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HARNESSING THE YOUTH BULGE FOR TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP, TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN AFRICA: THE CASE OF MOZAMBIQUE AND ZIMBABWE.

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ABSTRACT

In every part of the globe, the 21st century has seen an increase in the youth bulge accompanied by a surge in youths' involvement in various issues. Youth alone now constitute more than 65% (both male and female) of Africa's population becoming impossible to leave youths behind in any processes. Perhaps in the new millennium, the Arab Springs in North Africa and the #feesmustfall South African protests changed the course of history and discourse around leadership issues in Africa. Historically, challenges and opportunities confronting youths in Africa are traditional. Hierarchy (both political and social) always defines the leadership criteria. Historically, youths have been at the receiving end and decisions made on their behalf. This article is also developed in the context of the re-emergence of the #feesmustfall protests in South Africa and also incarceration of young political and human rights activists in Zimbabwe, immensely changing the face of politics in both countries and Africa at large. For Southern Africa, the mass youth protests raises pertinent questions around leadership, unemployment, poverty, education and involvement of the youth in national processes. Through the lenses of the qualitative research paradigm, the author answered the how, why and what questions by identifying patterns in the issues under discussion. This paper seeks to discuss how African countries can or should harness the youth population by grooming transformative leaders who hold governments to account solely on the basis that it is the continent's leadership and actions which affect the full enjoyment of human rights, good governance and democracy in Africa.

Key words: *Youth bulge, transformative leadership, good governance, peace and development.*

INTRODUCTION

Since 2000 to date, all eyes have been on Africa because of the pervasive disgruntlement which has been illuminated through the lenses of mass demonstrations. This has been mostly against their governments and leaders. Violent protests and uprisings in counter's such as Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, South Africa and Africa at large reflects the longstanding problems associated with poor leadership, the lack of democratisation, poverty and unemployment among other challenges facing young people. Against this backdrop, the youths have played a pivotal role in drawing attention to the deteriorating governance and leadership crisis in most African countries. The lack of good governance in Africa has imposed a burden on an already struggling youth population which is closely linked to the reluctance by African governments to formulate and implement youth inclusive and sensitive policies which effectively deal with the challenges they encounter on a day to day basis.

This article seeks to unveil the major causes of these and other obstacles and opportunities to youth participation in leadership, development and governance. In this paper, one will also be making recommendations on what can be done to reinstate youths' participation, involvement in leadership positions and national processes. Traditionally, the relationship between the State and the youth has always been a delicate one, marred by suspicion and mistrust. Suffice to say that it should be taken seriously as a potential threat to peace and development in Africa. Under the auspices of Agenda 2063 and



the African Youth Charter, this paper discusses youth involvement in public leadership and accountability processes given the ever increasing youthful population across the continent. Through the African Governance Architecture (AGA), specifically in 2014, the Secretariat opened up new frontiers for citizen engagement, including development of engagement standards and mobilisation of women, youth and civil society to meaningfully participate in democratic governance processes and agenda on the continent (African Union, 2021).

THE YOUTH BULGE THEORY

The youth bulge is a common phenomenon in many developing countries, and particularly, in the least developed countries (Lin, 2012). Since its inception, the 'youth bulge' theory has shaped the understandings of youth in peace and conflict. This theory has also become part of some public scholarship, mainstream political rhetoric, and has shaped the human rights and youth empowerment discourse in most States. Through the 'youth bulge' lens, youth - especially males - have been presented as current or future perpetrators of violence (Pruitt, 2020). However, the author is of the view that the 'youth bulge' thesis should be used as a lens through which African nations can view the increasing youthful population as an opportunity rather than a flaw; an opportunity rather a challenge. This will lead to both theoretical and practical understandings of the positive roles youths play in relation to transformative leadership, transparency and accountability in Africa and will result in more effective policy-making across the continent. In critically reflecting on the 'youth bulge' thesis, this article argues that applying this theory is crucial in understanding the involvement of young people, in general, in transparency and accountability processes. This will contribute to advancing more accurate analysis in scholarship and policy-making towards achieving transparency and accountability in Africa.

PROBLEMS AFRICA IS FACING DUE TO LACK OF TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

In recent history, countries such as South Africa, Mozambique, Tunisia, Egypt, among others have experienced instability due to an aggrieved and agitated youthful population. From the Arab springs to the most recent instability in Northern Mozambique, young people have expressed their frustrations towards their government due to the lack of transparency and accountability in how economic resources have been distributed to promote development. For example, Mozambique discovered some very lucrative minerals which consist of rubies, natural gas, hydro-electric energy, mineral sands, coal and (possibly) oil in recent years, but the greater part of the country remains very poor (Darch, 2018). In 2019, three oil and gas giants obtained a license and began to extract liquefied natural gas in the Cabo Delgado province. Cabo Delgado is now home to Africa's three largest liquid natural gas (LNG) projects: the Mozambique LNG Project (TOTAL formerly Anadarko) worth US\$20bn, Coral FLNG Project (ENI and ExxonMobil) worth US\$4.7bn and Rovuma LNG Project (ExxonMobil, ENI and CNPC) worth US\$30bn (Rawoot, 2020). However, it is important to note that large-scale investments in mineral resource exploitation began back in the 1990s when Mr. Joaquim Chissano was president. His approach and governance style was seen as technocratic in his policy orientation (Darch, 2018).

Major projects included MOZAL (the Mozambique aluminium project, owned by the Australian company BHP-Billiton) and SASOL's natural gas developments in Pande and Temane (including the Temane-Secunda pipeline). Exploitation of the Moatize coal fields was also renewed, initially by the Brazilian mining company Vale and more recently by Mitsui of Japan (Darch, 2018). These "mega-projects" have been subjected to criticism over the years for their failure to provide tax revenue, new infrastructure, employment, basic education, health, among other basic social amenities to the local communities. A decade before the violence erupted in the Cabo Delgado province (around 2007), there was the creation



and existence of a religious sect, popularly known as Al-Shabaab or Ansar Al-Sunna Mozambique, which became active in a few districts (Mutasa and Muchemwa, 2021). This sect was mostly comprised Muslim youths who were of the belief that the Northern part of Mozambique had been deliberately neglected and forgotten by the central government despite the discovery and existence of lucrative minerals mentioned above.

As a religious group, it perpetuated radical Islamism and Sharia law, opposing all forms of collaboration with the government (Brito, 2020). Over time, it began to expand and started to set-up military cells along with a tougher discourse as of late 2015 until its members started fighting in 2017 (IDeIAS, 2020). Coming from the background that unemployment is high and poverty is widespread in the Cabo Delgado region, “the insurgency seems to be developing in areas and among population groups marginalised by the state, mobilising in particular, young people in rupture with the state, but also “traditional” society, in so far as they adopt a fundamentalist practice of Islam” (Brito, 2020: 6). To feed the movement, the rebels looked to the local Muslim population that feels to have been marginalised and neglected for years by the government (ibid).

Northern Mozambique is known for its oil-rich land and also its growing fight against Islamist extremism. The literature on the civil war in Mozambique shows how RENAMO mobilized local cleavages in its favour (Chichava, 2020). Referring to the conflict in Cabo Delgado, Brito stresses that “in this aspect, it seems we are facing the same kind of dynamic which characterised the war waged by RENAMO: the arrival of an armed group, bearing a discourse of opposition to the established order, acts to accelerate social discontent and radicalises socio-political cleavages, some of them historical, which already existed locally” (Brito, 2020: 6).

A lot of literature and debate have been produced around the idea that there is an inverse relationship between natural resource wealth and broad socio-economic development in poor countries, a concept known as the “resource curse” (Darch, 2018). Broad statistical indicators sometimes point to substantial growth in macro-economic terms, but they do not necessarily show whether overall poverty has been reduced or socio-economic inequality, between social classes or between geographical regions, has dropped (ibid). In the context of Cabo Delgado and in other countries like DRC, Nigeria and Zimbabwe in which lucrative minerals such as oil, diamonds and gold have been discovered in abundance, poverty, marginalisation and the cost of living have increased particularly among the youth. Corruption has also risen exponentially which has mostly benefited the elite who personalise natural resources and smuggle gold, diamonds, and platinum, among others to their own benefit. For example, diamonds worth US\$15bn disappeared in 2018 and never recovered (Publish What You Pay, 2018), whilst 6kgs of gold was confiscated at the airport in 2020 (New Zimbabwe, 2020) in Zimbabwe, but no one has been arrested or held accountable for the diamonds or attempting to smuggle the gold to Dubai.

Indeed, the opposite is being observed caused by the inflow of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) pushing-up domestic prices, the creation of scarcity of capital and labour as the new resource sectors absorb whatever is available and the absence of wider impact benefits in the economy as a whole. This opposite effect of the discovery of lucrative mineral resources in many countries is leading to the eruption of violent conflicts by and violent extremism among the youth.



AGENDA 2063, THE YOUTH, PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA - YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN DEMOCRATIC AND GOVERNANCE PROCESSES IN AFRICA

Through Agenda 2063, Africa's destiny has been put in the hands of the young generation and all youths must act now to shape the Africa We Want, most importantly through formulation and implementation of interventions and policies which encapsulate the needs and concerns of young people (Agenda 2063). The assumption is that if the government is sensitive to young people's grievances, needs and concerns, more youths will take up leadership positions and Africa will realise more peace, inclusive and sustainable development. Agenda 2063 was crafted in such a way which rededicates young Africans to the enduring Pan- African vision of an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena.

Article 26 of the African Youth Charter (2006) stresses that every young person has the duty to (a) custodians of their own development and (d) partake fully in citizen duties including voting, decision-making and governance. Youths must continuously play a pivotal role in achieving the vision, using transformative leadership strategies that will bring equally desired outcomes. It is also high time that the elders drop the mantra 'youths are tomorrow's leaders' but rather capitalise on and tap into the skills and knowledge young people have amassed in technology, agriculture, politics, human rights, development, commerce, law among other professions to make them today's leaders. Many youths are excelling in the above sectors which means that youths are our current leaders. Rather than viewing young people with suspicion and as competitors, the older and more experienced generation should engage in leadership grooming and develop the capacity of young people in issues which promote transformative leadership, transparency and accountability in Africa.

To avoid the recurrence of future violent confrontations such as the Arab springs and the #feesmustfall protests (Baloyi and Isaacs, 2015), there should be a deliberate intergenerational dialogue and cross-pollination of ideas between the young and the older generations so as to ensure sustainable peace and development across the continent in order to address unemployment, poverty and other challenges which the youths are facing. There is a saying which goes 'nothing for us, without us' which means young people must be involved in all peace and development process across the continent. The reform of governance procedures and the leadership approach is what I strongly recommend in African countries. Structural reforms which address historical inequalities are of utmost importance on the African continent.

As part of Agenda 2063, youths must contribute to nation building by echoing their commitment to maintaining peace and contributing to sustainable development in Africa. It only calls for transformative leadership among the youths to get us to the Africa We Want. Hence, the youth should preserve and build on what we already have in Africa. This also means that young people should lead by example and desist from using violence to express their frustrations for there cannot be development without peace. In essence, a peaceful continent develops faster, in a sustainable manner.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR INVESTMENT, PEACE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE YOUTH POPULATION THROUGH TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

If natural and economic resources in Africa are strategically harnessed for the development, mentorship, and opportunities for young people to exercise their skills, the continent might enjoy the peace and sustainable development it seeks to achieve. Youth participation in democratic and governance processes is key in achieving sustainable peace and development. Agenda 2063 and the African Youth Charter allude to the notion that "the aspirations reflect our desire for shared prosperity and well-being, for unity and



integration, for a continent of free citizens and expanded horizons, where the full potential of women and youth are realized..." Studies have shown that countries with high youth bulge are not necessarily predestined to experience instability and conflict, but prosperity and growth. In fact, if carefully harnessed and given the right conditions, large youth populations present Africa with opportunities to promote peace and boost development (the 'demographic dividend'). According to Lederach (1997), conflict (where youths are calling for reforms, democracy, good governance and the rule of law) must harness positive energy for structural reforms.

Research in economic demography suggests that countries are strategically enabled to achieve economic progress if large youth populations precede significantly smaller cohorts (Hendrixson, 2003), especially in countries that are relatively economically stable and educationally viable. In terms of governance issues, youth leaders now believe in peaceful engagements rather than the use of violence because it is retrogressive and destructive. Through transformative leadership, young people should harness opportunities in the government, civil society, agriculture, infrastructure development, the music industry, sports, entrepreneurship, real estate, tourism, manufacturing, health, education, arts and culture, science and technology. Africa is not going anywhere else, but upwards.

High youth populations are now viewed as skilled and readily available labour that can be utilized for development (World Bank, 2006). Hence, if the state-youth relationship is carefully and strategically developed, it can lead to positive outcomes making Africa a very peaceful environment conducive for sustainable development and economic growth.

FORMULATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF PRO-YOUTH POLICIES

Upon assuming office in 2017, the South Africa's President, Cyril Ramaphosa, initiated the Youth Employment Service (YES) program sending a clear message that his administration was serious about tackling youth unemployment and development. This initiative came after the realization that a large cohort of youths is not employed amounting to 26% out of the entire population (SAStats, 2017). In the past few years, unemployment rapidly increased in countries such as Zimbabwe, Malawi and Nigeria which explains the high youth migration to countries such as South Africa. Protests, an increase in violent extremism and populist politics (with a strong youth element) on the continent also skyrocketed in the past two decades. Progressive implementation of youth sensitive/inclusive policies creates a peaceful and conducive environment that enables economic growth, employment and good governance to create the leadership for the Africa We Want.

As Africa countries move to adopt national youth policies, governments should ensure that all young women and men are given meaningful opportunities to reach their full potential, both as individuals and as active participants in society. Youth policies should address major concerns and issues critical to youths and should give direction to youth programmes and services provided by government and non-government organisations. Africa as a whole will benefit through the implementation of national youth policies. By placing young people as central to all development initiatives, African states recognise and value young women and men as key resources and national assets by highlighting the importance of youth development to nation building and the creation of democratic, productive and equitable societies across the continent.



CONCLUSION

This paper is expected to give African governments an opportunity to prioritise youth development and display its commitment to national youth development through the creation of appropriate policy implementation mechanisms and the allocation of sufficient resources through transparency and accountability. Authorities should work in a cooperative and harmonious manner when designing and delivering programmes and services which address youth development needs and opportunities for sustainable development across the continent. Furthermore, this analysis is intended to encourage an understanding amongst young men and women of the processes of governance and provides opportunities for their participation in national programmes, thus enabling them to play a positive role in sustainable peace and development in Africa.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The youths should create platforms for engagement with policy makers and duty bearers to discuss issues with transparency and accountability particularly in relation to natural resources management and revenue and how they think it can be used for sustainable development across the continent. Young people should understand the strength (in numbers) they have in order to change the way things are being done in Africa by taking the 'bull by its horns'.
- African governments should take heed and pay attention to the signs of disgruntlement and dissent fomenting in countries, particularly among the youths. Signs of violent extremism were present since the 1990s in the Cabo Delgado region, but the Mozambican government decided not to pay attention and today there is violence in the country. The youth bulge is real and their demands in every part of the world, imminent. If disregarded, this will have serious consequences for the whole world.
- African governments should also be transparent and accountable in how they utilise and distribute natural and economic resources. Failure to do so will plunge the continent into violent conflicts which will reverse the gains of the past years.
- Over and above the adoption of youth policies, African governments should also ensure the participation, involvement and inclusion of young people in democratic and governance processes so that youth policies are not viewed as cosmetic, but sincere in empowering young people.
- There should be an inter-generational dialogue between the older and youthful generations (leadership) so that there will be an honest discussion and consensus on what can be done to promote sustainable development in Africa through transparency and accountability in Africa. Failure to do so will only perpetuate the problems the continent is currently facing.

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