

**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESEARCH FOUNDATION  
(ESRF)**



**YOUTH AND THE POLICY PROCESS:  
AN OVERVIEW**

By

Dennis Rweyemamu

&

Prosper Charle

*Paper Presented at a Workshop to Mark the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of ESRF.  
December 13<sup>th</sup>, 2004.*

## Table of Contents

---

1.0	INTRODUCTION .....	1
2.0	THE POLICY PROCESS .....	3
2.1	<i>Theoretical Framework</i> .....	3
2.2	<i>Actors in the Policy Process</i> .....	4
2.3	<i>Experiences with the Public Policy Process</i> .....	5
3.0	RATIONALE FOR ENGAGING YOUTH IN THE POLICY PROCESS.....	6
3.1	<i>Legal Rationale</i> .....	6
3.2	<i>Political Rationale</i> .....	7
3.3	<i>The Importance of Youth in Socio-Economic Development</i> .....	9
4.0	MAJOR ISSUES IMPINGING ON THE YOUTH.....	10
5.0	STRATEGIES AND OPTIONS FOR ACTION .....	12
6.0	CONCLUSION.....	13
	BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	14

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

---

Viable and appropriate policies are necessary for sustainable growth and poverty reduction. However, getting the technical content of policies right is only part of the answer for arriving at sustainable policy results. Of equal importance is the process by which the content of policies is formulated and put into action. An effective policy process builds broad public consensus around policy content and secures wide support for policy implementation.

In any democracy, the government takes decisions on policy, and is accountable to the electorate. In a modern democracy, the electorate is generally not satisfied with being consulted once every five years (or whatever the agreed period between elections). People are becoming more educated and much better informed. Increasingly, they are better able to articulate their needs and have the confidence to put them forward. In this environment, governments need to consult the people at large as well as relevant interest groups if they are to produce the most effective policies. Consultation does not mean only that governments will ask people their views on the government's proposals but also that government will listen to proposals that come from their citizens. It does not reduce the responsibility of governments to govern but it does mean that in determining policies to be pursued, the government needs to take into account the views of those who may affect or be affected by any of these policies.

Successful participation in public policy increases government's accountability, transparency, openness, and responsiveness to demands from a wider range of societal groups. Expected outcomes from applying participatory approaches in policy formulation and implementation include multi-stakeholder consensus in key areas of policy formulation and implementation; matching issues to the stakeholder interest; demystification of the policy issues in terms of specific areas impacting on various stakeholders and disseminating information more widely and publicly; and identification of potential areas of dispute and conflict. It is within this context that the youth are also considered as an important stakeholder in the policy process.

The concept of youth varies from one community to another depending on customs, and traditions, social behaviour and their location. Different countries also have different conceptions and definitions of youth. The United Nations (UN), defines a youth as "*an individual, male or female, in the 15 – 24 years age bracket*".

Some may ask, "why is it important to involve young people in the policy process?" Young people are especially significant because they constantly enter society with fresh energy and fresh perspectives. To focus on youth is to focus on participation. To focus on participation is to transform the systems by which citizens are formed and the ways in which they respond to their national governments and to the rest of the world.

Youth have recently showed their power in some countries (e.g. Serbia and the Philippines) where they struggled to overthrow and replace corrupt national governments. Much research suggests that young people are the leading agents of change these days because they play by different rules, they have few ties to the “way things are,” and they have the energy to create a world of their own. Engaging young people in the policy process is the healthiest way to negotiate change.

This paper provides a brief overview of youth and the policy process. It begins with the theoretical concepts of the policy process. It then looks at the participatory approaches in the process, and the rationale behind the need to involve youth. The paper then highlights the major issues impinging on the youth, before suggesting strategies/options for action in terms of their participation.

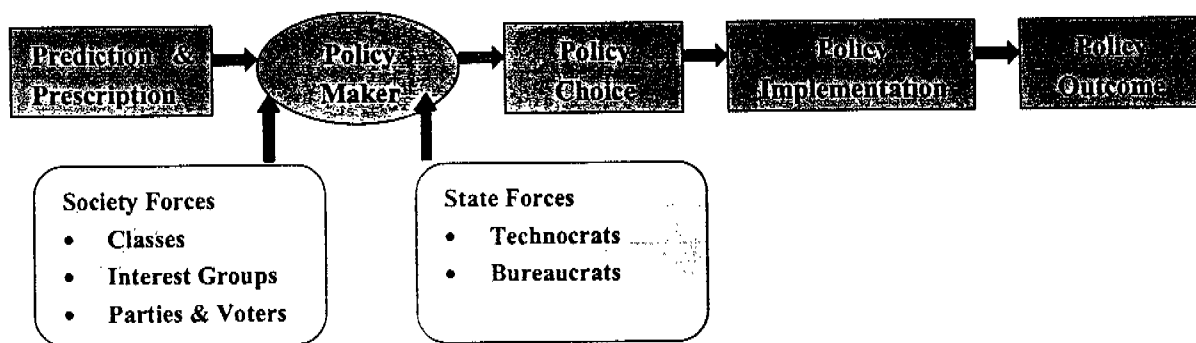
## 2.0 THE POLICY PROCESS

---

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework

The process of developing, approving, and implementing policies differs from country to country and for each issue. However, some underlying processes are common to most efforts. Literature proposes several different theoretical frameworks to describe the policy process. Although no single framework claims to describe the process completely in all cases, most frameworks try to provide useful descriptions of certain aspects of the process. Lasswell (1951) pioneered work on the stages of the policy process. In turn, Meier (1991) built on these stages by elaborating a framework that describes the major steps in the policy development process and some of the forces acting on decision makers. Figure 1 presents this framework.

Figure 1: The Linear Model of the Policy Process



Meier's framework describes five major steps in policy development as follows:

- i. **Prediction and Prescription.** The process starts when a problem is recognized, predictions are made that the problem will not be solved naturally, and one or more solutions are proposed.
- ii. **Policymaker.** The focus shifts to the policymaker, who is responsible for formulating policies in response to potential problems. Interest groups both within and outside government often influence the policymaker.
- iii. **Policy choice.** After considering the alternatives, the policymaker decides on the appropriate policy.
- iv. **Implementation.** Once a policy decision is made, it is implemented.
- v. **Policy outcome.** In the final step, the desired outcome is achieved.

The framework shows that the policy process starts with the recognition of a problem that needs to be solved, and the various interest groups attempt to influence the policy decision. The framework is useful in clearly separating policy choice from policy implementation and policy outcome. The linear nature of the framework makes the different steps appear straightforward. In the real world, however, the process rarely proceeds in such a prescribed fashion. At a minimum, the framework is lacking the evaluation phase that can start the process all over again if the desired policy outcome is not achieved. In addition, the influence of interest groups is shown only during the stage of considering alternative policy choices. In reality, interest groups are usually important in other stages as well, particularly during implementation.

## 2.2 Actors in the Policy Process

Walt and Gilson (1994) and others have considered the many actors involved in the policy process and the different roles that they play. Table 1 shows five of the key groups.

**Table 1: Actors and their Roles**

Technocrats	Knowledge
Bureaucrats	Institutions
Interest Groups	Representation
Politicians	Power (decision making)
Donors	Influence

Source: Walt and Gilson, 1994.

Technocrats include academicians, researchers and other experts who provide information to identify the extent and nature of the problem as well as technical analysis of its causes and solutions. Technocrats are interested in pursuing solutions to society's problems and generating interest and funding to support further research. Bureaucrats bring knowledge of government institutions, including how institutions can address the issue at hand. Bureaucrats are interested in using the government structure in the manner best suited to addressing issues and often seek to maintain or expand the current bureaucracy. Interest groups are generally formed to represent the concerns of particular groups of people (e.g. youth). They seek to make sure that the group's interests are heard and considered in policy decisions. Politicians are usually the ultimate decision makers. Some seek power in order to help solve society's problems, while others may just be interested in obtaining or retaining power. Donors (or development partners) often play an important role in policy formulation and implementation. They may support the process with funds and technical assistance, provide international recommendations and guidelines, and have significant influence on implementation through their funding decisions.

## 2.3 Experiences with the Public Policy Process

Experiences with the public policy process offer the following insights;

***The policy process is not linear or coherent.*** With policy development and implementation, change is often multi-directional, fragmented, frequently interrupted, and unpredictable. How to sequence actions, what to pay attention to, and who to include can be hard to determine, and can vary over the life of the policy cycle. Unlike projects and programs, which have relatively clearly defined sets of activities and components, the boundaries for policies tend to be fuzzy, to shift over time, and to be open to interpretation. Multiple stakeholder institutional arrangements can help build consensus in key areas of policy formulation and implementation.

***No single agency can manage the policy process.*** Policy is typically led by a small number of agencies (e.g. in the case of macroeconomic policy, the Central Bank, Ministry of Finance, or Cabinet). Still, it usually requires the concerted actions of multiple agencies and groups to succeed. The array of actors shifts as policy moves from analysis to formulation and to implementation. Even if one of them is nominally the lead agency, in reality no individual entity is "in charge" of policy. Authority and responsibility are dispersed among the actors involved. Traditional command-and-control management approaches are not applicable. Informal power and authority relations will be as important as formal channels. Identifying all the actors (including youth) and their issues of interest substantially helps one build an understanding of the policy process and a strategy for managing participation.

***Policy change creates winners and losers.*** Changes in policies usually involve imposing costs on some societal groups while benefiting others. This means that policy reforms often become highly politicized. Most often, the losers are those who gain from the current state of affairs in the country and who are in a powerful position to defend the status quo and resist change. In this situation, mechanisms for negotiation and rules of engagement are useful for building multi-stakeholder consensus.

***The resources required to develop and implement policies may not be readily available.*** Projects and programs have dedicated budgets, but policies may lack the resources needed to conduct them in a participatory manner. Few public economic agencies have sufficient slack resources to initiate extensive civic engagement, to demystify the policies, and to disseminate them. Institutionalizing participation in policy would require a concerted effort to lobby for new funding, identify existing sources of support (domestic and international), and negotiate for resource reallocation. These efforts necessarily extend over a long timeframe as a policy package moves from formulation through implementation.

## **3.0 RATIONALE FOR ENGAGING YOUTH IN THE POLICY PROCESS**

---

### **3.1 Legal Rationale**

Formal legal frameworks recognizing and protecting the fundamental rights of young people are already in place. The United Nations, numerous international organizations, and most governments in the world have signed a number of legal instruments. These include the almost universally ratified UN Convention on the Rights of the Child introduced in 1989, the UN World Program of Action, Resolution 56/117 on Policies and Programs involving Youth, and the UN document “A World Fit for Children.”

As with all legal frameworks, the value and power of these documents will only truly become alive if their essential intentions, values, and power are brought to life through the specific actions. The legal framework matters because the ideas and principles behind them matter profoundly, and because they serve as the foundation for a paradigm shift across the globe regarding how young people are perceived and treated, by themselves and by their elders.

Participation is itself a fundamental human right. A direct correlation exists between the level of violence, abuse, and neglect of young people and the lack of opportunities of these same young people to participate in the creation of social reality. The lower the opportunities to participate, the greater the likelihood that the basic rights of young people will be violated. The incidence of violence, abuse, and neglect are lower in cultures, societies, organizations, and institutions in which young people are permitted, encouraged, and adequately equipped to participate in a constructive manner. The reverse is also true. Thus, the right to participate is one of the essential elements of true and effective democratic institutions.

Participation as a right is also acknowledged in numerous legal instruments, declarations, conventions, and other legal documents at the international level, including Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This article upholds the principle that participation is both a substantive and a procedural right, that is, an end in itself and “the process through which to take part in and influence processes, decisions, and activities in order to achieve justice, influence outcomes, expose abuses of power and realize rights”. Youth participation includes: the right to express and stand for a point of view; the right to participate in the formulation, review, execution, and evaluation of public policy to the extent that capacity and experience allow; the right to protest and offer alternative solutions to ineffective or unjust systems; the right to advocate, lobby, and stand for beliefs; the right to information and knowledge; and the right to learn.



### 3.2 Political Rationale

Around the world there is growing unrest and awareness of the need for innovations in economic, social, and political organization. The causes of this unrest range from the end of the cold war to the increasing global integration of diverse cultures. At the same time there is political reform underway all over the world as well as growing concern on the issue of global governance.

**End of the cold war – political liberalization and democratic development:** The end of the cold war marked a clear transition to a new era in political affairs. People have recently made more dramatic struggles for self-determination and liberalization. This means increased vulnerability, increased opportunity, and increased gravity of the situation. Young people have been active, and in some cases, primary actors, in these vast national movements for social change. Box 1 below presents an experience of youth movements from Bosnia

**Box 1: Youth Movements in Bosnia**

In Bosnia, youth groups have organized a number of successful campaigns against corruption. For example, they are responsible for:

- Organizing a nationwide campaign against corruption;
- Holding seminars for entrepreneurs and youth to meet and develop job opportunities;
- Creating a youth parliament simulation so that young people debate the country's current affairs;
- Convening meetings between youth and politicians to exchange ideas;
- Organizing a debate on the budget entitled 'what do young people know about budget'.

**Increasing complexity:** Human life has always been a struggle against complexity and chaos, yet something is remarkably different about the present times. New complexity stems from our unprecedented capacity to create, transform, and destroy; from the size of the human population and its increasing spread across the globe; from the scale of the problems and opportunities we have created; from the increasingly ubiquitous manifestation and evolution of human creations; and from the increasingly intricate and vast number of connections between all of the above.

**Interdependence and diversity:** Closely linked to complexity is increased interdependence. There is growing awareness and recognition that we need to make the most of this interdependence. At the same time a growing body of evidence demonstrates that human systems, like other natural systems, depend on diversity and processes to balance diversity.

Young people are a significant and powerful component of civil society and correspondingly a real political force. They will need to participate in the change process to ensure stability and peace. Youth have a profound awareness of the state of the world. They take action as a result and in some cases have global impact.

However, young people around the world have less access to opportunities. There is a serious gap in expectations, which can lead to resentment. On every continent there are serious issues surrounding youth that go unattended. At the same time the ineffectiveness of the system coupled with the barriers to participation and expression can lead to protest and even violence. Until the issues impacting youth are addressed and the systems of participation are improved young people will protest the status quo. Young people are an important, significant, and powerful section of society and as such are a real political and social force. For example;

- Young people are leading political revolutions, social change movements, and important issue based organizations.
- They are leaders of student movements and others social movements – locally and nationally.
- At the global level, youth are leaders in the anti-globalization protests and movements as well as within established public, private, and non-profit organizations.
- In many societies, young people can afford to take risks that adults cannot.

However, around the world, newly elected or appointed young people, who enter international institutions and government agencies that influence and define policy, end up in one of the following scenarios:

- i. Becoming a part of the system instead of changing it and perhaps opting for apathy, cynicism, pessimism, bitterness, negative idealism (aggression, violence, and terrorism) or criminality.
- ii. Choosing to change the system, providing good leadership, and perhaps opting for idealism.

Thus, while young people are potential saviours, and leaders, they can also be potential terrorists, warriors, soldiers, and criminals.

### 3.3 The Importance of Youth in Socio-Economic Development

The importance of youth as a human resource and in socio-economic development is by itself a rationale for engaging youth in the policy process. This can be analysed from two contexts. First, available statistics (see Table 2) indicate that youth constitute a significant proportion of the total population in many countries. The second indicator of importance of youth in development is related to their potential contribution to development. Data reveals that youth constitute nearly 60 percent of the labour force in many countries. This is a group of energetic individuals who, if properly utilized have the potential to contribute significantly to the economies of the countries.

**Table 2: Comparison of Country Profiles on the Population of Youth (Year 2000)**

Country	Youth Population	% of Total Population	Gender Distribution
Burkina Faso	11,905,000	20.5%	M: 34%; F: 33%
Ethiopia	65,590,000	19.3%	M: 26%; F: 29%
Kenya	30,549,000	22.8%	M: 32%; F: 33%
Madagascar	15,970,000	19.2%	M: 27 %; F: 28 %
Namibia	1,894,000	19.2%	M: 27 %; F: 25%
Senegal	9,393,000	20.5%	M: 29%; F: 30%
South Africa	44,720,000	20.7%	M: 24 %; F: 28 %
Uganda	23,487,000	20.2%	M: 32%; F: 32%
Tanzania	34,837,000	20.6%	M: 29 %; F: 31 %
Zimbabwe	12,650,000	22.8%	M: 30 %; F: 29 %

Source: Demographic Yearbook 2001

## **4.0 MAJOR ISSUES IMPINGING ON THE YOUTH**

---

- **Unemployment and Underemployment**

The economic growth rate of many countries (particularly developing countries) has not been sufficient enough to create productive employment opportunities to absorb the increasing labour force most of which are the youth. Further more, some of the absorbed youth are doing jobs that do not match their qualifications and specializations.

- **Health Related Problems**

The youth face a myriad of health related problems including widespread malaria, malnutrition, HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), drug and substance abuse as well as poor access to health services. The HIV/AIDS pandemic is more prevalent among the youth under 30 years of age. Available statistics show that in 2003, young people (15-24 years old) accounted for half of all new HIV infections worldwide, with more than 6,000 infected with HIV every day (UNIADS/WHO, 2004). Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and teenage pregnancy is a specific challenge to the female youth particularly in African countries. They lead to all sorts of consequences including school drop out, and potential risks to life through attempts of abortions.

- **Increasing School and College Drop Out rates**

Many youth drop out of schools and colleges (again particularly in developing countries) due to among other reasons, the high cost of education and increase in overall poverty levels, poor returns on investment in education and lack of re-admission policy for teenage mothers.

- **Crime and Deviant Behavior**

Involvement of youth in criminal activities is noted to be on the increase. Many of the youth remain idle even after formal education for long periods of time. As a consequence, they try their hands in all openings, legal or illegal, with some ending up with deviant behaviour. In Tanzania, it is estimated that about 650,000 young people enter the job market (for the first time) every year, most of these being school and college leavers. But less than half of these get any form of employment, either in the formal or informal sector.

- **Limited Sports and Recreation Facilities**

Sports and recreation facilities provide the youth with an opportunity to socialize spend their time productively hence strengthening and developing their character and talents. However, the facilities are very scarce, and where they exist, the youth may find it difficult to access and utilise them.

- **Abuse and Exploitation**

Due to their vulnerability, the youth are exposed to different kinds of abuse and exploitation such as sexual, child labour and other forms of economic exploitation under the guise of employment, in many cases with little protection from the authorities.

- **Limited Participation and Lack of Opportunities**

Despite their numerical superiority, youth are least represented in political and economic spheres due to societal attitudes, socio- cultural and economic barriers, and lack of proper organisation.

## **5.0 STRATEGIES AND OPTIONS FOR ACTION**

---

The proper functioning of democracy requires that youth take their rightful place in the policy process. Youth's equal participation is a necessary condition for proper representation and consideration of their interests. Many key institutional structures remain deficient to youth's inclusion in policy making. The following actions are proposed to enhance youth's participation in the policy process.

- Provide leadership and self-esteem training to assist youth, particularly those with special needs (e.g. youth with disabilities, and those belonging to racial and ethnic minorities) to strengthen their self-esteem and to encourage them to take decision-making positions;
- Improving youth access to information in order to enable young people to make better use of their opportunities to participate in the policy process;
- Encouraging and promoting youth associations through financial, educational and technical support and promotion of their activities;
- Encouraging increased national, regional and international cooperation and exchange between youth organisations;
- Inviting governments to strengthen the involvement of young people in international forums, inter alia by considering the inclusion of youth representatives in their national delegations;
- Instituting measures that would eliminate structural constraints and ensure a safe and violence-free environment for all youth aspiring for public office;
- Taking measures, including, where appropriate, in electoral systems that encourage political parties to integrate youth in elective and non-elective positions;
- Support non-governmental organizations and research institutes that conduct studies on youth's participation in and the impact on policy process and the decision-making environment;
- Develop communications strategies to promote public debate on the roles of youth in society;
- Governments' should set up systems of monitoring and evaluation of youth's participation in politics and decision-making, including progress in the representation of youth through the regular collection, analysis and dissemination of quantitative and qualitative data;

## 6.0 CONCLUSION

---

It is often said that “youth are future leaders”. This statement is correct but not complete. The misperception is that youth are required or expected to wait, until the future arrives. Planning on the other hand cannot continue without involving the youth, and especially those who are in difficult circumstances. The youth have a right to participate in today’s issues that affect their life. They also have current responsibilities that must not be relegated to the older generations. The statement therefore needs to be amended to “Youth are future leaders, but today, they are partners in leadership with those older than them”.

When discussing partnership in development, the objective is not to replace anyone, but for all actors to come together as consultative partners in development, for the benefit of all. “Giving” young people the “right” to participate is not a choice owned by a society, organization, or individual. Those who stick stubbornly to the notion that they are doing young people a favour by allowing them to participate in decision-making are wrong. Participation is not a matter of favours or privileges it is a right that young people can legitimately act on where and when they see fit. It is not a gift they have to wait for. It must also be realized that the dynamics of today’s world will expose the roles of the different segments (e.g. state, business and youth/civil society movement), and even the concept and framework of participation, to constant change.

The essential principles of democracy hold true when it comes to stakeholder participation. Youth participation must be built, and maintained, on a clear distinction between direct, indirect, and false representation. Key distinctions must be recognized between people representing themselves, electing accountable representatives to represent the group as a whole, and people who claim to represent “the people.”

The Youth Sector is different from other sectors of civil society. Adults and young people are different. People often assume that young people, compared to adults, have less experience, less control over their emotions, as well as less control over resources. The assumptions deserve debate and demonstrate the need for more research, understanding, and caution in the process of selecting officials and representing youth in society. Today there are more and more initiatives, projects and programs around the world where young people participate in decision-making.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

- Anderson, J. (1997). *Public Policy Making* (2nd edition). New York: Holt, Rinehart.
- Dye, T.R. (1995). *Understanding Public Policy* (8th edition). Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.
- Kenyon, P. (2000). "Youth Policy Formulation Policy" International Council on National Youth Policy (ICNYP).
- Lasswell, H. (1951). "The Policy Orientation." In *The Policy Sciences*, edited by D. Lerner and H. Lasswell. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Meier, G. M. (1991). *Politics and Policymaking in Developing Countries: Perspectives on the New Political Economy*. San Francisco: International Center for Economic Growth Press.
- Saifuddin, A. (2000). "The Role of Youth and Civil Society in New Governance". Paper at the First ASEAN People's Assembly organised by ASEAN-ISIS, Batam, Indonesia, 24-26 November 2000.
- UN (United Nations) (2001) *Demographic Year Book 2001*. New York.
- UNAIDS (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS) and WHO (World Health Organization) (2004). *Report on the Global HIV/AIDS Epidemic. 2004*. New York.
- URT (1996), "The National Youth Development Policy" Ministry of Labor and Youth Development, Dar es Salaam.
- Walt, G. and L. Gilson. (1994). "Reforming the Health Sector in Developing Countries: The Central Role of Policy Analysis." *Health Policy and Planning* 9(4): 353-370.