



Discussion Paper

YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNANCE IN AFRICA

The Mandela Institute for Development Studies Youth Dialogue
7-8 August 2015
Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

Formerly lukewarm on political matters, and battling with “waithood”, the African youth have metamorphosed from ‘quiet’ to ‘active’ participation in governance. Broad categories now exist on the various expressions of active youth participation. Youth activism and popular protest movements have been recently deployed in the struggles for economic, political and social emancipation. Four scenarios beacon: the riot by thousands of young Mozambicans in 2010 forced the government to reverse the price hikes; in Tunisia in 2011, the youth from diverse social strata articulated grievances that ousted the regime of Ben Ali, inspiring similar activism across the continent, even in the Middle East, and elsewhere in the world; in Dakar in June 2011, *Y'en a Marre!* (or “We’re Fed up!”) helped to remove Abdoulaye Wade from office the following year; and in 2014 a similar event occurred leading to the demise of Blaise Compaoré’s reign. Even non-participation has become a form of political communication, a means of expressing dissatisfaction about a lingering *status quo*. However, as recent research reveals, these kinds of participation have not allowed young people to directly influence the post-protest governments. Even young activists struggle to translate the political grievances of the protest movements into a broader political agenda. Therefore, it becomes imperative to investigate the nature of participation that could improve the youth’s ability to directly and effectively influence governance.

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Acronyms

- AfDB African Development Bank
- ANC African National Congress
- AU African Union
- EMBs Elections Management Bodies
- FORUM International Forum for Volunteering in Development
- ICT4D Information and communication technology for development
- IDEA Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
- MINDS Mandela Institute for Development Studies
- MP Member of parliament
- NGO Non-governmental organization
- PLA Participatory Learning and Action
- PV Participatory Video
- UN United Nations
- UNDP United Nations Development Programme
- YAG Youth advocacy group
- YIG Youth in government
- YIP Youth in parliament
- YM Youth-led movement

PREAMBLE

The main objective of this paper is to discuss the nature of youth participation in governance in Africa. This study is crucial because the African youth, formerly lukewarm on political matters (Asef Bayet, 2010), have now metamorphosed, from 'quiet' to more 'active' participation in governance. Broad categories of active youth participation are discussed in this paper. Youth activism and popular protest movements have been staged recently in the struggles for economic, political and social emancipation in Africa. Four scenarios beacon: the riot by thousands of young Mozambicans in 2010 forced the government to reverse price hikes; in Tunisia in 2011, youths from diverse social strata articulated grievances that ousted the regime of Ben Ali, inspiring similar activism across the continent, in the Middle East, and elsewhere in the world; then in Dakar in June 2011, *Y'en a Marre!* helped to remove Abdoulaye Wade from office the following year; and in 2014 a similar event occurred leading to the demise of Blaise Compaoré's reign. Non-participation, too, has become a form of political communication, a means of expressing dissatisfaction about a lingering *status quo*.

However, as Alcinda Honwana stated in *Youth and Revolution in Tunisia* (Honwana 2013), these kinds of participation have not allowed young people to directly influence the post-protest governments. Even young activists struggle to translate the political grievances of the protest movements into a broader political agenda. Therefore, it becomes imperative to examine the nature of participation that could improve the youth's ability to directly and effectively influence governance.

This paper consists of four chapters. In chapter one definitions for the terms 'youth participation', 'quiet participation', 'active participation', 'direct/effective participation' as they are used in this study are provided. In chapter two, after developing the background that spurred today's efforts at more active participation, the broad categories of the ways in which young people participate in governance in Africa are established. The main thrust of this paper, is addressed in chapter three. Here, scenarios of youth activism and protest movements in four African countries, over a span of four years are examined. Each scenario will be examined against the question: Does this kind of participation allow the youth in the respective country to directly influence their government? In chapter four, an argument for more structured, direct youth political participation is put forward. Suggestions on what will enable African youth to directly influence their governments will be offered.

Chapter One: Clarification of Key Concepts

Discussing **youth participation** as a concept requires an understanding of the term ‘youth.’

A review of literature shows that the lingering debate on who is youth in Africa has sustained the confusion surrounding this concept. The perception of youth varies culturally and historically, from one context to another and even within contexts (Chigunta, 2006; United Nations, 2003). According to the *World Youth Report* (2003), the UN definition of youth is 15 to 24 years, while the Commonwealth definition stands at 15 to 29 years; the African Union adopts a broader definition of 15 to 35 years. But for many scholars, youth is better defined as that period of transition from dependence (childhood) to independence (adulthood), the nature and length of which varies from one individual or society to another (Curtain, 2003). The transition definition of youth has also been proposed. Rather than defining youth on the basis of age groups, within this definition, youth can be understood as a socially constructed category defined by societal expectations and responsibilities (Honwana and De Boeck 2005). For this study, the term ‘youth’ is framed around the African Union definition, that is, people aged between 15 and 35 years old. However, the term ‘youth’ will include people who may not meet the African Union definition but who are regarded as youth in their respective societies and contexts. For the purposes of this study, elders are therefore defined as people older than 35 years old or generally regarded as elders in their respective societies and contexts.

Youth participation therefore is youth involvement in participatory governance, where participatory governance is held as the ample opportunities democratic governance offers citizens and their organizations to engage with government (Fioramonti and Heinrich, 2007)¹. According to Yale University political scientist Robert Dahl, such ample opportunities democratic governance offers include effective participation, voting equality at the decisive stage, enlightened understanding, control of the agenda and inclusiveness (Dahl, 1991).

Quiet participation refers to the involvement in everyday processes of social change by fashioning the spaces within which the youth try to get by,

¹ Adapted from source: www.civicus.org/what-we-do/priority-areas/influence-of-civilsociety/pg-project

leaving the task of governance to the elders. Asef Bayat calls these dispersed options “non-movements,” which he describes as “quiet and unassuming daily struggles” outside formal institutional spheres in which everyday social activities are called political activism (2010: 5).

This leads to the notion of **active participation**. According to the *UN World Public Sector Report 2008:4*, “active participation” means “the involvement of citizens in a wide range of policymaking activities, including the determination of levels of service, budget priorities, and the acceptability of physical construction projects in order to orient government programs toward community needs, build public support, and encourage a sense of cohesiveness within neighborhoods.”

Active participation is linked to **direct/ effective participation** which the *UN Conference on Sustainable Development* (or Rio+20) qualifies as a participation “representing the voices and interests of all.” While UN uses the concept ‘direct/effective participation’, it does not, so far, define it. In his book *Democracy and its Critics* Robert Dahl defines effective participation as citizens unconditionally having equal opportunities to form their preference and place questions on the public agenda and express reasons for one outcome over the other (Dahl, 1991:221).

Chapter two tracks the background of youth participation in governance, the concept of “waithood” (in the African context) and its attendant burden, as well as the broad categories of youth participation in governance today.

Chapter Two: The Birth of Youth Participation in Governance in Africa

The Long and Winding Road to Adulthood

Many challenges face the African youth: unemployment, the search for sustainable livelihoods, the lack of civil liberties, war and the lure of terrorism, political instability, bad governance, failed neo-liberal social and economic policies, longstanding societal problems, lack of financial independence, and therefore the inability to support themselves and (raise) their own families. The African youth, therefore, constitute a disenfranchised group, largely excluded from key socioeconomic institutions and political processes (*African Economic Outlook*, 2012; *Africa Human Development Report*, 2012). Whatever their setting, many youth cannot afford to become fully independent as to partake in the privileges and responsibilities of social adulthood. This condition has a name.

The Notion of “Waithood”

The relegation to childhood of the African youth has been defined by Alcinda Honwana as “waithood”, a notion which means “waiting for adulthood” (Honwana, 2013). This notion describes the prolonged period of suspension when the youth’s access to social adulthood is delayed, or denied. While the chronological age of many young Africans defines them as adults, they are far from attaining the social markers of adulthood: “earning a living, being independent, establishing families, providing for their offspring and other relatives, and becoming taxpayers” (Honwana, 2013). They are consigned to a marginal sphere in which they are “neither dependent children nor autonomous adults” (ibid).

The term “waithood” was coined by Dianne Singerman (2007) in her work on youth in the Middle East, when she noted delayed family formation and the soaring rates of youth unemployment. This notion adequately captures the youth’s feeling of being trapped in a stage of prolonged youth or “retarded adulthood” (from the French *être en retard*). In reality, Singerman’s “waithood” finds synonyms in other expressions of the African youth, evidenced in the use of vernacular terms to portray the same idea. In their works Ibrahim Abdullah (1998) and Abubakar Momoh (2000) have mentioned the use of the vernacular term *youthman*, used in many West African countries, to describe those who are stuck in the “retarded adulthood” position. In other parts of Africa, the findings of Abdullah and Momoh find expression in art. In Malawi, for example, one of

the most popular songs of 2014 was a title called “Amaona Kuchedwa” by pop singer Lawi, a song about a man who notices that everything is taking too long, and gets into trouble for pointing this out².

“Waithood” represents the contradictions of the contemporary society: while young people’s expectations are raised by the new technologies of information and communication (ICTs) that connect them to global cultures, they are constrained by the limited prospects and opportunities in their daily lives.

The impact of “waithood” on the African youth depends on each youth’s abilities, character, and life skills. But it is also largely a question of family background (middle class/well connected or not), access to resources, skills, and level of education. Calvès, Kobiane and Martel (2007) pointed out that the experience of “waithood” also differs by gender. Men face the pressures of getting a steady job, finding a home, and covering the costs of marriage and family building. While for African women, now better educated, marriage and motherhood remain the most important markers of adulthood. Calvès argues that giving birth may provide girls an entry into adulthood, but their ability to attain full adult status often depends on men conquering “waithood” and knocking at their doors. (Calvès et al. 2007). The next section of this paper explores how the African youth are coping with the state of “waithood”.

Battling with “Waithood”

Singerman’s (2007) employ of “waithood” suggests a sense of passivity, with regard to the African context. Research and interviews on (and interaction with) other African youth indicate that they are not merely waiting, hoping for a miracle, or for their situation to change of its own accord. Rather, they are battling with “waithood”, by being proactively engaged in serious efforts “to arrive early,” rather than *en retard*.

African youth are seeking education. Growing numbers of African youth are now completing secondary education and attending university, but the mismatch between the educational systems and the labour markets leaves many unemployed or underemployed. As Chen observed, they are forced into the oversaturated informal economy or they become informal workers in the formal sector (Chen, 2006).

² See www.musicinafrica.net

Many African youth, be they male or female, are seen engaging in street vending (especially in selling recharge cards), cross-border trading and smuggling; many plan to migrate illegally to Europe (Eze, 2013); and some end up in criminal networks as swindlers, traffickers, gangsters and sexual workers. Furthermore, some African youth become entrepreneurs by repairing electronic and mechanical devices; making and marketing clothing and jewellery; and doing hair and nails. Others create new forms of artistic performance, especially as rappers in the Hip Hop genre, but also in making graffiti, painting murals, and writing blogs for example.

In this sense, the African youth develop their own spaces where they detour the encumbrances created by the state or society, and design new ways of functioning on their own. Moore calls this “self-stylization”, that is “an obstinate search for a style of existence, [and] a way of being” (Moore 2011: 2). YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other cyber social networks have facilitated this process.

Besides meandering around obstacles, the African youth portray their struggles in their own terms. Youth from Francophone Africa often use the French expression *on se débrouille* (or “we’re just making do”). Their Mozambican counterparts use the Portuguese expression *desenrascar a vida* (or “to eke out a living”). And in South Africa, young South Africans speak of “just getting by” (Honwana 2013). The idea of *débrouillage* or *desenrascar a vida* links “waithood” to improvisation, or to “patching it up along”, making the youth operate like Lévi-Strauss’s (1962) *bricoleur*, a ‘jack-of-all-trades’ who maneuvers and takes advantage of circumstances whenever possible to attain his/her own ends.

Despite the existence of “waithood”, the African youth have devised means to participate in governance.

Broad categories of youth participation in political governance in Africa

Research indicates that there are eight broad categories of youth participation in political governance in Africa—geared towards demands for transparency and requests for accountability.

1. Voting

Some African countries have witnessed an increase in youth participation in the electoral process through voting. The South African and Kenyan experiences are particularly worthy of note. In the article 'A new voice: The role of Africa's youth in electoral democracies', Joel Lowther (2013) noted that in the 1999 elections, an estimated 43% of South Africans under the age of 35 years old voted. Then in 2004, this number increased to 44.5%³. But in the buildup to the 2009 election, political parties sought to bring their messages to a broader audience and targeted young voters. The ANC's Youth League, created in the 1940s and dedicated to youth issues, used social media outlets to communicate its message to young South Africans⁴. Quoting Smith (2009) Lowther (ibid.) affirmed that many experts correlate the 2.5 million increase in South African's voter turnout in 2009 to youth participation⁵.

In Kenya, a similar trend occurred. While the 2007 election led to widespread ethnic violence perpetrated by Kenya's youth⁶, the catalyst for change in 2013 had to involve the same youth, since 75% of Kenya's population is under the age of 35 (Africa Human Development Report, 2012). Mercy Corp, an American aid agency, shaped a programme called 'Yes, You Can' which involved over 500,000 Kenyan youth and established over 17,000 youth 'bunge' from the national to local levels that helped to strengthen youth development and avert electoral violence⁷. According to the United States Institute of Peace (USIP, 2013) mobilizing Kenya's youth became easier with the use of technology, as social media connected groups of Kenyans and short message service (SMS) systems allowed for immediate instant reporting. The National Youth Sector Alliance (NYSA) also provided forums for the government and private sector to engage with youth leaders. USIP notes that, not only did youth involvement in the election enable evolution past tribal differences, but young Kenyans

³ See <http://www.sajia.org.za> on this study.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Lowther refers to this article: Smith, D., 'South Africa's ANC wins big election victory, final results show', The Guardian, 25 April 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk>.

⁶ 'U.N.: 600,000 displaced in Kenya unrest', CBS News, 11 February 2009, <http://www.cbsnews.com>.

⁷ See <http://mercycorps.org>

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became players in this election as 12 former ‘bunge’ leaders were elected to public office⁸. For the elections to have been successful, this indicates that young Kenyans understood and peacefully supported the political process.

2. Non-participation

The Executive Summary of the UNDP’s *Enhancing Youth Political Participation through the Electoral Process* opens with these words: “Young people [...] while often involved in informal, politically relevant processes, such as activism or civic engagement, are not formally represented in national political institutions such as parliaments and many of them do not participate in elections (UNDP, 2013:4).” The same document asserts that young voters tend to participate less in elections compared to older citizens. IDEA’s *Youth Participation in Elections and Politics* (IDEA, 2013) states that non-participation is a form of political communication, of protest from the youth. A truly global phenomenon since the 1970s, many reasons explain youth non-participation. This paper summarizes the findings at the global level as follows: (1) the youth do not feel that they have much of a stake in society; (2) the youth do not feel that there is anyone worth voting for; (3) young people think politicians are not to be trusted; (4) the youth believe politicians behave badly in parliament; (5) the youth hold that politicians are promise-breakers (UNDP, *ibid.*; Elections Canada, 2007; European Union, Eurobarometer 375; IDEA, *ibid.*; EACEA, London School of Economics, 2013).

With regard to the African context, let’s recall that about 65% of the total population of Africans is below the age of 35 years, and over 35% are between the ages of 15 and 35 years (African Union Commission, 2011). However, a 2011 study by AfroBarometer on political participation of the African youth reveals that despite their overwhelming numerical representation, the African youth tend to vote less and their levels of political party affiliation are lower than elsewhere in the world. Therefore, in relation to the five reasons stated above, these two particularly explain youth non-participation in Africa: (1) Cooper-Knock (2012) notes that many African politicians have utilized the youth’s voting clout for their own political agendas, thereby exploiting Africa’s youth through the political process⁹; and (2) International Peace and Conflict (2011) underlines that although a particular youth group might pledge support to a candidate or

⁸ See <http://www.usip.org>

⁹ See <http://democracyinfrica.org>

political party with hopes of material gains or greater political influence, these promises are often not fulfilled¹⁰.

3. Community volunteerism

The State of Youth Volunteering in Africa, a FORUM report by Dilhani Wiljeyesekera (Wiljeyesereka, 2011), declares that youth volunteerism on the continent is growing in scale, diversity, relevance and demand. From Tanzania to Rwanda, and from Senegal to Zimbabwe, youth volunteerism is on the rise across Africa. In Tanzania alone, 59 community and national youth volunteers currently placed in rural communities aim to improve the livelihoods, sexual and reproductive health, and participation of young people through youth-led initiatives. The reasons for the surge in volunteerism include wanting to make a difference, education, the desire to get involved, community recognition, and independence that comes with skills acquisition (Innovations in Civic Participation, 2012).

4. Digital mapping

In Mozambique, Kenya and Cameroon, the youth are involved in digital mapping. According to the *Collins English Dictionary* (2014), digital mapping is a method of preparing maps in which the data is stored in a computer for ease of access and updating. This has been useful for the youth to initiate and follow up on conversations with local authorities around allocation of services and resources. The efficacy of this tool has been defended by Rambaldi (Rambaldi, Chambers, McCall and Fox, 2006) who suggested that a community has a right to be included “on the map” and a right to map itself. Similarly the youth in rural communities have the right to tell their own stories, rather than having an external (often foreign or urban outsider) telling a story about them and owning the rights to it afterwards.

5. Participatory videos

A participatory video is a form of participatory media that communities, NGOs or other bodies use to make Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) engaging, compelling and fun.¹¹ The 2012 issue of *Participatory Learning and Action* (McGee, Greenhalf, Ashley, 2012) tells us that the youth of Kenema district in Sierra Leone used participatory videos to engage in governance processes,

¹⁰ See www.internationalpeaceandconflict.org

¹¹ See <http://www.inghtshare.org>

change citizens' perceptions about them and position themselves to get elected into district and municipal councils. The same source notes that participatory videos have been used by the youth of Liberia to demand transparency and accountability.

6. Journalism and Reporting

From Cape to Cairo, the emergence of information communication technologies (ICTs) has fuelled youth participation in governance through the media. The Reuters (2015) noted that technology has made it easier for young people to see what is happening in other countries and make contact online.¹² On a precise note, in *The Rise of Citizen Journalism in Nigeria*, Sunday Dare notes (Dare, 2011), that in Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, the youth are contributing in strengthening the nation's struggling democracy by keeping the society informed, requesting transparency and accountability and in revealing societal ills through citizen journalism.

7. Blogging

Enabled by technology, a flurry of political blogs by the African youth has sprung up online. Political bloggers, YouTubers, Facebookers, Tweepers and Instagrammers are lending their voice and talent to participatory governance. Even an award platform, the African Blogger Awards, now acknowledges this initiative in community building through online content¹³. And according to the webpage of the said Awards (ibid.), political blogging is only exceeded by entertainment blogging in Africa.

8. Protest Movements

Youth-led popular protest movements, able to overthrow regimes, have been staged recently in the struggles for economic, political and social emancipation in Africa. Given the nature, causes, success, timing, method, the media coverage and involvement, impact in other parts of the world, sacrifice and expected outcome of these protests, this paper has chosen to examine these movements, seen through the prism of four case studies, in greater detail in the next chapter.

¹² See <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/05/01/us-africa-democracy-insight-idUSKBN0NM3UT20150501>

¹³ See www.africanbloggerawards.com

Chapter Three: Youth-led Protest Movements: Four Scenarios

Unemployment and underemployment are two of the socio-economic challenges that have sparked youth-led protests in different parts of the continent. According to the 2012 *African Economic Outlook* report (with contributions from the experts of the AfDB and others), youth account for 60% of all unemployed Africans. Joblessness and frustration (Carpenter and Schenker, 2011; Honwana, 2013) are some of the reasons why the continent's youth are taking to the streets to demand for a change of circumstances from their respective governments. The "new politics" of more active participation has become the extended sphere of youth activism and protest movement; this has led to a shift from dispersed and unstructured social and political action to more organized street protests— in Mozambique, Tunisia, Senegal and Burkina Faso.

The methodology applied in gathering and analyzing data for the four scenarios is mixed. Sources of information have been found in government publications, local and international newspapers, magazines, personal communications, reliable websites, other reports and scholarly journals. All websites were accessed between May and June 2015.

The framework against which direct influence is measured for each of the scenarios will be whether the given protest has led to the inclusion of youth (in the given county) in formal politics and effective participation; in other words, whether, as defined by Robert Dahl (Dahl, 1991) a given protest has unconditionally offered equal opportunities to the youth of the concerned country to form their preference, and place questions on the public agenda and express reasons for one outcome over the other.

Scenario 1: Mozambique

A former Portuguese colony, overseas province and a member state of Portugal, Mozambique is a southern African nation whose long Indian Ocean coastline is dotted with popular beaches and offshore marine parks. The Frelimo party has been in power since independence from Portugal in 1975. Tension with former Renamo guerrillas has persisted. Mozambique was one of world's poorest countries in 1975, but has emerged as one of the fastest growing economies in the 21st century. It is expected to become one of the world's largest exporters of coking and thermal coal, as well as liquefied natural gas (UNESCO, *General History of Africa*, 1991).

Thousands of young Mozambicans stormed the streets on Tuesday, September 1, 2010¹⁴. Price hikes, imposed by the government, took the cost of a bread roll to 20 US cents, in a country where the average worker earns only \$37 a month¹⁵.

The following day demonstrators began burning tyres and blocked roads in protest. Police fired rubber bullets and tear gas as they clashed with the demonstrators¹⁶. Ten people died, one of the dead was a 12-year-old boy who was shot in the head while some 288 people were injured in the violence, according to the government¹⁷.

The government called on citizens “to abstain from participating in acts of upheaval, vandalism and looting”, saying the bread price increase was “irreversible.”¹⁸ Nearly 300 demonstrators were arrested, including nine accused of “incitement” for sending out mobile-phone text-messages urging people to join the protests against rising utility, transport and food prices. Ministers said the protests caused millions of dollars of damage. But they were criticized by opposition parties and human rights groups, who said the government failed to gauge the anger that would be unleashed by the bread price increases¹⁹. After three days of rioting calm was restored to much of Maputo. Residents got back to work on Friday after two days of protest. While the burned remains of protest barricades still lay in the streets, and as residents ventured outside to begin queuing for food, the government reversed the price hikes²⁰.

Did the protests allow the youth of Mozambique to directly influence their government?

The answer is yes and no. Yes because, on the spot, the protest movement forced the government to reverse the 30% price increase, crucial in Mozambique, especially to the youth. But no, because the Mozambican youth are still largely absent in formal politics (Honwana, 2013).

¹⁴ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-11150063>.

¹⁵ See the photo slides on <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-11182376>.

¹⁶ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-11150063>.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ See ‘The angry poor’ at <http://www.economist.com/node/16996835>

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ See ‘Mozambique’s food riot’ at <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/sep/05/mozambique-food-riots-patel>.

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Scenario 2: Tunisia

Tunisia became a French protectorate in 1881. When the country gained independence in 1956, Habib Bourguiba, its first president, established a one-party state. He ruled the country for 31 years, repressing Islamic fundamentalism and defending women rights in a manner unmatched by any other Arab nation. Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, a former minister of the interior and prime minister, led a bloodless coup against Bourguiba and became president in 1987 (UNESCO, *ibid.*). Until January 2011, Ben Ali and his Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD) party exerted total control over parliament, state and local governments, and most political activity, in what many political scientists consider as true dictatorship (Manhire, 2012; Haddad, 2012; Honwana, 2013).

The Tunisian Revolution began in the center of the country in the small town of Sidi Bouzid where, on 17 December 2010, Mohamed Bouazizi, a 26-year-old fruit vendor, set himself on fire to protest economic conditions and police mistreatment²¹.

Before Bouazizi's self-immolation, the youth lived in Tunisia under the absolute rule of President Ben Ali. A couple of hours after Bouazizi's self-immolation, several hundred youth assembled at the same venue to express their solidarity with Bouazizi and protest the lingering economic hardship, youth unemployment, and police abuses (Manhire, *ibid.*). Clashes between the demonstrators and the police rose as more people joined in the rallies. The young protesters set up a coordinating committee that began relaying information to demonstrators. Images of the protest went viral, but were completely ignored by the national media²².

Sixteen days running, young people in the neighboring towns of Kasserine, Gafsa, and Sfax staged protests in solidarity with Sidi Bouzid. Over the next few days, the protests spread to several other towns. Protesters responded to police violence by throwing stones, burning tires, and setting fire on official government buildings and cars. Young bloggers and cyber activists from Tunis and other provinces recorded and reported the events to the country and the world (Internet World Stats: Africa Stats, 2011).

²¹ *Arab Reform Bulletin*, 11 January 2011, available at <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/arb/?fa=show&article=42269>.

²² See Afrique Presse News Agency, 9 February 2011, available at <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/babylonbeyond/2011/02/tunisia-paris-to-have-either-a-rue-or-place-mohammad-bouazizi.html>

Twenty-one days running, cyber activism and protests relayed information minute after minute (Internet World Stats, *ibid.*). And by the next morning, demonstrations had spread across the country as youth from far-flung towns joined in. The rest of the month of December saw the arrival of thousands of people gathering in Tunis. The beginning of the year 2011 saw thousands of youth in protest. Mohamed Bouazizi succumbed to his wounds at the military hospital in Ben Arous on January 4. Workers went on strike and joined the demonstrations in Tunis, Sousse, and Sfax, the three largest cities in the country, screaming, “Enough is Enough!” “We Want Freedom!” “Ben Ali Dégage!”²³

In the evening of the thirty-fifth day, an announcement that Ben Ali would be leaving power in six months failed to quell the fury of the protestors²⁴. It has been reported that two hours later, Ben Ali was flown to exile in Saudi Arabia. The Tunisian Jasmine Revolution, the true one, as they call it, sparked the Arab Spring in the Middle East²⁵.

Did these nationwide protests allow the youth of Tunisia to directly influence the way they are governed?

Not in a sustainable manner. Research shows that while young Tunisians enjoy the freedom of independent civic and political engagement brought by the revolution (banned under the old regime), they rebuff formal politics, and, in their frustration, call for the politicized forms of Islam (ECA/UNDP, 2012; Honwana 2013).

Scenario 3: Senegal

Senegal, a small West African country, peacefully attained independence from France in 1960, and has since been among the more politically stable countries in Africa. It surrounds Gambia on three sides and is bordered on the north by Mauritania, on the east by Mali, and on the south by Guinea and Guinea-Bissau. Its economy is centered mostly on commodities and natural resources. Owing to its relative stability, tourism and hospitality are burgeoning sectors. French is the official language, while Wolof is the lingua franca. A

²³See ‘De l’indignation à la révolution’ at <http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2011/02/PIOT/20114>.

²⁴“Tunisie: Ben Ali s’engage à créer 300 000 emplois entre 2011 et 2012,” *Le Monde*, 10 January 2011, available at http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2011/01/10/tunisie-ben-ali-s-engage-a-creer-300-000-emploientre-2011-et-2012_1463646_3212.html#ens_id=1245377.

²⁵ See ‘Fin de règne’ at http://www.lepoint.fr/monde/fin-de-regne-ben-ali-quitte-la-tunisie-sous-la-pression-de-la-rue-14-01-2011-129754_24.php.

multiethnic nation, Senegal has no official religion, but Sunni Muslim with Sufi and animist influences is predominant (UNESCO, *ibid.*).

Fou Malade (or “Crazy Sick Guy”), a member of Y’en a Marre (a group founded by Senegalese rappers of the Keur Gui group and journalist Fadel Barro), spoke at a rally on a Saturday in July 2011 requesting the president’s resignation²⁶. Following Y’en a Marre’s call thousands flooded the streets to demonstrate against Senegal’s president, Abdoulaye Wade, who, they said, was trying to extend his time in office in what they called a violation of the country’s Constitution. They said President Wade wants to stay in his sumptuous colonial-era presidential palace until his death. The young protesters held up signs, some using language imitating the protests in Tunisia earlier in the year. The signs read: “Enough is enough!²⁷”, “Wade, give it up, you are 100 years old.²⁸”

The protests continued every Saturday, at various parts of the city, as organized by Y’en a Marre. A few weeks later, stone-throwing youth took to the streets and massed in front of Senegal’s National Assembly and played cat-and-mouse with security forces, yelling, “Resign, Gorgui! Resign!” “*Ma carte d’électeur, mon arme!*” (or “My voting card, my weapon!”)²⁹. In particular, Y’en a Marre criticized President Wade’s proposal to lower the threshold for victory to just twenty-five percent of the vote in the first round. They held that the change would guarantee his re-election. They also opposed a proposal to create a vice presidency on the same ticket. That measure was a subterfuge, the youth contended, to install President Wade’s son Karim, already a powerful government minister, in the presidency, since it would have allowed for a transfer of power to the vice president³⁰.

After several rounds of protests, the young protesters forced a retreat from the president, and helped to remove him from office in the February 2012 presidential elections³¹.

Following the protests, are the youth of Senegal now able to directly influence their government?

²⁶ See ‘Protesters Urge President to Step Down’ at <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/24/world/africa/24senegal.html>

²⁷ Extract of the Y’en a Marre Movement Call for Action. Cited in James Genowa, “Y’en a Marre! (‘We’re Fed Up!’): Senegal in the Season of Discontent”, in *Origins*, March 2012.

²⁸ See ‘in Blunt and sometimes Crude Rap, a Strong Political Voice Emerges’ at http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/19/world/africa/senegal-rappers-emerge-as-political-force.html?_r=0.

³⁰ See ‘Au Sénégal, la colère contre l’émeute’ at <http://www.liberation.fr>.

³¹ See ‘Le Y’en a Marre de la jeunesse sénégalaise’ at <http://www.lepoint.fr>.

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One is more inclined to respond no than yes. While Y'en a Marre helped stop Abdoulaye Wade's political machinations, it declined to join President Macky Sall's cabinet or to form its own political party. It only concentrates on creating what it calls a "New Type of Senegalese" (NTS), described as one that is more socially and politically conscious, assumes his or her responsibilities as a citizen, and fights for the well-being of the Senegalese people. But can it push for fundamental change in Senegal – where little is now heard about it and its NTS³² – without entering the formal political arena?

Scenario 4: Burkina Faso

Formerly called the Republic of Upper Volta, the West African country was renamed "Burkina Faso" on August 4, 1984 by then-President Thomas Sankara. In the African Sahel, Burkina Faso is surrounded by six countries—Mali to the north; Niger to the east; Benin to the southeast; Togo and Ghana to the south; and Ivory Coast to the southwest. Before the conquest of what is now Burkina Faso by the French and other colonial powers during the late 19th century, the country was ruled by various ethnic groups including the Mossi kingdoms. After gaining independence from France in 1960, the country underwent many governmental changes. Today it is a semi-presidential republic (UNESCO, *ibid.*). Blaise Compaoré ruled the country from 1987 until he was ousted from power by the popular youth upheaval of 31 October 2014³³.

In October 2014 large numbers of young Burkinabe took to the streets to demand the end of President Blaise Compaoré's 27-year reign. At the time, Compaoré was working on a Constitution amendment to allow him to run for a third term. However, these young people who spent their entire lives under his rule were eager for change. Following this massive uprising, Compaoré, who had survived earlier protests in 2011 and 2013, was forced to step down at the end of October in 2014³⁴. The army swiftly moved in to fill the power vacuum, and in a public statement, Lt. Colonel Yacouba Zida, acknowledged the role played by their nation's youth, stating: "To the youth of Burkina Faso which has played a

³² See 'INCIVISME: Y'en a Marre où est votre Nouveau Type de Sénégalais ?' at <http://www.voicesofyouth.org/fr/posts/incivisme----yen-a-marre----ou-est-votre-nouveau-type-de-senegalais>

³³ See 'Violent Protest Topple Government in Burkina Faso' at <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/31/world/africa/burkina-faso-protests-blaise-compaore.html>; also Reuters reporting, last updated : June 1, 2014, 01 :34 at <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/39108/politique/burkina-le-r-cit-de-la-chute-de-compaor-heure-par-heure/>.

³⁴ See 'Le récit de la chute de Compaoré, heure par heure' at <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/39108/politique/burkina-le-r-cit-de-la-chute-de-compaor-heure-par-heure/>

heavy price for change, I want to reassure that their aspirations for democratic change will not be betrayed or disappointed.³⁵”

But youth protesters and other civil society groups demanded that power be handed over to civilian rule, and following negotiations between various groups, a transitional government led by Michel Kafando, a former diplomat, was set up and given the mission of leading the country to general elections in 2015.

Nevertheless, the military continues to play a key role, while holding important posts, in the transitional government.

Have these violent protests allowed the youth of Burkina Faso to directly influence their government?

The answer is no. According to *Jeune Afrique* (February 3, 2015)³⁶, the youth are only ready for another street action, not unusual in the history of Burkina Faso, if the political maneuvers of the transitional government fail to stop the *débrouillage* (or “making do”).

In summary, while the African youth have succeeded in intervening to salvage critical situations, they seem to mostly remain fire extinguishers of their nations’ political infernos. The next chapter offers some observations on youth participation in governance on the African continent.

³⁵ Cited by Erik Neumann, in ‘What will be the outcome of Burkina Faso’s Youth Revolution?’, *Takepart*, 4 November 2014: <<http://www.takepart.com/article/2014/11/02/what-will-be-outcome-burkina-fasos-youth-revolution>>

³⁶ See <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/33577/politique/burkina-faso-o-va-la-r-volution/>.

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Chapter Four: Observations on youth participation in governance in Africa

The scenarios discussed in the previous chapter show that young Africans denounce old-style party politics and object to being manipulated by politicians, whom they regard as corrupt and self-serving³⁷. According to the International Conference on Youth on the theme: “Youth and Democratization in Africa: Lessons Learned and Comparative Experiences” (UNECA, 2012), experts that convened at the conference noted that the protests have shed light on gaps in youth social movements aimed at political change. At the same time they suggested that to push for fundamental, political and socio-economic change on the continent, the youth would need to enter the formal political arena³⁸.

However, it also seems that the youth refuse to get involved with *the means* that enable for active and effective participation in governance. It appears that there is a gulf between the youth and the current political culture in Africa. Critchley (2011) suggests that this disconnect derives from the dissociation of power from politics. “Power is the ability to get things done” while “politics is the means to get those things done” (Critchley, 2011:175).

The following arguments are made for more structured and direct participation of the youth in governance: (1) youth social movements have been able to overthrow regimes, but systemic transformation takes time and requires more than a mere change in leadership; (2) young activists seem to be struggling to transform the political grievances of their protest movements into a broader political agenda; (3) the young are more united in defining what they do not want and fighting it, than in articulating what they collectively want, and how to attain it; (4) few young Africans from other parts of Africa are interested in the participatory efforts of their peers (UNECA/IDEA/UNDP, 2012)³⁹.

So far, it appears that the African youth are largely involved in developing alternative sites for social and political intervention within civil society organizations — alternative to party politics. The youth involve themselves in political action initiatives that do not require party membership. They fight for

³⁷ See ‘Waithood, Restricted Failures and Youth Protests in Africa’ at http://www.iss.nl/fileadmin/ASSETS/iss/Documents/Conference_presentations/PCC_Alcinda_Honwana_10April2014.pdf

³⁸ See a summary by one of the joint organizers at <http://www.idea.int/africa/democracy-and-the-role-of-youth-in-africa.cfm>; and the conference report at <http://www.idea.int/africa/upload/Youth-Conference-Proceedings-Final.pdf>

³⁹ Ibid.

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freedom of expression in the physical and virtual worlds; they lead anti-corruption and open-government campaigns; they work in youth leadership development programs, women's rights, environmental protection and similar volunteer initiatives. However, the success of these initiatives in enabling the youth to more directly influence how they are governed remains to be established.

Further research is recommended to explore the following questions:

- Are civil society associations, as platforms of political action, enough to steer significant political change?
- Is it possible, as many African youth seem to believe, to drive the creation of different governance cultures from outside the dominant political structures?
- Can the African youth afford to rely on street protests and non-participation as the main mechanisms for expressing dissatisfaction with the status quo?
- Will the problems facing the youth in Africa be solved if the youth, from the periphery, only envision the day when they will elaborate and implement their visions for governance?

Conclusion

This paper appraised youth participation in governance in Africa by discussing the broad categories of this participation, including the activist and popular protest movements in Mozambique, Tunisia, Senegal and Burkina Faso. The aim of the paper was to discuss whether the youth in Africa are engaged in activities that enable them to directly influence how they are governed. The paper established that beyond uprisings and activism, real change requires youth participation in formal politics. Questions on the future of youth participation in governance in Africa were raised for future research.

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