

Youth Involvement in Policy Making: A Case of South Africa

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KEYWORDS Youth Involvement. Policy Making. Governance. South Africa

ABSTRACT This study sets out to assess the extent at which youth in South Africa participate in policy making. The paper adopted a qualitative approach whereby semi-structured interviews and focus groups were conducted with youth in the University of Fort Hare, Walter Sisulu University and Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. Secondary analysis was used to establish the role of youth in policy making as defined in the Constitution of South Africa and other legal frameworks. The data from interviews was transcribed verbatim and presented in a thematic form. The study establishes that youth do not actively participate in policy making due to poor youth policies, education and training, poor intervention strategies by civil society organisations and lack of Information Communication Technology. The study recommends the government to involve the youth at all phases of decision making, to involve civil society organisations and increase funding towards youth programmes.

INTRODUCTION

Millions of South African youth are still grappling with the challenges of limited youth participation in governance, economic affairs and policy making of the state despite seventeen years since the development of the National Youth Policy of 1997. Mtwesi (2014) affirms that this is attributed to a number of factors ranging from youth marginalisation, poor information dissemination, undefined legislation regarding youth involvement and low education levels in poorest provinces in the country. This has exacerbated high levels of unemployment and youth poverty as evidenced in rural urban to migration to larger cities like Pretoria and Johannesburg (Mtwesi 2014). The International Labour Organization (ILO) (2013) observes that youth unemployment in South Africa manifests itself through marginalization which makes it difficult for the youth to fit in the mainstream economy and decision making arena. ILO recognises further that globally deteriorating youth unemployment presents little chances of youth being employed than older people. On a global scale, 73.4 million young people who want to work and are actively looking for a job cannot find one. About one out of every two young people (52.9%) is unemployed or a discouraged work-seeker, and not enrolled at an educational institution (ILO 2013). In South Africa, the June (2014) Labour Force Survey proves that 36.1

percent of youth between ages 15-35 are unemployed which is almost double the 15.6 percent of adults aged between 35 and 64 who are unemployed. Only those with tertiary qualification have chances of getting employment. All these statistics attempt to explain the reasons why youth are not developing in South Africa and the gaps in the economic policies which does not favour youth growth. In the famous words of Kofi Annan Secretary-General of the United Nations “*No one is born a good citizen; no nation is born a democracy. Rather, both are processes that continue to evolve over a lifetime. Young people must be included from birth. A society that cuts itself off from its youth severs its lifeline; it is condemned to bleed to death.*” It is against this background that this report seeks to explore how the South African youth are involved in decision making. Merits and demerits of participation processes used by the youth will also be conceptualised. Active participation in policy making ensures accountability and commitment across both national and local authorities furthermore, setting grounds for their long term engagements as active citizens. The young people between the age of 15-30 form 80 percent of the world’s most active economic entities and are regarded as South Africa’s largest generation (Bhatkal 2014; E.U. 2012). Involving young people in national and global governance is therefore important because the sustainability of developmental effort, glo-

bal or national requires their involvement, ownership and participation. Most of the youth exist in third world countries and in most cases are excluded in policy making (Pereznieto and Harding 2013).

Objectives of the Study

The study aims to assess the level of youth involvement in governance and policy making in South Africa. The study seeks to analyse the effectiveness of strategies that are aimed at increasing youth participation in policy making matters that affects their economic and social well-being. The study seeks to recommend the government to embrace youth in policy making to make their voice heard towards nation building.

Problem Statement

The South African youth are still confronted with challenges in relation to policy making (Nicolson 2013). This calls for local and national authorities' commitment to actively involve the youth in governance. In most instances, the state is still making it difficult to promote space for active citizenship (Bhatkal 2014). The youth feel that their participation is limited mostly to voting on national elections (Resnick and Casale 2011). This possesses a significant risk to the inclusion of governance on issues relating to security and the rule of law. Governance and accountability are imperative in strengthening and fulfilling citizenship and rights (United Nations 2013). The active commitment of the youth as the largest population group in South Africa is therefore vital. Due to the challenges of youth involvement in policy making mentioned above this study is aimed at stimulating thought, discussion and action to expand youth involvement in governance. It may also provide a launching point for further analysis of the state of youth engagement policy making in South Africa, given its importance for positive youth development and meeting national and regional development goals.

Literature Review

This literature review focused on assessing youth involvement in policy making in South Africa and in other countries as well.

Participatory Governance and Policy Making

Governance is defined to as the practice through which a country exercises power and the relationships between the state and citizens (Plan UK 2012). In participatory governance citizens are involved in the distribution of public resources and broader decision-making. Accountability is the notion of responsibility for actions by decision-makers (Christian 1996). Citizens hold these decision-makers for justification for their actions. The youth have a relationship with the state and should be included in decision-making processes, particularly on issues that affect their lives directly such as education and health just to mention a few (European Union 2011). Although the youth in South Africa participate in governance through voting, volunteerism/ activism, recent research shows that, young people are referred to as victim's not critical stakeholders in policy making (SIIA 2015). They often feel that their concerns are not fully represented politically. Young people, furthermore, are full of good ideas on how to improve their representation and the democratic system at large. Most youth are active politically in universities through student bodies though in most cases mislead with political leadership and political institutions and excluded from policy development (UNDP 2012).

Resnick and Casale (2011) suggest that the participation of young people in formal, institutional political processes is fairly low when compared to older citizens in South Africa. This challenges the representativeness of the political system and leads to the marginalization of the youth in policy making and this leads poverty, barriers to education, multiple forms of discrimination and limited employment prospects and opportunities among the youth (United Nations 2013). Walker et al. (2014) has outlined that the main challenges for youth are restricted opportunities for effective involvement in policy making. The youth feel excluded and marginalized in their societies and communities (E.U. 2011). There is need for participatory structures and greater trust between youth and institutions and for greater capacity development must be stressed. Efforts must be made to focus on the most vulnerable of young people.

In developing countries including South Africa, young people can engage in peace building and using new technologies to organise citi-

zens to bring about change (United Nations 2013). The youth have proved the potential for activism, volunteerism, facilitating to manage conflict and promote peace. Young people are energetic stakeholders in conflict and in peace-building, and there are agents of change and offer a foundation for the transformation of lives and communities, contributing to more just and peaceful societies (Resnick and Casale 2011). The other means in which the youth can be involved in governance include strengthening youth advocacy groups, providing quality research to network with public authorities, and fostering the creation of national youth councils and plans (Bhatkal 2014; United Nations 2013). Innovative strategies must range from societal partnerships for service delivery to provincial youth parliaments to a digital game on youth and local governance (E.U. 2011). These youth centered initiatives must take into consideration the progression of applicable and convincing youth indicators, formal and contextual analyses (political analyses) during the programme design phase and partnership building (Mushemeza 2009).

Most young people are not involved in direct participation because the opportunities for youth to engage in governance and participate in political and decision-making processes depend largely on the political, socioeconomic, and cultural contexts where social norms result in multiple forms of discrimination against the youth (Walker et al. 2014). This is mainly because most of the youth who are interested in activism are mostly in poverty and uneducated. A few who have had the chance to be heard in parties such as Democratic Alliance (DA), Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) and other political parties are still facing challenges on the grounds of discrimination. A few in the African National Congress (ANC) are used by senior members as lap dogs (News 24 2013). They are placed at the fore front in campaigns but when it comes to the important issues in policy making they are side stepped. Volunteering, like social activism, can be purposeful and change-orientated (Nicolson 2015). In South Africa mainly because of poverty, volunteering and activism are largely the domain and the achievement of the poor. It is the extension of a helping hand between equals hence it is difficult for the youth involved to be noticed. At times youth will end up leading vio-

lent such as the recent xenophobic in Durban and Johannesburg (Tromp and Oatway 2015).

Meaningful youth participation and leadership require that the youth have opportunities, capacities, and benefits from an empowering environment and relevant evidence based programmes and policies at all levels (Resnick and Casale 2011). Recognising the youth' right to participate in policy making is also vital to ensure the achievement of internationally agreed development goals and to invigorate the development agenda (Mushemeza 2009). Non participation is therefore an ineffective way of registering the youth's dissatisfaction with governance systems. This further makes it impossible for the realisation of the development agenda (Bhatkal 2014).

Government Strategies in Ensuring Youth Involvement in Policy Making

Mtwesi (2014) ascertains that in effort to ensure that youth participate in policy making process, the government of South Africa promulgated pieces of legislation such as the National Youth Development Act of (2008). This framework establishes the provisions of the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA)-an institution which exists to spearhead youth development in South Africa. This legislation speaks to functions and objectives such as effective management and good governance, the regulation of staff and financial affairs as well as administration of funds meant for NYDA. It is imperative to realize that the NYDA was mandated to initiate, design, coordinate, evaluate and monitoring and provision of oversight role in integrating youth in the act development an Integrated Youth Development Plan and Strategy (IYDS). It provides a roadmap to enhance economic emancipation of the youth and oversees the education and training programs, networking and fostering relations with the private sector and non-governmental organisations on programs geared towards skills development, poverty alleviation initiatives, combatting of crime and enhancement of urban and rural development.

Barriers to Effective Youth Participation in Policy Making

Mtwesi (2014) remarks that policy makers in South Africa have expresses their deep concern for youth development however little has been

done to improve the social, political and economic statuses of youth. It is sad to learn that the previous and current programmes designed for youth development failed to effect change thereby exposing the youth to economic hardships and suffering due to escalating unemployment. Public polices in South Africa lack youth input which makes them more rigid or autocratic on how youth should develop. Felix (2003) asserts that lack of information communication between youth and their leaders inhibit participation in policy making and development issues. The author mourns the lack of diversity, adultism and systematic mistreatment of young men due to their age contributes to youth challenges in the country. This is simply because despite their existence the voice of the youth in the governance of the country is far from being heard, which remains a critical challenge to be addressed by the policy makers.

The Institute of Security Studies (2003) as cited in the World Youth Report (2003) illustrated that in South Africa, a significant number of youth are ready to implement change in communities and youth development initiatives to better the lives of others though they are still trapped in crime. Ages from 12 to 21 are subjected to crime and at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS and other related diseases which in essence discourages youth development. Statistics South Africa (2014) affirms that 37 percent of the country's population are youth which calls for powerful resource for the country to support the youth. The National Development Plan (2011-2030) affirms that it would be beneficial if the majority of the youthful population is employed, the challenge however remains to convert this into a demographic dividend. It argues further that it was going to be possible in event if the number of working age can be productively employed. Another sidekick to youth development is societal norms and values which discriminate youth participation in economic affairs in favour of older people. The burden remains with policy makers to formulate public policies and policy implementation frameworks that encourage youth participation for economic and political development.

Poor Infrastructure

The Department for International Development (DFID) (2010) acknowledges that young

people in several countries lack direct access to institutional systems and structures within governments, the media and civil society sectors. To that end, the abilities of youth to advocate for their rights are severely harmed as a result they are left without a voice or any contribution to the economic and political affairs of the country. In many developed and developing countries, where the youth influence decision making, inadequate infrastructure proves to be a limiting factor in the implementation process. Such a scenario discourages the confidence of young people and trust in such ineffective systems. World Bank (2007) and GTZ (2008) agree that, to achieve active participation youth need to be empowered. By empowering we mean government of South Africa, should support the youth through skills development initiatives, public speaking, group programmes, promoting social cohesion which is essential in enhancing communication and interaction with stakeholders. GTZ (2008) states that the twin process of empowerment and participation should not be just a mere talk, however it should be geared towards the regeneration of skills for young men and competencies in the climate of mutual respect and understanding. To realise youth participation formal consultations and dialogues are efficient to stimulate youth desire. The youth should be involved as beneficiaries, partners or leaders in policy making or other development initiatives encourage their participation.

Poor Education and Training

The DFID (2010) reasons that poor education and training in South Africa works against the active participation of youth in policy making. An increased number of youth does not have the much needed analytical skills for critical thinking, conflict resolution and problem solving skills to address certain policy issues. In instances where youth are given the right to participate, they do so without ensuring that they receive enough training or access to the appropriate information that would enable them to make informed decisions. The DFID (2010), remarks that the problem which affects youth participation is social exclusion and resource misallocation which make some groups of youth in communities reluctant to actively contribute in the decision making processes of an organization.

Effects of Denying Youth a Voice in Policy Making

World Youth Report (2003) observes the dangers of not giving the youth a voice in policy matters. Global trends express that the absence of youth perspective in policy making at all levels has led to consistently militated against their best interest. It reasons that most young people are not capacitated to air their concerns except in few countries where those at the age of eighteen have a right to vote. Youth in South Africa do not have the power like that of huge commercial lobbies to influence change in government. There is limited access to media and the courts and very few belong to members of trade unions such as Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) or other professional bodies that could lobby on their behalf. In the Committee on the rights of Children, the majority of state parties to the convention attest to the priority and value attached to children and young people within their respective cultures, they generally do not “undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative, and other measure to the maximum extent of their available resources” to ensure that the rights of the younger members of society are realized.

Importance of Youth Participation in Policy Making

The World Youth Report (2003:271) argues that youth participation strengthens a commitment to understanding of human rights and democracy. The report reveals that in newly formed democracies and well established democracies, young people need to experience the implications of democratic decision making as well as observing human rights. For instance in countries marred by conflict and tensions that threaten democracy such an experience are of importance. In South Africa, for instance the Constitution of (1996) provides for a Bill rights which clearly stipulates that it is a democratic right of young men to express freely what they want as well as to participate in elections when they are eighteen years of age. World Youth Report (2003) contends that youth need the chances or opportunities to participate in democratic decision making in schools and communities.

According to the World Youth Report (2003) the involvement of young men in the affairs of the country protects their rights from being abused. Youth participation is one of the most

conventional approaches tantamount to the belief that adults are protecting young people. If young men are given enough information they can make own choices which does not expose them to any risk. A survey conducted by UNICEF in East Asia and the Pacific reveals that ignorance concerning sexual relationships inhibits youth development. About (55%), HIV/AIDS (43%) and illegal drugs (42%). Bangkok (2001) states that in a similar UNICEF Survey covering the transition economies in Central Asia and Europe, it was found most youth do not participate in the economic affairs of their countries due to poor health as a result of drug abuse. This entails that youth involvement is inhibited due to uncontrolled or wild behaviours which make policy makers not to take them seriously.

Youth Involvement and Achievement of MDGs

The United Nations (2010) contends that the investment in youth by the international and national communities is regarded as a means to achieving Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The UN (2010) in Chege (2011) added further that eighteen percent of the population in the world represent the youth, of which fifteen percent reside in Africa. These statistics indicate that the youth are therefore affected by each of the goals and are thus responsible for their own success. In that sense the UN (2006) emphasis that the youth should take a leading role in policy making in the world, hence they are the resources that can accelerate the social and economic development for future generations or in their lifetime. Apart from fulfilling MDGs, Udensi et al. (2013) ascertains that youth involvement is significant for community development hence the often overlooked youth should be involved in all segments of the development process. The authors observe that youth represent a vast and often untapped resource for immediate and long term community development efforts. Youth provide an invaluable resource for program planning and effective evaluation. The involvement of youth in decision making processes at community level bring more sustained positive relationships with older community members, fellow youth, development practitioners and relevant stakeholders. Those collaborations and participation by youth bring about skills capacity improvements and strong networking relations (Udensi et al. 2013).

METHODOLOGY

The overall aim of this research is to assess the involvement of youth in policy making in South Africa. The study follows the qualitative approach. The methodology seeks to answer the following questions: How effective is youth involvement in policy making in South Africa? Are youth benefiting from public policies? What is the future of youth involvement in South Africa? Is the government prepared to listen? In the study data was obtained primarily through semi-structured interviews and 3 focus groups consisting of 5 people each mainly from students in higher education institutions and other youth in general. Additional data was collected from 15 youth leaders and representatives who were key informants in the Eastern Cape Province in South Africa. A purposive sampling technique has been used to select participants from three institutions of higher learning namely: University of Fort Hare, Walter Sisulu University and Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. Secondary analysis was conducted to assess the availability of youth's previous involvement in policy making in the Eastern Cape Province. Data acquired from secondary sources was analysed in a qualitative manner using thematic content analysis whereby the data from semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions was transcribed to verbatim and read several times and arranged themes in accordance to how the data was collected to identify any differences or contradictions. In the study, reliability was exercised by using peer reviewed papers which form the basis of this paper.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

The Unequal Participation of Youth in Policy Making

The majority of youth interviewed reported that they are not treated as partners and have no voice in decisions that are able to influence policies. Further on, most youth complain that there are not involved from the beginning, in conceptualizing strategies and plans through to the implementation process. These results correspond with the findings of the UN IANYD report in August 2015 where the youth complained that, they are also limited to discuss and comment on readily developed strategies and

plans. This therefore; confirms that decision making is not transparent and accountable throughout. Usually there are no approaches to determine if youth participation made a difference and this further makes the youth frustrated and crippled. Generally the youth reports that age based stereotypes are common.

The Need for Youth Inclusion in Policy Making

The study observes that, youth exclusion in governance matters is increasingly triggering unequal representation in policy matters in South Africa. In several public meetings youth participation is limited mostly because administrators consider it impractical for everyone to participate in these meetings. The participation process is therefore regarded as an equal representation if the citizens in towns or certain jurisdictions. These results are in line with information from the Ugandan case study by Walker (2012) which reveals that, youth struggled to be involved in policy making which led to conflicts and youth felt marginalised. Focus group discussions revealed that most political offers do not match their preferences and concerns because of lack of inclusion. The participants revealed that, politicians are not adequately addressing their interests since they are not considered as equal partners with equal opportunities and capacity to influence decisions in the policy making process. This could however be improved by electing youth representatives who work directly on youth relevant issues. This situation needs to change as youth are nearly the largest population in South Africa (UNICEF 2012). Engaging youth in participation is therefore essential as most government policies affect them and the sustainability of any development effort, global or national, will therefore require their ownership, involvement and participation (Pereznieto et al. 2013).

Gender Dynamics in Policy Making

The study acknowledges that, gender dynamics in the context of participatory governance for the youth was skewed towards women and need to be promoted in South Africa most importantly where gender equity is still far from being achieved. This may result in lack of gender specific support structures. These results

are also in line with the results of Walker et al. (2014) using a sample from Peru where women were unequally represented and overshadowed by men. In such instances where women are willing to be involved in governance, it is imperative to benefit in such circumstances to combine the representation of women and men.

The Need for Decentralization in Policy Making

The participants admit on the prevalence of an unequal representation within the formal political institutions especially on unemployment, cost of education and housing may lead to disenchantment, socio-economic pressures which often lead to strikes in South Africa. Lack of operative upward channels of communication from informal and often unorganized political influences to institutional political actors may lead to increased divergence and increased support amongst young people for political extremes and sometimes even to violent acts, particularly against persons from immigrant backgrounds, hence the recent xenophobia attacks in South Africa. These results were supported by Ruiz (2010) and GIZ (2012), in their reports using a sample from Comodia and Serbia respectively, the authors emphasized the need of a decentralised system of governance whereby youth had their own platform to enable them to be embraced in governance. There is need to establish multi-level youth empowerment structures at national, regional and local levels to encourage involvement along social, political and economic lines (GIZ 2012).

The Need to Create Effective Policy Making Institutions

Data analysis from focus groups advocates a high level of distrust of older political office bearers and the press and how it reports on local and global issues. As such, while it is seen by policy-makers, the youth sector is important hence young people should act as representatives for other young people. however in South Africa, the 'representativeness' of the young people who get selected or put themselves forward is questionable in relation to the vast majority of youth in the country. The paper establishes further that participatory instruments can empower the youth by strengthening individual

capabilities such as self-confidence, civic awareness and engagement, leadership and organisational skills, as well as more specific skills such as literacy and use of media. Studies by Couzens and Mtengeti (2011), using a sample from Tanzania showed that involvement prepared the youth with skills to engage in governance, increased their awareness of their rights, and their ability to assert them.

Socio-economic Challenges and Youth Involvement

The paper observes that youth faced socio-economic challenges which discourage their involvement in policy making matters. Studies by (Banaji and Buckingham 2010; Olsson and Miguel 2010) revealed that most socio-economically deprived and/or geographically mobile youth are mostly unreachable and hence remain unengaged by the elite language, institutional concerns and strategies of broad-spectrum youth civic bodies. Most youth representatives in touch with adults in positions of power have been exclusive by college authorities or are self-selected on the basis of their skill, buoyancy and ambitious aspirations. South African youth are of the opinion that the political system is not sufficiently adapting to their interests and needs. While it would be irrational to "only" expect the democratic system to familiarize to young people, it would also be both perverse and inefficient to only expect South African youth to adapt to a structure that neither is unresponsive to their crucial needs nor represents their future. These results are contrary to the results by (Walker 2012). In his study the author states that support of youth by senior political members is vital as they attain the position of influencer in governance.

The Need to Improve on Infrastructure

The paper establishes that poor infrastructural development has been a barrier to achieving sufficient youth's involvement in policy making. The participants agree that the youth do not have proper facilities such as offices in which to operate, recreational facilities such as parks, stadiums where they can gather as part of social cohesion to discuss policies affecting them. The local municipalities in the country are negligent towards providing such facilities

which means that youth do not meet often hence their participation towards policy making and decision matters remains weak. Providing adequate infrastructure assist youth development forums where issues related to HIV/AIDS, drug abuse can be debated in an open platform. These are some of the areas the government still lacking which in turn pose a serious threat to the health of the youth.

The Need to Improve Youth Participation in Policy Making

Data from focus groups arguments to a failure at community level, with many young people not being acculturated into the world of political life. Furthermore, existing political parties do not consider this as something they should be working to address. Although there are no straightforward routes to attaining representation and fairness there are however a number of suggested methods by the youth which can be achieved by established stakeholders which would contain both greater accountability to local and regional communities of youth, and greater openness and flexibility in relation to the forms of participation and communication accepted by established political leaders in South Africa.

CONCLUSION

The main findings of this paper revealed that, youth participation is still to be embraced in policy making in South Africa. The study depicted that insufficient education; training and skills development are hindrances to active youth involvement since several youth do not have the analytical skills to interrogate the trends the economic, social and political affairs of the country. The paper notes that the quality of education in South Africa seems to be failing to shape and strengthen youth leadership qualities. The paper acknowledges that youth are not involved in the three levels of government national, provincial and local which disempowers them in as far as decision making is concerned since they lack a voice on how policies are being made. Inadequate information dissemination on the side of the youth is another hindrance since the participants revealed that they have no access to valid or useful information such where to get funding, whom to talk to and when

and where to present their grievances. Such a scenario contributed to the fall of various youth development forums and committees. The lack of private sector intervention in the affairs of the youth is another obstacle to achieving effective youth involvement in policy making. The civil society organizations such as Community Based Organizations (CBOs), pressure groups, trade unions and (NGOs) Non-Governmental Organizations are failing to act as representatives for the youth despite their advantages of having a voice which can be heard by legislature. The study concludes that limited funding on education and youth awareness programmes systematically exclude them from policy making as they are not aware of their rights and how they should participate contributes to the continuous isolation of the youth in decision making processes which leads to underdevelopment and youth poverty.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the main findings of the study, the government of South Africa is required to establish a youth specific policy that target increased youth involvement in policy making. The policy should also be designed in a way that it would help create employment opportunities for the youth so that they become independent and can enter the decision making arena with enough resources to influence change. Most youth are marginalized in communities due poor to government employment policies which incapacitate most youth to access youth development funds. The paper recommends the government to involve youth in policy decisions making at all levels which is imperative in empowering the youth with a voice to influence change. Vocational education, training and development workshops should be conducted to equip the youth with necessary skills to become entrepreneurial and self-sustain themselves economically. The government including relevant stakeholders need to increase their investment in youth development projects which creates dependence and awareness on how they can influence policy makers to support them. The paper recommends local municipalities to improve their recreational facilities (community parks, arts centers and halls) to promote social cohesion and networking which is a backbone in enlightening the youth concerning public policies that affect them.

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Paper received for publication on July 2016
Paper accepted for publication on October 2016