



Policy Brief on the National Youth Policy

“Towards a new National Youth Policy for Zimbabwe”

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1. Introduction and Background

The Youth Empowerment and Transformation Trust (YETT) in partnership with 42 youth community-based organizations (CBOs) from across the country submits this policy brief to secure the rights and aspirations of youth in Zimbabwe through the ongoing process to review the National Youth Policy.

Article 12 of the African Youth Charter obligates State Parties to develop ‘comprehensive and coherent national youth policies’ following ‘extensive consultation with young people’. The purpose of such national youth policies is to provide strategies for youth participation in decision making at all levels of governance in issues concerning the youth and societies they live in. Ultimately, it is through such policies that countries are expected to fulfil the needs and aspirations of the youth.

The government of Zimbabwe enacted its first national youth policy in the year 2000 as a way of meeting its obligations towards the African Youth Charter as a binding regional instrument as well as to its youth. Over the past two decades, the government has already consulted and reviewed the policy once. In a fast-changing context where the country faces multiple and complex challenges, whose impact weigh disproportionately on the youths, stakeholders agree that the youth policy is already due for its second review. To this end, the Ministry of Youth, Sport, Arts and Recreation working with the Zimbabwe Youth Council (ZYC) has initiated this policy review process.

YETT has participated in consultation meetings by the ZYC to capture key issues emerging from over one thousand youth as well as convened a National Indaba on the 16th of October 2019 that was attended by one hundred youths from partner organisations to propose solutions to various policy gaps that prevail in the country. The Indaba builds upon ongoing YETT research on and consultations with the youth on the challenges they face as well as their proposals for sustainable solutions. A part of this process is a Youth Situational Analysis (YSA)¹ undertaken by the organization over the past year to comprehensively appreciate the situation of the youth in Zimbabwe. The YSA reached out to 5,582 youth across 195 Enumerating Areas (EAs) country wide. The findings of these processes are submitted in this brief to policymakers as part of the National Youth Policy review.

2. Youth Empowerment, an Urgent Imperative: A Situational Analysis

The youth in Zimbabwe today face several critical challenges that seek urgent resolution for the individual empowerment of the youth as well as the development of the country. These challenges span across the multiple facets of development manifesting in social, economic and political dimensions. However, most of these challenges are a result of macro-level & policy challenges.

2.1 Social Challenges and the Youth

Social services delivery in the country has taken a knock in response to the economic recession witnessed by the country over the past two decades. Health and education infrastructure and systems have deteriorated over the years while social protection programmes have been compromised owing largely to the lack of budgetary allocation towards these services. This situation has been compounded by a high disease burden whose impacts are felt largely by the youth, especially when it comes to sexual and reproductive health as well as the equally

¹ Youth Situational Analysis 2019. Accessible on:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1y5RKHOg1KAJyb7sDBHc119CCJkyatFy1/view?usp=drive_web

menacing mental health poser. A changing climate whose effects are creating various humanitarian challenges complete a debilitating social crisis. The following are some of the key indicators of the unfolding social crisis:

- *Limited access to contraception, SRHR services and commodities as well as HIV testing and treatment services.* The YSA noted, for example, that just over one third (35 percent) of youths reported ever testing for HIV. Inadequacies in policy, infrastructure, financial resources as well as societal attitudes and norms remain among some of the key obstacles to access to SRH, including HIV and sexual and gender-based violence prevention and management services.
- *A redundant education system* that falls short of empowering youths to get jobs, earn a living or become active citizens. The situation is not helped by the fact that four decades after independence, the country lacks adequate infrastructure and in cases where such infrastructure is in place it is oversubscribed, obsolete and does not harness the benefits of modern technologies for learning. Funding has been a major obstacle for access to education especially at the critical Early Childhood Development (ECD) and tertiary levels.
- *Food Insecurity and limited access to clean and safe water.* In analysing issues of humanitarian assistance and resilience under the YSA, it was noted that forty six percent of youth cited food insecurity as a key humanitarian issue within their communities. This was followed by limited access to clean water (32 percent).
- *Alcohol, Substance and Drug Abuse* is a growing problem. Three quarters (76 percent) of respondents to the YSA reported that alcohol was affecting youth, followed by drugs and substance abuse (66 percent). This trend is sustained by growing disillusionment among the youth due to lack of meaningful opportunities for empowerment as well as the break down in social and moral fibre, owing mainly to the absence of parents for one reason or the other.

2.2 The Youth Economic Situation

While poverty is rampant across the country and at household level, the youth situation is depressing and manifests in some of the following conspicuous ways:

- *Unemployment and high Informalisation of the economy-* The World Bank estimate youth unemployment at 13.9 percent (ages 15–24), demonstrating the high unemployment level in Zimbabwe². YETT's own statistics from the YSA (2019) indicated that only seven percent of the respondents were formally employed.
- *Limited financing, capacity and support to youth entrepreneurship-* Only nine percent of respondents to YSA running businesses reported receiving funding from financial institutions for business support. Forty percent of participating youths cited a lack of funding/capital as a key barrier to their economic participation.
- *Limited opportunities in local economies.* In analysing migration issues in the YSA, it was noted that youths increasingly feel that opportunities for a better future lie beyond their current geographical stations. This translates into high intentions to migrate to other urban areas or other countries.

In all these indicators, the youth note the lack of a supportive policy environment and inadequate programmes.

² <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/SLUEM1524ZSSSF>

2.3 Youth Participation and Governance

Youth recognise that their meaningful participation in decision making is at the confluence of their ability to influence and leverage their own development and that of their societies. Yet, some key obstacles remain:

- *Limited civic participation by the youth.* Beyond voting, the YSA noted that there is limited civic participation by youth with only 8.5% having organised a youth event and 13% participating in a political event organised by youth.
- *Limited participation of youth in elections (as stakeholders and candidates).* In the YSA, youth expressed the need for the introduction of a competency-based youth quota system (50%) in political representation at political party level, parliament and in government for effective youth representation and participation in democratic processes and access to political decision-making. The justification of a culture of gerontocracy through constitutional apparatus, particularly the age limits for certain political offices was seen as discriminatory to the youth.
- *Policy Stagnation.* One of the key conclusions from the YSA is that in the different domains that affect youth wellbeing, the key challenge emanates from weaknesses within the macro-environment, specifically restrictive policies and legislation, policy inconsistencies along with weak policy implementation. The YSA also noted that only one third of youths who were aware of the national youth policy felt that it fully addresses priorities and aspirations of young people.
- *Negative perceptions about electoral process and contested outcomes.* Youth demand electoral and institutional reforms that ensure the delivery of free and fair elections, accountable government, devolution and zero tolerance to corruption.

3. Key Policy Strategies

The youth propose that the following consolidated strategies be implemented through the new youth policy to aid the process of pursuing their vision of inclusive and sustainable youth development:

- i. An enforceable 50 percent youth quota for participation in strategic spaces and structures³ of decision making for social, economic and political development;
- ii. Provision of adequate financing from [Youth] Empower Bank and a consolidated revenue fund drawing resources from the public purse, the private sector and donor agencies for the support of youth development, entrepreneurship and job creation initiatives. Such funding should also support the provision of key social services such as health and education;
- iii. Design and implementation of social protection programmes that ensure access to key services and provide safety nets for youth enabling them to enjoy minimal globally acceptable standards of health, education, recreation and rehabilitation services;
- iv. A new youth empowerment programme that is adequately funded with a persuasion towards developing youth life skills, inculcating national values, promoting civic engagement and enhancing sustainable national development;
- v. A responsive and relevant education and training curricular that addresses emerging knowledge, technologies and skills in line with industry and national needs as well as global trends;

³ Boards, Commissions, Committees, Parliament, Party Structures etc

- vi. A youth authority that monitors and ensure a youth-focussed implementation of existing laws, policies and strategies that have the possibility of advancing youth development; and
- vii. Raising awareness on youth rights, among the youth and other target groups. This involves providing information and programming for families, communities and institutions in order to create an enabling environment for youth development.

4. Policy Implementation Enablers

The youth recognise the following as the key enablers to successful implementation of the National Youth Policy across the strategies and in response to the multiple challenges this target group faces:

- Mainstreaming youth development issues across all departments of government through the setting up of youth desks to serve an advisory function and promote accountability;
- An up-to-date, youth-informed Youth Act and/or an Independent Youth Commission to enforce provisions of the constitution on youth development as well as emerging legitimate needs of this group;
- Inclusivity designed on the principles of ‘Leaving No One Behind’ to ensure equal participation and inclusion of young women and youth with disabilities amongst other marginalised groups of this sector. Political inclusivity is key;
- Crafting of an implementation plan and the resourcing of the implementation plan of the youth policy;
- Evidence-based youth programmes that are monitored and reviewed regularly by all stakeholders (including civil society organisations); and
- Peaceful resolution of national conflicts, national healing and reconciliation as well as a devolved economy that is anchored on a strong national economy.

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