



**Title: Things Youth in Africa Consider important or valuable and how they inform youth participation in Electoral and Governance Processes.**

**Discussion paper for the 2014 Mandela Institute for Development Studies (MINDS) Annual Youth Dialogue in Elections and Governance**

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July 2014.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## Executive Summary

<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>i</b>
<b>Chapter 1</b> .....	<b>ii</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
Defining and Contextualising Youth.....	2
Demographic Superiority.....	3
<b>Chapter 2</b>	
What youth want and consider important.....	4
Employment, quality of life and social mobility.....	5
Social equality and personal freedoms.....	6
<b>Chapter 3: Participation: Challenges and opportunities</b>	
Youth's challenges for participation in electoral and governance processes.....	7
Youth involvement in governance process: challenges and opportunities.....	9
<b>Chapter 4: Youth Responsibility</b>	
Youth Responsibility to participate in governance processes.....	12
Civic society participation as a way of engaging leadership.....	13
Human rights and the changing face of African society.....	15
Empowerment of women.....	16
<b>Chapter 5: Conclusions</b> .....	<b>18</b>
The importance of elections.....	19
Pan- Africanism and participation and development.....	20
<b>References</b> .....	<b>21</b>

## **Executive Summary**

This study identified and situated the youth at the centre of Africa's development, through an understanding of what they consider important and valuable in their lives. It identified the need for a good quality of life through access to employment and economic opportunities and the need for an equal and just society and personal freedoms as things youth consider important and valuable to them. This study assessed the challenges faced by youth in participating in electoral and governance processes in the context of Africa, grappling with disease, poverty and conflicts and how it affects the way in which youth participate in these processes. The study further used the concept of 'demographic superiority'- that is the importance of youth numbers as the **power** accessible to youth and which could be used to advocate for and influence positive change and transformative development in Africa. Youth is the largest constituency in Africa and if they recognise and use the power in their numbers through participation in electoral and governance processes they will make a profound significant gains in accessing what they want and consider important and through influencing of policies, programmes, leadership and resources allocation to critical areas that help to drive change. Participation in civic societies has also been noted to be important for youth development and acquisition of skills and responsibility, and good leadership qualities that are important for Africa's development politically, socially and economically.

## **Abstract**

This study sought to locate the youth as an important constituency in driving democratic and development processes forward in Africa because of their “demographic superiority”- posing a particular question: What things do youth in Africa consider valuable and important, and how do they influence their participation in elections and governance processes? The study considered how the youth can respond to and influence the direction of peaceful electoral processes, human rights issues, unemployment, education and skills, and empowerment of minority groups such as women, homosexuals and the disabled on the African continent. In seeking to understand Youth perceptions in electoral and governance processes the study mobilized and explored concepts of pan Africanism, civil involvement and responsibility, and active participation in governance processes to understand how they inform youth participation in governance. The underlying assumption being that youth active participation in and engagement with leadership and governance processes has the capacity to accelerate the transformation of the continent to realize socio-economic and political progress needed to improve conditions and living standards of the African society. It linked the youth needs to participation in electoral and governance processes.

Key words: Africa, elections, governance, participation, development, youth

**CHAPTER 1: Introduction and back ground to the study of things that youth value and consider important for personal and professional growth and transition to adulthood.**

This study interrogated the question of what matters to young people, why they consider such things valuable and important, and how, what is considered valuable and important inform their involvement and participation or lack of it, in electoral and governance processes in Africa. This study drew out the realities of young people on the continent and used them to demonstrate how they are linked to elections and governance processes and systems. The study also explored concepts such as pan Africanism, civil involvement and responsibility, and active participation in governance processes. Issues such as unemployment, human rights, and the changing face of African society were explored and their link to youth day-to-day lives illustrated. In addition, the importance of things like education and skills and empowerment of women what it means to youth development were also explored for their relevance on why youth should take them seriously and link them to broad issues of elections and governance processes and systems. Finally, the study considered the role youth should play to ensure they have access to what they consider valuable and important as well as their role in ensuring a society where equality is not only discussed but practiced in Africa. Extensive literature review was the core data gathering method of this research. One-on-one interviews were carried out with youth from different African countries who are currently resident in South Africa on temporary resident permits, asylum or refugee status. The countries represented in these individual interviews are Ghana, Cameroon, Mozambique, Nigeria, Malawi, Kenya, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Zimbabwe.

The importance of the youth as the future of the African continent has long been identified and policies, charters, constitutions, ministries, departments, trusts and organisations have been established for the purpose of developing the youth for leadership roles in Africa. Failure to take youth issues seriously and the exclusion of youth from decision making would result in a waste of critical human resource and potential with negative impact for the continent in the future (NYD and VOSESA, 2011). Emphasis has been put on coming up with ways to ensure that the youth participate in the mainstream economy and politics. It has been argued that the responsibility is on the present leaders to harness this important constituency for the future good of the continent, as Alessi (2004:1) notes “the values, attitudes and skills acquired by today’s youth will influence the course of the current events and shape the future.” The African Youth Charter recognises and upholds the unequivocal right of every young person to participate in all spheres of society-political, economic and social (African Union, 2005:6).

According to an African Union report (2012), 60% of the one billion people in Africa are youth under the age of 35 years. According to the World Bank (2011) 200 million people are between the ages of 15-24 years. This huge percentage is however never translated into any significant action that could determine the outcome of leadership through elections. In fact, youth have been accused of being apathetic in elections, as such, they do not capitalize on their superior numbers to influence decisions that could improve their state in regards to issues directly impacting their lives such as unemployment, exclusion from leadership positions, lack of education and/or skills, and inaccessibility to resources. As such, youth have failed to play a meaningful role in shaping the Africa and future they would like to see and which most aspire to. In practice, many youth in Africa face a daunting task when it comes to meaningful participation that will change their lives. This is so because they face many socio-economic and political challenges including, poverty, unemployment, diseases, poor education and political regimes that are oppressive. All these conditions limit the youth’s ability to participate freely in the mainstream society and build a better life. “Where the youth are marginalised and frustrated they are seen as a problem that need to be solved and as a source of social unrest” (NYD and VOSESA, 2011:3). It is their exclusion that is the problem and not the youth themselves.

The need to capture Africa's youth arise from the recognition that the continent has the world's most youthful population and is the fastest growing region in the world. This implies that the population of young people on the continent will increase favourably in the coming years, regardless of poverty disease and war on the continent (Population Reference Bureau 2007). It is important to understand the positive role the large numbers of the African youth can play in influencing positive leadership and development on the continent.

### **Defining and contextualising the youth**

In order to be all encompassing this study defines the youth as anyone between the ages of 15-45 years of age. This category covers a diverse group with a mixture of needs and circumstances. Youth is loosely defined as the period of transition between childhood and adulthood, marked by completing schooling, further education and entering the field of work, achieving financial independence and starting a family (Pandary, 2005). In Africa these life stages are experienced differently because of socio-political and economic challenges. Transition to adulthood for example is in many cases delayed because of conflict and high levels of unemployment (Pandary, 2005, United Nations, 2011a), people live in a punctuated time, the here and now (Guyer, 2007). Youth are mostly described in any number of ways ranging from apathetic to politically active social shifters, a demographic dividend to a potentially dangerous youth bulge, they are also regarded as fragile and need to be protected, at the same time they are regarded as immoral and promiscuous. No matter how one tries to understand the youth there is general consensus that "youth issues" need tackling (Nandingiri, 2012).

The broad range of age encompassed in this study covers a spectrum of socio-political, historical, and cultural experiences, identities and inequalities. Many times youth are seen and treated as a homogeneous group: stripping them of their identity and context. Unpacking who exactly is meant by 'youth' requires us to acknowledge and understand the complexity and diversity of youth and the many factors that influence their identities and the decisions they make in life, beyond age, gender, class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, religious beliefs, citizenship, culture, contexts they live in, to understanding "what their experiences are, and the access they have to different avenues" (Nandigiri, 2012:115). This helps in understanding the things they consider important and valuable, and the ways in which power structures are part of their lives. Mobilising youth as an important demographic for Africa's development means recognising the different life circumstances and experiences that shape those who comprise this broad category (National Youth Commission, 1997). Recognising their 'evolving capacities,' growth and progression of their lives and decision making skills, along with influences, is crucial if youth apathy "signified by lack of interest in politics and absentism in voting is to be converted into political activism" (Bynner and Ashford, 1994).

### **Demographic Superiority**

The youth can take advantage of their demographic superiority and influence the shape and direction of development in Africa in order for them to access things that are most valuable and important to them. Demographic superiority becomes important if youth show interest and recognise that their power in numbers can create huge opportunities if they harness it to benefit self and society. The increase in youth numbers has been understood through the theory of "youth bulge" which posits that as this generation of youth enter the workforce, they will either help their nations move forward (as demographic dividend) or due to lack of opportunities unemployment rate will grow, leading a huge number of unemployed young men to acts of violence and destruction. Demographic dividend follows that, "as large

youthful populations become older and have fewer children than previous generations, the size of the working-age population will increase and they will have fewer dependants to support. Nations will save money on health and other social services, improve the quality of education, increase economic output, invest in technology and skills, and create the wealth needed to cope with future aging populations” (NYDA and VOSESA, 2011:4). Poverty and unemployment in Africa have led many governments and policy makers to view the increase in youth numbers in a negative way, as a time bomb. This has led to interventions that “target the autonomies, rights and lives of young people” (Nandingiri, 2012:115).

The youth bulge theory has been hailed for forcing governments to focus on employment opportunities and job creation for the young generation. However these policies and initiatives have been justified due to a dangerous misconception that potentially sets up problematic programmes and approaches to youth development instead of seeing them as part of the rights of youth as citizens (Nandingiri, 2012). Such theories of bulge and demographic dividend are based on problematic population control language that reduces people to numbers. They are categorising “based on colour, age, job education and citizenship, by so doing removes any sense of autonomy, integrity, and dignity. It positions them as a ‘body’ open to policies and programming regardless of their human rights, values or wishes” (Nandingiri, 2012).

These theories form, and support existing modes of oppression through interventions and policies that are linked to the ideology of domination and subjugation of youth and other weaker groups in society, “If those in power believe that the youth populations need controlling or protection and are constantly labelled as ‘violent’ and ‘irresponsible’ it limits the spaces in which the youth can challenge, critique, and create an alternative discourse” (Nandingiri, 2012:115), as well as constructive engagement between youth and leaders. By excluding youth from the key-decision making processes, it perpetuates a cycle of harmful practices, policies and programming that is at its best irrelevant, and at worst dangerous. Youth need spaces to articulate their positions, needs and realities and take meaningful action to ensure that they access what they want. Youth need to move from artificial category, to multiple identities that need recognition and realisation with larger facets and aspects of society, including active engagement with governance processes and leadership as social shifters.

In terms of constructive and proactive engagement with government and leadership is concerned demographic superiority should become an alternative theoretical and practical analytical category that allows the youth to look at how they can significantly use their numbers to solve the problems they face as members of communities. The youth should be able to transfer their demographic superiority in the areas of political participation in elections and governance processes as well as leadership at community and national level on the continent. This is important because the youth have shown a considerable desire for a free, just and equal society, one that offers opportunity to all. Above all the youth have shown to be aware and accept the changing nature of Africa’s face in terms of advancing and accepting minority communities, human rights, homosexuals and women more than the conservative older generation of citizens who believe in an unchanging culture. It is also important that as the youth grow and occupy influential positions in society and governments they have to keep their interests and that of their nations at heart so that they are not ‘corrupted’ by power and desire for self-enrichment at the expense of national interests.

## **Chapter 2: What youth want and consider important.**

What the youth want and consider important in their lives has not significantly changed since the early days of nationalism and anti-colonial struggles in Africa in the 1940s. After 1990 all across Africa “youth” have come to represent the contradictions of the post-cold war era of neo-liberal reform, where promises of infinite possibility clash with material decline and scarcity (Jones 2005, Comaroff and Comaroff 2000, 2005, Ferguson 1999). The post-colonial African state was supposed to be a working society where everyone is supposed to be able to convert the present into the future (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000, Guyer 2005). Mbembe and Roitman (1995), give a gloomy picture of the condition of youth in Cameroon and a possible explanation of what the youth want and how they seek to access that which they deem important. They argue that the temporary and precarious nature of the economy is the cause for an increase in the engagement of efficacious action. Social instability turns into moral uncertainty. Moral uncertainty as a result of crisis brings out personal crisis in terms of personal identity and imaginations of the future for young people. Young people do not try to solve this crisis through engagement in political processes but as Comaroff and Comaroff (2000) notes through religious and occult economies in Southern Africa. They see a shift to new forms of religious imaginations as a symptom of big political and economic changes taking place at a global level, a shift from a work society to one where the value of work is less certain and much less predictable. The Comaroffs are moving from the global level to try and understand particular local concerns with zombies and Pentecostalism in South Africa as a way to capture how the youth understand and try to improve their condition. It could seem to me that African youth have resorted to take anything that promises a better future no matter how superficial it is rather than engagement with leadership and governance processes that offers prospects for real change.

### **Employment, Quality of life and social mobility**

It is important to note that what the youth of today consider important and valuable is access to employment opportunities. Lack of employment for youth is both a crisis for personal life and broader forms of connection and community. Unemployed youth feel that they lack respect, value, recognition and belonging in contemporary society. In a capitalist society one's value to family and society derives from having a job in the formal market, managing a middle class lifestyle, and the ability to provide for the family. Youth feel that belonging isn't a 'priori' but something that must be purchased by participating in the everyday economy (Berlant 2007). The political and economic crisis in Africa has led to the demonization and exploitation of the youth: they are called “unpatriotic” at the same time they are recruited to do the dirty work of politics during politically motivated violence, protests and civil wars. The result is a figure of “youth” that provokes more anxiety and fear than hope. That is to the global cliché “the youth are the future,” one adds: Are these youth our future? If so what kind of future will it be? Moreover will they even live long” (Jones 2005:3). In Madagascar Cole, (2004) scarcity and the need to acquire material property and a good lifestyle defined what the youth consider important and valuable at the same time shaped the youth's perception of the future and relationships.

Zimbabwean youth according to Jones (2005:4) defined a “‘good’ human as one with proper clothes, proper housing and adequate food.” Jones argues that young people face constant pressure from elders and peers to possess and to be possessed. Youth face a daunting task of the seemingly weird ability of others to accomplish what they cannot. This creates a gap between norm and reality, a gap that most powerfully manifest itself in an inability to align social reproduction and physical maturation, to “escape the compound” (Hansen 2005,) and

graduate to adult status (White 2001; Hunter 2002). At a deeper level beyond the politics of material insecurity there is also a growing doubt about the effectiveness of action especially participating in elections or governance processes. This portrays a picture of senselessness and hopelessness for the youth in Africa but as Mbembe and Roitman (1995) argue of Cameroon, we must recognise that senselessness can itself become a structure for a sense, delegating realms of responsibility and powerlessness and creating avenues for both possible and impossible action. The crises faced by the youth make visible a good deal of their political sociality and a sense of how they seek to deal with these challenges. It is particularly marked in local ritual forms a variety of religious and traditional practices, which step in to act as guarantors for value and for the future in the face of a senseless and menacing world (Guyer 2007, Van Dijk 1998, Commaroff and Commaroff 1998).

What the youth want is explicitly highlighted in their use of post-fordist, neo-liberal language of accumulation to explain their engagement in civil war and election violence as militias and child soldiers in Sierra Leone's RUF (Richards, 2006), Rwanda's genocidal *Interharamwe* (Roessler 2005) Liberia and Guinea-Bissau (Vigh, 2006), as well as in uprisings during the 'Arab springs' (Hafez, 2011). The rise of the political economy of dregging (hustling) in Liberia and Sierra Leone meant that the male youth are constantly available to be used for virtually any form of work of labour. Deployment and employment took the same meaning as young men moved across social and legal and identity categories looking for economic opportunities (Hoffman, 2011). During peace negotiations they threatened to go back to the paying labours of militia violence if the government did not provide work opportunities for them (Hoffman, 2012). The argument here is that in virtually all countries where youth are used by politicians to perpetrate violence against their opponents or when they engage in violent activities against their governments through protests or civil wars. They view what they are doing as a process of accumulation, using 'violence' as an opportunity to be rewarded for their 'work.' The dilemma the youth face in Africa is of youth politicisation by powerful political leaders for personal ambitions, they are often seen as "political capital" to be exploited (Frimpong-Mansoh, 2012). The youth in most cases are given token rewards for mobilising support for the political elite, these rewards range from food, beer, and money things that do not provide the youth with a future but satisfy short term needs. Meaning that, the youth are swept underground and excluded from participating in and contributing to issues of governance.

As Africa faces a 'youth bulge' that is excessively burdened by lack of employment, capturing the vote of this demographic has become more important than ever before (Resnik and Casale 2011). Attempts to capture the youth demographic superiority are made by political parties for their own ends and not by the youth themselves in order to advance their own interests politically and economically. Resnik and Casale (2011) argue that youth in Africa are more likely to question the legitimacy of the electoral process as a meaningful way for expressing their interests than they are to engage in protests. Blackwash, a Black Consciousness youth group in South Africa exposes what they call the Black Condition whereby black South Africans are pushed onto marginality; disappointment with the post-1994 government, bad living conditions and poor education inherited from the apartheid Bantu education system. The fact that the youth are able to identify problems within the system means that they are able to play an active role through engaging leadership to solve those problems for their own good.

## **Social equality and personal freedoms**

The youth of this generation like the youth of previous generations value an equal and just society, where human rights and democracy are respected. These values were at the centre of anti-colonial and post-colonial pro-democracy struggles. Older generations remain focused on issues such as economic well-being, law and order, and religious values while young people are concerned with post-material goals such as quality of life, social equality, and personal freedom (Resnick and Daniela, 2011). Mabrouk, (2011) described the Tunisian revolution of 2010 as one for dignity and freedom. The strong language of democracy, freedom, and equality were also heard during the spread of the Arab Springs in Egypt among women and youth who participated in the revolutions (Agrama, 2011; Hamdy, 2011; Ghannam, 2011). Entelis (2011) argues the same for Algeria that democracy was denied after a military coup of 1992 and this led the youth, women and other social movement groups to take to the streets in protests way before the Arab Springs of 2010-11.

Post-colonial Africa has been faced with many challenges in its search for democracy and identity as a continent. The reason for youth in Africa to use their “demographic superiority” to influence change and development emanates from the position that “Africa is under transition” (Wani 2014:1). Most countries in Africa are ridden with unending conflict, bad governance challenges and in many states infrastructure has collapsed and the population is under threat from curable diseases and famine. Good governance has remained an issue for Africa’s development. African citizens have been denied the enjoyment of peace, economic prosperity, and liberal democracy, rights and freedoms, including choosing governments. This was the cause of the pro-democracy struggles of the 1990s. The thirst for democracy, freedom and justice, the economic failure and the deep rooted repressive political systems dominant in the larger part of Africa’ post-colonial history provided the “incentive and legitimacy” for popular democratic struggles in Africa during that period. These struggle for democracy prompted constitutional and political changes and reforms in many countries forcing the introduction of multi-party systems and the holding of elections, and granting civil and political rights and freedoms to people.

Youth interviewed as part of this study noted with concern the deteriorating state of democracy in Africa, after attaining freedom from colonial rule. They have argued that there is no incentive for them to participate in elections when they know that their vote might not count. This shows that youth in Africa misunderstand their role in enhancing democracy. Their role is not to wait for the government to do things for them, but it is up to them to take the initiative and recognise that elections can be an effective process for them to change governments and it is therefore an incentive for them to participate and make a difference. These youth who are resident in South Africa noted that democracy, rule of law and human rights are weak if not non-existent in most countries in Africa. A study by Afrobarometer (2014) found out that people in Africa want more democracy than what their leaders are willing or able to provide. Politically motivated violence and oppressive regimes that do not respect the wishes of the people and their right to choose leaders of their choice in countries like Zimbabwe, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Kenya and other conflict ridden countries on the continent affects the decision by many youth when deciding to vote. Youth interviewed also argued that their decisions not to vote in many instances are made based on the level of perceived democracy in their country. They argue that democracy and economic stability cannot be separated, “if there is no democracy there is no economic stability because of corruption and lack of accountability among leaders” said one Congolese young man during a short interview. This implies that since the youth want democracy, civil liberties, social equalities and the rule of law, their absence means that they do not participate in

electoral and governance processes. Zimbabweans interviewed saw participation in civic and human right organisations that seek to make the government accountable as risky and dangerous in a charged context political intolerance.

### **Chapter 3: The Youth's challenges for participation in electoral and governance process**

Since the dawn of Pan-Africanism and anti-colonial movements in the 1950s, youth in Africa have been at the forefront of calling for radical change in the political and economic sphere that affects their lives. A notable example of youth sacrifice for their rights is the Soweto uprising of 1976 in South Africa. Most nationalist political movements started as youth organisation movements and transformed into political and liberation movements. The youth of that era recognised the importance of participation in those movements as a way of making their voices heard. Political participation typically refers to “activities by citizens that are aimed at influencing the selection and decision of government personnel” (Verba et al 1978 cited in Resnick and Daniela, 2011:4). These activities include voting in elections, as well as more informal modes of engagement, such as meeting with community members, contacting political representatives, or involvement in collective action and civil society.

The most visible form of youth participation and engagement with leadership and governance systems in most countries in Africa is through the political parties' youth leagues and national youth agencies and commissions funded by governments. The youth leagues have been viewed as widely tokenism and tends to gloss over the needs of the youth and are meant to control the youth so that they conform to party policies and not advance the youth agenda. Through youth leagues political parties have formed attachments with the youth and often encouraged them to engage in violence against their opponents. For example, Malawi President Hastings Kamuzu-Banda transformed the Young Pioneers, the youth wing of Malawi Congress Party (MCP) into a paramilitary group that terrorised pro-democracy groups (Roessler 2005). In Zimbabwe President Mugabe's Zimbabwe African National Union- Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) youth wing have been instrumental in consolidating Mugabe's stay in power through the use of violence and intimidation methods during the elections of 2000, 2002, 2005, 2008 (Machakanja 2010, Sachikonye, 2011). In Kenya President Daniel Arap Moi used the Mungiki 'criminal' group composed of urban youth to support Uhuru Kenyatta in the 2002 elections (Kagwanje 2005). The Mungiki youth group was used by Uhuru Kenyatta and President Mwai Kibaki to terrorise opposition supporters in the 2007/8 election violence. In Cote d'Ivoire President Laurent Gbagbo relied on the 'Young Patriots' to take up a spiteful discourse around citizenship and national belonging as a way of rallying support against the opposition regarded as outsiders (Marshall-Fratani 2006). Former ANC youth league president Julius Malema promised to kill if necessary in order to get Jacob Zuma elected in 2009 (Castella and Daniella, 2011). These few examples give us a glimpse into how the youth are viewed by political leaders, as instruments of their continued stay in power or as policy drivers. This allows us to understand why the youth render electoral processes as ineffective because they participate in undermining democratic institutions and processes they are supposed to engage with to improve the political and economic conditions in Africa. On the other hand this also shows the power the youth have if it is used to engage with or to change leadership for national benefit.

Since this study is about how youth can peacefully and actively participate in African elections and governance processes, it is also important to understand the role the youth have previously played in advocating for change in years after independence. The youth are not passive political actors being used by politicians for their own selfish ends. The changing nature of the political landscape and the party systems in Africa meant that the youth themselves have had to reposition themselves and take stock of how to achieve what they want. In as much as it was expected that political, economic and social changes of the 21<sup>st</sup>

Century would lead to political parties that carried the revolutionary ideologies of the 1950s to have no attachments with the needs of today's youth in Africa, many youth in Africa continue to identify with these political parties.

It is also important to understand that as the political environment changes political parties also prepare themselves for the changes making themselves relevant to calls for change in order to harness the youth vote. They rebrand themselves as parties for peace and the future. For example in Zimbabwe, after a crushing defeat to the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in 2008 at the height of economic meltdown, the ZANU-PF party re-strategized to capture the youth vote. They emphasised on a message of increasing youth participation in the economy through indigenisation and empowerment programmes in agriculture, mining and small to medium enterprises (Raftopoulos 2013). Their manifesto for the 2013 elections was- *indigenise, empower, develop and create employment*- a message that resonate with what the youth want and consider important in terms of employment and social mobility. This won them many youth votes in the 2013 elections. In South Africa over a million people voted for the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) because the party manifesto on nationalisation and redistribution of the economy directly addressed the needs of the young voters most of whom are out of work and those who are employed continue to work under bad conditions and earn poor salaries. Analysts have argued that those who voted for the EFF are young people and the working class most of them fall within the 18-45 age range. The case of appealing to the youth by promising them everything they value was a strategy used by Uhuru Kenyatta and his The National Alliance (TNA) party to clinch the 2013 elections. They named themselves the 'digital' party aligning the party with technological progress associated with the youth, at the same time referring to the other parties led by older politicians as 'analogue' invoking their irrelevance to the youth interests.

### **Youth Involvement in elections and governance processes**

There has been a rise in concern with youth distrust and disengagement in political processes worldwide (Niemi, 2012). Political apathy is mostly in connection with "political indifference and is used to describe political behaviour within political systems (participation in elections), as well as an attitude towards the political system" (Schlee, 2011:2). Studies in Senegal (Villalon 2004), Botswana (Molomo 2000) and Zambia (Bratton 1999) show that voter turnout was lower in national elections that followed the reduction in voting age. This shows that age plays an important role in voting with the younger voters less likely to vote, partly because of a narrow political and economic world view and failure to understand how it impacts on the things they value and consider important. According to Wani (2014), elections have become more regular and other components of liberal democracy have relatively improved compared to the situation that obtained in the 1980s and early 1990s the quality of democracy and governance remains a suspect in many countries. Wani (2014:2) notes that between 1996 and 2006, 44 elections were held in Sub-Saharan Africa and between 2005 and 2007, 26 presidential elections and 28 parliamentary elections were held in Africa. This period also opened up the inclusion of civil society organisations as part of the 'new' democratic systems in Africa. Civil society refers to non-governmental, non-political organisations that deal with issues ranging from development agencies and organisations, capacity building and empowerment, human rights groups, social movements and pressure groups.

A survey by Afrobarometer (2010) shows that as many adults in Southern Africa have shown that elections should be used to determine who should rule their countries. As such elections remain an important avenue for people in Africa to have a say in the nature of their

government and is a useful conduit for people to participate in governance processes. A survey by South Africa Social Attitude (SASA, 2013) on political efficacy in South Africa showed that the youth of the “born free generation” (born after independence) were not considerably different from the older generation in terms of the perceived efficacy of their vote and their sense of duty to vote. In this survey the younger South Africans were positive towards elections and about 74% of those between 18-19 years old believed in this civic duty compared to 78% of those over 50 years old.

Strengthening democratic governance in terms of building democratic institutions and the capacity of the state remains a major challenge for Africa. Regardless of these achievements in the 1990s Africa has continued to be riddled with many challenges that affect especially the younger generation. Speaking to the press on the topic “From OAU to AU: Decolonization, Democratization and Development” the Africa Union Commissioner for Political Affairs, Mr Aisha Abdullahi, stated that, “Some of the key issues that engage the continent’s attention include, human rights with particular emphasis on the enforcement of all human rights instruments adopted so far at the national level; human security by focussing on improving the totality of individual security by tackling emerging threats such as climate change, human trafficking, arms smuggling, cyber security, piracy and other such threats; and peace and security through the ending of the scourge of war which continues to take its toll on the human resources of Africa and reduces the quality of life of many African citizens in the war torn parts of the continent” (Wani, 2014:4).

There are many obstacles to the youth’s participation in electoral and governance processes in Africa. Political obstacles are associated with the authoritarian nature of many regimes in Africa and lack of internal democracy in political parties, while economic and social variables relate to education, poverty, patriarchal culture and fear. The authoritarian nature of most African regimes creates an environment that is prohibitive of political participation for the youth. The regimes’ policies are aimed at taming both the people and the political forces in their countries through enacting repressive laws that restrain freedom of expression and gag civil society and labour unions (Desrues and Karhlani, 2013). Apathy for many youth stems from an attitude that views politics generally as dirty, while others might be satisfied with the system but unwilling to engage with it (Schlee, 2011). The manner in which elections take place in Africa is another deterrent factor to political participation and commitment among young people. They believe that elections do not reflect the will of the people and at worst; they reveal all the extremes of the political regimes vote buying and rigging, corruption, violence, etc. “In theory elections should reflect the will of the people and have a determining role in marking out the course to be taken out by society, but that’s in theory...” (Moroccan youth interview with Desrues et al, 2013).

The lack of internal democracies of political parties, the leadership’s failure to pay attention to or take their youth wings seriously and their distance from the ordinary people makes the point that the parties’ leaders are the main obstacle to the internal promotion of young people within the party structures. These conflicts have been called “generational struggles” or “intellectual violence” between the youth and leaders inside political parties (Desrues et al, 2012). In most countries in Africa ministers for youth ministries are often too old and out of touch with the realities of the youth they represent. Studies have shown that very hierarchically organised groups with no chance for promotion foster a feeling of resignation and powerlessness (Hamdy, 2011, Schlee 2011). Because there is no democracy in the parties the youth are faced with a daily struggle to justify their existence. The youth themselves argue that abstention, lack of interest or apathy should not always be seen as a neutral or resigned stance, and on the contrary they argued that disengagement is a conscious sign of the

disagreement with the prevailing political reality and is part of democracy rather than lack of political culture (Piombo, 2004).

This political reality in Africa is marked by inability of political parties to offer any solution to change the youth's personal situation, lack of internal democracy within the political parties and the reality of power in the hands of repressive regimes and dictatorships. Most constitutions in Africa do not allow for democratisation of political life and politicians do not give a good example of political activism, they encourage violence on opposition politicians and activists. Young people including those active in politics have lost most hope, and those outside politics view those who participate in politics through parties as elites. Youth always resort to participate through protests, strikes, toy toying and sometimes burning of libraries and other essential properties. These methods are destructive leaves the youth disadvantaged as they will not be able to rebuild infrastructure that is important to them like libraries and schools.

## **Education**

Apart from these political issues, there are other social and economic factors that hinder young people from participating in elections and politics in general. The inadequacies of education and the absence from the curriculum of the values of civic participation do not encourage political activism (Desrues et al, 2013). Education is central to "the development of political apathy among the youth and the significance of political pessimism in the foundations of the intention not to vote points to the importance of education post-16 both in school and the workplace in building positive orientations to the political system" (Bynner and Ashford 1994:234). They argued that this critical stage of political socialisation may be lost if a young person drops out of school and becomes unemployed or goes into a 'dead-end job. If a young person remains in the education system their political interest and activity are likely to be reinforced, this is regardless of the level of educational achievement (Bynner and Ashford 1994). Early withdrawal of the youth from education weakens their interest in politics and any forms of participation in governance processes. When they vote they are unlikely to make informed judgements about the political choices they make, an important element for democracy to function which enables the youth to choose leaders who address their needs.

Civic competence and enhanced political participation of the youth in electoral and governance processes can be made possible through youth access to education. Education is particularly important because it allows the youth to understand and make sense of the political and economic world in which they are actors. Education enables the youth to make interrelations of the world with the conditions they face every day as citizens and as members of organisations and communities. It further enhances their genuine interest in thinking about the terms in which they can understand the social and political organisation of life. Education allows them to carry and process complex information about politics, the economy and society a skill which is necessary in this age in which information has become complex and important to human life and development. Poor quality education limits the youth's life choices and impedes their ability to access and take advantage of opportunities in the formal economy (NYDA and VOSESA 2011). Youth's inability to access opportunities in the formal market can demoralise them and lead to a sense of "frustration and idleness" (ILO, 2010:1), giving room for them to be used in violence by self-centered politicians and organisations. However when properly engaged and prepared for work, family life, and civil society youth, become key actors in the strengthening and transformation of their nations and societies in Africa (Nogueira et al, 2009).

## **Patriarchy and youth apathy**

Most African populations live in the rural areas and for those who live in urban settings they are heavily guided and influenced by traditional practices and beliefs. In this instance political apathy is nurtured through domestic structures of subordination rooted in cultural practices, which sees political leaders as ‘fathers’ who have an obligation to take care of their children and wives and provide for them in exchange for legitimacy (Schartzberg, 1993). At the family and village levels the head of the family is the sole authority although he can consult other family or village members before making decisions. At community level age is more important than education-so that young educated people are often thwarted they try to make their voice heard. The more the individual is able to influence decision making in non-political spheres like the family, school, or work the more ego-strength they develop therefore gaining political competence and efficacy (Schlee, 2011). It can be argued that submission to authority and the tendency to avoid conflicts which are rooted in traditional culture, have contributed to the political apathy of youth in Africa.

## **Other challenges and how they should motivate youth participation**

Poverty and unemployment have long been given as reasons why the youth of this generation do not participate in electoral and governance processes. Youth who participated in the 1990s pro-democratic movements and protests took their desire for freedom from the Yoke of poverty and corrupt oppressive regimes as an incentive for them to stand up against these regimes. What motivated the youth of the 1976 Soweto protests against the apartheid government in South Africa was their desire to achieve a just and equal society as well as enjoy the civil and political rights, to be involved in decision-making processes that affect their future. The youth’s poor and desperate condition in the 21<sup>st</sup> century must motivate them to understand that it is through participation that they can be able to fight poverty, and ensure a just and equal society in which democracy and human rights thrive. The youth of today just like the youth of three decades ago should take control of their destiny and decide the course of development and democracy their society should take, through active participation in electoral and governance processes. Youth must state a claim in society leadership and this requires numbers and skills to mobilise those numbers to their advantage.

## **Chapter 4: Youth Responsibility in Society**

Youth are encouraged to be responsible because the future of the Africa's development is in their hands. Responsibility means that when they acquire social economic and political mobility they remain focussed on the goals to improve the welfare of the people that are aligned to what they consider important and valuable. Globally, youth are being called upon to carry the burden of forging political or "civic order that must be attuned as much to the evolving future whilst sustaining and adapting the past" (Youniss et al. 2002:123). This political order is framed by capitalism and democracy, both of which have focussed attention to the civic competence of the youth. In this context the youth should increase their knowledge, capability, and awareness of their civic responsibilities and rights so that they can actively promote democratic principles (Arnot and Swart, 2012). They are encouraged to devote their "energy, enthusiasm and creativity to economic, social and cultural development and the promotion of mutual understanding" (UN 2010). On the other hand in the new world order the youth are encouraged to become stakeholders in a system that requires a mixture of consumer activism, campaigning for good governance, challenging market or government failings as well as promoting world peace (World Bank 2006).

Responsibility is an important facet for leadership world over and across generations. The decision to participate in electoral and governance processes can be described as "moral activism" (Desrues 2013). This includes a commitment to society and it is frequently motivated by aspirations to achieve a more just society. Abu-Lughod (2011) offers a glimpse of the youth taking personal responsibility to their society during the Egyptian uprisings in 2010. In this village in Upper Egypt daily lives were deeply shaped by devastating national economic and social policies, the subjective power of the police and security forces and a sense of deep marginalisation and disadvantage. In this context the youth were galvanised to solve local problems in their own community, feeling themselves to be in a national space despite a history of marginalisation. They used a particular language of social morality in their activism. They started a face book page called "Youth of Good Works" their priority was the wellbeing of their community, and their goal was to undertake local improvements. They identified the community's most urgent needs and volunteered their energy to address them. Among their success was their ability to solve the crisis in the distribution of bread, shortage of bottled cooking gas, high price of meat, and garbage collection in the neglected public areas of the village. They managed to start a new weekly market. Four months later they turned their attention to help families displaced from the Theban Hills by the antiquities and tourist authorities. They were helping them get the compensation they were promised and have set up co-operatives to collect donations to help them buy land elsewhere in Egypt. Other projects include building homes for the needy villagers. The youth of this village speak the moral language of responsibility, selflessness and community welfare, the struggle against corruption and self-interest. They speak a strong language of social morality not of rights. They do not speak of democracy, but in tackling the problems directly and personally, they are living it.

It is important for the youth to understand that it is in their interest to ensure that politicians act to advance constituents' concerns and that political institutions operate in the public's interest, absence of these basic elements of socialisation in a large population including the youth may be seen as undermining the system, or worse, opening the way to regimes which reject the democratic principles which the system is based (Bynner and Ashford 1994:224). Non-participation at grassroots level in issues that affect society, leads to lack of participation in electoral and governance processes for the youth. Such participation makes the youth aware of larger issues that affect them and look at other facets of their lives that need changing. It awakens them to the importance of making leaders accountable to the people who elect them.

In Morocco the young people's commitment to their political groups through associative activism goes beyond personal interest and the achievements they expect from an activist career. Young activists interviewed by Desrues, et al (2013) were convinced of their mission and responsibility towards society and others. This made them aware of the need to act and change the reality around them, stressing both altruistic values and a sense of collective responsibility through student activism and party activism. Desrues et al, summarised the perception on politics held by the youth militants in Morocco in three main dimensions related to (duty), action (changing society) and order or social cohesion (the dangers of anomie). Desrue argued that the young people's views about political activism in Morocco were positive considering political activism a "positive pursuit" and a "civic duty." They advocated a conscious and informed citizenry with knowledge about and involvement in politics. Through solidarity with the disadvantaged and exploited groups their activism reflected a civic spirit. For them it was one of the ways to achieve equality, political democracy and the redistribution of wealth (Desrues et al, 2013:760). This is proactive and constructive engagement by the youth for possible results.

### **Civil Society participation as a way of engaging with leadership**

In the 1990s Africa many youth participated in the pro-democracy movements which fought against dictatorships and one party state system. This forced a number of countries to introduce multi-party elections for the first time (Bodewos 2010). This was credit to a vibrant and growing civil society on the continent (Chazan 1992, Harbeson 1994). Advocates of civil society assert that civil societies have the power to perform multiple functions including socialising their members into democratic values and behaviour. Participating in the civil organisations allows citizens and youth to learn art of association and participatory habits and skills important for democratic citizenship such as how to organise people, debate issues, mediate conflicts, develop consensus and build coalitions (Bodewos, 2010, Diamond 1992). Although it has been argued that civil society have a limited capacity to contribute to democracy building in Africa due to a number of factors such as poverty, corruption, ethnic factionalism, insufficient capacity and resources, and entrenched patrimonial structures found in most of Africa (Chabal and Daloz 1999; von Doep 2002). Advocates of civil society organisations argue that citizens who learn these skills will not only improve their organisation but will also take a greater role in promoting the community's common interest in the civic and political arenas (Bodewos 2010).

In Botswana Sebudubudu (2012) argues that trade unions, women and youth organisations, human rights organisations, and the media have played an important and leading role in enhancing democratic governance. These organisations have created space to allow citizens to express themselves on national issues to ensure transparency and accountability. Their methods include peaceful demonstrations and protests against certain government policies

and activities, publishing different opinions on national issues, and observing elections. Mpabanga (2012) has argued that in this context the government has listened to people's views and the economic growth rate has been considerably high and government has intervened to open up space for the private sector and at the same time encouraged citizen participation in the economy. The government has ploughed back diamond revenue into the economy and society. In this context Botswana has become a beacon of democracy and good governance in the Southern African region (Molomo and Mokopakgosi 1991, Jotia 2006).

Since in most African countries the youth have shown profound disgruntlement with the ruling political parties, participation in the civil society organisation and opposition political parties seem to be the only alternative for youth to be recognised. This is so because like civil society organisations the opposition political parties use the moral language of human rights and good governance as the reason for opposition ruling regimes. Ose-Hwedi (2001:58) states that "the role the opposition is to check and balance the operations of the ruling party and prevent abuses of power and insure, inter alia, that the government does not neglect the public interest." For many youth in Africa, opposition parties' role is to provide an alternative and better style of governing that represents all segments of society, formulate programmes for the people, and manage the economy well to solve societal problems (Sebudubudu and Ose-Hwedi 2010).

The responsibility of the youth is not to assume that the opposition parties will serve them well simply because they use the moral language of human rights and democracy. Youth need to scrutinise political party policies and see if they align with their broader interests as youth and society in general. Opposition parties who claim to stand for democratic values and human rights have also used the youth for selfish purposes. In Kenya Raila Odinga used the Luo youth to buy voter cards and threaten voters during elections in Kibera (Bodewes 2010). In Zimbabwe the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) has more militant youth league wings and security department and the commissariat stuffed with youth who have used violence on ruling ZANU-PF supporters, in its struggle to unseat the Mugabe regime (Le Bas 2006, Chitiyo 2009). Desrues has noted that in most times youth comply with their party policies even if those policies do not improve their conditions or that of society. This is mostly done by the youth because they seek to maintain their discipline and social moral behaviour. In South Africa the African National Congress (ANC) expelled Youth league president Julius Malema on charges that he refused to conform to party policies and respect elders (party leaders), thereby bringing the party into disrepute by advocating for radical policies that were against the party principles.

Most of the youth interviewed said they have 'lost faith' in the electoral and governance processes in their home countries. For them the solution was always migration to politically and economically stable countries and start a new life. They view their responsibilities not as to their countries but as to themselves and their families. This shows that youth are affected by the number of years the incumbent has been in power, as well economic performance of the government and the space for participation and democracy existing in their countries when they decide whether to vote. Africa's youth particularly those in urban areas, operate broadly in ways similar to those of the other youth in other regions of the world. When compared to their older compatriots "the youth are less likely to vote and show no affiliation to any political party" (Resnik and Daniela (2011:6). Most of the youth argued that they are more likely to engage in protests; events in the Arab Springs have shown that the youth are more vulnerable to protests more than participating in more peaceful electoral and governance processes. Again this shows the youth's lack of understanding of how to engage with leadership as well lack of agency and responsibility to make a difference in society.

## **Human rights, minority rights and the changing face of African society**

Africa faces a daunting task in tackling issues of human rights, equality and adapting to the changing face of African society linked to global processes. It has been highlighted that at the centre of youth struggles is inclusion into political and economic processes at an equal level so that they can meaningfully contribute to Africa's development. It is this same spirit that the youth can mobilise to defend the rights of minority ethnic groups, homosexuals, the disabled and women in society. In the African setting ethnic conflicts, human and minority rights abuses constitute one of the fundamental challenges to the consolidation of stable and democratic societies in Africa. African societies face similar challenges in their search for political stability and democratic consolidation. African societies are among the most complex pluralist communities in the world, constituted mostly by "a diversity of tribal, ethnic, cultural and religious groups, different traditions and people divided along urban and rural lines" (Alderman 1998:73). In what feasible ways can the multi-ethnic, tribal and racial groups in Africa be mobilised as one political community with reasonable though divergent linguistic, religious, philosophical, moral, political beliefs and practices? Addressing this challenge for the youth in Africa is a complex and complicated task in the African pluralistic cultural context.

Africa is amongst the most conservative societies in the world, resisting any form of change that does not resonate with past cultural beliefs and practices. However the experiences of the older generation of leaders and the more dynamic and versatile youth are different. Youth in Africa are more realistic to the changes that are happening to African society and the world in general because they are consumers of the global culture more than their conservative leaders. This environment makes the youth more acceptable to change and more likely to accept previously despised groups like homosexuals and the disabled, as well as according women an equal status in society. Change in terms of identity, sexuality, and inclusion of minority groups into mainstream society is inevitable because of globalisation and transnationalism. Alienating these groups means losing an important constituency in the development agenda as for example women have been food producers in Africa and therefore harbour critical knowledge in terms of food production which is critical for alleviating poverty, hunger and famine in Africa.

### **Empowerment of women**

One of the examples of the changing face of Africa that the youth as future leaders need to seriously consider is the role of women in the development of the continent. If the youth are the catalysts for Africa's development then they will have to fight for the liberties of women in the household and in public sphere of the workplace where women are excluded from decision making. Here I will use an example of women as food producers to illustrate the challenges women face in Africa and how they are important to Africa's development. Warner and Campell (2000: 1327) note that "the basis of Africa's development is the smallholder producers who comprise the majority of the population and produce the bulk of GDP and export earnings." African women are frequently disadvantaged in both statutory and customary land tenure systems (Davison, 1997), resulting in weak property and contractual rights to land, water and other natural resources. Even where existing legislation protects women's property rights, lack of legal knowledge and weak implementation may limit women's ability to exercise these rights (Quisumbing and Pandolfelli 2010). The youth can play an important role as members of the civic societies or political parties to educate women on their rights; this is where education becomes important to the youth. The youth should be well conversant with the legal issues at play. Both education and participation in civic society

organisations become important for youth if they seek to play an influential role in the changing face of African society where women are an important constituency in development.

There is consensus in the feminist literature on women and land in Africa south of the Sahara that securing land rights for women is central to improving both women's livelihoods and food security more generally (Razavi 2002:16). There are debates about the type of land tenure that would best achieve these goals especially questioning of the potential impacts of introducing privatized individual tenure in contexts where some forms of communal multi-use and multi-user systems may in fact protect some land access for women and other marginalised groups (Whitehead and Tsikata 2001). In Kenya privatized tenure under a titling system can erode women's land rights (MacKenzie 1990). In Uganda it has been shown that it is not lack of land but a shortage of inputs, including capital and labour that limits women's productivity (Razavi 2002).

Davison (1997:50) posits that conscientisation is critical for increased empowerment and it includes gender awareness and sensitivity to the needs of both women and men. It has also been noted that the monopolization of knowledge by men through the ideological apparatus embedded in cultural beliefs has also reinforced negative attitudes and altered the acquisition of new knowledge by society on issues of empowerment of women. This entails that culture is an ideological tool used by patriarchy to oppress women in society. Gender oppression according to Ritzer (2003:110) is reproduced by an ideological system of institutionalized knowledge that reflects the interests and experiences of men. This gender ideology identifies men as socio-cultural authority and allocates to the male role the right to dominate and the female role the obligation to serve in all dimensions of social production. This shows that specific kinds of knowledge about women are shaped by power domains and social relations in which female youth life worlds, organizing practices and cultural perceptions are 'colonised' by wider ideological, institutional and power frames of a patriarchal society (Long 2001). Youth can use the knowledge they acquire through education and civic participation to ensure that women's ability to participate meaningfully in development is recognised and achieved at an equal capacity with that of men. Oppong (1981:115) notes that wherever women have access to strategic resources, being important economic producers and owners of property, their part in domestic decision making has been shown to be enhanced. It follows that, men's interests in oppressing and controlling women is to have an autocratic relationship, whereby the husband makes the majority of decisions affecting his own and his wife's use of resources. This form of gender oppression is incorporated in the deepest and most pervasive ways into society's organization, a basic structure of domination most commonly called patriarchy (Ritzer 2003). Meena (1992:74) argues that culture has been used by African males as an excuse to conceal existing oppressive gender relations.

Patriarchy has socialized people to accept that society and household development is achieved through the abilities of men to lead and organize their families. Ncube (1987:33) argues that under patriarchal system married women were under the total guardianship of their husbands. Any property they acquired automatically rested in the husband unless it fell within specific and recognized categories for women. Sweetman (1996:15) concurs and states that 'economic patriarchy' refers to the privileging of males and elders in ownership and control of resources including human resources. Even though women and children are economically active, contributions to their households are often considered secondary to or subsumed under, that of men and elders. This shows that patriarchy is a socio-cultural practice that undermines the empowerment of women because of its bias towards male dominance in all spheres of social life. Liberal feminists also attribute women's oppression to

“existing social-cultural and liberal barriers which limit women’s equal participation in accessing opportunities within the capitalist system” (Meena 1992:71). It follows that lack of equality of opportunities leads to discriminatory practices which also lead to the exclusion of women from participating equally in the economy, politics and public sector in general.

The inferior position that culture has imposed on women in society has also affected their position in development projects, women can only make decisions that their husbands can approve of. This has according to Mosse (1993), gave women a great deal of work but less control than ever over their lives and basic resources. Women’s participation therefore applied to development work but not decision making and this led to women’s disempowerment. Sweetman (1996:18) argues that despite being excluded from holding land, the land reform experience for women in the Svimusi Co-operative of Cashel, North- East of Zimbabwe was perceived by them to be generally beneficial by providing them with food for consumption and money after selling to the market. Makumbe (1993) concurs in the study of the Dairy development project at Murombedzi Growth point in Zimbabwe. The project was a success because members were made major decision makers and were represented in all committees at all levels of decision making and development. According to Williams (1994) by failing to provide incentives for women as producers, development projects eroded what had been a source of power and status for women. She noted that in Malawi it is women who are involved in improving and innovating of animal and plant varieties, especially the growing of beans but when it comes to resource allocation and researches on agriculture, men are given first if not exclusive priority, leaving women out of the process of development.

The successes that have been noted in projects where women have been empowered and included in the project design process and were asked to generate their own ideas should be an incentive for female youth to fight for a society where equity and equality are not only discussed about but are practiced. It is in the interests of both male and female youth to fight for the empowerment of women as producers and managers of farms and industries because women have a great potential to drive Africa’s development. For the female youth and women, and a gender analysis of why women had been ignored by development planners and of what women and men’s roles were in food production should be a priority if Africa is to defeat poverty.

## **Chapter 5- Conclusion**

### **How Youth Participation in Governance processes can change African society**

In conclusion it is hoped that if youth understand and use their ‘demographic superiority’ effectively to engage in leadership and participate in governance processes in different capacities and levels, they will be able to impact positively on their self and national development.

Therefore Youth are encouraged to be active citizens and participate in civil society organisations. For the youth participating in civic life is essential for a healthy democracy they seek to achieve, and is important in a continent where there is need to expand the space for political participation, human rights, freedom of expression and political tolerance. Participation in civic life means active involvement in communities and civil society organisations themselves, as well as engagement in more formal democratic processes such as voting in elections. In a context where a number of countries have remained authoritarian not opening up space to active political participation through democratic freedoms, as well as an increase in civil wars and conflicts, Youth volunteering and service can provide a platform for youth to participate in governance processes and development of Africa. Ranging from traditional forms of volunteering to social activism this form of participation allows the youth to engage in the public domain (CIVICUS, IAVE and UNV, 2009). Youth can volunteer in organisations that support the elderly and minority groups’ rights, to campaigning for health and wellness and raising awareness about the importance of voting in elections, and campaigns against war, human rights abuses and violence against women and children.

By participating in volunteering and service opportunities offered by civil society organisations and groupings, youth are also contributing to a more vibrant civil society which will help address their economic and political concerns by tackling a range of social and economic issues affecting society and in the process become actors in society other than passive recipients dependant on other players to provide for them what they want (Eberly and Gal, 2006). Furthermore engagement in civil society is also an important means to hold governments accountable. In South Africa Section 27 on education ensured that schools get books on time. Treatment Action Campaign, a civil society organisation with thousands of volunteer members, was successful in holding the government to account for providing access to treatment for people living with HIV through the public health system. This kind of participation leads to a greater conscientisation of African population on the changing nature of the face of Africa and encourage youth to accept minority groups such as small ethnic communities, homosexuals and offer women and girls equal opportunities in education, work and development. Voluntary face-to-face participation in the socio-political domain builds social capital, including civic mindedness, tolerance and a sense of efficacy, the increasing

absorption of the younger generation with virtual networks, and their abandonment of face to face social interaction may well have a number of profound consequences for their political involvement and the functioning of democracy itself.

It has been noted that direct participation in governance processes through active involvement in political parties has eroded the voices of the youth through generational conflicts between youth and party leaders. Participating in civil society organisation and grouping through volunteering can restore and give the youth a voice. And allows the youth to reflect critically on the activities they are involved in they can become critical of the status quo. Voluntarism can “prompt personal transformation, whereby individuals can change their beliefs, perspectives and daily behaviours after developing a new awareness or understanding about a situation or a set of circumstances” (CIVICUS, IAVE, UNV, 2009:12). Through volunteering and service young people build the skills and confidence required to challenge the status quo and work towards a just society where equality is not only preached but is practiced. This also allows the youth to mobilise members of society to stand for what they want and consider valuable such as jobs, freedoms and democracy.

It has also been noted that through volunteering and service, and participating in NGOs and other organisations has the potential to reduce unemployment and idleness among the youth at the same time giving them necessary education about their civic duties and rights to become informed voters and future leaders. Youth who participate in community development projects improve their skills and chances for employment. Those who are already employed and professionals have the capacity to become role models to other youth. In the United States and South Africa, it was noted that in areas where youth participated in voluntary projects of any kind there were low levels of unemployment and crime NYDA and VOSESA (2011). Participation strengthens democratic institutions and makes politicians and other local leaders accountable to the electorate therefore increasing people’s confidence in electoral and governance processes.

### **The importance of elections and governance processes**

Change through revolutions promise quick results when it comes to leadership change making them look attractive to the youth. Peaceful process like elections are viewed with suspicion by youth in African societies because they are in most instances manipulated by ruling elites, or are held under conditions of violence. However studies have shown that peaceful means of bringing change have many advantages for those interested in meaningful change. Through election campaigns and mobilisation processes people have an opportunity to engage with leaders through, community rallies, and television debates. This allows citizens to put aspiring leaders to task over pertinent issues of development, human rights and democracy in general, allowing people to make rational and informed choices on whom among the candidates has the potential and ability to take their agenda and what they consider valuable forward. This is the opposite of revolutions and violent disposal of governments. In Egypt, Abu-Lughod (2011) noted that during the revolutions in 2011, businesses closed down and tourists stopped coming to Egypt, and foreign owned companies shut down. This meant that the country lost a lot of money in revenue and businesses lost profits. At the end the youth were the worst affected because they lost their means of income and it would take long to ensure investor and tourism confidence in the country post-revolution. This did put the youth back to precarious conditions of unemployment, and continued conflicts meant that political freedoms and democracy were delayed casting doubt on whether they could be achieved. Furthermore change through revolutions is chaotic, instant and is riddled with

uncertainty. It has a potential of further alienating the youth from the things they were fighting for over space and time.

Youth participation in governance processes either as members of political parties or civil society organisations gives them the opportunity to examine other facets of their lives that need changing. As future leaders participating in these institutions and organisations allows them to understand these processes their strengths and weaknesses. This gives the youth an opportunity to strengthen these institutions of democracy for the betterment of society. The youth's demographic superiority means that they are able to influence change in many areas of society and governance more than other age groups on the African continent. Their demographic superiority is not only advantageous in terms of voting only but also in educating people about the importance of peaceful processes, influencing people's perceptions on human rights and the protection and acceptance of minority groups and homosexuals, as well as advocating for gender equality in decision making and leadership. Not participating in elections and governance processes even though it has been argued to be a sign of no confidence in the system means that the youth have no say in the nature of government they want and therefore allow others to decide their future and destiny. This is not a viable option neither does it serve their interests.

Participation in elections can therefore be seen in two ways: those who live in societies where democracy is growing and human rights and freedoms are valued voting can mean consolidating those gains. It is a way of putting successive governments in check, reminding them that they have to serve the interests of the people. Those who live in societies where democratic values are undermined and violated non-participation is a sign of protest against oppressive systems of governance, to them nothing makes a difference. Citizens of these societies are more likely to turn to violence and revolutions as a solution to their problems than putting their confidence and energy in electoral and governance process they do not trust.

### **Pan- Africanism and political participation and development**

Pan-Africanism gives African youth a model of thinking that can help them come up with home grown ideas to solve Africa's problems. Pan-Africanism was about the anti-exploitation of African resources (human and material) during the colonial era and its continuation in the post-colonial era. It emphasised the struggle for equal and just society for all, regardless of sex, colour or creed (Ibrahim, 2007). Pan-Africanism was to bring people of African descent whether in Africa or the Diaspora and as one to unite the continent of Africa as a continent of free peoples (Saunders, 2012).

The economic, political and social challenges that Africa face today have taken away the spirit of Pan- Africanism among today's youth. Youth believe that it is in their interest to migrate to other countries especially in the West and pursue their careers and lives away from the problems facing the African continent. The spirit of Pan-Africanism can inspire today's youth as it inspired youth during the anti-colonial struggles to build a better future, to make necessary sacrifices, as well as to come up with home grown solutions that will solve Africa's challenges through peaceful participation in governance and development processes. The ideas of Pan-Africanism were used by youth in Sierra Leone to mobilise against the one party state in the late 1970s up to the 1990s when young soldiers removed the government through a coup de tat (Abdullah, 2007). Steyn, Badenhorst and Kamper (2010) argue that a new non-racial generation is emerging, one that shows a general spirit of optimism and independence with a strong desire to escape poverty and fulfil their careers and social

expectations. As the youth of the 1940s-60s used Pan Africanism to get together, participate actively for political freedom and achieved it, the current youth can use the same to deliver social, economic and institutional results through elections and governance.

The youth's 'demographic superiority' has the potential for acceleration in the rate of economic growth due to the fact that young people are more numerous, better educated and healthier. It is for these reasons that youth must be encouraged to participate in leadership and governance processes because they have the capacity to shape the direction of a better Africa. The Youth must acknowledge that however small their contributions might look they are very important to Africa's political and socio-economic development. It is important for the youth to think of themselves as capable of coming up with African solutions to African problems.

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