



Discussion Paper

**ENHANCING YOUTH-ELDER COLLABORATION IN GOVERNANCE IN
AFRICA**

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ABSTRACT

Youth constitute the majority of the population on the African continent. This paper explores the convergence of traditional (African Tradition) and modern ways of social engagement in political governance interactions. It discusses the imperative for youth participation in governance, as well as the challenges and opportunities for dialogue between youth and elders in governance systems. In the first chapter, the paper discusses cultural norms which have prevented the development of collaboration between youth and elders, as well as the consequences of constricted relationships, for example the entrenchment of elders as leaders. The chapter concludes with proffering strategies for reform, including a redefined understanding of governance, performance based evaluation criteria for leaders and the strengthening of institutions. Through case studies, the second chapter of this paper outlines key issues the youth face in collaborating with elders in governance. The case studies present youth who have attempted to drive development agenda within government, as well as those who have successfully influenced political decision making and action. This chapter highlights some of the strategies the youth who have successfully influenced elders in political decision making have employed, in order to gain influence and collaborate with the elders.

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CHAPTER ONE

1.1. THE IMPERATIVE FOR YOUTH-ELDER COLLABORATION IN GOVERNANCE

"What is happening to our young people? They disrespect their elders, they disobey their parents. They ignore the law. They riot in the streets, inflamed with wild notions. Their morals are decaying. What is to become of them?" Plato, 4th Century BC
(Guardian, 2009)

Governance is the exercise of authority, control, management or the power of government (World Bank, n.d). Governments in Africa exercise authority over and manage the lives of millions of young adults aged between 15 and 35, who account for over 35% of the population of the continent. It has been projected that by the year 2020, 3 out of 4 people in Africa will be on average 20 years old (African Union, n.d).

Political participation has been defined as "those legal activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take" (Verba and Nie, 1972, p.2). Citizen participation in governance is essential for enhancing public confidence in governing institutions, formulating and implementing state policies that reflect citizen needs whilst receiving necessary feedback on people's reactions to such policies (youthbridgefoundation.org). The most direct methods of participating are voting, and contesting for political office via the electoral process. Indirect mechanisms for participation in governance include campaigns, activism, protests, lobbying and consultations amongst others.

Representative government structures typically take the form of legislative assemblies and executive offices at national, regional and local levels. Youth participation in these is crucial, as democratic government should reflect the composition of population. Policy and governance spaces are learning spaces in which young people can acquire a set of expectations about their right to participate and their power to bring about change by doing so. They can also acquire the skills and experience required to operate effectively in these spaces, ensuring they are better placed to participate as adult citizens in the future (McGee and Greenhalf, 2011, p.32).

Also, young Africans see government as a mechanism for developmental efforts and results. Youth consider the quality of governance to be responsible for the political, economic and social successes or failures of their countries. A 2012 study of youth across Africa published by the Mo Ibrahim Foundation and cross checked by the Africa Governance Institute (Africa Governance Institute, n.d) captures a range of African youth perspectives on governance;

- 56% of African youth are interested in current affairs. Urban youth have a higher level of interest than rural youth.
- Less than $\frac{1}{4}$ of African youth surveyed think their country is a full democracy, and less than $\frac{1}{2}$ are satisfied with their democracy.
- Less than $\frac{1}{2}$ of youth have confidence in the honesty of elections.
- Since 2000, youth voter turnout has declined in most countries, except Tanzania, Uganda, Malawi, Ghana, Kenya, Senegal and Cape Verde.
- In some African countries, youth have more confidence in the military than in government.
- While a majority of youth believes that violence is not justified in politics, 75% of those surveyed do not exclude the adoption of non-conventional forms of political action (including violence) if their socioeconomic situation is not improving and their political voice is not heard. The highest percentages of young people sharing this position are in the countries of North Africa, Central Africa and West Africa.
- 80% of young people surveyed do not consider emigrating abroad as a relevant solution, and all insist on the fact that the conditions of their social, political and economic integration need to be established in their respective countries and in Africa.

Across Africa, youth seek to participate in government directly or indirectly by engaging meaningfully to gain influence. This is because governance structures across the African continent are dominated not by youth, defined for the purposes of this paper as those aged between 15 and 35 years old, but by older individuals—the elders. The very use of terms ‘youth’ and ‘elder’ speaks to the dichotomy between both groups. This dichotomy, based on age classification determines the

status, privileges and rankings of individuals by the length of their existence on earth.

To effectively enter, and function optimally in government, youth will need to achieve the status of colleagues/ partners, able to dialogue and communicate with these elders. The following section explores some of the ideological and cultural factors which impede engagement between youth and elders.

1.2. BARRIERS TO ENGAGEMENT

Cultures are a reflection of the values or norms which guide human interaction in a society. Although the cultures and traditions of societies on the African continent are diverse, there are common norms, principles and thinking patterns evident in the majority of them. Several trends which flow out of cultural norms and notions affect the relationships between youth and elders in the context of governance in Africa. In particular, this section explores the following trends: the notion of eldership as leadership, inhibited communication and youth frustration.

1.2.1. ELDERSHIP AS LEADERSHIP

Proverb: *“A young man standing cannot see what an old man will see sitting down.”*
(Igbo, Nigeria)

Meaning: Elders are guided by the wisdom of experience and, therefore, will always have advantage over the young.

Proverb: *“An Okro plant cannot grow taller than its farmer.”* (Creole, Sierra Leone)

Meaning: The youth (Okro plant) is planted by the farmer (elder) to whom it owes its existence and sustenance. Thus, the youth cannot be greater than the elder.

Proverb: *“When a kid goat bends down, it sucks from its mother’s breast.”* (Swahili)

Meaning: Youth are admonished to defer to elders, and reap the reward of nurturing.

The proverbs above show that leadership is generally considered the responsibility of elders who have accumulated years of life experience. These experiences, ostensibly, are the requisite competencies required for public office. The cultural

notion of leadership as the responsibility of older individuals is reflected in the structure of several contemporary African governance systems;

Table 1.1 Minimum Age to Contest for Office of the President in Selected African Countries

Country	Minimum age to contest the office of President
Burkina Faso	35
Cameroon	35
Democratic Republic of Congo	30
Egypt	40
Ghana	40
Nigeria	40
Senegal	35
Sudan	40
Tanzania	40
Uganda	35
Zimbabwe	40

This table shows that governance in Africa can be described as elder-led. This has several consequences for youth-elder relationships: firstly, young people are not considered suitably qualified for high leadership responsibility. Secondly, the notion of elders as leaders perpetuates a vicious cycle in which young people in Africa are unprepared for the challenges of leadership, development and nation-building. Thus, leaders, although ‘mature’ and ‘elders’ are ill-equipped to effectively tackle developmental problems. Thirdly, it follows that, as a result of dominance, elders can determine levels of youth access, as well as the agenda and processes for engagement in governance systems. The next section discusses how

the conflation of eldership and leadership affects communication between youth and elders, and how it affects youth ability to influence governance.

1.2.2. INHIBITED COMMUNICATION

Several cultural norms in Africa prevent meaningful dialogue between youth and elders. Specifically, it can be stated that respect for elders is sacred in Africa. Respect may be described as consideration for, or deference to elders. In practice, the norm of respect has been relied upon by African leaders to avoid scrutiny and accountability, and silence criticism. Abdul-Razaq Hamzat-Nigeria (Hamzat, 2013) explains;

“When the elderly person is doing things wrongly, things that are destroying or capable of destroying both the old and the young, both the present and future generations, the young is expected not to question that action even though he or she would be affected in the consequences of the wrong actions of the elder/leaders.”

Razaq goes further to describe the frustration youth experience when issues they present are discarded on the grounds that young people are rude, arrogant or disrespectful. He argues that “the result of such situation is the backwardness seen all over Nigeria/Africa, where the elders/leaders continuously do things wrongly, but the youths are said to be too young to take part, or when allowed to take part, are expected to just keep quiet when things are going wrong, or speak only when they are told to do so.”

Similarly, Modibe J. Modiba (Modiba, 2015) articulates the challenges youth face in engaging with elder-leaders:

“We live in a continent infested by young people, we live in a continent where our leaders do not want to be challenged, questioned and called to order by the younger population. We live in a continent where the culture and respect card gets used every time young boys and girls call their leaders to order, we live in a continent where our leaders use "culture" and "respect" to keep the youth silent and limited.

If the "culture" and "respect" card is going to be used by our leaders to silence and keep us stagnant then we'll rather create our own culture instead of succumbing to the status quo. Don't get me wrong, respect is highly important in

the African culture, but if our leaders are not going to respect us, then we will not respect them.”

As a result of inhibited youth expression, youth voices are faint in the structures of governance, and can be ignored by elders. Also, young individuals who attempt to criticise governance systems, failures or actions can be discredited and disgraced. Youth who dare to confront elder leaders may find themselves cast as cultural offenders, and violators of the hallowed tradition of respect. Thus, the opinions, perspectives or ideas of the ‘disrespectful’ young person are rendered untenable, and unworthy of consideration. The second chapter of this paper will discuss the strategies youth activists have employed to express unpopular and controversial opinion.

Social Media and Political Expression

Social media has allowed youth to voice opinions and, to some extent, engage with elders in governance. It has been reported that there are 100 million active Facebook users in Africa (TechCrunch, 2014). Similarly, young Africans use Twitter to hold lively political discussions in Africa. These platforms have emerged as channels for youth-elder dialogue across the continent. To illustrate, during the 2015 Burundi protests which were largely youth-driven, access to social media was allegedly suspended by the government:

“Protest-hit Burundi cut mobile access to several social networks and messaging applications, a telecoms official said on Wednesday, following days of demonstrations against President Pierre Nkurunziza's bid for a third term. Networks including Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp — which have been used to coordinate protests — were no longer accessible via mobile telephone in the capital Bujumbura, although an official explanation for the service cut was not given.’ (The Nation Kenya, 2015).

Political parties across Africa have begun to deploy social media to engage youth: in Côte d'Ivoire, political aspirants ‘feverishly post campaign updates on Twitter and Facebook’ (Essoungou, 2010, p.3). Similarly, in Zimbabwe, the Movement for Democratic Change, an opposition party in Zimbabwe, adopted social media to interact with the younger generation. Fungisai Sithole, the Party Chief of Staff explained the rationale thus:

“The current generation does not want to be treated as the ‘other’. They want to be engaged, they want to talk, they want to contribute” (Davis, 2013). To overcome the challenges of low internet access and the high cost of smart phones, the party has developed a bespoke platform that uses text messages to interact with voters and members (ibid).

Additionally, young people in Africa have utilized social media to improve the accountability of leaders. Atiku Abubakar, a former vice president of Nigeria commented on the implications of social media on the relationship between youth and elders in governance;

“Social media is where young people, the bulk of Nigeria’s population, gather to share their thoughts, often venting their frustrations with the inefficiencies of the country. I may not always like what is written about me; indeed some commenters could be very insulting. Our society has always been one where older people expect a lot of respect from younger people, so the relative equality of voice that social media provides may shock newcomers to the platforms.

Overall, social media has allowed me to listen to a diverse array of Nigerian voices without filters. I am going to guess that colleagues in public service may see social media as a threat, and indeed seek to censor social media networks. But I think such an attempt would be a mistake.

Instead of censoring social media, governments need to see them as an opportunity to listen directly to their constituency. The conversations on social media represent a gold mine of data and reference for performance. The reality is that leaders can test opinions using social media, and more importantly, can generate and collate ideas and solutions from their constituency by putting their thoughts out in social media.

Not all ideas on social media are good, and sometimes leaders have to make tough decisions which are unpopular. Indeed that is the point of being a leader, being able to filter through multitudes of voices to make the right decision. However, it is good to see social media as a resource. A 24-hour focus group, which can yield fine ideas for every political leader.

Leadership can only improve where there is an active participation of the led. The active participation of young people on social media, and the continuous interest in how the nation is governed can only lead to improvements in government. I am

personally more conscious of my public actions of late, because my presence on social media means I have to give an account of my actions – a responsibility which is self-regulated simply because I am aware of the access that the platforms have now provided.” (Abubakar, 2013)

Limitations of Social Media

Social media is useful to the extent that it allows the dissemination of information and enables discussion. Online discourse spaces are accessible to all individuals, and are not managed by governments, which fosters freedom of expression. However, virtual civic activism does not necessarily translate to influence of governance or a relationship with elders who control government systems. Social media spaces are outside of decision making structures, such as parliament or policy making offices within the executive arm of government. As such, engagements and dialogue occur within the very narrow framework of conversations with a leader or arm of government maintaining an online presence. Also, there is a great degree of ‘noise’, i.e., numerous voices online. As a result, elder led governance systems can choose to ignore or amplify youth voices as desired. Additionally, in hostile societies, use of social media can expose the identities of virtual activists, leading to harassment. Furthermore, voices on social media are outside of government and governance processes. Thus, youth influence of governance systems is restricted to issues within the public domain, and to some extent, political leaders active on social media.

Youth unable to engage with elder-leaders in governance, or contribute to governance can experience frustration, which can have various outcomes. These outcomes are explored in the following section.

1.2.3 FRUSTRATION

Young people, frustrated by systemic exclusion and strangulated communication become disillusioned and disenchanted with elders. Ideological differences, particularly around developmental issues deepen the chasm between both groups. Youth react to these frustrations by creating vehicles to express and achieve their aspirations.

The notion of otherness has been embraced by some youth, who seem to have rationalized the futility of utilizing traditional methods to engage with elder-led governance systems. Some of these vehicles are civil society and non-governmental organizations, social enterprises, movements, protests, and campaigns. Also, negatively inclined endeavours, such as criminal activity are a response to the stymied existence of some young people.

However, some African youth deploy energies and resources towards challenging elders and proffering solutions. This approach of independently engaging with development problems and opportunities provides a credible challenge to the policy agenda devised by elder-led governance systems. Youth operating successful initiatives or projects articulately express the perspectives and realities of young people. Also, these youth leaders are likely to have acquired some measure of societal respect as well as practical experience, which cannot be negated or easily dismissed.

Summary

Limited dialogue and collaboration between youth and elders results in adverse consequences for development processes and outcomes: existing communication mechanisms are, to a significant extent, located outside of government systems. Governance structure, Parliaments, Executive, Political Parties remain elder designed, elder-controlled and insular. Youth operate outside of formal representative governance systems. As a result, each group is denied the ideas, energies, and experiences of the other. Consequently, developmental efforts are fragmented and deprived of the substance necessary for results.

Nonetheless, it is possible for the relationships between youth and elders to be improved. The following section explores issues which have the potential to facilitate effective communication and engagement between young people and elders in governance.

1.3. ENHANCING YOUTH-ELDER RELATIONSHIPS IN GOVERNANCE

“Children and youth represent the possibility of either an exit from Africa’s current predicament or an intensification of that predicament” - Alex de Waal (Kolo, 2010)

Across Africa, governments have attempted to enhance youth engagement with government and governance processes. These include the establishment of youth councils or youth desks in government offices, government support for youth-led civic or social initiatives, and youth participation at governmental dialogues. These efforts notwithstanding, improvements in youth-elder relationships will need to address fundamental impediments within systems and cultures. In particular, this section tackles firstly, the ‘why’ of governance, and argues for a redefined purpose of governance. Thereafter, it addresses the ‘how’ or method of government, and recommends reform of governance systems towards performance based leadership and functional institutions.

1.3.1 PURPOSE OF GOVERNANCE

Firstly, the purpose of governance would need to be redefined to allow multi-generational functionality towards a common purpose. Elder-youth collaboration would benefit from an understanding of governance, and the exercise of state authority as a responsibility to deliver solutions and progress for communities and countries. The state is the most important actor in development, responsible for ‘coordination for change, provision of vision, conflict management, and institution building’ (Chang, 1999). A developmental state has been defined as one which is able to “authoritatively, credibly, legitimately and in a binding manner, formulate and implement its policies and projects” (Edighegi, 2010, p.4).

However, half a century after decolonization, despite immense natural and human resources, as well as a continuous stream of financial and technical aid, it is purported that bad leadership has rendered the African continent the poster child for poverty and under development;

“The earlier generations of post-independence leaders have failed woefully to raise the standards of living of our people. They have appropriated the opportunity of my generation - better educated, exposed and equipped - to provide better governance. They are embezzling the future of the next generation through

incompetent economic management, under-investment in human capital, and destruction of institutions to preserve their personal power and access to the natural resources of our continent. (El-Rufai, 2011).

“If the world has one picture of African statesmen, it is one of rank corruption on a stupendous scale. There hardly seem any leaders who haven’t crowned themselves in gold, seized land, hand over state businesses to relatives and friends, diverted billions to foreign bank accounts and generally treated their countries as giant personalized cash dispensers”. (Moyo, 2009, p.49)

Should the objective of government become service and productivity, it would likely be easier to remove the systemic barriers which prevent youth participation in governance. The energies and creativity of young individuals would be desired, perhaps even required to drive developmental objectives.

1.3.2 PERFORMANCE BASED LEADERSHIP

A purposive understanding of governance would reshape the criteria required for entrance into governance from elder-ship, tribal representation and strongman-ism to practical, competitive, results driven, and representative considerations. Also, leaders, whether youth or elders, in parliament or the executive arm of government, would be required to render performance based accounts of stewardship. Nasir El-Rufai, a former Federal Minister, and current Governor of Kaduna state, Nigeria posits criteria for assessing leaders, including:

“Education, Experience and Pedigree, Team Players not Lone Rangers, Bold, Courageous Leaders with Clear Vision, Persuasive Democrats in Words, Actions and Practices, Public Service Skills and Performance, Strong, Dedicated Advisers and Inner Circle, Bridge Builders Across Regions and Religions” (El-Rufai, 2011).

Governance systems which assess leaders on merit and performance will overcome the cultural notions of elder and youth roles. Objective metrics for evaluation will enable dialogue, collaboration and competition across generations.

1.3.3. FUNCTIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Institutions have been defined as:

“The rules of the game of a society, or, more formally, the humanly devised constraints that structure human interactions. They are composed of formal rules (statute law, common law, regulation), informal constraints (conventions, norms of behaviour, self-imposed rules of conduct), and the enforcement characteristics of both”. (North, 1993)

The reform or building of institutions is crucial to fostering open, meaningful interaction between youth and elders in governance. Institutions serve as the platform for the emergence and function of leadership, and can incubate or prevent multi-generational collaboration. To illustrate, minimum age requirements to run for political office are determined by legislative or executive institutions.

Strong and stable institutions are the mechanisms by which the purpose of governance is defined, and through which the objectives of government are implemented. To collaborate as colleagues with elders, youth will need to advocate and contribute to the development of ideas and systems which promote development.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Across Africa, youth, outside the spheres of governance have identified problems, mobilized resources, and deployed their skills, energies and efforts towards tackling developmental challenges. It follows that these youth are capable of achieving results within government. While it may be farfetched to consider elders and youth as peers in Africa, or indeed anywhere in the world, it is possible, within the context of governance to place them as collaborators, equally capable of and responsible for achieving the aims of government.

The following chapter explores cases of youth who have attempted to establish a development or reform agenda within government, hold leaders to account by evaluating performance, and drive the development of stable institutions in their countries.

CHAPTER TWO

2.1. COLLABORATING WITH ELDERS: THINGS TO KNOW

2.1.1. THE NEED FOR A CRITICAL MASS

Case: John Githongo, Kenya

In 2002, President Mwai Kibaki asserted in his inauguration speech:

“We want to bring back the culture of due process, accountability, transparency in public office. The era of "anything goes" is now gone forever. Government will no longer be run on the whims of individuals. The era of roadside decisions, declarations have gone. My government's decisions will be guided by teamwork and consultations. The authority of parliament and the independence of the judiciary will be restored and enhanced as part of the democratic process and culture that they have undertaken to bring and to foster.

Fellow Kenyans: I'm inheriting a country which has been badly ravaged by years of misrule and ineptitude. There has been a wide disconnect between the people and government, between people's aspirations and the government's attitude towards them. I believe that governments exist to serve the people, not the people to serve the government....Corruption will now cease to be a way of life in Kenya. And, ladies and gentlemen, by the way you have voted in the last elections, I am calling upon all of you to come out and fight corruption, and agree to support the government in fighting corruption as our first priority”. (BBC News, n.d)

This speech seemed to herald a new dawn of governance in Kenya. Shortly after, 37 year old John Githongo, a journalist, former head of Transparency International Kenya, and Election Monitor, amongst other roles in civil society was appointed the government's Anti-Corruption Tsar. His official title was Permanent Secretary for Governance and Ethics in the Office of the Presidency. Githongo's appointment lent credence to the government's reform claims- surely only a determined administration would invite a civic minded, ideologically driven, young (ish) man into its fold for the purpose of reform.

In 2005, three years after, Githongo resigned his position in government, and then published revelations which revealed the extent of corruption in Kenya, including a 500 million pound scam, implicating the Presidency and Senior Government Officials. His decision was triggered by admissions of corrupt activity by his employers: “they told me it was them...these ministers, my closest colleagues sat there and told me to my face that they, they were the ones doing the stealing. Once they said that, I knew I had to go” (Wrong, 2009, p.20).

Githongo’s experience provides lessons to youth seeking to assume roles within the machinery of government to drive reform. Although his tenure was truncated, he did achieve successes: firstly, his work sufficiently unnerved the elder-led establishment which then lifted the veil of hypocrisy. Also, his access to government officials, documentation and processes allowed him gather useful information. Additionally, his resignation exposed the double-speak of government publicly, and provoked outrage in the media and civil society: while he was not permitted to succeed entirely in his role in government, his experience did mobilize citizens, the media, and donor community to deeper scrutiny of government.

2.1.2. MANAGING CULTURES

Case: Victor Abongwa, Cameroon

Victor Abongwa has engaged with governments and elders through a combination of activism, lobbying, direct work and social sector interventions since 2005. He is the founder of Big Steps Outreach Network.

“Young people in Africa are taught to and they know they are generally not to speak when elders are speaking or only speak when spoken to. It is not uncommon to hear an elder say” what an old man can see sitting down, a young person can never see even if they used a ladder”. These deep rooted notions or wisdom comes with age has been an underlying impediment to meaningful conversations between the young and the old, as in most instances the old believe the young have little or nothing to offer and the young on the other hand think the ideas of the old are too archaic and cannot hold water in contemporary society.

Over the years I have come to terms with the fact that to effectively collaborate with elders in government, there is a need to harness cultural strongholds in ways that do not undermine the greater goals, rather respecting them while being objective and result oriented. Elders don't like to be kept waiting although they keep others waiting all the time, so I make sure to be there on time when I have a meeting or event that Government officials would be in attendance. I have learned to be soft spoken, yet always sending my point across and stand by those even when coerced to take it back.

Elders like to be acknowledged and have their importance felt by all in attendance, I do that but also do not fail to make young people in attendance too know they are equally as important. Acknowledge elders first and their role, then young people in that order. Elders like accountability even though in most cases they are hardly accountable themselves, so when tasked with a set of deliverables, I make sure to deliver on time and be transparent and accountable with what I was tasked with.

Youth should know the elders were there first and even though as young people born in an era where with the click of a mouse on Google we can get a wealth of knowledge, it is also important to acknowledge that experience and wisdom which comes with age has a very vital role to play and we can never undermine their importance. Their experiences definitely outweigh our knowledge and so if one can complement the other (new knowledge complimenting experience and wisdom, better results can be produced). If young people stop looking at elders as threats and vice versa, and rather as partners in development, then the development agenda can be achieved much quicker and meaningfully."

Thus, it seems that young people seeking to collaborate with elders in governance must understand the cultures which guide thought, action and systems. There are the 'traditional' cultures of ethnic groups, and the 'institutional' or 'organizational' cultures which have emerged in governance systems.

In dialoguing with elders in African governance systems, the medium is just as important as the message. Within government systems, young people must be alert to codes of conduct inspired by cultural norms. While the decision to adhere to or ignore these norms is subjective, young people should be aware that there

are implications, to their reputations, credibility, effectiveness, access and progress, however they choose.

2.1.3. EDUCATION AND ENLIGHTENMENT

Laws, Technology and Social Media

Laws are a useful tool for youth to engage with governance systems. For example, Freedom of Information Acts can be activated to obtain information on governance processes and decisions. Similarly, the provisions of constitutions, enabling pieces of legislation, anti-corruption acts, and regulations can be relied upon to comment upon government policy, or initiate dialogue with government.

Also, there is a need for group, rather than individual action. Young people are the largest demographic group in Africa, yet this does not reflect in the opportunities and resources available to them. Ideological and purposive coherence is needed to form the groups or blocs which can successfully engage with elder-managed governance systems. This coherence will be the result of education and enlightenment towards developmental challenges, and opportunities. This generation has the benefit of accessible technological and media tools which can disseminate information, promote conversation and mobilize action.

It is important to note that there are limitations to the use of social media, including internet penetration rate and costs of acquiring and use technology. Orthodox channels, such as youth groups, religious organizations, schools, and non-governmental organizations provide access to large numbers of youth.

2.1.4. ECONOMIC POWER IS NECESSARY

The Acquisition of Influence

Youth entry into and influence of government is constrained by a lack of resources: direct participation in governance through elections requires financial muscle and extensive networks across many sections of society. Similarly, indirect participation through means such as lobbying, sponsorship of bills or campaigns demands significant expenditure.

To successfully engage with governance systems, on a footing of respect with elders, young people in Africa, as a numerical and ideological bloc will need to consciously and deliberately acquire the economic resources necessary for political

activity. Practically speaking, an African youth who seeks to run for Parliament, but cannot afford to run a successful campaign or mobilize the necessary resources is unlikely to win an election, regardless of the quality of ideas, extent of capability, or experience. Also, youth-owned and managed resources would reduce incidences of tokenism or stooge-ism, wherein elders sponsor or nominate youth to offices, and seek to control their work in governance.

2.1.5 COLLABORATION WITH REFORMER-ELDERS IN GOVERNANCE

Case: Bring Back Our Girls, Nigeria

In April 2014, 276 school girls in Chibok, Nigeria were kidnapped by the Boko Haram terrorist group. At a rally in Port Harcourt, Dr Oby Ezekwesili, a former minister of Education in Nigeria and Vice President of the World Bank launched what would become The Bring Back Our Girls Movement. The issue was adopted by youth activists, who began a fiery campaign on social media.

Coordinated by Ezekwesili, the social media platforms of the movement became a reliable source of information on the status of kidnapped girls as well as government response. Importantly, the sustained and strategic actions of the group generated support within and outside of Nigeria.

This example shows the benefits of engaging with reformers or crusaders in government. Youth can identify and collaborate with elders in governance who articulate and work towards the achievement of common issues. These reformers may hold government positions or be engaged in civil society. Youth will gain necessary experience, insights and strategies as to how to operate in government, access to networks and resources, as they observe how these are acquired, learn to navigate the cultures within governance, and build multi-generational relationships.

CONCLUSION

Dialogue between youth and elders is necessary for improved understanding and collaboration towards development. This paper has attempted to articulate some of the obstacles, rooted in cultural norms, which youth navigate in engaging with government, particularly the elders who dominate governance systems.

These obstacles create a chasm between youth and elders, thus depriving each group of the ideas, experiences and competencies of the other. However, there are tools, such as social media and social activism, which have served to bridge the gap, and enable youth dialogue with elders in governance.

These tools have had limited impact, as they do not place youth within representative decision making systems, whether in Parliaments or the Executive. The reform of governance systems, specifically the removal of legal barriers and redefinition of the rationale and delivery of governance will assist in the emergence of youth-leaders, who will be considered capable and responsible for leadership responsibility.

Case-studies discussed the lessons to be drawn from the experiences of youth who have engaged with governance systems. Young people can manage cultures in such a manner as to engender good relationships with elders. Similarly, legal obligations of government as expressed in statutory instruments can be relied upon to initiate dialogue with elders in governance. Additionally, youth as a demographic group, can consciously acquire and deploy the economic muscle needed to participate in and influence government. Furthermore, alignments with reformist elders in governance can provide youth with the opportunity for learning, experience, mentorship needed to engage with governance systems.

To conclude, there is potential for improving the relationship between youth and elders, especially within governance. There is not a single approach to reform systems or cultural beliefs. However, young people have the resources to craft strategies and deploy tools towards engaging qualitatively and improving relationships with elders in governance.

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