

BARRIERS TO YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION IN LUSOPHONE AFRICA

A DESK RESEARCH CONDUCTED BY THE YOUTH BRIDGE
RESEARCH INSTITUTE (YBRI)



Bridging Gaps for Positive Youth Development

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**Research conducted
by the Youth Bridge
Research Institute
(YBRI)**

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PREFACE

This desk study report stems from interrogating the apparent structural barriers that continue to inhibit youth engagement and participation in Lusophone Africa as well as the necessary efforts to address them. This Research was initiated by the Youth Bridge Foundation (YBF) and led by its subsidiary organisation; the Youth Bridge Research Institute (YBRI). YBRI was set up to inter alia, conduct research on the situation of the youth in development to inform YBF's programming, advocacy, and contribute to public policy in the broader space of youth development in Ghana, Africa and the Diaspora.

The Research was situated within a scope of identifying frontiers and barriers for youth engagements as well as the prospects and opportunities within these frontiers. It also attempted to map the dynamics and aspirations of Lusophone Africa youth; especially within the "dramatic eruption of the youth in domestic and public spheres" (Diouf, 2003:p14). Since the youth isn't homogenous and discrete; it is imperative that all rhetoric and strategies stem out from tailored engagements.

Guided by the African Youth Charter, the Research focused on youth aged 21 up to 35 years. It was revealed that despite the fact that the startling statistics of the youth in Lusophone countries reaffirms Africa in general, as a youth bulge, there are prospects for policy makers to tap and harness the potential of young people for national development. As state and non-state actors call for a united African Youth, it is important that a path is paved to harness the potential of the African Youth; specifically the Lusophone Youth.

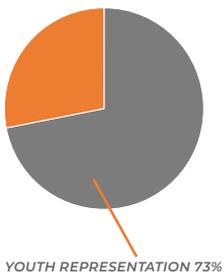
This Research was funded by the Open Society Foundations to contribute to integration of Lusophone African youth in the larger youth centred African Democratic process through capacity development for the Lusophone youth.

BACKGROUND

“ The startling statistics of the youth in Lusophone countries reaffirms Africa in general, as a youth bulge, a phenomenon that presents both an opportunity and a challenge for the continent. In Lusophone Africa, just as other African blocs, the phenomenon of youth bulge is an opportunity for policy makers to tap and harness the potential of young people for national development. “

Lusophone countries are countries that were colonized by the Portuguese prior to their independence. There are six such countries in Africa. They are Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde, São Tomé and Príncipe and Equatorial Guinea. ***Over 73% of Africa’s population, an amalgam of Anglophone, Francophone and Lusophone countries, is youthful and under 35 years.***

AFRICAN YOUTH POPULATION



It is important to clarify the concept of youth in order to avoid any ambiguity.

Admittedly, there are various definitions of the term ‘youth’. According to the 2006 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report, youth is defined as the age between 15 and 24 years. The African Youth Charter defines the youth as young men and women aged between 15-35 years. women aged between 15-35 years. The definition is also based on two main reasons: The lower age limit of fifteen years provides a major human-development watershed.

That is, it coincides with that period when most children experience puberty; and the upper limit of thirty-five years is the age at which most youth fully enter adulthood. Even though the age bracket of 15-35 years would be generally used, it is significant to note that in every culture, there are huge differences between teenagers and those in their twenties and mid- thirties. Therefore, in the discussion on the youth in Africa, much attention is devoted to those who are aged 21 up to 35 years but not to the total neglect of those who are aged 15-20 years.

Countries in the Lusophone Africa bloc subscribe to the definition of youth given by the African Youth Charter, as those young men and women aged between 15-35 years. The startling statistics of the youth in Lusophone countries reaffirms Africa in general, as a youth bulge, a phenomenon that presents both an opportunity a phenomenon that makes them susceptible to political manipulation and being used as agents to foment violent conflict. Given their pre-eminence and preponderance in the Lusophone population, the need for their engagement and participation in decision making at all levels cannot be discounted. However, just like their Anglophone and Francophone counterparts, young people in Lusophone countries face several challenges and barriers, with the most fundamental one being structural factors.

THE STATE OF CURRENT THINKING ON THE YOUTH IN AFRICA

Studies on youth in Africa are not generally compartmentalized in terms of whether they are Anglophone, Francophone and Lusophone. This is because youth issues are common across Africa. Diouf (2003) for instance, pointed out that the youth constitute the bulk of Africa's population and their integration into society in terms of both civic responsibility and membership has had enormous economic, social and political consequences (ibid:3-12). He argued that though African societies are increasingly looking up to the youth as instruments of change, the dramatic eruption of the youth in domestic and public spheres poses a threat and provokes within the society a panic that is simultaneously moral and civic.

This has culminated in the youth in Africa being left on political margins (ibid: 14).

Durham (2000) agreed with Diouf (2003) on the fact that the youth constitute the bulk of Africa's population. She asserted that people who might be considered "youth" form an increasing portion of the African population. She defined youthful period as an early stage of adulthood, in which people have many of the characteristics

Like Diouf (2003), Durham (2000) also pointed out that the claims to the position of youth and about their nature are centrally involved in the reinvention of political and social space. Burgers (2003) also noted that historians have often not ignored the youth but the overwhelming tendency has been to simply highlight their youthfulness without examining the historical significance of their age. This, he argued, is due to the absence of canonized script or normative theoretical guideline to which scholars may make reference to in order to firmly grasp the interest of the youth (ibid:2-15). In his view, the youth do not always appear homogenous, discrete or bounded category, possessing a long and recognizable local history in sharp contrast with global history of political mobilization (ibid: 20). He noted that in African resistance movements, the youth are temporary subversives, and comprise in most cases only a potential episodic oppositional coalition (ibid: 21). And in party rhetoric and strategy, the youth are regarded as necessary for the strength of any successful political coalitions (ibid:24). He postulated further that whenever a country

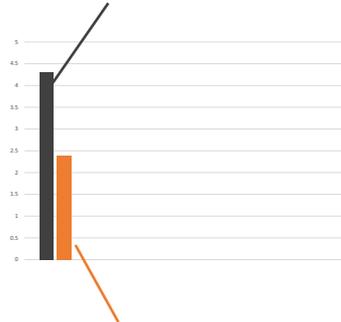
is in transition to political maturity, its youth tend to get more militant and political parties with more progressive platforms invariably attract larger members of the younger elements, who in turn adorn the older parties with their youthful spirit (ibid:28).

“Generally, the youth in Africa have been labelled “a lost generation” especially in parts of Francophone, Anglophone and Lusophone countries, where civil wars have led to massive population displacement, a social upheaval described by Richards (1995:224) as a crisis of the youth; and in many parts of the continent, where the youth have had to come to terms with unemployment, socio-political marginalization as well as severe barriers to participation. “

Thus, since the late 1980s and early 1990s, terms like “the lost generation” and “marginalized youth” have gained currency (ibid). Others have described them as perpetrators of crimes and hedonists who are a drain on national resources and a group to be feared (Griffin 1997; Males 1998; Rook 1998). ***In many Lusophone countries for instance, even though the youth constitute 60-65% of the population, they are***

described as marginalized, apathetic, disenchanted, disempowered and exploited (Konteh, 2007:18).

LUSOPHONE YOUTH POPULATION



Marginalized Youth in Lusophone countries

YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN AFRICA: A STRUCTURAL FUNCTIONALIST EXPLANATION

Structural-functionalism attempts to explain why society functions the way it does by focusing on the relationships between the various actors and social institutions that make up society. As a framework, it views society through a macro-level orientation, which is a broad focus on the power structures, positions, functions or roles that are performed to ensure equilibrium and proper functioning of every society, system, or organization (Merton, 1957). In other words, the theory addresses society as a whole in terms of the functions of its constituent elements; namely norms, customs, traditions and institutions.

“The central concern of structural-functionalism is a task of explaining the stability and internal cohesion needed by societies and organizations to endure over time (Porpora, 1987).”

The theory sees society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability. In every structure, there are efforts to impute, as rigorously as possible, to each part, specific roles and functions that must be played for its effective functioning,

stability and cohesion (Murdock, 1949). According to Merton (1957), these functions that generally have positive effects on society may be manifest or latent.

“Manifest functions are explicitly stated and understood by the participants in a relevant action. Latent functions are those that are neither recognized nor intended.”

However, Merton (1957:67) added that in every society and decision-making structure, there could also be manifest and latent dysfunctions which could undermine equilibrium. Manifest dysfunctions are anticipated disruptions of social life while latent dysfunctions are unintended and unanticipated disruptions of order and stability (ibid: 68).

For society to function properly and achieve equilibrium, every individual in the social structure must perform his role and function irrespective of how significant or insignificant it may be without any manifest or latent disruption. A common analogy, popularized by Herbert Spencer (1897), presents these parts of society as “organs” that work towards the proper

functioning of the “body” as a whole.

A neglect or failure to perform one’s role may lead to poor functioning of the structures of society. Again, in every organizational set-up, there are roles and positions that are assigned to the various individuals. Some individuals may occupy top positions while others may be at the bottom. Often times, those at the bottom may perform peripheral functions while those at the top of the hierarchy perform the core duties. Nevertheless, these roles and positions are not mutually exclusive in themselves. They complement each other such that a failure to perform one task, no matter how small it may be, affects the entire activities of the organization. Hence every role and position must be allowed to operate effectively to ensure harmony and stability.

“The structural-functionalist theory serves as a useful framework for analysing the structure of governance, politics and decision-making in Lusophone and other African countries and the role of the youth in them. In virtually all African countries, the position and function of young people in the structure and composition of government and decision-making appear “latent”. “

Indeed, membership of key decision-making structures is largely skewed in favour of representatives the adults. In most cases, these representatives are the aged even though there could. Nevertheless, the youth in Lusophone countries, just as their counterparts in Anglophone and Francophone countries, have a role or “manifest function” in the governance, politics and national development. Being the bulk of the nation’s labour force and voting population, the youth are expected to make meaningful input into development policies formulated by policy makers both at the local/community and national level. No matter how peripheral their role in governance and decision-making may be, it is important that the youth are encouraged to play the role assigned them. As per the theory, there will be disequilibrium in the society if the complementary functions and role of the youth in the decision-making process are not exercised. Just as the whole human body is declared unfit when one part is diseased and unable to function properly, the development process of Lusophone countries and other African blocs have failed to function properly and effectively in delivering on its goals because the youth, a key component of the process are unable to perform their “manifest functions”. This may have

serious negative implications for the youth and national development including political conflict, policy implementation problems, challenges of national cohesion, dissipation of youth talents, potentials and initiative, etc. The application of the structural-functionalist theory to this study is indubitably useful in analysing governance and decision making in Africa, and the position of the youth in the structural arrangements. In the structure of decision making in Africa, there are roles and positions that are played by the different actors. Therefore, the theory presents a framework for explaining the position and role of the youth in decision-making among Lusophone countries and the implications of their marginalization in the process.

THE PRACTICAL BARRIERS TO YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN LUSOPHONE COUNTRIES

A review of the state of current thinking on young people in Africa as a whole, points to derogatory conceptions about them, as well as their palpable lack of substantive participation and marginalization from governance, politics and decision making. It is to be conceded that recent political events, point to a revival of the African youth in rejecting the fallacy of a passive generation that must wait or bid its time, and a crisis generation that has been marginalized (Borges, 2019; Honwana, 2012).

“The youth today, are bringing about modern modalities for socio-political action through social media and other online activism, that have succeeded in regime changes and other appreciable transformations in society (Borges, 2019). “

Even though the current proactive role of the youth is commendable, they are still perceived as agitators, foot-soldiers and hot-headed people whose role in political participation must be confined to the area of political periphery and not substantive participation on governance as active decision makers (Castro, 2013). Indeed, there is a generally low level

of youth engagement in formalized state-centred institutional politics and governance across the Africa region (Borges, 2019).

Among Lusophone countries, there are to youth empowerment and participation at all levels of decision making, beyond serving as agitators and leaders of protests and unrests. Notable among such barriers is the fact that many of the countries in this bloc have no formal blueprints and National Youth Policies aimed at developing, preparing, empowering, training, mentoring the youth as well as harnessing their potential for participation and national development (Castro, 2013). In Angola and Sao Tome, there are no national youth policies and national platforms for the discussion of matters concerning young people. All issues related to the youth are treated as incidentals and anecdotes of major policy interventions and blueprints of governments (ibid). The lack of official blueprints to regulate young people and to empower them to participate in decision making has led to other challenges and problems including idleness among them, social evils and their susceptibility to being manipulated by unscrupulous

politicians as agents of violent conflict (Young, 2010).

Youth participation among Lusophone countries has also been negligible, arguably because, many countries on this bloc are generally fledgling and fragile democracies, whose appreciation of the democratic ideal of inclusivity are yet to be formed, nurtured and developed (Young, 2010). It is usual for such countries to place leadership positions in the hands of the aged, perpetuate gerontocracy and relegate the role of young people to the periphery of foot-soldiers, agents to be used to foment conflict as well as patriotic regime guards (Konteh 2007; Males, 1998). In Cape Verde for instance, despite the various indicators of relative democratic success, there still remain serious deficiencies and deficits in the country's democratic practices, particularly in the area of inclusion, in a manner that has compelled young people to enact their own forms of engagement (Borges, 2019; Young, 2010). education, although literacy rate among Lusophone countries averages 60%; as well as unemployment; poverty and economic mesmerisation among the youth in Lusophone countries, just as their counterparts in other African blocs (Urdal, 2004; Honwana, 2012; Borges, 2019).

LUSOPHONE COUNTRIES AND THE AFRICAN YOUTH CHARTER

The marginalization of the youth in Lusophone countries clearly undermines the African Youth Charter and other allied blueprints including including the African Charter on Democracy Elections and Governance that Ghana Ghana and many other African countries have duly ratified. Just as their counterparts in other African states, countries of the Lusophone bloc have also either signed or ratified the African Youth Charter. The table below gives a pictorial representation and details of ratification of the Charter by Lusophone countries as of June 28, 2019:

Details Of Ratification Of The African Youth Charter By Lusophone Countries

No.	Country	Date Signed	Date Ratified	Date Deposited
1.	Angola	02-02-2010	10-06-2009	13-05-2010
2.	Cape Verde	-	15-02-2011	09-05-2011
3.	Equatorial Guinea	02-02-2009	-	-
4.	Guinea-Bissau	17-06-2008	31-07-2008	14-10-2008
5.	Mozambique	25-10-2010	29-07-2008	28-08-2008
6.	Sao Tome & Principe	01-02-2010	19-09-2014	27-06-2019

(Source: Africa Union)

From the table above, five (5) out of the six (6) countries have ratified the African Youth Charter. It must however be pointed out that the signing and ratification of the African Youth Charter by countries in Africa as a whole, does not necessarily translate into concrete actions aimed at implementing the ideals encapsulated in the Charter. In this regard, the Lusophone countries, just as their counterparts in other African blocs, have not demonstrated much commitment to the African Youth Charter beyond merely signing or ratifying the document. One of the major provisions in the African Youth Charter (Article 11) for instance, is a call on nations to among other things, guarantee the participation of youth in Parliament and other decision-making bodies in accordance with prescribed laws. Under governance, democracy and leadership, the Charter it states that governments will promote the active participation of youth in decision-making processes at all levels. Unfortunately, it seems many Lusophone countries continue to honour the imperatives of the African Youth Charter in the area of participation, in breach.

Article 12 of the African Youth Charter also enjoins state parties to enact national youth policies and among other things, put in place measures to set up

youth coordinating mechanisms to implement, monitor and evaluate programmes. Whereas some African countries in Africa have yielded to this requirement, many Lusophone countries do not have national youth policies and official blueprints to regulate youth activities. Moreover, the Charter calls for a youth perspective to be integrated and mainstreamed into all planning and decision-making as well as programme development. This is however, not adhered to by countries of the Lusophone origin.

“In article 13 of the African Youth Charter, there is emphasis on quality education and skills development. This section among other things, enjoins African countries to promote quality education that leads to holistic development of the cognitive, emotional and creative abilities of young people. But as indicated earlier, even though the literacy rate among young people from Lusophone origin averages 60%, quality education in a manner that properly develops the skills, potentials of the youth appear lacking.”

A CASE FOR LUSOPHONE YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN THE AFRICAN YOUTH AND GOVERNANCE CONVERGENCE (AYGC)

“The challenges of young people in Africa generally appear common. However, their counterparts of the Lusophone origin suffer from other peculiar setbacks and problems, which constitute monumental barriers to youth participation. “

Indeed, the fact that many countries of Lusophone origin, seem to have no national recognition for the challenges confronting the youth; lack established and formalized avenue for youth participation; and have no official or national blueprints and youth policies to regulate youth training, development, empowerment and participation, amply speaks to the challenges of youth participation in the Lusophone bloc.

Innovative interventions like African Youth and Governance Convergence (AYGC), a Leadership Grooming Programme, with an annual convergence organized by the Youth Bridge Foundation with the support of Youth Bridge Research Institute (YBRI), the research unit of the Youth Bridge Foundation, will be useful in bringing the challenges of youth participation in Lusophone

countries to the fore, for a thorough discussion, empowerment and resolution with respect to how the challenges can be effectively tackled. It is to be admitted that young people from Lusophone countries, are ideally, plagued with a language challenge that may render their inclusion in the annual AYGC quite problematic and somewhat unbeneficial to them. This is because available research and statistics show that a whopping 98%

of young people in Lusophone countries, speak only Portuguese and cannot comprehend or express themselves in the traditional languages of English and French. To surmount this challenge and ensure that it does not limit the international exposure and engagement of young Lusophones, the YBRI is committed to simultaneously translating AYGC proceedings into French, English and Portuguese.

Over the years, young people from Lusophone countries have not benefitted from the AYGC empowering prospects, leadership training, mentorship and youth development opportunities that prepare young people for participation.

A case is therefore being made for them to fully be part of the AYGC, to ensure a holistic training and development of the African and Diaspora youth for substantive participation in governance and decision-making in all spheres of life, as a way of securing the development and future of the African continent. For, if the future of Africa belongs to the youth, then the youth must be prepared now, for the future.



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