Engaging Youth in Mainstream Development and Governance: Some Reflections from Africa

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Abstract

This paper examines that how significant move it would be to involve youth in the main stream development and governance projects in Africa. It is obvious reality that no inclusive and sustainable development and governance can be built without involvement of youth. Successful democracy needs participation of all citizens especially the active role and participation of youth is paramount. Reviewing and re-looking the engagement of youth in some of the African nations would be the main discourse of this paper. I will be looking into the point why there is less participation of youth in main stream development and governance of the world nations in general and in particular in Africa? What are the main constraints which prevent youth in taking active participation in the political and democratic process of their specific nations? How could we motivate youth thereby they could be the part and parcel of overall development and governance of their nations in Africa? In summation, it can be said that youth engagement and voluntarism could make governance more stable and effective in African continent. Cases of youth engagement are cited from Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa, Sudan and Ethiopia. African nations could make a big difference if the youth engagement will be taken into consideration.

Keywords: Engagement, Youth, Development, Governance, constraints, and Remedies

1.Introduction

In today's global arena we are experiencing lack of trust of youth in governing institutions and political leaders. The modern youth who are well equipped with modern technological knowhow and skills have lot of dreams to make a difference but hardly they are getting any big chance and opportunity in mainstream development and governance of world in general and Africa in particular. There are plethora of macro and micro issues which are unfolded, for instance no higher education for youth, no scholarships, unemployment, insecurity, no major political representation in the main stream development and governance of the nation and no proper health systems and rampant corruption.[1] These are some of the major constraints which make young youth alienated. The major macro cause is that there is no reward for youth in Africa they are facing numerous challenges which make them disinterested to take active part in the development and governance of the nation. Moreover, the perception is that the issue of programme development and policy design is for experts and youth do not have the expertise, skills and the drive power still prevails.[2]

In Africa, youth are often counted as a lost generation, marginalised, frustrated and suffered from decision making bodies and policy making institutions. African youth make up more than half of the continent's population, yet for generations governments had been ignoring them and silencing their voices. There is no one who can push them ahead. Politicians and political institutions have failed to fulfil the basic needs and aspirations of youth which is the main cause of alienation. These are some of macro and micro causes which makes youth marginalised in developing countries and Africa is not different case. Not only is this but there no fixed quota for youth in governance and mainstream development. These are the direct causes which make some youth involved in criminal activities when they don't find any opportunity and place in the mainstream development and governance of their nations.[3] Engaging and participating in decision making and governance is beginning to reshape the way youth in Africa are perceiving and exercising their citizenship in a powerful manner. In the words of McGee and Green half:

> *"If policies, plans and budgets are to be relevant to youth, they also need to be informed by their realities, priorities and perspectives."4*

Kofi Anan the Former Secretary General of the United Nations says *"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."[5]*In the light of Enhancing Youth Political Participation Report of UNDP, 2012 which says "The young people from 15 to 25 age group constitute a fifth of world's population yet the actual realities are clear that they still remain underprivileged and having less opportunities and influence in political institutions."[6]

The constraints and hindrances of youth engagement make it very clear that no democratic institutions can have claim to be legitimate and proper if youth is marginalised and disengaged from democratic processes. This research also shows that youth in Africa are still under represented within the institutions of democracies.'

Kingsley Y. Amoako, a Ghanaian-born diplomat who led the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa in 1995-2005 at the rank of UN Under Secretary General, has suggested the real solution for youth development in Africa in these words *"When our children are assured of survival and health, provided with a good education, protected from war and violence, and when youth participate in the democracy and development of their countries, then Africa will be set to claim the 21st century."[7]* Thus, in world in general and Africa in particular the nation states need to give equal opportunities and entitlements and other means of survival to young youth. The youth need to have better and quality education and job security. And above all the youth need to have active participation privileges in the governance system and overall developmental spheres. They should not look like sufferers and frustrated youth rather they must have high recognition and identity cult in their own countries in Africa.

And I believe based on the above research analysis that the recognition, survival, and dignified life of youth can be achieved when they will be given equal chances of participation in governance, politics and overall developmental projects in side their own nations as well as in global arena. The better advantages will always motivate young people in Africa and elsewhere and they will use their efforts for the cause of nation building and national survival.[8]

2. Research Objectives of this Study

Interrogating causes of youth disengagement in the mainstream development and governance in Africa. Exploring changing dynamics of African development and governance. And especially debating the robust and vital role of modern youth of Africa in bolstering governance and overall development in Africa. Analysing the youth participation and engagement and their voluntarism for taking active participation in overall decision making process and developmental projects. Discussing the involvement and engagement of African youth as model or strategy for making a big difference in Africa. These are some of the objectives of this paper.

3.Youth Engagement in Governance and Development

The present trend in Africa presents a worrying picture as about 65% of the population of Africa is below the age of 35 years, and over 35% population is between the ages of 15 and 35 years. (African Union Commission). In 2011 study done by Afro Barometer on the issue of political participation of African Youth is consistent with as compared to the other research findings in the other parts of the world and confirms that despite their overwhelming numerical importance in electoral districts in Africa, African youth tends to vote less than those in other regions and their levels of political participation is lower as compared to other parts of the world. It has been found in research reports done by many scholars on engagement of youth in Africa.

Such as Eguavoen believes African region is facing a growing "Youth Bulge"[9] the idea of youth bulge is separate part in this paper and I have clearly elucidated it. The actual reality in Africa is that youth is not creating any hindrance or challenge rather these youth are disproportionately burdened by underemployment, capturing the votes of this very significant demographic group is becoming more important than ever in the context of Africa. Still they don't show any kind of major backlash like youth of other countries in Asia, Europe and America are showing against the existing regimes about their burning problems. In African context the vibrant civil society is lacking that is one of the reason the institutions are not effective, credible and accountable.[10]

However, it is becoming true by present conditions in Africa that you is now raising their genuine issues and demands. Therefore, eruptions of youth may occur soon to highlight their demands in front to the policy making institutions in Africa. Because these youth want change now they do not want to be dependent on the false promise which their leaders have been doing with them and in actual practice nothing changed on the ground. The recent election of Nigeria is the proof of that where youth stood up for change and did not give the power again to the President Jonathan who contested election second time but lost because of his previous past where there was prevailing insecurity, unemployed youth, and rampant corruption that was the reason the people of Nigeria and youth in particular fed up by the previous regime and they give power to Mohammdu Buhari in 2015 general elections. In this 2015 elections the majority of credit go to Nigerian who wanted for change. Dr. Azeez says: *People believe that the victory of Gen. Buhari was actually driven by the youth in Nigeria.*[11]

In Accordance to African barometer II report which says that despite of the reason of youth bulge in Africa, majority of the regions in Africa president are more than 60 years old. This could be the one the reason which prevents youth to be the part of political arena. Even from the findings of Europe, Latin America which says that the African youth are not interested to protest and their protest level is only 14 percent which is lower than the youth of Europe and America. Thus, the pessimistic claims that disillusioned, African youth will instigate instability do not yet appear warranted in many of the electoral democracies in Africa." It is also said that young people feel alienated from political process and institutions that is something which contrasts deeply with their strong feelings about key social issues such as education, employment and inclusion. Let us briefly cite few examples from Africa.

Ransford Edward Van Gyampo from University of Ghana who states the real situation of youth participation in political governance of Ghana, "The institution of Western form of governance has paved way to destruction of participatory engagement contrary to popular discussions, it is 'good governance' which has been gifted to Africa with participatory development and democratic engagement. But the fact of the matter is that, the contemporary, post-colonial governance has taken a peculiar picture of participation of the youth in national development and governance of African continent. Despite their emphasis upon the demographic weight age, the youth do not have any better participatory role in the decision-making and policy implementation process in modern day of Ghana. Even implementing policies and programmes are benefiting the youth, the youth are marginalized. In other few cases, for instance, case of the Youth in Agriculture Programme (YIAP), government ministries with no expertise in working with the youth are obliged to pass the programme instead of the National Youth Council (NYC) or representatives of the youth associations. It seems that the only formal opportunity for the participation of the youth is their recruitment into the government ministries, and agencies (MDAs) which gives employment to only 2 per cent of the total youth."[12]

Another case from Africa can be cited Nigeria. The Nigeria as sovereign nation, the greatest challenge to the nascent democracy is the prevailing insecurity of lives and properties of the people. It is evidenced by reports of international organisations and civil society associations that are unemployment, robbery, insecurity and lack of political representation are the burning issues of youth in Nigerian context. The security agencies were not capable enough to deal with the cases of criminalities or criminal acts. The situation was worsening day by day till the election of new president Mohammedu Buhari but recently Nigerian state has responded in a very tough manner to terror threats coming from Bokoharam. The collective security system of Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon and Chadian armies have defeated and crushed many terrorists of Bokoharam.[13]

According to Nigerian Tribune Newspaper 2002, conditions of youth are very bad due to the increasing number of unemployed Nigerians mostly youths, some of whom are ready to recruit for criminal activities. Nigeria indeed, has to work onto create the nexus between democratic nurturing and to sustain the current debate on sustainability and security issues which are central issues in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular. It can be said in the above context that Nigerian government needs to work for the betterment of all people living in Nigeria most importantly the youth need to have equal opportunities in the policymaking and policy implementation processes. And the issue of security and employment for youth has still remained unfinished agenda in Nigeria. Recently you have seen Chibouk school girls more than 300 were captured by vicious terror organisation Bokoharam. Some of them were even raped and some were killed by Bokoharam. Most of them were tortured to accept Islam by force on the basis of bayonet. In South Africa also we look into there are plenty of youth which do not have job opportunities and the recent crisis of xenophobia is one of the major cause of concern as narrative which tells us the inside story about South Africa which is giant of Africa.

The youth population are so active and vibrant that are playing pivotal role in highlighting very important issues such as HIV/AIDS. It is said that 50 percent of the population of South Africa consisted upon youth under the age of 30. The South African society is highly affected by the disease of HIV/AIDS. Therefore, youth voluntarism and activism become very paramount for creating awareness and preventive measures about HIV in the South African society. This HIV has affected mostly women and children, who have less energy and resources, and who also faces incidents of aggression and violence. In the words of Sithe Ntombela, says:

> "*young people cannot wait till 2030 to voice their needs and what they want to see from their country and its policy young people need to engage with policy today.''*[14]

In the field of business, polity, culture and main stream development the youth need to be engaged at the first cost they have the capability to make the real difference in South Africa and elsewhere.

In Ethiopian context I have met many students who told me a different story that they are not getting jobs, scholarships, there is no proper health care; there is low salary which is not enough for having balanced life. The narrative is that in Africa the youth has been side-lined. They are not getting their due and advantages. The reality is that their total future is in doldrums situations. Therefore, research makes it clear that there is need of structural change in policy making and policy implementation process. There is need of job packages and developmental opportunities by which youth could be motivated enough to work for the nation building program in Africa. There is need of quota system in political representation that how much percentage of seats shall be reserved for youth in Africa. There is need of scholarships so that everybody can have quality education. After receiving education it must be ensured that youth must be engaged in different sectors.

Thus, African nations need to create this type of opportunities for youth. There is also need of Foreign Direct Investment in Africa but it should come with major regularities. Freedom of press and expression is always undermined by political authorities. The freedom of speech and expression is very much limited in Ethiopian context. This is the first country in Africa where majority of journalists and media people most of them are young people are behind the bars from last many years. Also in Ethiopian context if you see the role of opposition it is very weak. The Ethiopian example can be put under the theme of 'domination' of one political party where opposition parties are most of the times are being intimidated by the ruling party in power. Not only this but majority of the population which is consisted upon youth lacks basic facilities. There are many dropouts from the schools who cannot afford the school fee because they belong to poor families. Even youth in Ethiopia lack better opportunities such as employment. This is the some of the youth get involved in malpractices such as prostitution and end up their lives with HID/AIDS. And this may the reason also because of lack of opportunities and rewards youth in Ethiopia get involved in malpractices such as stealing, drugs and other crimes.[15]

However, it is also believed that EPDRF (Ethiopian People's Democratic Revolutionary Front) has been quite successful in making Ethiopia progressive nation. Economically Ethiopian has been counted as one of the fastest growing economy in Africa with 8 percent GDP. EPDRF is also very strong because it has strong past roots in the politics, history and culture of Ethiopia this may be the reason that the people of Ethiopia have been supporting to EPDRF since 1995 as compared other political parties. EPRDF has taken recently various measures to involve youth in democratisation and good governance process.[16]There is no youth participation in the governance and politics of South Sudan. It is believed that youth do not get any space to be encouraged to take part in the governance and other activities in the country. It is also believed that government of the South Sudan is lacking a will to involve the youth of South Sudan in the process of governance. In South Sudan it has been found that youth has been divided on tribal lines. And majority of youth have no common objectives for strengthening nation building programme. The drugs, excess of alcohol and unemployment has made them disinterested in the overall policies and programmes of the government. These things have reduced the commitment of the youth of South Sudan. It is said in the context of South Sudan there is huge unemployment of youth which resulted admiring youth towards drugs and excess of alcohol. These are also factors they lost trust in politicians and they are not having any interest in the advocacy of politics in South Sudan.[17]

Leaders often make all sorts of statements about the future belonging to the youth, but these statements are never accompanied by meaningful action to help the youth participate in the preparation for that future. Youth must be in position to understand what is important to them; what it mean actually here, they need to enhance their skills, capabilities and confidence and to make able themselves to take active participation in the overall affairs of the state and affect their live in this way. There are number of documents in the African context which recognises the importance and relevance of young people in the African continent.

The African Youth Charter 2006, is one of the legal document which recognises the pivotal role of youth, it also includes their rights, and duties of youth. It also emphasis upon the skill development of youth in Africa thereby their life could be improved. In 2011 the Decade Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment and Development was also taken into adaptation by African Union.

There are different interpretations about the age of youth. However, it is accepted phenomenon that youth is one who is in transition phase from childhood to adulthood. So far as the age of the youth is concerned there are different viewpoints. According to United Nations youth is from the age of 15-24 years, on the other side commonwealth nations consider youth age from 15-29 years, and African Youth Charter consider the age of youth from 15-35.[18]

4.Potential Advantages of Youth

The youth population have several potential advantages for national and socio-economic development. The social advantages provided by youth include a greater degree of mobility, versatility, openness, adaptability and tolerance. In economic terminology the youth has strong dynamism in the spheres of supply of labour which is required for the economic prosperity and growth. The consumption of youth is related to the basic needs for instance, in housing the youth provides benefits and opportunities for mass production thus economies of this scale needed for the development of local industrial and commercial enterprises. It is also important mention that youth can bolster also social security in Africa and elsewhere in the world.

The prosperity and advancement of the nation depends on the creativity and skills of its people. It is believed that youth are more capable, creative, and innovative as compared to adult population. In the African context the role of youth can be mentioned in several areas for instance in the areas of peace building, community development and IT sector. Youth of Africa is also major catalytic in HIV/AIDS it is the youth which creates a lot of awareness about the preventive measures. However, the major narrative is that African youth are marginalised and deprived in socio-economic, educational and political fields. I do agree upon the interpretation of Action Aid which says:

> *"Youth are not only the leaders of tomorrow but are the drivers of change today." And remarks of United Nations General Secretary Banki moon remarks "leaders* of tomorrow must be heard today."[19]

The youth participation in governance and mainstream development can bring major change in our modern societies. They can help in promoting peace across the entire world if they will be given their rights and significant importance in our governance system. As per the research done on youth percentage in Sub-Saharan Africa it has been cited that the youth population in this area is around 70 percent. There is 70 percent population which is under 30 of age.[20] Therefore, it can be said that ignoring vast majority of population may affect over all development of the region if they will not be given equal entitlements and opportunities. The one of the major irony remains in Africa that is, how youth has been side-lined and deprived by political authorities. Even some viewed in Africa that youth as threat to own societies. However, recently mind-set is changing and now presently governments in African countries are trying to give attention towards youth problems and possibilities. The youth participation is not an end in itself rather it is means to create more sustainability, progress and growth in Africa.

Moyo in his words elucidates the significance and role of youth in African societies. He says to bring the youth part of the dialogue is aimed that they show us where we have been wrong in past and they can lead us to right path in coming future where we want to be. He said pan Africanise is the best alternative for the people of Africa to move forward. In his words we need to stop complaining except you want come out with any solution and bring change in African society. He also emphasis that the quality of leaders which we can get is possible by the youth.[21]

5.Demystifying 'Eguavoen' Idea of Youth Bulge': And Other Notions of Instability

According to the World Bank the current youth with similar age group in developing world is the largest one the world has ever seen before. It is said the half of the world's population under the age of twenty-five, 1.5 billion among them are young youth, and it is sure that 86 percent of these youth are in developing world.[22]It is believed that the alarming situation in war zones where youth of same age group faces myriad challenges in societies, governments and peace process. It is also said that most of the wars are taking place in the places where the young people are more. The youth rate in Sub-Saharan Africa is the highest as compared other parts of the world and history is replete by the untold stories of human rights violations in this region.

This region had affected by conflict, droughts, wars, hunger, poverty and diseases. However, it can be mentioned that Sub-Saharan Africa has changed a lot and still transition is going on towards prosperity and development.[23]It is believed that if potential of youth will be made skilled one then they would be able commendable role in Africa. Therefore, there is dearth need to invest on human development skills. Every nation has to be ready to create better avenues for youth so that they can become doctors, engineers, teachers, lawyers, technicians and above all very well skilled people in Africa. And these plans can be gained through the investment on higher education and human development skills. To ensure justice with youth it is paramount that institutions has to become much more responsible and accountable in this regard.

Eguavoen elucidates that in many Sub-Saharan countries young people already represent the majority share of the population pyramid, which he calls it as 'youth bulge'. However, if we look the real research data on youth participation and representation in the affairs of African nations is still minimal. Cincotta, for example, confidently states:

> *"As one might expect, and as numerous studies have shown, populations with excessive numbers of young people invite a higher risk of political violence and civil strife than others."[24]*

I would give the exact answer of the youth bulge thesis and instability idea which some scholars believe it credit goes to youth is incorrect and highly biased theory. In the entire history of the world youth had never created unsustainable growth rather they have been quite adamant to make real difference in the country's growth and development. However, it is also the fact that the youth never accepts injustices, deprivations, turmoil and cycle of violence this is the reason in any part of the world they stand up against these challenges and try to make shift from conflict to peace, and underdevelopment to development. Now the real question remains to what extent we have to rely on youth bulge idea.The answer is quite simple it's natural when youth face challenges and difficulties in achieving their goals and targets which are their fundamental rights. Then they do protest against unjust institutions and it is not done by youth only it can be done by any group of people you need to have only consciousness that your rights have been taken away from you what one can do in that circumstances definitely he will resist unjust system. But realities in African youth is different they are always ready to move forward but they lack strong political institutions which can motivate them through scholarships, jobs, and better opportunities.

In spite of facing many challenges the African youth do not want to become murderers no not at all. Nevertheless, they raise their voices against unjust governments and demanding their political, social, economic, and educational rights. If one would call a person who is demanding a just a hurdle and challenge to particular nation then he lacks scholarly bent of mind. (Boyden and de Berry 2004; Annan et al. 2008).[25]

6.Concluding Remarks

Although, Africa has a youth-dominated population, African government policies are often not youth-centred. African governments and their international supporters are frequently under-informed about the priorities of most youth. Reliance on the *"youth bulge and instability thesis"* leads to distorted assessments of everyday realities. The above all major research diagnosis is that African nations have to invest a lot on *'human development'* so that youth would be able to utilise their abilities and potentials for betterment of their concerned nations. Research also shows that because of lack of opportunities it created a lack of trust in youth that's why they become alienated and that are why they got lack of interest in politics and developmental projects in Africa. The reputation of politicians and political institutions is not good among the young citizens in Africa because of false promises made by politicians and because of institutional failure. Corruption has been always counted as the major symptom of institutional failure in Africa. Therefore, there is need that Africa needs to have strong judicial system. Right to Information Act which India has from last 2005 for curbing and mitigating corruption?

If African nations would use strong policies to prevent the corruption then of course African blessed land and its resources could be properly shared with all the citizens of African nations without distinction of caste, colour, creed, religion and birth etc. Africa needs to have the best leadership for better governance which is also vital for the development and prosperity of Africa.

The African nations need to invest more and more on 'human development skills' and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and to provide opportunities to all young youth thereby, they can use their potentials for the growth and prosperity of African continent. Due to alienation the young youth can be easily motivated towards criminality which we have been seen in the context of Nigeria and Somalia.

The examples of Bokoharam and Alshabab can be cited in this context. The examples of drug mafia and gangs of South Africa can be entailed here in the above context. The problem of theft and murder sometimes in some of the African countries also comes in this context because the young youth have no other choice except to go for wrong activities. Therefore, the need of hour is to involve youth in development and governance process. Give them opportunities and push them ahead so that confidence can be built in them and they can become the prosperous future of progressive Africa. In the African continent there is no need give the ideas like youth bulge or instability thesis what is required here youth development theories which could be a catalyst in motivating governmental institutions to take special measures for the benefit of the youth. To involve youth in overall governance and developmental processes may be the real panacea.

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