

Chapter 1

Introduction

This report, commissioned by the National Youth Authority (NYA) with support from the Commonwealth Secretariat, serves to offer an overview of youth development in Ghana following a review of Ghana's National Youth Policy (NYP), enacted in 2010.

Drawing on evidence from interviews, an online survey and focus group discussions with key stakeholders and secondary data sources, the analysis highlights critical demographic and socio-economic issues affecting young people in Ghana today. Central among these are issues related to population dynamics, education, labour market participation, hunger and poverty, HIV and AIDS and other communicable diseases, substance abuse, youth crime and violence, and civic participation. The report also reviews contemporary development concerns, including environmental change, information and communication technologies (ICTs) and migration, so as to provide a broad picture of how various public policies and institutional programmatic interventions have targeted and addressed or overlooked the concerns, needs and aspirations of Ghanaian youth. Each chapter offers relevant recommendations that will be critical in guiding future interventions and policies pertaining to youth development.

1.1 Youth development and the evolving prioritisation of youth in policy and action

Globally, the world has the largest youth population in history. More specifically, 1.8 billion people, or 42 per cent of the world's population, are under 25 years of age. Close to 90 per cent of all young people live in developing countries, where they represent the majority of the population (Serajuddin et al., 2017). Projections for Africa predict that youth populations (comprising those aged 15–34 years) will represent 46 per cent of the increasing labour force from 2015 to 2063, averaging 12.1 million a year.

As 60 per cent of Africa's population is younger than 25 years, African Heads of State and Governments designated 2017 as the year of 'Harnessing the Demographic Dividend through Investments in Youth'. This also contributed to implementation of the African Union's (AU's) Agenda 2063 and responded to the need to mobilise and invest in human capital. Across the continent, it has been recognised that equipping young people with the skills and tools to drive integration, peace and people-centred sustainable development will help individual countries reap demographic dividends.¹ This vision is underpinned by the principle of inclusive development and the goal of removing obstacles to female participation in society.

In this era of globalisation, there exists tremendous potential for youth populations with regard to self-development, in light of improved technology, increased

Box 1.1 Agenda 2063 and the First 10-Year Implementation Plan (2014–2023)

The Agenda 2063 Framework Document was developed and later adopted by African leaders at a 2015 Summit, to serve as the basis for Africa's long-term socio-economic and integrative transformation. The document mandated the African Union Commission (AUC) to prepare the First 10-Year Implementation Plan (2014–2023), the first in a series of five over the next fifty-year horizon, to offer a common basis for the preparation of medium-term development plans of member states of the AU, the Regional Economic Communities and the AU Organs. Embedding the Agenda in national youth policies and programmes will contribute to achievement of the overall continental goals.

Of the Seven Aspirations in the document, Aspiration 6 aims for: 'An Africa whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children: strengthening the role of Africa's women through ensuring gender equality and parity in all spheres of life (political, economic and social); eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls; creating opportunities for Africa's youth for self-realisation, access to health, education and jobs; and ensuring safety and security for Africa's children, and providing for early childhood development.'

Source: AUC (2015).

production and trade, access to knowledge and labour markets, and urbanisation. However, globalisation has also exposed vulnerable populations to hate speech, violence, conflict and insecurity, and environmental degradation, and many youth do not have access to basic social services such as health and education. This in turn affects their ability to enter the often-uncertain labour market. Similarly, many inequalities still exist among individuals and social groups, in terms of their ability to access opportunities, resulting from differences in sex, class, location, disability and ethnicity.

With the persistence of human development challenges and the unique vulnerabilities of young people, both the international community and UN member states have prioritised youth development issues as part of efforts aimed at achieving sustainable social and economic development. In 2015, the UN General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This provides an overarching framework for global development until 2030 (see Box 1.2 for the SDGs most relevant to youth populations).

1.2 Youth leadership and engagement in development

At the regional and global level, youth-related issues have never been as high a priority as they are currently. The role of the UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth was created in 2013. In 2019, the AU appointed an AU Youth Envoy.

Box 1.2 SDG targets most relevant to young people

Given that nearly 50 per cent of the world's population is under the age of 30, young people are crucial to accountability under the 17 SDGs and their 169 targets. Moreover, young people play a vital role in national development and in implementing the new people-centred and people-led accountability mechanisms in realising the 2030 Agenda while 'leaving no one behind'.

Although the 17 SDGs do not specifically mention young people, some of the targets and indicators that underpin them address the needs and role of youth. The 2030 Agenda includes a commitment to 'the full realisation of [young people's] rights and capabilities, helping our countries to reap the demographic dividend'. The SDGs that explicitly refer to young people fall into two categories: those that refer to age disaggregation or age groups and those that specifically mention young people. Eight SDGs refer to age disaggregation or age groups in the Goal, targets or indicators: SDG 1 (poverty), SDG 3 (health), SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 8 (decent work), SDG 10 (inequality), SDG 11 (sustainable cities), SDG 16 (peaceful, just and inclusive societies) and SDG 17 (partnership). There are explicit references to youth, young men and women, adolescents, girls and women aged 20–24 years in the targets or indicators of nine Goals: SDG 1 (poverty), SDG 2 (hunger), SDG 3 (health), SDG 4 (education), SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation), SDG 8 (decent work), SDG 13 (climate action) and SDG 16 (peaceful, just and inclusive societies).

Source: Commonwealth Secretariat (2016).

Since 2013, UN member states and other stakeholders have advanced a number of initiatives aimed at empowering young people. For instance, youth summits – such as the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Youth Forums, the Commonwealth Youth Forum and the World Youth Conference – have become influential platforms on the international stage. These efforts build on longstanding international youth policy frameworks such as the UN World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY) and the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment (PAYE).

Likewise, African leaders have put in place a number of youth-specific frameworks to improve the situation of young people, following the Lisbon Declaration on Youth Policies and Programmes and the Baku Commitment to Youth Policies. In particular, apart from the recently widely endorsed Agenda 2063, existing frameworks such as the Africa Youth Charter² underscore the need for, and provide guidance in the development of, national youth policies. They equally have the potential to encourage African leaders to transform education and skills development, human rights, health and well-being, and empowerment, as well as employment and entrepreneurship, which matter greatly in achieving sustainable development and peace.

Moreover, individual UN agencies have developed youth strategies to guide their work *with* young people. These include the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Youth Strategy and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Strategy on Adolescents and Youth, and, most recently, Youth2030, the first ever UN strategy on working *with* young people (UN, 2018). This series of institutional youth strategies has prioritised youth development, covering economic empowerment, civic engagement and participation, resilience-building, and sexual and reproductive health, with a special focus on marginalised and disadvantaged youth, especially girls.

Similarly, bilateral development agencies have also taken steps to prioritise youth. For example, the UK Department for International Development (DFID), the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) have all developed and published youth strategies to inform their programming around the world.

In essence, it can be said that various institutions have recognised young people's role in development. This presents the Government of Ghana (GoG) with an opportunity to review these youth strategies and to uncover areas of convergence or priorities in achieving the common vision of harnessing the development potential of young people.

1.3 Rationale and purpose

Ghana's current NYP, as enacted in 2010, identifies 19 thematic areas for interventions and services geared towards *youth empowerment*. The Policy underscores the essence of youth engagement and meaningful participation in the process of working with and on youth development issues. Although the Policy notes that youth are a 'valuable resource', surprisingly little is known about the current state of affairs in youth development. Measuring progress on youth development continues to be a challenge, regardless of how widely its importance has been recognised.

Fortunately, the 2010 NYP provides space for a review at least once every five years. Nearly eight years from when it was launched, a comprehensive review of the state of youth development needs to be undertaken with a view to understanding how various initiatives, including policies and programmatic interventions, have responded to the needs of young people. Additionally, given the persisting challenges, emerging development issues and evolving needs and aspirations of youth in a middle-income economy, it has become critical to understand the current needs and experiences of young people so as to be able to design appropriate evidence-based interventions.

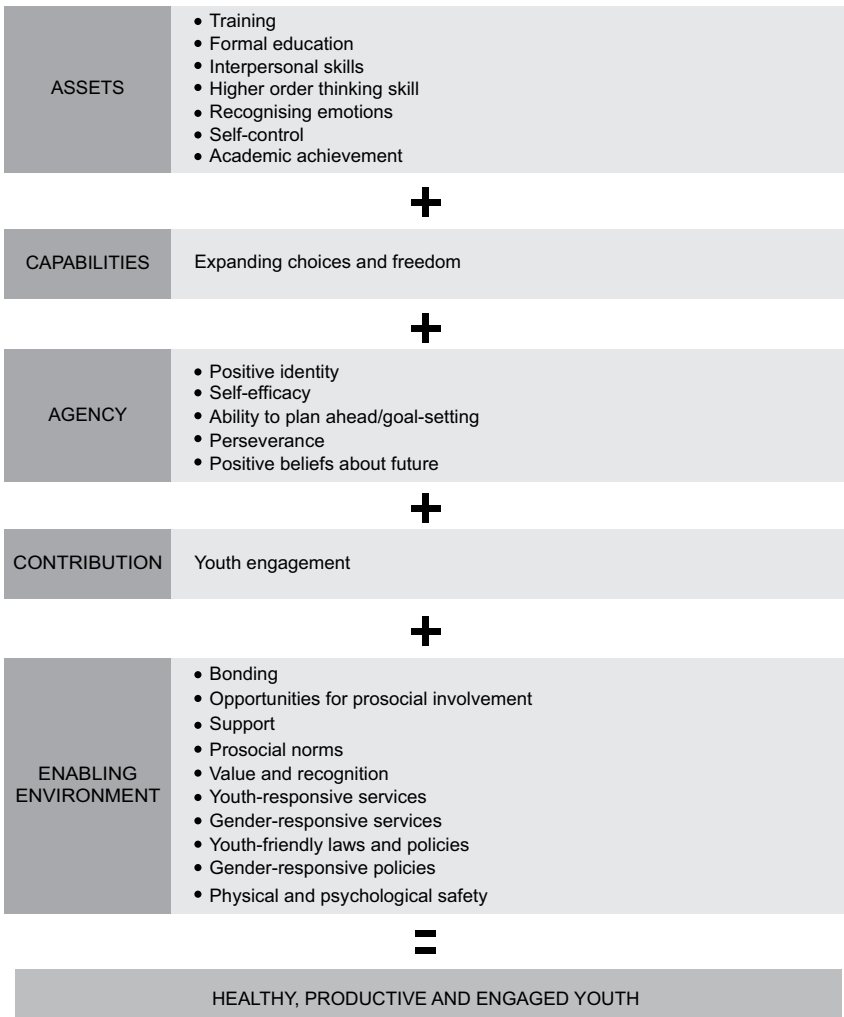
This report represents a response to the urgent necessity to understand the everyday lives of young people. In line with key development frameworks like the AU's Agenda 2063, it offers insights that can contribute to the transformation of Ghana's youth population and subsequently allow the country to reap the demographic dividend associated with successful population transitions through childhood to adulthood, and to achieve the 2030 Agenda. Ultimately, this report presents a baseline evaluation or situational analysis that can inform revisions of current policies or support the creation of new policies on priority issues for youth development.

1.4 Theoretical framework: Positive Youth Development and capabilities

The theoretical approach for this report is derived from the work of both Sen (1985) and Nussbaum (2000) on capabilities as well the concept of Positive Youth Development (PYD) (see Figure 1.1), which in recent times has underpinned a range of (youth) human development interventions.

The PYD framework, which in recent times has been championed by international development agencies including USAID and the International Research & Exchanges Board,³ demonstrates that, to achieve the vision of healthy, productive and engaged

Figure 1.1 Positive Youth Development



Source: Author, adapted from <https://www.youthpower.org/positive-youth-development-pyd-framework>

youth, policy and programmatic interventions must work *with* youth to improve their:

- **Assets:** Youth are a valuable resource for every nation. However, they will need necessary resources and must be equipped with training and skills that will open up their competencies to achieve desired outcomes.
- **Capabilities:** This concept emphasises opportunities available to individuals as a result of the core capabilities to define quality of life. This includes, for instance, ‘being able to have good health, adequate nutrition, adequate shelter, opportunities for sexual satisfaction and choice in reproduction, and mobility’ (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2016, p. 9)

The concept of capabilities offers effective prerequisites for youth development as well as policies that can contribute to the process of expanding young people’s choices and freedoms that are critical to human development. Thus, beyond the implicit meaning of certain developmental terms, including ‘poverty’, which is often measured in terms of income, poverty will be seen in this report as going beyond income deprivation to mean capability deprivation, to understand how it can, for instance, limit a person’s participation in education or civic and political life.

- **Agency:** A growing number of young people believe they have the ability to utilise their assets and aspirations to make a difference in their communities or influence decision-making that matters to their individual and collective lives. However, the wide range of challenges they confront undermines this potential. These challenges include lack of decent work opportunities, ineffective and undemocratic political participation structures, conflicts and violence, man-made and natural disasters, poor health services, and gender- and age-based discrimination.
- **Contribution:** Youth are seen as a source of social change and therefore opportunities are offered to them to contribute to development processes at various levels, including personal, family, community and national.
- **Enabling environment:** Youth development, and therefore the development of the capabilities of young people, happens within an ecosystem that strengthens their assets and agency; provides access to safe spaces, services and opportunities; and enhances their ability to avoid risks, to stay safe, secure and protected and to live without fear. An enabling environment allows young people to develop certain life-long skills such as public speaking, negotiation, teamwork, etc. The term ‘environment’ encompasses the social (e.g. relationships with peers and adults), the normative (e.g. attitudes, norms and beliefs), the structural (e.g. laws, policies, programmes, services and systems) and the physical (e.g. safe, supportive spaces).

Young people may suffer various forms of exclusion and discrimination and therefore, in using these concepts, an effort is made to explain the unique vulnerabilities and agential competences of young people. These may depend on, for instance, age- and other context-specific needs or factors such as economic status, education, sex, ethnic identity, disability and geography.

Thus, deliberate efforts may be needed for certain social groups that are often ignored or discriminated against, to ensure that age, sex, and social, cultural and environmental factors do not militate against the development of any young person and that no young Ghanaian is left behind. As this report notes, while social protection has been a key approach in addressing the needs of certain social groups, few programmatic and policy approaches have effectively and comprehensively addressed the needs of all youth, and these approaches rarely reach the most marginalised, those living in extreme poverty, teenage mothers and out-of-school youth, among others.

In essence, PYD requires a supportive political, legal and economic environment as well as responsive institutions that attend to the needs of young people and develop their capabilities and agency so they can participate in various aspects of society and life. Where young people are likely to be offered opportunities, they can develop; where they are constrained or lacking in second-chance opportunities, they may feel disempowered. This report uses the terms 'PYD' and 'youth development' interchangeably.

1.5 Approach to the report

1.5.1 Defining youth

According to Ghana's NYP (2010), youth is defined as those between 15 and 35 years. This definition is consistent with the AU's definition. For the purposes of this report also, youth are defined as persons between the ages of 15 and 35 years. While this definition is based on age, sociological research has revealed that being a youth is more of a social than a biological stage.

1.5.2 Gender and youth

There exist significant differences between the socio-economic realities that females experience in the course of their life and those that their male counterparts encounter. Female children and youth are more likely to be victims of poverty, discrimination and abuse. While gender norms are slowly shifting – especially in the growing middle-class, where families are adopting lifestyles that promote gender equality – this cannot be taken for granted. Consequently, all policies should pay particular attention to ensuring *equitable* rights for both males and females.

1.5.3 Methodology

Document and literature review

A thorough literature review was conducted to enable an understanding of the theoretical and conceptual approaches to working *with* youth as well as on youth development issues through national, regional and global youth development interventions (policies and programmes). Relevant documents were largely retrieved online from the websites of various ministries, departments and agencies. Other document sources, apart from Google search resources, included electronic journals from sources such as JSTOR, Children's Geographies, etc. The NYA supplied useful

documents regarding country-level instruments and documents related to youth development in Ghana. Additionally, a profile of youth was established using key demographic data from the Population and Housing Census from the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS).

Situational analysis of youth in Ghana

A situational analysis was generated to discuss key youth development indicators in relation to local, economic and social conditions, as well as development indicators such as the Commonwealth Youth Development Index (YDI), the UN SDGs and the AU's Agenda 2063.

Focus group discussions

Focus group discussions were conducted with young people and the members of the Technical Committee for the Review of the NYP to establish common views as well as clarify diverging perspectives among stakeholders by sector.⁴ The relevant chapters of this report use selected quotes from the young participants⁵ as part of an effort to promote direct *youth voices*.

One-on-one semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were designed based on the findings of the literature review. Various stakeholders were interviewed, including members of the youth demographic, youth workers and experts, donors, private sector employees and government officials, through in-depth one-on-one discussions on key issues to ensure representation of youth concerns. The total number of participants was 53 (see Annex 3 for details).

Validation workshop

On 4 June 2019, the NYA, under the auspices of the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MOYS) and with sponsorship from the Commonwealth Secretariat, organised a one-day Consultative Workshop to validate the findings of the draft *Overview of Youth Development in Ghana*, as well as to elicit further contributions from stakeholders working in the field of youth development. About 80 people, including representatives of various youth development institutions, public sector agencies, civil society (including youth-led or youth-focused organisations), private sector entities, and bilateral and multilateral agencies participated in the workshop. A deliberate effort was made to ensure balanced regional, age and gender representation of participants.

Limitations of the study

Despite the triangulated approach to data generation, identifying data on a broad range of youth development issues was a challenge, considering that research and knowledge around youth development is not easy to find. The GSS and the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) both made an effort to provide relevant baseline data. Aside from this, in most cases, documents reviewed failed to differentiate youth from the more general Ghanaian population. The Ghana

Youth Data Audit (Senanu, 2014) suggests that a number of the youth development priorities set forth in the current NYP lack any ‘comprehensive youth data’ (see Table 1.1); our researchers echoed this. Furthermore, there is inadequate differentiation by sex. This problem of age and sex differentiation is particularly glaring when it comes to district-level youth data. Consequently, until further investment and training takes place to enhance the capacity of institutions such as the NYA, the GSS and the NDPC, and other relevant government institutions and youth organisations, there will continue to be obvious gaps in the data. Ultimately, addressing this challenge is critical to evidence-based policy-making, as well as to the establishment of a Ghana Youth Development Index as recommended by the Commonwealth YDI, and thus efforts to measure progress towards achieving the SDGs.

In order to fill some of these data gaps, direct interviews were conducted, with the aim of enabling a further understanding the contemporary needs of Ghanaian youth. However, given the absence of data, the situational analysis in this document cannot be considered a full reflection of the experience of Ghanaian youth; rather, the findings should be considered indicative. Nonetheless, the analysis and the recommendations are valuable for moving forward with the youth development agenda and with a new youth policy that addresses some of the gaps identified.

1.6 Structure of the report

This report is divided into 17 chapters that focus on Ghanaian youth and the key issues of concern to their development. Each chapter contains a brief overview of the issue and its theoretical underpinnings, followed by a presentation of key trends and a brief summary of the chapter’s findings, as well as strategic recommendations for

Table 1.1 Youth data availability

National policy priority areas...	
<i>Without comprehensive youth data available</i>	<i>With comprehensive youth data available</i>
Science, Research and Technology	Education and Skills Training
Information and Communication Technology	Youth and Employment
Entrepreneurial Development	Youth in Modern Agriculture
Gender Mainstreaming	Health, HIV and AIDS
Environment	
Networking and Partnerships	
Mentoring	
Art and Culture	
Governance, Democracy and Leadership	
Sports and Recreation	
Youth in Conflict	
Prevention and Peace-Building	
Youth Patriotism and Volunteerism	
Nationalism and Conscientisation of Youth	

Source: Senanu (2014).

future policies and initiatives. The report closes with a brief summary of findings and a discussion on the way forward on youth development in Ghana.

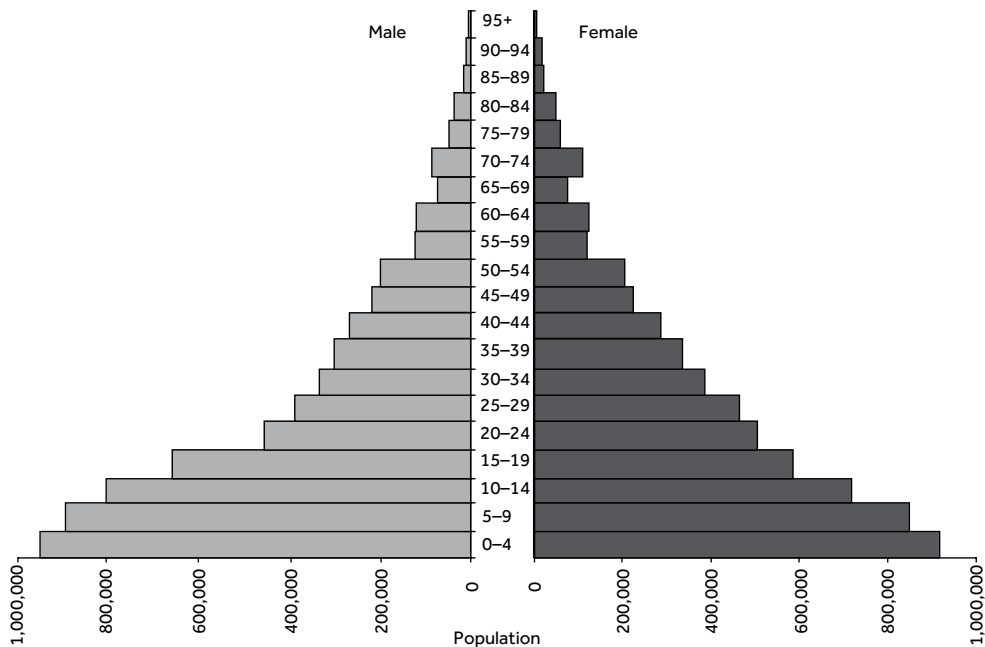
1.7 Ghanaian youth demographic profile

Understanding population dynamics is critical to understanding the status of population segments and the implications of this for the political, economic and human security of a nation. In particular, understanding a population's age trends is critical for investment in priority areas (e.g. education, health, employment and consumption). Likewise, age-to-sex considerations can reveal sex ratios and the implications for mortality, family formation and equitable access to social services among males in comparison with females. Young people may be considered a vulnerable social group, given the diverse risks they are likely to face in their life course. However, they are also recognised as the future of the country. It is therefore important to understand their population profile in order to be able to give them the attention they need.

1.7.1 Age and sex structure of Ghana

Ghana's population is youthful: 58 per cent of the total population (24,658,823) are aged under 25 years (GSS, 2013a). The population is characterised by a large share of children under 15 years and a small share of elderly persons (65 years and older), as reported by the 2010 Housing and Population Census (ibid.). A high fertility rate and a decreasing mortality rate are significant contributors to the population structure.

Figure 1.2 Population pyramid of Ghana, 2010



Source: GSS (2013a).

1.7.2 Spatial distribution of youth population

Demographic data suggests that, in all regions⁶ of Ghana, the age group 20–24 years makes up less than 10 per cent of the population; the exception is Greater Accra, which has a record 11.4 per cent of its population in this age group (GSS, 2013b). Generally, data suggests that there are more females than males in each region (GSS, 2013a).

1.7.3 Youth mortality

Data suggests that males make up the higher proportion of all deaths. However, among youth aged 15–19 years, 60 per cent of deaths are of females and 40 per cent are of males (GSS, 2013b). It is likely that this higher female mortality rate is pregnancy-related, given that maternal deaths are common among young women (ibid.).

Similarly, among those aged over 20 years, females make up a higher proportion of deaths. Here, again, maternal mortality is deemed the major contributing factor (GSS, 2013b). For instance, 14 per cent and about 15 per cent, respectively, of deaths among those aged 20–24 and 25–34 years are maternal deaths (ibid.).

While pregnancy-related deaths are common among females, among young men and among young women who die for other reasons than those related to pregnancy and maternity, causes of death include accidents, violence, homicide and suicide (GSS, 2013b).

1.7.4 Recommendations

1. Ghana's youthful population suggests the need for the government to invest in priority human development issues such as education and health in order to ensure a healthy and productive population.
2. Youth do not represent a homogenous category, and young people have diverse experiences across geographical areas, age and gender. Thus, there is a need for critical analysis of the situation of young people beyond national or regional trends to understand their everyday life experiences.

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Notes

- 1 This is not the first time the AU has focused on youth (e.g. African Youth Decade 2009–2018).
- 2 The African Youth Charter 2006 entered into force on 8 August 2010. To date, 37 countries, including Ghana, have signed it, and 24 have also ratified it. The Charter highlights the rights, responsibilities and duties of youth in relation to various international agreements.
- 3 <https://www.youthpower.org/positive-youth-development-pyd-framework>
- 4 The NYA established this Technical Committee and organised consultations with young people and relevant stakeholders as part of on-going efforts to facilitate the review of the existing policy.
- 5 To protect the identity of interviewees, only their age and sex are revealed.
- 6 In this report, the administrative regions of Ghana refer to the 10 previous regions. Six new regions were created in 2019.