is meant by participation, and how the many practices defined as such should be understood.

Bishop and Davies define participation as the process of citizens taking part in policy decisions.[31] They state that participation always rests on power being shared by the governed and the government. They go on to argue that participation takes place somewhere between policy-making by administrative fiat and direct democracy. Hart elaborates on this view by referring to participation as "the process of sharing decisions which affect one's life and the life of the community in which one lives."[32]

An essential aspect of participation is that people are free to involve themselves in social and developmental processes and that the individual's involvement is active, voluntary and informed.[33]

Wilson classifies participation in two main categories. He describes the first as superficial or tokenistic participation, where a desultory effort or symbolic gesture towards youth participation is made.[34] In contrast deep participation is an umbrella term encompassing active, authentic and meaningful participation. Deep participation involves young people experiencing elements of citizenship and democracy in their everyday lives, in real and holistic situations with meaningful outcomes or actions.

More specifically, Checkoway defines youth participation as the process of involving young people in the decisions that affect their lives. For Checkoway, it includes numerous and diverse activities, from forming committees and holding meetings, to lobbying decision-makers and policy-makers.[35]

31 Bishop, P. and Davis, G., 2003. *Mapping Public Participation in Policy Choices*. Consultation Workshop Paper. Brisbane: School of Politics and Public Policy, Griffith University.

32 Hart, R., 1992. "Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship." *Innocenti Essays*. Florence: UNICEF. P. 5.

33 Commonwealth Secretariat, 2005. *Participation in the 2nd Decade of Life: What and Why?* London: Commonwealth Secretariat.

34 Wilson, S., 2000. "Schooling for Democracy." *Youth Studies Australia*. 19 (2). Pp. 25-31.

35 Checkoway, B., 1992. *Adults as Allies*. Michigan: School of Social Work, The University of Michigan.

In 1975, the American National Commission on Resources for Youth defined youth participation as enabling youth to meet genuine needs by challenging those in power in a responsible way.[36] There should be opportunities for youth to be involved in planning or decision-making for activities whose impact extends beyond the youth participants themselves. The Commission identifies other features that should be integrated within youth participation, such as provision for critical reflection on the participatory activity and the opportunity for the group involved to work towards a common goal.

Youth participation is also regarded as the process of guiding and designing micro- and macro-society by and with young persons. It is a democratic process in which young persons challenge society to bring about changes, either by formal or informal means.[37]

All these views see meaningful youth participation occurs when young people are actively involved in programme decisions, design and implementation. For young people to actively participate, they need tools and conditions that enable them to design their own world and future. Adults should be present only to support and advise them. Supporters of this view recommend that reliable adults' guidance coupled with respect in a non-judgmental and inclusive environment is essential if young people are to participate in a meaningful way.[38]

Youth participation is about creating an environment where youth work in partnership with adults with mutual respect and understanding.

Real youth participation involves recognising and nurturing the strengths, interests, and abilities of young people by providing real opportunities for youth to become involved in decisions that affect them both at the individual level and within systems that they are part of. Such participation moves beyond tokenism towards a process where youth are meaningfully involved in decisions affecting their welfare.[39] Thus it involves sharing decision-making and collaborating with adults who can serve as mentors to youth.

36 Cited in *ibid.*

37 For further information visit www.inpetto-jeugddienst.be/Engels/participation [accessed March 7, 2006].

38 McCreary Centre Society, 2002. *Why is Youth Participation Important?* Vancouver: The McCreary Centre Society.

39 *Ibid*.

In terms of spheres of participation, the UN General Assembly has defined youth participation as comprising four components: economic participation, relating to work and development; political participation, relating to local, national, regional, and international decision-making processes; social participation, relating to involvement in community activities; and cultural participation, relating to the arts, cultural values and expression.[40]

Youth participation envisaged by the pan-African Youth Charter[41] aims at creating an environment for young people to be able to actively participate in all spheres of society. It calls upon State Parties to the Charter to undertake several steps that ensure youth participation. These include:

- creating a quota system to ensure youth participation in parliament and other decision-making processes;
- creating youth focal points in government structures to ensure mainstreaming of youth issues;
- giving priority to policies and programmes including youth advocacy and peer-to-peer programmes for marginalized youth, such as out-of-school and out-of-work youth, to offer them the opportunity and motivation to re-integrate into mainstream society;
- providing access to information and education and training for young people to learn their rights and responsibilities, to be schooled in democratic processes, citizenship, decision-making, governance and leadership such that they develop the technical skills and confidence to participate in these processes; and
- providing technical and financial support to build the institutional capacity of youth organisations.

Information and communication technologies are creating a new form of youth involvement called “cyber participation” that works through cross-boundary web sites, tele- and video-conferencing, chat boards

40 UNDESA, 2004. *World Youth Report 2003* [online]. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Available from: www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/wyr03.htm [accessed December 30, 2005].

41 World Family Organization/ African Union, 2006. Draft Pan-African Youth Charter. http://www.worldfamilyorganization.org/Africanunion/DRAFT_PanAfricanYouthCharter_en.htm[accessed July 21, 2006].

and webcams, This mode of participation is providing young people with creative, open and non-hierarchical channels of participation.[42]
Cyber participation is also promoting e-democracy as it enhances participation in democratic deliberation and decision making processes. But there are political and economic challenges associated with it like access - not only access to the internet, in terms of equipment and affordable connection, but also the 'educational' dimension. This would require new, enhanced 'civics' courses that go beyond mere informatics skills and includes Internet-era communication skills to prepare more active cyber-citizens.[43]

There is a strong argument that if the problem of access is not addressed, the digital gap will percolate to political cyber-participation, and we will end-up with de facto disenfranchisement of cyber-citizens. This gap will largely coincide and likely exacerbate the gap between haves and have-nots.[44]

This new mode of participation, although not a substitute for traditional and conventional youth participation avenues, can provide opportunities for more young people to become active in decision-making and in shaping their societies.

42 World Youth Report 2005. Youth at the United Nations: World Programme of Action-Participation. United Nations.
www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/wpayparticipation.htm [accessed October 20, 2006].

43 Kyriakou D., 2004. Council of Europe Conference - The Future of Democracy in Europe.17-19 November, 2004. Highlights from speech at Plenary Session. Barcelona.

44 Ibid.

CHAPTER FIVE: BENEFITS OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Youth participation is not a single type of project. It is rather a programme strategy, or even a public attitude that encourages youth to express their opinions, to become involved, and to be part of the decision-making process at different levels.[45] Youth participation is also a right endorsed by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the pan-African Youth Charter.

But why is youth participation important? What benefits can youth, adults, communities and nations draw from the participation of youth?

a. Participation promotes resilience in youth

Service providers within governments tend to be view youth as a problem in need of solution. Emphasis is therefore placed on problem intervention rather than young people's potential. In contrast, resiliency-based approaches involve community-wide, intersectoral collaboration. They focus as much on enhancing young people's skills as on reducing risky behaviour or avoiding an undesirable outcome.[46]

This approach sees youth as more than the focus of a given problem; they are part of the solution. Youth participation promotes resilience by building on young people's strengths, including energy, enthusiasm and creativity.

Similarly, research into how resilient youth are indicates that opportunities for meaningful youth participation in problem solving, goal setting and planning are major factors in helping youth withstand the negative impacts of neglect, poverty and other problems.[47]

45 Golombek, S. (ed.), 2005. *What Works in Youth Participation: Case Studies from around the World*. Baltimore: International Youth Foundation.

46 McCreary Centre Society, 2002. *Why is Youth Participation Important?* Vancouver: The McCreary Centre Society.

47 Werner, E., 1990. "Protective Factors and Individual Resilience," in Meisels I.S. and Shonkoff, J. (eds.), *Handbook of Early Childhood Intervention*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 320-348.

b. Participation enhances young people's health

Youth participation gives young people the opportunity to develop important decision-making and problem solving skills. They are encouraged to develop meaningful relationships and are given the opportunity to improve their self-esteem. These benefits protect youth from developing reckless lifestyles that can impact adversely on their health in both the short-term and the long-term.

A study by the University of Minnesota Division of General Paediatrics and Adolescent Health shows that a sense of connectedness, through being part of the social environment provided by the family, school and the community helps promote a healthy lifestyle and protects youth from engaging in risky behaviour.[48] The research demonstrates that where youth have strong social connections, they are less likely to engage in activities such as drinking and driving, violence, early and unprotected sex, and drug use.

c. Youth participation improves programme efficiency

Research into community development and health promotion shows that people of all ages are more likely to commit to a programme when they have been involved in the its design and implementation from the outset.

In particular, youth participation can increase the efficiency of programmes and projects;[49] youth involvement in all phases of the project cycle enables those responsible for programmes and services to direct the resources that are available towards finding more successful approaches to issues affecting youth. Youth have more knowledge than older people about the issues that affect them and as such are integral to achieving effective and sustainable solutions.

48 Cited in McCreary Centre Society, 2002. *Why is Youth Participation Important?* Vancouver: The McCreary Centre Society
49 *Ibid*.

d. Participation allows unique youth perspectives in policy-making and decision-making

Although youth tend to want immediate results from decisions and actions, usually they focus on their futures and typically think in the long-term when analysing policy decisions. This long-term view can help counterbalance the short-term thinking which dominates governmental decision-making which is predominantly adult-led. Because they are typically excluded from positions of power or influence, young people's perspectives are usually those of the outsider. They are therefore free of prejudice and full of novel ideas.[50] As the American journalist Henry Louis Mencken says, "Youth, though it may lack knowledge, is certainly not devoid of intelligence; it sees through shams with sharp and terrible eyes."[51]

Given the opportunity, young people can provide contributions that are extremely beneficial in forcing organisations to look beyond the comfort zone where decisions are taken according to tested approaches. This boosts creativity and can lead to new solutions to policy problems.[52]

Youth also bring fresh energy to the issues they address, which can revitalise overworked, cynical government employees. As Francis Bacon observed: "People of age object too much, consult too long, adventure too little, repent too soon and seldom drive business home to its conclusion, but content themselves with a mediocrity of success."[53] The energy and the continuous desire to make improvements that characterise young people can help balance the complacent and unhurried approach that is so often seen in adults. They can help propel people towards a policy consensus.[54]

50 State of South Australia, 2002. *Telling the Emperor: A Guide to Youth Participation in Decision-Making*. South Australia: Papercut Media.
51 As quoted at http://www.dailycelebrations.com.htm[accessed March 7, 2006].
52 State of South Australia, 2002. *Telling the Emperor: A Guide to Youth Participation in Decision-Making*. South Australia: Papercut Media.
53 As quoted at www.dailycelebrations.com.bacon.htm [accessed March 7, 2006].
54 Kester, C., 2002. *Youth Participation in Federal Sustainability Decisions. Establishing a Youth Council on Sustainability*. Washington: Internships for Students of Engineering.

e. Youth participation has a positive impact on adults

A study by Zeldin et al concludes that young people can have powerful and positive effects on adults and organisations, but that the right conditions need to be in place for positive change to occur. According to their findings, for young people to achieve ownership of decision-making processes, they require support as well as challenges, voice, opportunity for action based on a cause, skill building, adult structure, affirmation, and a project that is relevant to them.[55]
When adults work collaboratively with young people for an extended period of time, pursuing a common goal, they too derive benefits: their general perceptions about young people and about their ability to make a valuable contribution to organisational decision-making are enhanced.

Adults also develop more confidence about working with young people and more effective working relationships; their awareness about young people's needs and youth issues is increased, and a willingness to share their knowledge and connect with the community is developed. Organisational culture changes through the process in ways that stimulate inclusivity. Organisations become more responsive to the community, and the value of young people's contribution to the organisation's mission and focus is recognised.[56]

f. Participation strengthens young people's personal development

Youth participation can improve academic achievement by increasing young people's substantive knowledge and practical skills as a result of solving real problems. It also strengthens young people's sense of social responsibility and long-term civic values. Rather than simply accepting their situation, youth participants are more likely to think critically and to actively challenge their circumstances.[57]

Unless youth are given the opportunity to work in partnership with adults to meaningfully determine the course of their lives, their personal development will be restricted. They do not mature by being passive,

55 Zeldin, S., at al., 2000. *Youth in Decision-Making: A Study on the Impacts of Youth on Adults and Organizations*. Madison, WI: National 4-H Council University of Wisconsin.

56 *Ibid*.

57 Checkoway, B. 1992. Adults as Allies. School of Social Work, the University of Michigan.

by simply observing or by being lectured about their development. As meaningful participation increases, so too does experience, competence and confidence. This in turn enables them to participate more effectively.[58] These skills provide young people with more opportunity to define their own self-worth in terms of what they can do and their capacity to influence their environment. It also enables them to demonstrate that they are capable of being responsible and caring, and of participating within society.[59]

g. Youth participation contributes to organisational and community development

Participation involves youth in activities that bring people together. It teaches them to prioritise and make decisions, and enables them to plan programmes that can contribute to building the capacity of organisations.[60] In contrast to youth who do not view themselves as part of a community, participants play roles that contribute to collective action and prepare them to facilitate change.

Youth participation also contributes to community development.[61] When young people work as tutors in schools, volunteer in hospitals, work in shelters for the homeless, rehabilitate abandoned buildings or formulate strategies for neighbourhood revitalisation, they contribute to developing the community in addition to developing themselves.

58 Rajani, R. 2001. The Participation Rights of Adolescents: A Strategic Approach. UNESCO.
59 Werner, E. 1990. "Protective Factors and Individual Resilience," in Meisels, I.S. & Shonkoff, J. (Eds.), Handbook of early childhood intervention, pp. 320-348.
60 *Ibid*.
61 *Ibid*.

CHAPTER SIX: TYPOLOGIES OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION

> *One of the worst examples of the misuse of Information and Communications Technology that I have seen was a PowerPoint presentation by some 9 year olds… They had been sponsored by a utilities company and they were little adult mouthpieces cloned from business, structured by bullet points that arrived with deadly precision from the left-hand margin. [The children] seemed moulded by the technology, dancing to the puppeteer's strings. By contrast, a genuine dance by children from Ghana to illustrate a particular issue was filled with hope and the zest of youthful promise and action. I was reminded at the time of Roger Hart's ladder of participation and non-participation[62].*
> Dr John Parry, University of Sussex. Taken from a seminar on ICT for development

Some adults assess youth participation in terms of its scope, looking at factors including the number and frequency of activities. Thus, it is common for adults to conclude that because a number of youth activities occur, and because a number of young people take part in them, youth participation is taking place. However, quantity does not measure quality. Quality participation demonstrates an effect, showing that a decision has been influenced or a desired outcome produced.[63]

It is essential to distinguish between such activities and those that are only nominally participatory to ensure that activities really do lead to positive outcomes.

In the worst of scenarios, activities involving youth are wholly influenced by adults; youth are merely passive hitch-hikers on an adult-driven bandwagon. In other cases youth are simply informed or consulted, and meaningful discussion is minimal.

There are other situations where a small proportion of youth are very active. However these activists are not usually representative of all young people. Similarly, it is often the case that that in the name of participation, "smaller, quieter voices get drowned out by the others' louder, more dominant and putatively more epistemologically legitimate [voices]."[64] This tends to perpetuate existing patterns of power and

62 Cited in Commonwealth Secretariat, 2005. *Participation in the 2nd Decade of Life: What and Why?* London: Commonwealth Secretariat. P. 19.

63 Checkoway, B., 1992. *Adults as Allies*. Michigan: School of Social Work, The University of Michigan.

64 Shacklock, G. and Smyth, J., 1997. *Conceptualizing and Capturing Voices in Drop Out Re-*

privilege. The voices of young people who are already active are promoted rather than those of young people who have potential and may be encouraged to participate more actively[65].

In sharp contrast, youth may sometimes be encouraged to become involved by committed adults and organisations that believe truly inclusive societies cannot ignore the young. In other situations they may be pushed to participate in their community's affairs by need or extreme circumstances, or by their own vision and personal motivation. In such cases youth take control of the situation themselves.

It is, therefore, important to assess who is taking part and how they are involved when considering cases of youth participation.

Arnstein's framework includes eight levels of citizen participation symbolised by a ladder.[66] Each rung represents the degree of control a citizen has over an initiative. A number of other writers have adapted Arnstein's ladder metaphor to create different models of participation and empowerment. Each use different goals, purposes and methods.

Five of these models developed respectively by Westhorp, Hart, Rocha, Shier and Rajani are particularly relevant when discussing youth participation.

6.1 Westhorp's Model of Participation identifies a six stage continuum of youth involvement:[67]

1. **Ad hoc or unstructured input** involves information being passed between young people and an organisation and its decision-makers. Examples include periodic events such as *youth weeks, speak outs*, individual discussions with staff, suggestion boxes and information sessions.
2. **Structured consultation** involves information being passed between young participants and decision-makers. Examples

search. Working paper (Students Completing Schooling Project). Adelaide: Flinders Institute for the Study of Teaching. P. 4.

65 *Ibid*.

66 Arnstein, S., 1969. "A Ladder of Citizen Participation." *Journal of the American Institute of Planners, 35*. Pp. 216-224.

67 Westhorp, G., 1987. *Planning for Youth Participation: A Resource Kit*. Adelaide: Youth Sector Training Council of South Australia.

include workshops, discussion groups, forums, focus groups, cooperation with youth organisations, surveys, and youth reference groups, which act in an advisory capacity.

3. **Influence**: Once an organisation guarantees that young people can have formal input in decision-making, some level of influence is assured. This may take place through a youth advisory group, through the representation of young people on existing decision-making structures or by appointing youth representatives to decision-making bodies.
4. **Delegation**: Young people are given responsibility for a particular task or an aspect of an organisation's work. Examples include appointing a youth spokesperson, employing young people, peer education strategies and establishing youth sub-committee structures.
5. **Negotiation**: Young people have some bargaining power and decisions should be both acceptable to them and to those with the ultimate power of decision-making. Examples include mentoring, appointing youth advocates to negotiate between adults and young people, and integrating young people into existing structures, for example by allocating a percentage of positions to be filled by young people.
6. **Control**: Young people make all crucial decisions. Examples include young people's groups with no adult involvement, central involvement of young people in planning and strategic direction setting, and adults solely occupying support roles.

This continuum does not imply that there is an optimum level of control. It simply demonstrates that a variety of options exist and that some will be more appropriate in certain situations than in others.

6.2 Hart's Ladder of Participation is probably the most widely used model of participation after Wesththorp's. There are eight levels. Hart describes the bottom three as examples of non-participation, while the upper five are ranked according to their degree of participation.[68]

1. **Manipulation** occurs when adults use young people to support causes and pretend that the causes are inspired by young people when actually it is not.

68 Hart, R., 1992. "Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship." *Innocenti Essays*. Florence: UNICEF.

2. **Decoration** occurs when young people are used to assist a cause in a relatively indirect way. Adults do not pretend that the cause is inspired by young people.
3. In the context of youth participation **tokenism** is the act of making a desultory effort or symbolic gesture towards involving young people in decision-making. Young people appear to have a voice and seem to be involved in an organisation's decision-making. They may even be involved in the organisation at some level. The interaction, however, provides young people with little or no actual power in decision-making, or choices about what they do or how they participate. Tokenism may be accidental, as adults in organisations may exercise tokenism without being aware of doing so. The convincing resemblance of tokenism to meaningful participation means that an organisation may never realise their actions are tokenistic and may, therefore, continue practices that are damaging for young people.

   Tokenism gives the impression that young people are involved in decision-making and may improve the reputation of an organisation. Young people may feel manipulated, disempowered or frustrated because their work and time is wasted. They often become involved in good faith and anticipate their input will make a difference. When that fails to happen, young people may become indifferent or suspicious, or may lose faith in their ability to affect change.[69]
4. **Assigned but informed participation** involves young people being given a specific role, and being informed about how and why they are being involved.
5. **Consulted but informed participation** occurs when young people give advice on projects or programmes that are designed and run by adults. The young people who are involved are informed about how their input will be used and the outcomes of the decisions made by adults.
6. **Adult-initiated participation** occurs where decision-making is shared between young people and adults in projects or programmes that are initiated by adults.

69 State of South Australia, 2002. *Telling the Emperor: A Guide to Youth Participation in Decision-Making*. South Australia: Papercut Media.

7. **Youth initiated and directed projects or programmes** involve adults only in a supportive role.
8. **Projects or programmes initiated by youth** and jointly directed by youth and adults enable young people to share decision-making with adults. These projects empower young people while enabling them to gain experience and learn from the expertise of adults.

Roger Hart's Ladder of Participation regards projects and programmes that are initiated by young people and involve them in decision-making in partnership with adults as a better paradigm of young people's participation. This is followed by projects and programmes that are initiated and directed by young people. This issue is somewhat controversial for many people working with and for youth. Essentially, the debate is over which of these levels of participation is actually the most meaningful.

Many believe that decision-making that involves a partnership between young people and adults is the better model. Others believe that young people are most empowered when they make decisions without the influence of adults. Adults are often still included in this process, but the level of support they provide is reduced. Ultimately, it is up those working with young people to determine which form of decision-making best suits participants' needs.

Alhough Hart's model is widely used, it does have some limitations. It is too often used as a way of measuring the quality of participation-based programmes on the incorrect assumption that participation should always aim for the eighth rung of the ladder.

There is a danger that adults will take from these models the idea that only youth-initiated community participation is valuable, and thus responsibility for planning will be delegated to youth.

The other main problem with Hart's model is that it does not take account of the context, setting and situation in which the participant is operating. Rajani's Model attempts to eliminate this limitation.

6.3 Rajani's Model of Adolescent[70] Participation brings together a number of factors that have featured in other models. His model considers four factors relating to participation; the institutional settings in which participation occurs, the geographical setting, the role or roles of the participant, and their level of participation.

Within this model, the goal of adolescent participation programmes is seen as ensuring that young people have the ability, opportunity and supportive environment necessary to participate effectively and meaningfully wherever they would like to.

The outstanding feature of Rajani's model is its clarification of the contexts in which participation takes place. It also separates the role of young people from their level of participation. This is an important distinction to make, particularly as it shifts the focus away from the project level towards that of the individual participant.

According to Rajani, adolescents can participate at different levels, from the personal to the global, and in a range of institutional settings, from within the household and school to becoming involved in municipal councils and international conferences.[71] The Internet and other virtual communities are an increasingly important space for communication for many young people.

Additionally, within these settings, young people can participate by taking on different roles. Rajani asserts that in order to promote meaningful adolescent participation, the following considerations must be taken into account:[72]

1. **Setting**
   While all settings are likely to be of some relevance to adolescents, some are likely to be more so than others**.** School, for example, may be the most significant setting for the majority of young people because they spend most of their time there. Additionally because of the nature of their relationships with teachers and fellow students, they are likely to be particularly influential there. Participation that is

70 Where adolescents are taken to be young people aged 10-19-years-old.
71 Rajani, R., 2001. *The Participation of Adolescents: A Strategic Approach*. New York: UNESCO.
72 *Ibid*.

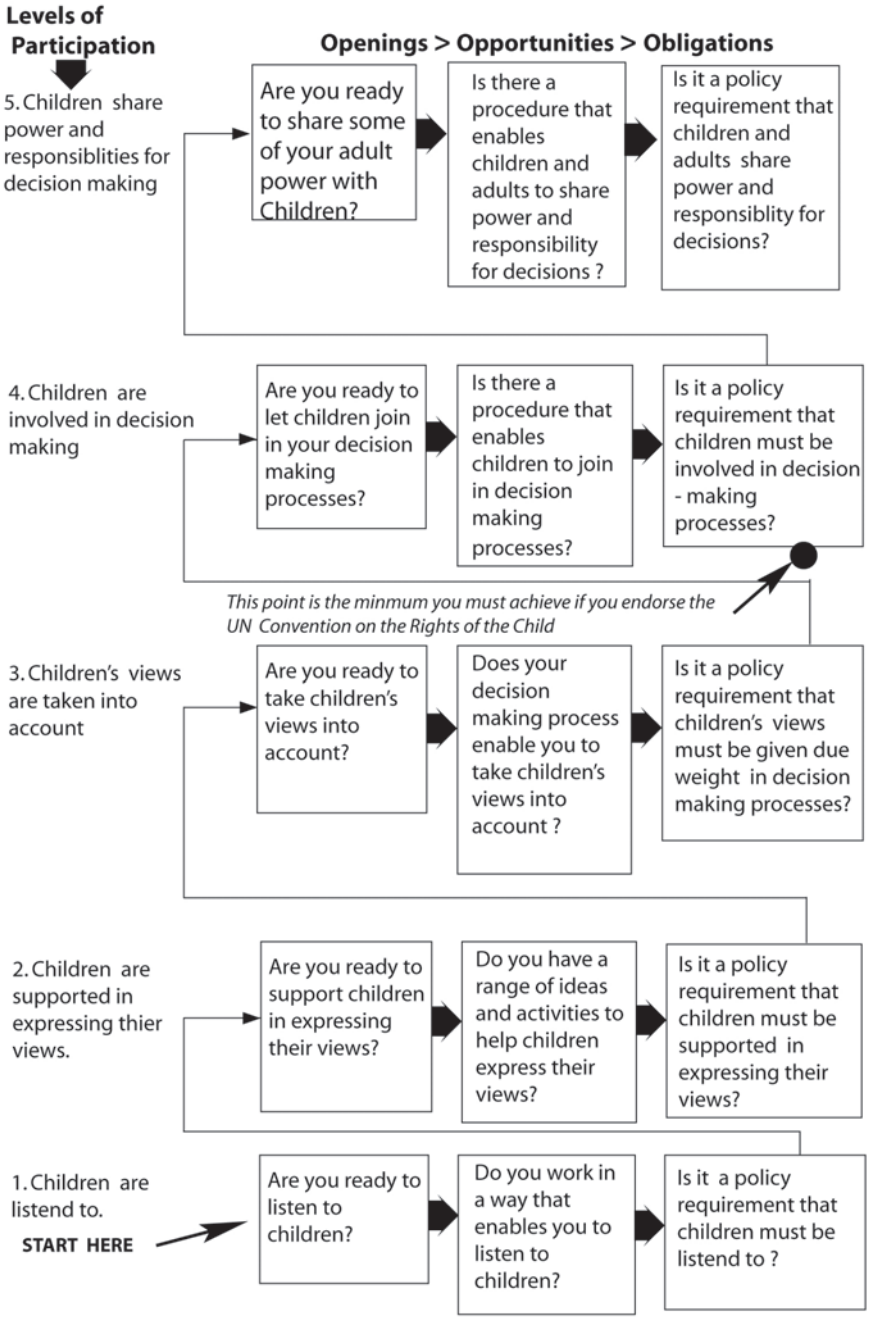
embedded in the major institutions and processes of young people's lives is more likely to have a deeper impact and to be sustainable.

2. **Frequency of participation**
   One-time events have limited value if they are not linked to ongoing processes**.** Special events, such as surveys or conferences, can provide useful opportunities for adolescent participation. Young people who have participated previously are especially appreciative of the opportunity to network, see new perspectives and learn novel strategies.
3. **Rationale for the selection of participants and transparency of the process**
   There is a tendency to focus on adolescent participation in the context of national and international conferences, and on more visible groups of adolescents such as street youth and those involved in hazardous labour practices. As a result, critical local spheres such as the household, the village primary school and the informal economy are often neglected. Common distortions include the large number of participation programmes being organised for street children while virtually none are organised for female domestic workers.
4. **Young people often thrive in different types of settings**
   Attention is often paid to adolescents in formal, recognisable settings such as schools, organised youth groups and agriculture plantations because they tend to be more familiar and accessible to those who create a space for youth to participate. At times, however, participation can be particularly meaningful in unusual settings where youth culture flourishes.
5. **Youth participation should not be limited to marginal settings**
   The right to participation in part implies the right to choose the spheres and parameters of participation. It is therefore important not to ghettoise adolescent participation by focusing on domestic, limited or alternative settings. Young people should be enabled to participate in as many and diverse settings as they desire, to the maximum extent of their competence.

6.4 Shier's Pathways to Participation offers a useful alternative to Hart's ladder of participation by introducing the role of adult commitment into the youth participation equation.[73] The model consists of five levels of participation. At each level, individuals and organisations have different degrees of commitment to the process of empowerment. The model shown in the figure[74] below clarifies this by identifying three stages of commitment at each level: openings, opportunities and obligations.

73 Shier, J., 2001. "Pathways to Participation: Openings, Opportunities and Obligations: A New Model for Enhancing Children's Participation in Decision-making in Line with Article 12.1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child." *Children and Society*. 15 (2). Pp. 107-117.

74 Ibid.


Levels of Participation
Openings > Opportunities > Obligations
5. Children share power and responsiblities for decision making
Are you ready to share some of your adult power with Children?
Is there a procedure that enables children and adults to share power and responsibility for decisions ?
Is it a policy requirement that children and adults share power and responsiblity for decisions?
4. Children are involved in decision making
Are you ready to let children join in your decision making processes?
Is there a procedure that enables children to join in decision making processes?
Is it a policy requirement that children must be involved in decision - making processes?
This point is the minmum you must achieve if you endorse the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
3. Children's views are taken into account
Are you ready to take children's views into account?
Does your decision making process enable you to take children's views into account ?
Is it a policy requirement that children's views must be given due weight in decision making processes?
2. Children are supported in expressing thier views.
Are you ready to support children in expressing their views?
Do you have a range of ideas and activities to help children express their views?
Is it a policy requirement that children must be supported in expressing their views?
1. Children are listend to.
START HERE
Are you ready to listen to children?
Do you work in a way that enables you to listen to children?
Is it a policy requirement that children must be listend to ?

6.5 Rocha's Ladder of Empowerment[75] also uses the ladder metaphor, but takes a different approach. She focuses on empowerment rather than participation. According to the model, the level of empowerment of the participant reflects the arena in which the participation takes place. This ranges from the individual through to the community level. The model is particularly useful for examining the power relationships that are involved in community participation.

This model delineates five steps of empowerment each considering four dimensions; who is empowered by the process, or its locus; what the goals of the process are, what steps are followed in the process; and what the nature of the experience is in relation to power. The steps are sequential, moving progressively from a lesser to a greater degree of empowerment. Each one represents a 'good faith effort' by organisations based on their methods, goals and area of interest.

1. **Atomistic Individual empowerment** is represented as the bottom rung on the ladder of empowerment. The locus of this form of empowerment is the individual and its goal is to increase the efficacy of the individual.
2. The individual is seen as the locus of empowerment also at this next level called **embedded individual empowerment**. Yet, greater emphasis is placed on the individual's environment at this level than at the level of atomistic individual empowerment. The emphasis is on negotiating one's environment and processes could include organisational participation as a member or as a volunteer, or involvement at a level of organisational decision-making.
3. **Mediated empowerment** includes the community and individual in its locus. It focuses on providing the knowledge and information necessary for decision-making and action to take place in partnership between the individual and community.
4. The locus for **socio-political empowerment** can be both the individual and the community. It focuses on the process of change and involves a collaborative struggle

75 Rocha, E., 1997. "A Ladder of Empowerment." *Journal of Planning Education and Research*. 17. Pp. 31-44.

to alter social, political or economic relations. It looks at the developmental processes of individuals, groups and organisations, and tries to address contradictions and oppressive elements in communities.

5. The focus of **political empowerment** is the community as its sole locus. Its focus is on political action to bring about institutional change. The emphasis is on outcomes rather than on the coping strategies individuals employ, how efficient actions are or whether there is a change within the groups involved.

Within Rocha's model, the level of empowerment changes depending on the power experiences of the participants, including the source of their power and its object or target.

CHAPTER SEVEN: BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Despite young people's current demographic significance, their full and meaningful participation in issues that affect their lives is hindered by a myriad of challenges and constraints. The following section explores some of the challenges they face.

7.1 Lack of Access to Education and Training

Although in many parts of the world youth are better educated than ever before, an estimated 96 million young women and 57 million young men are illiterate. Most of them are from developing countries. Limitations on government budgets are the primary reason that there is a lack of access to education and training.[76]

7.2 Limited Roles for Youth in Collecting Information and Research

Young people should be involved as active partners not only when information products are designed and when information is collected, but also in defining the theme of the information collection, translating material for the target group, and producing and distributing material based on the research. Participation of the target group in information collection guarantees that the product answers their expectations and needs. However, such involvement is largely missing from participatory approaches. Today youth have limited access to information, and where it is available it is often neither youth-friendly nor current. Young people are usually forced to make use of information products that have been conceived and developed by adults who employ sophisticated adult vocabulary and methods of working.

A similar situation persists in the research arena. Young people's involvement in research is usually limited to data collection, rather than analysis, write up, or action based on the findings.[77] This is at variance with the argument that participatory research should involve the different stakeholders involved in and affected by a problem, who should take

76 International Labour Organization, 2001. *Young People in Today's World*. Geneva: International Labour Organization.

77 University of Queensland, 2002. *Talking About Youth Participation - Where, When and Why?* Queensland : University of Queensland.

responsibility for carrying out research and working towards a solution. To this end, the process of finding the solution and the solution itself cannot be separated, and is most appropriately carried out by those affected by the problem.[78]

Similarly, young people who have not experienced the problem or social situation being researched are less likely to know what is really happening. This is consistent with the principles of ethnographic research which suggest that participants observe their lives in terms of their own experiences.[79]

7.3 HIV and AIDS

The HIV and AIDS pandemic poses another major challenge for young people today. It is estimated that around the world 7,000 young people are infected with HIV every day - around 2.6 million new infections a year among young people, including 1.7 million in Africa. Young people account for at least 50 percent of those who are infected after infancy and in some countries the figure exceeds 60 percent.[80]

This pandemic is changing young Africans' perceptions of themselves and expectations about their future. Many young adults feel hopeless and fatalistic, seeing the HIV and AIDS pandemic as beyond their power to change and prevent. This sense of fatalism and powerlessness, and pessimism about the opportunities youth have for employment or livelihoods, may lead them to live for the present, with less attention given to preparing for what they see as an uncertain future.

Resources allocated to combat AIDS may also reduce investments in education and primary health care, with consequences for future economic growth. By shortening lifespans, AIDS also lowers returns on public investment in both health and education. AIDS is particularly devastating to economic growth because it predominantly affects the working-age population and threatens to leave millions of children

78 Kemmis, S. and Wilkinson, M., 1998. "Participatory Action Research and the Study of Practice," in Atweh, B., Kemmis, S. and Weeks, P. (eds), *Action Research in Practice: Partnerships for Social Justice in Education*. London: Routledge. Pp.21-36.

79 University of Queensland, 2002. *Talking About Youth Participation - Where, When and Why?* Queensland : University of Queensland.

80 International Labour Organization, 2001. *Young People in Today's World*. Geneva: International Labour Organization.

orphaned and at risk of becoming child labourers through needing to support themselves and possibly siblings.[81]

7.4 Youth Unemployment and Underemployment

A new analysis prepared by the International Labour Organization's Employment Strategy Department found that while youth represent 25 percent of the working-age population[82], they represent 47 percent of the total 186 million people out of work worldwide in 2003.[83]

The report put the global youth unemployment rate at 14.4 percent in 2003; a significant increase on the youth unemployment rate of 11.4 percent a decade ago.[84]

But the problem goes far beyond the large number of young unemployed people. Young people represent some 130 million of the world's 550 million working poor who work but are unable to lift themselves and their families above the poverty line of one USD per day. These young people struggle to survive, often performing work under poor conditions in the informal economy.[85]

The disproportionately high proportion of youth who are unemployed is more pronounced in developing countries. 85 percent of the world's youth live in developing countries where they are 3.8 times more likely to be unemployed than adults. This compares unfavourably with industrialised countries where young people are 2.3 times more likely to be unemployed than adults.[86]

This high rate of youth unemployment may be because levels of skills are lower among disadvantaged youth - or are perceived to be - and their social networks are likely to be limited.[87] An inability to find or keep decent or productive work despite education and skills may undermine

81 *Ibid*.
82 Where this is taken to include people aged 15-64-years-old.
83 International Labour Organization, 2004. *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2004*. Geneva: International Labour Organization.
84 *Ibid*.
85 *Ibid*.
86 *Ibid*.
87 Childhood Poverty Research Centre (CHIP), 2004. *Promoting Disadvantaged Young People's Employment – What Can be Done?* CHIP Briefing 6. London: Save the Children.

young people's sense of well-being, and increase the likelihood of their recruitment into militant groups or organised crime.
The report also stresses that young people have more difficulty finding work than their adult counterparts, with the global youth unemployment rate in 2003 at 3.5 times the global adult unemployment rate. While there is a correlation in most countries between trends in youth and adult unemployment rates, the report notes that during recessions, youth unemployment tends to rise more rapidly than adult joblessness.[88] In many contexts, being young increases one's chances of facing discrimination, particularly in the labour market. Youth who also face another form of discrimination, such as bigotry on the basis of gender, impairment or ethnic status, will be particularly disadvantaged.

In brief, unemployment and underemployment have effectively hindered the participation of today's youth in the economic and social sectors. There is a strong link between youth unemployment and social exclusion, particularly in societies where employment is considered integral to gaining full social status. Further, an inability to find a job creates a sense of vulnerability and inadequacy which can lead to idleness among young people. This may in turn heighten the attraction to illegal activities.[89]

7.5 Youth Poverty

Youth poverty is undoubtedly a serious problem for development. This is primarily because of the large numbers of young people and children living in absolute poverty in developing countries – about 674 million people aged less than 18 years old.[90] And, in many contexts, youth are more likely to experience poverty than other age groups because of the fluid situation surrounding the transition from childhood to adulthood, particularly in terms of relationships and responsibilities. Age-based discrimination also has a large impact on youth poverty, particularly in terms of access to labour markets.[91]

88 International Labour Organization, 2004. *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2004*. Geneva: International Labour Organization.
89 Childhood Poverty Research Centre (CHIP), 2004. *Promoting Disadvantaged Young People's Employment – What Can be Done?* CHIP Briefing 6. London: Save the Children
90 Gordon et al, 2003. *Child Poverty in the Developing World*. Bristol: The Policy Press.
91 Moore, K., 2005. *Thinking About Youth Poverty Through the Lenses of Chronic Poverty, Life-course Poverty and Intergenerational Poverty*. Chronic Poverty Research Centre Working Paper 57. Manchester: Chronic Poverty Research Centre.

Further, young people make up a significant proportion of the populations of developing countries. On this basis Curtain argues that they require a significant proportion of national and global anti-poverty investment.[92]

According to Curtain, "[y]oung people are less likely to be identified as a poverty target group where a static definition of poverty prevails. This static definition focuses on cases of persistent poverty among the long term poor."[93] While life-course factors are not always well considered in traditional poverty analysis, it can fairly be argued that while the features of youth poverty tend to be highly dynamic, youth can also face chronic poverty. This is particularly apparent when youth poverty has its roots in parental and childhood poverty, and when it has implications for a young people's future and that of their own offspring.

Youth are more vulnerable to poverty than other social or demographic groups for a number of reasons. Young people are often in the early stages of physical and financial asset accumulation. As such they may find it particularly difficult to recover from financial difficulties. Young couples may deplete assets or reduce their own consumption to ensure that their young children receive health care or education. Even in labour markets where there are social insurance mechanisms, young people have generally not built up the time or contributions to benefit from such systems. When a young person is forced to leave education before gaining a secondary, tertiary or vocational qualification, there will be a reduction in the returns on the investment made into their education; the young person and their family may have made significant long-term investment of time and resources in education, which is then lost. It then becomes more difficult for the young person to find productive work and rebuild their stock of assets.[94]

According to Curtain, young people in poverty are likely to be under-represented in household surveys if they have left the parental home and are in difficult circumstances such as temporary accommodation

92 Curtain, R., 2004. "Youth in Extreme Poverty: Dimensions and Country Responses," in *World Youth Report 2003* [online]. New York: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Available from: www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/wyr03.htm.

93 *Ibid*. p. 4.

94 *Ibid*.

or have no accommodation at all.[95] He suggests that this is because, "young people are more likely to be experiencing a more dynamic form of poverty,"[96] and that this is because of "the obstacles most face in seeking to achieve adult status."[97]

Youth, however they are defined as a group, face a set of constantly changing challenges and opportunities. The transition from childhood to adulthood inevitably involves confronting and overcoming a number of uncertainties. Moreover, young people potentially face a large number of changes that occur at the same time, relating to work, living arrangements and personal relationships. The difficulties they face are thus compounded.[98]

The extent to which a young person is economically dependent, independent or depended on can also change extremely rapidly, and has significant implications for their present and long-term well-being.[99]

If, for example, they are given the opportunity to build their own networks, they will be solely dependent on the social and political capital of their households and communities. Where these are weak or destructive, for example, where a young person is from an ethnic minority, their capacity to build their own positive socio-political relationships may be limited. Youth are often particularly determined to escape remote, marginal or stagnant areas, and some are able to build better lives as urban migrants.[100]

However, having limited skills and social networks, being a member of an ethnic or linguistic minority, or lacking access to information undermine many young people's urban livelihoods. Disappointment and desperation can affect young people who are unable to out-migrate because of gender, illness or impairment, family responsibilities or extreme deprivation. Their sense of well-being is further undermined and the likelihood of being recruited into militant groups or organised crime increases.[101]

95 *Ibid*.
96 *Ibid*. p.18.
97 *Ibid*. p. 4.
98 *Ibid*. p. 1.
99 Moore, K., 2005. *Thinking About Youth Poverty Through the Lenses of Chronic Poverty, Life-course Poverty and Intergenerational Poverty*. Chronic Poverty Research Centre Working Paper 57. Manchester: Chronic Poverty Research Centre.
100 *Ibid*.
101 *Ibid*.

Poor youth are also at risk of leaving the next generation in poverty. Where pregnant women suffer poor health and nutrition during their own childhood, the risks of maternal and child mortality and morbidity are higher. These problems are compounded by early childbearing. In 2004, it was estimated that 17 percent of babies in developing countries were born to women aged 15 to 19 years old. These babies are at greater risk of ill health.[102]

Unhealthy, poorly educated children can grow into young people with a reduced capacity for learning and working. However, adolescence and young adulthood, when adult functions are developed, may provide opportunities to reduce the negative impact of childhood poverty. Skills, education, and levels of health and nutrition acquired during these periods may counterbalance earlier disadvantages.[103]

7.6 Discrimination and Violence against Girls

The UN defines violence against women as: "Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life."[104]

Article 2 of the Declaration on Violence Against Women explores what the international community recognises as generic forms of violence against women. The definition encompasses, but is not limited to, physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family and in the community. This includes battering, sexual abuse of female children, dowry-related violence, marital rape; female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women; non-spousal violence; violence relating to exploitation, including trafficking in women and forced prostitution,[105] sexual harassment, and intimidation at work and in educational institutions; forced pregnancy, forced abortion, and forced sterilisation; violence involved in dating and courtship violence, sexual relationships motivated by economic reasons, including school girls having sex with older men in return for school fees being paid; incest;

102 *Ibid*.
103 *Ibid*.
104 *The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women*, General Assembly Resolution, December 1993.
105 UNICEF, 2000. "Domestic Violence against Women and Girls." *Innocenti Digest*. 6 (June 2000). Florence: UNICEF.

and violence perpetrated or condoned by the state.[106]
Other forms of violence perpetrated against women include economic abuse and acts of omission. Economic abuse includes acts such as denying funds, refusal to contribute financial resources, denying food and basic needs, and controlling access to health care and employment. Acts of omission involve gender bias that discriminates against women in terms of nutrition, education and access to health care, which is a violation of women's rights.[107]

Buvinic et al enumerate the socio-economic consequences of violence:[108]

- Direct costs involve include providing psychological counselling and medical treatment; police services including time spent on arrests and responding to calls; costs incurred by the criminal justice system; housing and shelters for women and their children; and social services.
- Non-monetary costs do not draw upon medical services, but take a heavy toll on the victims and survivors by increasing morbidity and mortality due to homicide and suicide, increased dependence on drugs and alcohol, and other depressive disorders.
- Countries' economies are affected as female participation in the labour market decreases, and as the productivity of women's work and their earnings decrease.
- The inter-generational impact of violence on children, erosion of social capital, reduced quality of life and reduced participation of women in girls in democratic processes also has an impact on the wider society.

In brief, violence can irreparably harm girls, physically and psychologically. They are left unable to concentrate or stay in school, and are deprived of the self-respect and self-confidence they need to take their rightful place in the world. The most distressing aspect of violence against girls is that in far too many places its existence is still denied, ignored or it is simply accepted as normal behaviour. Even environments that should be safe for girls - schools, home, communities and families - are not.

106 World Health Organization, 1997. *Violence against Women. Information Kit*.WHO/FRH/WHD/97.8. Geneva: World Health Organization.
107 UNICEF, 2000. "Domestic Violence against Women and Girls." *Innocenti Digest*. 6 (June 2000). Florence: UNICEF
108 Cited in *ibid*.

On the other hand, girls and women face systematic discrimination within entrenched power relations that perpetuate an almost universal subordination of females. Gender norms and bias ingrained in educational and economic policies and structures limit the social, economic and political contributions of girls and young women. They are left vulnerable to physical, sexual and psychological harm by the men in their families and communities seriously curtailing their volition to involve in socioeconomic endeavours.

7.7 Youth Cynicism about Politics

The idea that today's youth are less politically engaged than past generations was a common thread in discussions by policy-makers and researchers attending the Youth Policy and Research Conference of the European Commission in 2001.[109]

Apathy towards politics and politicians, and an unwillingness to participate through traditional channels, including political parties, electoral campaigns and voting, seem characteristic of youth in many countries. Competing interests and economic need mean young people spend time engaging in activities other than public service. It becomes difficult to recruit the next generation of policy-makers and political leaders. Overall, youth participation today tends to be issue-specific and service-oriented, rather than political.[110]

Young people are likely to disapprove of the structures of adult political discourse, especially the tactics full-time politicians employ in debate. However, they claim to retain a strong interest in political and social topics. They seem to be tired of politicians, but not of political issues. As a result, there is a great demand for structures that are able to support youth's involvement in democracy and to train young people to become role models for those who are currently indifferent to politics.

Yet in settings like Ethiopia, there is a tendency to reject politics. Youth consider politics as dangerous and something to distance oneself from, possibly because of the repression suffered under the Dergue regime and its legacy.

109 Golombek, S. (ed.), 2005. *What Works in Youth Participation: Case Studies from around the World*. Baltimore: International Youth Foundation. P.13.
110 *Ibid*.

Whatever the reasons, in general, young people seem to be becoming increasingly disillusioned with politics and governance. In most developed countries, less than 30 percent of young people use the vote when they have the right to. As Woollcombe observes "…'Politics as irrelevance. Why should we be bothered?' - is the politics of disillusion and it is surprisingly common."[111]

Emma Forrest, a 17-year-old columnist for the English newspaper, the Sunday Times, agrees:

> *Everyone has a brief flirtation with politics but, like Barbies and Enid Blyton, you grow out of it. Most of my friends are smart enough to know they can't make a difference. The Labour leader looks like a game-show host, and Amnesty has been judged too political to advertise on TV. British teenagers are so jaded by the time they are old enough to vote, the title of Ken Livingstone's book seems not inflammatory but just plain truth: 'If Voting Changed Anything, They'd Abolish It'*.[112]

7.8 The Lack of Constructive Outlets for Young People

The problem of youth having no constructive outlets is complex. Many youth do not know what recreational activities are available to them. Additionally, many adults believe youth simply have no interest in the types of activities municipalities provide with the exception of sports activities, which comprise the majority of activities provided to young people. Thus, young people are provided only with sports services as it is believed that youth are not interested in other services that municipalities provide. Some people believe that young people lose interest in traditional sports by the time they are 13 or 14 years old as many have been involved in organised sports from the age of five or six years old.[113]
In the Ethiopian context, for instance, the problem of young people having nowhere to go, and the government-generated craze of labelling unemployed youth as 'vagrants' who require legal control and policing

111 Woollcombe, D., 1997. *Youth Participation*. Report prepared for the Rio+5 Summit. San José: The Earth Council. P. 13.
112 Cited in Woollcombe, D., 1997. *Youth Participation*. Report prepared for the Rio+5 Summit. San José: The Earth Council.
113 Public Health Agency of Canada, 2000. *Hearing the Voices of Youth: Youth Participation in Selected Canadian Municipalities*. Ottawa: Public Health Agency of Canada.

have serious implications for youth participation in social and economic activities.

Concerns about the lack of activities available relate to those about young people having nowhere to go. Some youth note that there are few places where they can simply relax. Most go to friends' houses where they watch videos or listen to music. The problem they noted was that this also results in high levels of apathy, lethargy, and sometimes drug or alcohol use.

This discussion about having nowhere to go emphasises another serious concern raised by young people. Many are upset by the negative image of youth the media portrays. They say that these negative stereotypes have a serious impact on how they are treated in public places. Here the issues of having nothing to do and nowhere to go lead to youth being treated poorly in their communities.

7.9 Adultism and Gerontocracy

To work with young people successfully, it is necessary to tackle the pervasive attitude that favours older people. Before law-based governments emerged, countries were commonly ruled by their oldest citizens, or through gerontocracy. By creating laws that discriminate against both the young and the very old, adults have gained power within society, thereby establishing modern 'adultism'.

Societies have almost certainly been governed by older people for thousands of years. Most people intuitively feel more capable when they are older and more experienced. Adultism, however, is a relatively recent development, whose emergence coincides with that of organised states. Today, rather than the oldest member of society holding power, adults organise themselves into governments that wield power over both minors and senior citizens.[114]

Adultism refers to all behaviours and attitudes engendered by the assumption that adults are superior to young people. It leads to the belief that adults are therefore entitled to control many aspects of young

114 Bonnichsen, Sven. Age Lines: How to Define "Adults" and "Youth" [online]. Available from: www.Youthrights.org [accessed March 6, 2006].

people's lives without their agreement.[115] At the heart of adultism is a lack of respect for young people and a tendency of regarding them as less important and, in a sense, inferior. Where adultist sentiments prevail, youth are not trusted to develop independently, and so are taught, disciplined, harnessed, punished and guided into the adult world.

Except for prisoners and a few other institutionalised groups, young people's lives are more controlled than those of any other group in society. In addition, adults regard themselves as having a right to threaten, hit, withhold privileges and ostracise young people to control or discipline them when they consider it is in young people's interests to do so.[116]

If a group of adults were treated in this way, society would be quick to condemn it as a form of oppression. Adults, however, generally do not consider adultism to be oppressive, because this is the way they themselves were treated as youth; the process has been internalised.[117]

Even where adults are aware of adultism, their own behaviour in interactions with young people sometimes is insensitive. Despite their best intentions, adults still speak more often than young people, interrupt their sentences, frustrate their involvement within society, and cause them to withdraw from participation.

7.10 Organisational Culture and Institutional Resistance

Enabling youth to participate is more difficult if the culture of work or system within which an organisation and its people operate is prejudiced against participation. For example, if the organisation operates within an autocratic and traditional style of leadership or management, youth participation is unlikely to flourish.

115 Bell, J., 1995. *Understanding Adultism: A Major Obstacle to Adult-Youth Relationships*. Somerville: Youth Build USA.
116 *Ibid*.
117 *Ibid*.

This also happens where staff are not given enough latitude for freedom of speech; if the office structure tends to divide or isolate people; and if office policies and practices undermine the concept of participation.[118] Adults within organisations often expect young people to feel committed to a plan that they have themselves conceived and developed as managers and administrators. Young people are thus expected to participate in activities without having been involved in the decision-making process; adults make decisions and expect young people to be as enthusiastic as they are. Even if young people do believe in the vision, there is no space for them within the process and their individuality is not recognised: the situation is likely to become stifling.[119]

If, however, consensus is built at the beginning of a project or programme about the code of conduct that will be used, and these rules are revisited from time to time, conflicts are easier to deal with and can be avoided.[120]

Media outlets, political leaders, and children's advocates often encourage the public to view youth as an investment in the future, when the young will take adults' place in working, supporting families and serving their communities. This traditional perspective fails to take into account that in many countries, youth already are very much active players, contributing to the public good, with a voice in their communities.

On the other hand, there is the natural fear that children and young people will expose adults' inadequacies, although this is actually a major benefit of children's and young peoples' participation. It is also accepted within society that parents are supposed to provide and protect their children.[121] Under such circumstances, young people may question their own legitimacy, doubt their ability to make a difference, or internalise the treatment they receive at the hands of adults and the limitations that are placed upon them. As a result, they often withhold opinions that would have been valuable for those who are older than them. As Elihu told his

118 Tayo, O., 2005. "An Adult's Dilemma on Youth Participation," in Golombek, S. (ed.), *What Works in Youth Participation: Case Studies from around the World*. Baltimore: International Youth Foundation.

119 Iyer, J., 2005. "Making It Work: Pravah's Experience in Working with Youth," in Golombek, S. (ed), *What Works in Youth Participation: Case Studies from around the World*. Baltimore: International Youth Foundation.

120 *Ibid*.

121 State of South Australia, 2002. *Telling the Emperor: A Guide to Youth Participation in Decision-Making*. South Australia: Papercut Media.

interlocutors in the Book of Job: "I am young in years, and you are aged; therefore, I was afraid and timid to declare my opinion to you. I said, 'Let days speak, and many years teach wisdom.'"[122]
At times, youth have taken the initiative and expressed opinions only to encounter adult resistance to their efforts. This resistance can take various forms: embarrassment[123]; counterforce to discipline young organisers; isolating outspoken youth from their peers; or denying young people access to the systems of power or reform, in which adults have made symbolic concessions; channelling youth participation to avoid confrontation; or finding ways to gain the support of youth activists who challenge adults. Resistance is a normal response to most efforts to change the status quo, but it is often amplified when youth try to challenge the system or pattern of adult dominance and youth subservience.[124]

7.11 Youth and the Government System

In many countries, governments tend to regard their youth purely as instigators of violence and authors of a wide variety of social ills. Consequently they never seriously address the need to assist youth and youth groups and may leave them collapse due to lack of funds. They may create laws to prevent and contain social behaviours exhibited by youth that they consider maladaptive. Their measures are largely reactive.

In Ethiopia, for instance, the Vagrancy Control Proclamation has been promulgated, creating numerous problems for unemployed youth. It provides unconditional power to police officers to arrest suspected vagrants at their discretion.

Article 6.1. of the proclamation[125] reads, "Any police may arrest without warrant any person who may reasonably be suspected of being a vagrant." The proclamation views a vagrant as a person who is "able-

122 The Book of Job 32:6-7.
123 Homer (800 BC-700BC) wrote in *The Odyssey*: "A young man is embarrassed to question an older one."
124 Checkoway, B., 1992. *Adults as Allies*. Michigan: School of Social Work, The University of Michigan.
125 Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2004. "Vagrancy Control Proclamation." No. 384/2004. *Federal Negarit Gazeta*. 10th Year. No. 19 (January 2004).

bodied having no visible means of subsistence, and is found, in a public place or a public utility area or a place open to the public, betting or gambling or playing other unlawful similar games involving money or material benefits."[126] Since this proclamation was issued, many youth have remained largely confined to their homes due to fear of indiscriminate arrests if they venture onto the streets.[127]

Yet, according to Rob White the street:[128]

> *…represents for many young people a place to express themselves without close parental or 'adult' control, at little or no cost in commercial or financial terms. It is also a sphere or domain where things happen, where there are people to see and where one can be seen by others. In short, for many young people the street is an important site for social activity. And the intrusion of 'authority' into one's social affairs can and does create resentment and resistance, especially if this is done in a heavy handed fashion.*

For many young people, the street is where they construct their social identity in relation to their peers and other members of society. Many of the identities young people adopt within the public domain are inconsistent and oppose the dominant culture, including being messy, dirty, loud, smoking, and sexual. Others conform to what is regarded as acceptable behaviour including being clean, neat, and polite.[129]

Malone further elaborates:

> *Visible expressions of youth culture could be seen as the means of winning space from the dominant culture, to construct the self within the selfless sea of city streets; they are also an attempt to express and resolve symbolically the contradictions that they experience between cultural and ideological forces: between dominant ideologies, parent ideologies and the ideologies that arise from their own experiences of daily life*[130]

126 *Ibid*.
127 The Amharic Reporter (Miazia, 1997).
128 Cited in Malone, K., 2002. "Street Life: Youth, Culture and Compelling Uses of Public Space." *Environment and Urbanization*. Vol 14 No 2 (October 2002). p. 157
129 Malone, K., 2002. "Street Life: Youth, Culture and Compelling Uses of Public Space." *Environment and Urbanization*. Vol 14 No 2 (October 2002).
130 *Ibid*. P.157.

In spite of this vital connection between youth and the streets, governments are increasingly forcing young people to keep away from streets and public places.

Malone tries to explain this tendency:

> *The fear of crime in the streets has made the city dweller nervous of those exhibiting behaviours seen as different from the mainstream. Because of the visibility of youth in the streets, they are constantly under barrage of these regulatory practices. Excluded, positioned as intruders, young people's use of streets as a space for expressing their own culture is misunderstood by many adults. To protect them (adults) from harm, curfews, detention and move-on laws are now becoming common place in high-income cities around the globe.*[131]

Valentine explains the implications of this:[132]

> *Public space therefore is not produced as an open space, a space where teenagers are freely able to participate in street life or define their own ways of interacting and using space, but is a highly regulated – or closed – space where young people are expected to show deference to adults and adults' definitions of appropriate behaviour, levels of voices, and so on….*

Many young people complain that they are tired of being regarded as criminals and thieves by security forces when they go to a mall or shop, or when using public transport. Others point out that their seniors spend hours in malls and coffee shops without being bothered by the owners. They resent this treatment, seeing it as blatant discrimination. Some are angry that young people's positive contributions to their communities are seldom highlighted and that all youth are punished for the misbehaviour and criminal activities of a small minority of their peers.

Taking the case of Ethiopia once more, the government sees youth unemployment as a sign of young people's lethargy. Instead of tackling the problem the government's measures only extend as far as labelling unemployed youth as vagabonds and taking legal measures that exacerbate the situation.

131 *Ibid*. p. 157
132 Cited in *ibid*. P. 157.

Young people's sporadic attempts to organise civil society groups in Ethiopia are often infiltrated and dismantled by suspicious governments. In situations where they manage to establish groups, governments may respond by creating similar and parallel organisations to counterbalance their potential influence.

At times, despite the dictates of their constitutions, governments ban peaceful demonstrations, protests and mobilisation efforts spearheaded by youth. They often mistakenly regard these activities as yet another form of organised political opposition, rather than outlets for public resentment or a channel for young people to advocate for a good cause.

On the other hand, the justice and security systems often seem not to have considered that protecting youth is one of their duties. Youth caught arguing or fighting with adults are often incriminated without even very crude attempts being made to ascertain the truth about the situation. Wounds sustained by gun barrel punches at the hands of security forces are everyday experiences for many young people. Injustice for youth seems to abound with the effect of making young people avoid any social and economic engagements or provoking them to take the law into their own hands.

Moreover, most attempts by governments to make use of their youth's energy are fundamentally exploitative and perverse. Most governments and political institutions, especially in Africa, want to gain young people's votes to achieve political power rather than work with young people to help them and bring about social transformation.[133]

7.12 Globalisation and the digital divide

Young people both suffer and benefit from the process of globalisation. On the one hand, they are flexible enough to use the new opportunities it offers. On the other, many lack the skills they need to benefit from these new opportunities. Not only can information and communication technology (ICT) empower young people and improve their lives, but it can also deepen existing inequalities by excluding youth from the information revolution. The digital divide, characterised by unequal access to ICTs, is a major problem for many young people in developing countries. It manifests itself both at the international level and domestically, widening the gap between urban and rural communities.

133 Richards, P., 1996. Fighting for the Rain Forest: War, Youth and Resources in Sierra Leone. London: Heinemann.

Furthermore, globalisation has had an impact on youth employment opportunities and migration patterns. It has led to significant changes in youth culture and consumerism, and the appearance of global youth citizenship and activism.

7.13 High Turnover of Youth Participants

People leave positions in organisations and other groups as an inevitable consequence of age. Young people involved in programmes for youth eventually grow out of the appropriate age range. Even before this occurs, they may develop other interests or need more financial support than projects can provide. Other causes of turnover are preventable, including inadequate mentoring, unrealistic expectations and bad treatment.[134]

Further – and often more serious – problems can occur when people who have passed the youth age limit do not acknowledge that this is the case. As adults they harbour adult needs and preferences. This makes it difficult to serve a group whose needs are no longer compatible with their own. Instead of leaving gracefully, these people remain in post depriving fresh young leaders the opportunity of becoming involved. This has a number of implications. First, this can produce inertia, preventing new avenues for youth participation from emerging. Secondly, these people may find it hard to recognise what Rajani refers to as appropriate contexts and settings for youth participation.[135] As a result, they may be tempted to impose adult needs, roles and methods upon youth structures. This may produce dysfunctional systems.

134 Douglas, S.M., 1998. *Selected Case Studies of Youth Involvement in Public Decision-Making* [online]. Canadian Association for School Health. Available from: www.schoolfile.com/cash/youthinvolvement.htm [accessed March 7, 2006].

135 Rajani, R., 2001. *The Participation of Adolescents: A Strategic Approach*. New York: UNECSO.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There are dozens of strategies and frameworks for effective youth participation. Yet, regardless of the framework or strategy employed, the conclusions and recommendations, in the sections that follow, drawn from Busch[136] and other authors are relevant to help create a situation that is beneficial to both youth and adult participants. They also help overcome the barriers to, and constraints on, effective youth participation discussed in this paper. These recommendations are made with a view to assessing many of the aspects of effective youth participation and the barriers that may be encountered; hence some of the points are specific, while others are generic. It is, however, worth noting that these recommendations are not programmatic or policy prescriptions. They are strategies for effective youth policy and programmes that crystallised after reviewing the available literature and they may, with flexibility and suitable adaptations, contribute to creating a world that fulfils the needs of both youth and adults.

a. A Shift in Adults' Thinking about Youth

There has to be a paradigm shift in terms of how adults think about youth. Organisations that successfully involve young people in meaningful ways are able to translate this attitude into policies and programmes that incorporate youth as partners in building communities. Achieving this attitudinal change in the home and school environment is essential if youth are to participate meaningfully.

But a shift in adult thinking is not enough to create a favourable environment for youth engagement. Adults must translate that positive attitude into commitments and activities that promote young people's involvement.

b. A Shift in Young People's Attitudes Towards Adults

The quality of youth participation improves if young people change their own perceptions about the older generation and see themselves as partners with adults in community initiatives. Effective partnerships between adults and youth are based on a mutual understanding of each

136 Busch, T., 2005. "Creating a Local Youth Council," in Golombek, S. (ed.). *What Works in Youth Participation: Case Studies from around the World*. Baltimore: International Youth Foundation.

group's culture, and a commitment to collaborating while considering differences in communication and work styles, priorities and decision-making approaches. In some cases, adults may take on the role of advisors; in others, it may be more effective to establish partnerships. Creativity, open-mindedness and innovation are key ingredients for successful working relationships involving adults and youth.

c. An Overall Change in Societal Attitude

Although we are encouraged to invest in young people so that they can develop the skills and resources they will need in the future, such thinking obscures the fact that young people are already making valuable contributions. Yet these contributions are frequently overlooked, with young voices going unheard and the vast potential for young people to further contribute to their communities goes largely untapped.

It is important to pursue a positive approach to youth development. Holistic strategies for addressing children and youth's complex set needs should be employed. This approach recognises that we need to ensure young people develop the skills, values and attitudes they need to succeed today, rather than just in the future.

This approach also recognises that young people are not problems to be solved, but problem solvers themselves. This paradigm emphasises that youth are assets to the community, and active agents of change who can contribute their energy, idealism and insight to a community's growth and progress. They are not merely passive recipients of programmes and support.

From the programming and service side, youth development frameworks need to move away from deficit models, valuing young people for their potential. Interventions should be designed such as to build a set of the core competencies needed for young people to participate successfully as youth and later as adults. This approach considers young people through a more holistic lens, addressing the broad range of their social, moral, emotional, physical and cognitive competencies.
The media is a powerful tool in shaping public opinion. When the news focuses on youth as victims and criminals rather than as peer educators

or youth council presidents, it is difficult to raise the public's awareness about young people. It is thus important that the media equally portray youth as strong and resourceful individuals in search of avenues for civic engagement and emphasise the positive contributions made by youth to their communities, such as through volunteer work.

d. Recognition that the Quality of Leadership and Participation are not Dependent on Age

It is clear that active participation and strong leadership are not dependent on age, but rather on personal factors such as motivation, vision and passion for a cause. They are also dependent upon external conditions such as opportunities to participate, the involvement of committed and supportive individuals, organisational policies and political contexts. Moving away from using age and maturity as criteria to determine who is valuable to the community is essential if meaningful youth engagement and active citizenship are to be achieved.

e. Youth Reflection and Involvement in all Stages of Programmes and Projects

Learning through service differs from volunteering sporadically mainly because it includes planned components on volunteer preparation and ongoing reflection about the activity by participants. This reflection process plays an important role in bringing about changes in knowledge, attitudes and practices by youth, regardless of the issue. Such reflection can help youth reflect on the cause of the problem they are trying to address and what policies could help resolve it. This helps young people to better understand the issues, and to think of new ways to effect sustainable change in their communities.[137]

Youth must therefore be involved at all stages of such projects and programmes, including the envisioning and planning phases. Adults should not be dismissive when younger people share ideas that are important to them, even when they appear too idealistic to more pragmatic adults. As Iyer states: "Fresh dreams are a critical resource that only the young (and young at heart) can dream. They are the life

137 Woollcombe, D., 1997. *Youth Participation*. Report prepared for the Rio+5 Summit. San José: The Earth Council.

water of hope sometimes missing in the older generation. It might take a good deal of energy and time to help turn these hazy dreams into achievable goals, but it is worth it, as these experiences are rewarding in more ways than one."[138]

f. Commitment and Support from Adults and Peers

One of the great benefits of youth-adult partnership is that young people can gain a clearer perception of how activities can be improved by working with adult educators, mentors and allies.[139] They come to see adults as friends and partners in a developmental process, rather than as controllers.

The most successful young people do not work in isolation, without support and encouragement. They work closely with adults who play various roles in the process – from bringing young people together and giving them encouragement, to nurturing their ideas and building support for their work.

Older peers or adults working as assistants in paid positions can relieve young participants of the burden of some communication and coordination responsibilities. Young people should determine which tasks are to be delegated to older assistants. Young people may use their adult assistants as interpreters to translate adult language into youth language, for example while dealing with laws or political documents, to schedule appointments for the youth while they are at school, or to assist with administrative jobs like mailing letters. Assistants should never take the lead in an initiative and should remain in the background to assist when problems arise, or as mediators in the case of conflicts.

Youth participation is about developing partnerships between young people and adults in all areas of their lives. This enables young people to take valued positions in society, ensuring that the whole community benefits from their contribution, ideas and energy.[140]

138 Iyer, J., 2005. "Making It Work: Pravah's Experience in Working with Youth," in Golombek, S. (ed), *What Works in Youth Participation: Case Studies from around the World*. Baltimore: International Youth Foundation. P.34.

139 Cited in Checkoway, B., 1992. *Adults as Allies*. Michigan: School of Social Work, The University of Michigan.

140 Australian Youth Foundation, 1996. *Youth Partnership and Participation*. East Sydney: The Australian Youth Foundation.

Involving young people meaningfully in decision-making relies on effective working relationships between adults and young people. By recognising different skills and capacities and valuing all contributions, both parties come to respect the other's expertise, providing a basis for partnership.

Stacey expresses this concept well in a description of the Youth Partnership Accountability model:[141]

> *If adults talked more with young people about decisions that have to be made, really listened to young people and their ideas, this would mean they are trying to work in partnership with young people. Partnership is about doing things together. It is about listening to everyone's voice and taking different ideas seriously…It is about mutual respect.*

This partnership model sees young people as having significant control over a service or project while adults play a supportive role. This model places emphasis on adults being accountable to young people for their decisions and actions in line with UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The issue of accountability is thus seen as an integral aspect of the partnership between adults and young people.[142] By working closely with young people, adults can help them to understand the obstacles to creating community change.[143]

Youth often lack essential knowledge of technical community issues or do not have practical skills for planning programmes. Often their attitudes are not conducive to creating change. As a group they tend not to perceive themselves as capable of planning programmes that they have chosen, or that could make much of a difference to society as a whole. In addition, youth who take the initiative to organise themselves have fewer resources than their adult counterparts. Adults have established organisations, institutional infrastructure and extensive experience of the community. Young people often act as individuals; they lack access to self-sustaining organisations; and participate only occasionally and without much influence. If their participation is to make a real difference, they must be given support and resources to achieve their goals.

141 Stacey, K., 1998. *Theoretical Underpinnings of Youth Partnership Accountability*. Melbourne: Centre for Adolescent Health.
142 *Ibid*.
143 *Ibid*.

g. Flexibility in Issues and Structures

Young people find themselves in different stages of development. As much as possible, youth in these different stages have to find support for their present needs. Hence, the issues addressed by youth projects should not be rigid and one-size-fits-all. They have to be flexible enough to satisfy a wide spectrum of current and emerging needs of young people. If a project is to survive it needs to employ different strategies, which may range from spontaneous short-term action groups being established to developing stable working councils with a hierarchy of leaders and regular members. The idea is to create two levels of participation: a loose network of young activists who form spontaneous action groups, and a core group of deeply involved members, elected for a full year to a youth council. This engenders openness and flexibility in decision-making processes and creates a structure that motivates everyone to participate, regardless of their social class or education level.

h. Youth-oriented Methods of Work and Communication

A youth participation project needs to be non-hierarchical and have steady communication directly with decision-makers.

Plans should be shared openly with adult decision-makers in intergenerational discussions. Within this dialogue, young people must be allowed to design its format, and lead the discussion process and its development. When intergenerational conflicts arise, older youth should serve as mediators between their younger peers and adults. Communication should always focus on building consensus.

Those engaged in youth participation models must develop their own language and avoid copying adult discussion formats. They must offer a reliable alternative to the communication style of adult political work for young people.

Political decision-making processes often extend over long periods of time. Young people tend to need immediate positive responses to their efforts. Communication strategies that are relevant to youth are necessary if young people are to remain motivated in these situations. It may sometimes be instructive to apply what is known as the Peer

Education Model as a communication strategy.[144] This model develops young people's skills by creating roles for young people to educate their peers. It begins with a detailed training programme for the young educators and is sustained by ongoing support from adults. This model has been used successfully by health promotion programmes targeting young people. It offers a number of advantages including the following:

- learning is reinforced through young people learning from other young people;
- accurate information and skills are provided to young people to enable them to be effective educators;
- information and skills are pitched at an appropriate level and style;
- young people are encouraged to assume responsibility.

Young people who are appointed to boards and committees can be linked to past or current young members of these bodies for peer-to-peer experience sharing.

i. Structures, Institutions and Norms that Encourage Youth Participation

Youth participation does not simply increase as a result of young people being incorporated into adult decision-making processes. Youth participation must be institutionalised in issues, settings and practices that are very much part of young people's lives. These settings include school, local government, youth organisations, issue-based clubs and sports teams. Legislation, political frameworks and sustainable funding that recognise youth participation as an important dimension of community and youth development are essential.

It is crucial that young people be given the opportunity to familiarise themselves with public issues. Young people may not have the same level of access as other sections of society to information on current issues, especially on public policy and decision-making, as other sections of society. Youth need to be sensitised on governance processes from local to national, and even sub-regional and continental levels.

144 Australian Ministry of Youth, 2003. *Youth Participation Handbook*. Adelaide: Government of South Australia.

We must explore how youth can go on to successfully articulate the issues these processes raise. We need to examine whether rules facilitate participation in public affairs with specific reference to youth. Where necessary, rules should be reshaped to allow the input of young people in public policy-making.

We must also address how the ideas and interests articulated by youth can be incorporated into specific policy proposals. The strategies adopted should target policy-making organs at all relevant levels, which can include bodies ranging from national parliaments to bodies, such as district water boards. In each case the issue that must be addressed is how to get youth involved in the particular policy-making process.

Finally, we must identify ways in which youth can influence, participate in and monitor policy implementation. It is important that youth be represented and consulted by the organs responsible for monitoring and implementing policy formulation.[145]

j. A Holistic Approach to Tackling Youth Poverty

A number of priorities must be set to tackle chronic poverty in general, and youth poverty in particular:[146]

- The spiral into poverty must be interrupted by providing opportunities through innovative social protection policies. These can take the form of, for example, insurance systems and direct transfers, as well as non-contributory pensions, which can be particularly relevant for youth, who often have older dependents as well as their own future to consider. Youth-targeted social protection may include 'hardship funds' that can be deployed to ensure that structural or idiosyncratic shocks do not push a young person out of secondary, tertiary or vocational education, or to support re-entry into the education system.
- The descent into chronic poverty caused by ill health should be prevented by, for example, providing health services for breadwinners and carers.
- Childhood poverty should be prevented and interrupted,

145 Kinuthia, M., 2004. *Youth Democracy and Governance: Youth Reverse Mentoring Africa*. A paper presented on ADF IV Symposium on Youth and Governance, October 11-15, 2004, Economic Commission for Africa, Addis Ababa.

146 Chronic Poverty Research Centre, 2004. Chronic Poverty Report 2004-05 [online]. Manchester: Institute for Development Policy and Management, University of Manchester/Chronic Poverty Research Centre. Available from: www.chronicpoverty.org [accessed March 6, 2006].P. 50

particularly through interventions in nutrition, health, education and household security. Youth are better able to face challenges if they have not had to cope with poverty in - and even before - childhood.

- Provide chronically poor people with opportunities; investments that give chronically poor people opportunities for development are key to interrupting child, life-course and intergenerational poverty. It is both crucial to promote broad-based growth *and* to redistribute material and human assets, so that chronically poor people can take up economic opportunities.

To consolidate these actions, the obligation to provide resources must be politically recognised. Chronic poverty cannot be seriously reduced without real transfers of resources and sustained, predictable finance. Political indifference to meeting national and international obligations on poverty eradication needs to be challenged. The need for policy change must not mask the fact that it is the chronically poor themselves who are the leading actors in overcoming their poverty. To date, when their existence is recognised, the chronically poor – and particularly poor children, youth, older people and disabled people – are perceived both by policy-makers and in the popular imagination as dependent and passive. Most people in chronic poverty are working to improve their livelihoods and the prospects of their families who are in difficult circumstances. They need real commitment, matched by action and resources, to support their efforts to attain their rights and overcome the obstacles that trap them in poverty.[147]

k. Eliminating Violence and Discrimination against Girls

Violence is a complex problem and there is no one strategy to tackle it that will work in all situations. Violence may take place within very different social contexts, and the degree to which it is sanctioned by a community will naturally influence the kind of strategy needed. Considering the interconnections between the factors responsible for violence – the gender dynamics of power, culture and economics – strategies and interventions should be designed within a comprehensive

147 Chronic Poverty Research Centre, 2004. Chronic Poverty Report 2004-05 [online]. Manchester: Institute for Development Policy and Management, University of Manchester/Chronic Poverty Research Centre. Available from: www.chronicpoverty.org [accessed March 6, 2006].

and integrated framework. A multi-layered strategy that addresses the structural causes of violence against women while providing immediate services to survivors ensures sustainability and is the only strategy that has the potential to eliminate this problem. Three areas of intervention are commonly used:[148]

- Effective legal measures, including penal sanctions, civil remedies and compensatory provisions to protect women from all violence, including violence and abuse in the family, sexual assault and sexual harassment in the workplace.
- Preventative measures, including public information and education programmes to change attitudes concerning the roles and status of men and women.
- Protective measures, including refuges, counselling, rehabilitation action and support services for women who are experiencing violence or who are at risk of violence.

l. Keeping Young Leaders Local and Hands-on

Where young people have had to imitate bureaucrats to achieve their aims, there is danger that they themselves begin to believe in the pretence. This distances them from average youth. Such young people rarely become involved in actual projects: they sit at meetings, speaking articulately and impressing other bureaucrats, but rarely their peers. Being easily daunted, or deflected, by formality, suits and bureaucratic processes, they unknowingly relegate the concerns of their youth constituency to the background.

Models of youth participation that have a local focus can be independent, serving young people of different educational, economic and ethnic backgrounds. Young leaders should be recruited at this local level. This ensures that leadership building programmes are not elitist, but are open, democratic and transparent.

m. Job opportunities for Unemployed Youth

Tackling youth unemployment and young people's consequent vulnerabilities and feelings of exclusion would make a significant

148 Radhika Coomaraswamy, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women cited in Unicef (2000:10).

contribution to the global economy. According to the ILO, halving the world youth unemployment rate would add at least USD 2.2 trillion to global gross domestic product (GDP).[149] This is approximately four percent of the 2003global GDP value. Further, the report points out that a good start to an individual's working life reduces the likelihood of prolonged unemployment in the future.[150]

Making markets work for poor people – including making labour markets work for disadvantaged youth – is both fundamental and difficult. In most contexts, more work is needed to link education systems with economic requirements. This could be by increasing the quality and relevance of education and training, ensuring that young people stay in education long enough to gain the skills required in the workplace, and combining training programmes with, for example, assistance finding jobs, placement schemes, wage subsidies, or access to credit, child care or transportation. Such measures can enable young people to gain initial employment.[151]

To facilitate this process, youth groups and organisations should direct their members to engage with policy-making processes and in protecting their employment rights. They need, therefore, to maintain a constructive dialogue among themselves and policy-makers.[152]

The informal sector is an important avenue for generating employment opportunities for unemployed youth. Many young entrepreneurial businesses are blocked from growing and entering the mainstream economy by legal, administrative and bureaucratic practices. A major hurdle for young entrepreneurs is lack of resources, including access to credit, when they are establishing businesses. Providing a supportive environment through enhanced access to training, micro-credit and other assistance where projects

149 International Labour Organization, 2004. *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2004*. Geneva: International Labour Organization.
150 *Ibid*.
151 Childhood Poverty Research Centre (CHIP), 2004. *Promoting Disadvantaged Young People's Employment – What Can be Done?* CHIP Briefing 6. London: Save the Children.
152 Bonzi, J.I., 2004. *Youth and Governance*. A paper presented at the ADF IV Symposium on Youth and Governance, October 11-15, 2004. Addis Ababa: The African Child Policy Forum/Economic Commission for Africa.

are feasible, is particularly important. In Ethiopia an encouraging start has been made, as thousands of young people are receiving training in technical vocations.

n. Access to Educational Opportunities

Reducing youth illiteracy and improving the coverage and quality of education and training are potentially powerful instruments for reducing inequality in the distribution of income. They also enable access to training, and so to better jobs and higher incomes.[153]

Schooling and training increase one's productivity and as such increase young people's chances of obtaining higher wages and increasing the social contributions they make. Similarly, achieving a higher level of education makes individual's more flexible and able to adapt to new job opportunities. It endows the individual with the ability to manage resources more efficiently, to conceive new ideas and new frontiers of production.[154]

o. Sufficient and Sustainable Funding

Where young people permanently lack finances, the constant need to struggle for money dampens their energy and they become demoralised. Models of youth participation, therefore, need to be free from worries about finances.

Sustainable funding cannot, however, be achieved simply by soliciting funds from non-governmental organisations or government ministries. Desired outcomes can only be guaranteed by allowing young people to participate when decisions are made about public finances and particularly in budget-making. Youth must be given the opportunity to directly influence budget-making. If youth do not have a voice when public resources are allocated and distributed, and when the public budget is made, any say they have in influencing public policies will be purely cosmetic.[155] Budget setting is integral to policy-making. The budget is the key instrument for translating policy into action.

153 *Ibid*.
154 Cohen, E., 1979. *The Economics of Education*. Cambridge: Harper and Row.
155 Tsegaye, Shimelis, 2002. *Opening Decision Making to Society through Participatory Budgeting*. Africa Local Government Action Forum-Phase II. Session IV. Harare: MDP/World Bank Institute.

Budgets are also intimately related to matters of economic and social capital, empowerment, governance and individual rights. They affect the well-being of future citizens as well as current ones. As has been said: "In a thousand ways [budgets] go to the root of prosperity of individuals, relation of classes, and the strength of kingdoms.[156]"

Youth must be given the opportunity to allocate resources, prioritise broad social policies and monitor public spending so that they can directly confront the political legacies of clientelism, social exclusion and corruption.[157]

p. Follow Up

It is important to remember that youth are constantly seeking new experiences and knowledge, and that they place more value on what is currently happening than on what might take place in the future.

While young people often find adults too strict and almost stoical, adults think of young people's emotional responses to events as a sign of weakness and lack of control. Younger people are less compartmentalised; work and recreation, colleagues and friends are not clearly demarcated. They experience everything in a more holistic way.[158] As Robert Louis Stevenson said, "Youth is the time to go flashing from one end of the world to the other… to try the manners of different nations; to hear the chimes at midnight; to see the sunrise in town and country; to be converted at a revival; to circumnavigate the metaphysics, write halting verses, run a mile to see a fire, and wait all day long in the theatre to applaud Hernani."[159]

Thus, activities must constantly be reviewed to ensure they are progressing as planned. We must constantly work to enhance both expression and control of emotions. By providing clearly marked avenues for expressing emotions, it will be easier to make objective assessments in the future.

156 Cited in Gartener, H.F., 1988. *Administration in the Public Sector*. New York: McMillan Publishing Company. P. 370.
157 *Ibid*.
158 *Ibid*.
159 As quoted at http://en.proverbia.net/default.asp [accessed March 7, 2006].

CHAPTER NINE: CLOSING REMARKS

Demographically, youth constitute the majority of the world's population. Despite their large number, however, their concerns are relegated to the margins in debate and bracketed exclusively with such issues as school and sports. This has deprived young people of an influential platform for articulating their concerns, which has led to further frustration, despair and despondency.

Even in situations where youth participation has apparently taken place, the environment has often been exploitative and frustrating. This has contributed to militancy, impatience and risk taking on the part of youth. In most instances, legal promises remain what Ebo calls "concentric circles of commitments made often for cosmetic rather than genuine reasons."[160]

In brief, while the world remains predominantly governed by older people, we will continue to fail our youth. As a result, dysfunctional habits and orientations prejudicial to the world's future development are likely to persist.

Jackson says: "Our youth are not failing the system; the system is failing our youth. Ironically, the very youth who are being treated the worst are the young people who are going to lead us out of this nightmare."[161]

Indeed, in the past many young people felt disenfranchised from the processes of power and therefore unable to make a difference on issues they cared deeply about. These feelings exacerbated problems that led to political conflicts and revolutions on many occasions.[162] Studies have shown that youth, particularly the disenfranchised, have often been at the forefront of liberation movements. These movements, in countries ranging from Ethiopia to Colombia, and from Sri Lanka to South Africa have been both violent and peaceful.[163]

160 Ebo, A., 2004. "Conclusions," in McIntyre, A. (ed.), Invisible Stakeholders: The Impact of Children on War. Pretoria: Institute of Security Studies. P. 135.

161 As quoted at www.freechild.org/quotations.htm [accessed March 7, 2006].

162 Abeyratne, S., 2004. "Economic Roots of Political Conflict: The Case of Sri Lanka." *The World Economy*, 27 (8). Pp. 1295-1314.

163 Nina, D., 1999. "Children Involved in South Africa's Wars: After Soweto 1976*." Monograph No. 37: Child Soldiers in Southern Africa*. Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies. Available from: www.iss.co.za/Pubs/Monographs/No37/ChilderenInvolved.html [accessed March 7, 2006].

Encouraged by the growing understanding of their causes, youth are now struggling to emerge as a new social order. Today's youth seem to no longer accept or respect the structures that exclude their voices, and are increasingly demanding a voice of their own.

The current situation is thus much more dynamic than advocacy groups and those who regard youth as victims may care to admit. Youth are increasingly hijacking the agenda, functioning as actors and stakeholders in their own right. Youth are intractable in taking decisions in their own interest. They are advancing their activities to secure their space in existing socio-economic and political structures. They are breaking through the thick walls of marginalisation, patriarchy and adultism, and are becoming knowledgeable masters of their own fate. Helen Keller once said, "It is not possible for civilization to flow backwards while there is youth in the world. Youth may be headstrong, but it will advance its allotted length."[164]

Today, at the beginning of the 21st century, the idea of a world entirely free from adultism and gerontocracy might appear a utopia. But one day, not far away, young people will play an integral role in a new world order.

164 As quoted at www.dailycelebrations.com.htm [accessed March 7, 2006].

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“We live in an age when to be young and to be indifferent can be no longer synonymous. We must prepare for the coming hour. The claims of the Future are represented by suffering millions; and the Youth of a Nation are the trustees of Posterity.” ~ Benjamin Disraeli

The African Child Policy Forum
P.O. Box 1179
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Telephone: +251-11-5518407/09/10
Fax: +251-11-5513420
Email: info@africanchildforum.org
Website: www.africanchildforum.org

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