Chapter 17

Moving Forward: Getting Youth Policy Right in Ghana

As the world drives forward towards integrated knowledge-based economies, it becomes more important than ever to focus on improving basic skills, increasing access to opportunities and building capacity across science and technology for the young people of Ghana. Developing human capital or the capabilities of youth requires more than a simple investment in a school building. It demands that youth be recognised as important assets for their country; that they are given a platform to speak and participate in governance processes at various levels of society; and that they are empowered with opportunities to utilise their skills to become active citizens.

For many developing countries like Ghana, policy priorities aimed at the youth demographic have often been centred solely on access to free education. Ghana has made great strides with respect to ensuring inclusive, free education for all, and primary school enrolment has increased significantly. However, numerous challenges remain, including related to the transition and retention of students in secondary education institutions and access to quality primary and higher education.

While education is critical for human development, the availability of up-to-date sexual and reproductive health information and training for young people must be given equal attention. Additionally, youth empowerment is rapidly gaining traction worldwide as a critical focus for policy initiatives; and it is time for youth development initiatives to reflect this new reality.

As a relatively stable, democratic nation, Ghana has enjoyed positive economic trends that have encouraged both foreign and local investment. However, skilled graduates are not meeting current labour market needs. Moreover, youth unemployment and underemployment deserve attention. In order to address these and other challenges, Ghana must recognise the need to mainstream youth issues, and to address them in a coordinated multi-sector effort, in order to move the country forward towards a more sustainable future.

17.1 Youth policies that fail young people

Youth development cannot be put into a single box. It is a multi-sectoral challenge that requires acknowledgement of and response to the dynamic needs present across a diverse youth demographic. While Ghana has initiated a number of measures for youth populations, in many respects these have failed because of issues related to unaccountability, lack of coherence, absence of consultation with all relevant stakeholders (especially youth) and inadequate monitoring and evaluation

measures. Without adequate analysis of the effectiveness of policy initiatives, proper consultation and inclusion of youth as stakeholders, there is little hope of avoiding the perpetuation of mistakes and, ultimately, success will remain limited.

17.2 Understanding youth policy priorities in relation to country context

This report has already focused on various policies and programmes and their outcomes in relation to the situation of young people in Ghana. All the issues, as well as the various policies, plans or programmes across various sectors, are critical to youth policy formulation.

While this concluding chapter does not revisit these policies, it is important is to reflect on and further discuss the key findings and recommendations presented in the previous chapters. It is also important to consult young people in defining the main priority issues they feel are important to their future or their present everyday life. Both online and offline consultations can be undertaken. In Ghana, the NYA undertook such consultations. Table 17.1 presents an indication of the survey trends.

For coherence with global indicators, we can categorise some of these issues under five broad areas linked to the Commonwealth Youth Development Index for further insights into specific issues that affect young people:

1. In terms of *education*, starting questions to ask in relation to how Ghana can enhance young people's skills and capabilities include: What are enrolment rates in secondary education? What is the literacy rate? What percentage of young people have experience using the internet? Are young people acquiring skills that will make them employable and ready for adulthood? Do they have opportunities to participate in the formulation of education/employment-related policies at the national or community level?

2. Regarding *health and well-being*, it is important to establish rates related to adolescent or youth mortality, fertility, mental health, alcohol and drug abuse and HIV/AIDS. These indicators or trends can help us understand how healthy young people are as they transition into adulthood as well as the consequential health risk young people are likely to face in the short and longer term.

3. In terms of *employment*, what is the NEET rate? What is the youth unemployment ratio?

4. *Political participation* is also an important domain, in particular whether there is youth-friendly voter education, as well as whether young people have the right to vote and to voice their views in official elections at various levels of decision-making.

5. On *civic participation*, questions that need to be answered include those related to how young people participate in volunteering or perceive volunteering. Additionally, questions need to understand experiences in helping strangers.

Table 17.1 Ghana youth development issues survey

Ghana Youth Development Issues Survey | 7,730 Respondents | Analysis as at 26 May 2019

YD ISSUES	SUM	AVG	W.AVG	RANK SUM	RANK AVG	W.AVG RANK	RANK OF IMP.	THEMATIC AREA
Education and Skills Training	15404	3.57	1	1	1	20	1st	C. EDUCATION & SKILLS DEVELOPMENT
Drug and Substance Abuse	11601	3.38	2	2	2	19	2nd	B. YOUTH HEALTH AND WELLBEING
Employment and Labour Relations	9261	3.37	3	3	3	18	3rd	A. ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE
Entrepreneurship and Financial Inclusion	6847	3.11	5.5	7	4	16	4th	A. ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE
Hunger and Poverty	7862	2.97	5.5	5	6	16	5th	A. ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE
Peace and Security	8816	2.81	6.5	4	9	16	6th	B. YOUTH HEALTH AND WELLBEING
Climate and Environment	5245	3.11	7	10	4	13	7th	C. EDUCATION & SKILLS DEVELOPMENT
Health and Wellbeing	7428	2.84	7	6	8	13	8th	B. YOUTH HEALTH AND WELLBEING
Disability	5183	2.99	8	11	5	12	9th	D. PARTICIPATION & GOVERNANCE
Information and Communication Technology	5413	2.81	9.5	9	10	11	10th	C. EDUCATION & SKILLS DEVELOPMENT
Culture and Life Skills	4182	2.84	10	13	7	10	11th	C. EDUCATION & SKILLS DEVELOPMENT
Girls and Young Women	4248	2.76	11.5	12	11	9	12th	D. PARTICIPATION & GOVERNANCE
Sexual and Reproductive Health	6361	2.6	12	8	16	8	13th	B. YOUTH HEALTH AND WELLBEING
Globalisation and Migration	2386	2.71	14	16	12	6	14th	C. EDUCATION & SKILLS DEVELOPMENT
Participation and Democratic Governance	2513	2.68	14	15	13	6	15th	D. PARTICIPATION & GOVERNANCE
Leadership Development and Accountability	4040	2.62	14.5	14	15	5	16th	D. PARTICIPATION & GOVERNANCE
Population and Demographic Dividend	1212	2.68	16.5	19	14	4	17th	E. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES
Juvenile Justice	1863	2.48	17.5	17	18	3	18th	E. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES
Inter-generational Relations	1067	2.59	18.5	20	17	1	19th	E. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES
Leisure and Recreation	1314	2.42	18.5	18	19	1	20th	B. YOUTH HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Source: Author.

Having considered some of the key domains and possible questions that could help in framing indicators for the NYP or a potential national YDI, it is also important to understand the economic well-being of young people and their social relations, such as family members, and whether they can finance investments in human capital. While governments often shoulder some of the cost of investment in human capital, in a number of cases families will have to finance some of their needs. Implementing paid or free public services also demands a focus on the needs of the most vulnerable, especially the poor, who may not be able to access certain social services even when they are readily available.

Additionally, it is important to know the stage in the demographic transition model at which Ghana finds itself, to be able to see the implications for policy and planning. Ghana is at Stage 2 of the demographic transition model (Henson, 2014), which is shaped mainly by experience of a high birth rate, a low death rate and slightly higher life expectancy. The population is expanding, though not rapidly. As noted earlier in terms of demographic trends, this means GoG will need to invest in quality and higher education as well as job creation for young people. If investments are pursued, Ghana is likely to reap huge gains in terms of the demographic dividend in the next decades. The opposite is true if the country fails to invest in young people.

17.3 Getting youth policy right

After acknowledging the weaknesses contained in the current NYP, it becomes clear that, in order to increase the potential for success, policy-makers must lead the difficult process of coordinating various stakeholders, developing a coherent policy with clear outcomes and beginning the process of mainstreaming youth policies into national development planning with youth as *partners*. Inclusive, meaningful youth participation will ensure the creation of policies that speak to the current youth demographic in a way that empowers them to participate and build their capacity as the future of the country.

17.3.1 Ensuring coordination

Given the multi-dimensionality of youth development, youth policy formulation and implementation is often plagued by fragmented efforts and poor coordination among different sectors at both national and local levels. This becomes increasingly problematic where jurisdictions overlap, such as in the case of initiatives hoping to address youth employment. In order to holistically and strategically guide efforts focused on youth development capable of addressing youth concerns and requirements, a clear national youth coordination framework is needed. This must ensure cooperation and communication across youth service providers and youth organisations as well as among and across different levels of government and their ministries, agencies and departments. This must be spearheaded by the NYA.

Through organising or 'bringing together' various stakeholders; developing an overarching strategy and cross-sector objectives to enable youth outcomes; and assigning clear roles and responsibilities, the framework can provide guidelines for cross-agency communication, monitoring, evaluation and analysis of policy

development. Working in coordination will foster coherence and support across sectors while at the same time ensuring efficiencies in budgetary requirements and reducing overlap. Coordination can also involve settings such as Friends of Youth, which brings together stakeholders from all levels of national development who have an interest in youth development. This platform can further be constituted into sub-working groups that deal with thematic issues regularly. It can further serve as a sounding board by ensuring all other indirect stakeholders and observers are informed of forum-related developments and can contribute to creating the agenda for youth development.[1]

17.3.2 Mainstreaming youth in development planning

Mainstreaming youth development issues into national development planning and strategies will work to ensure the success of any youth policy initiatives. In Ghana, youth policy sits within MOYS and the NYA. Integration of youth priorities and issues across national policy planning and implementation, including medium- and long-term local and national development strategies (e.g. the National Development Plan 2018–2057), will promote the overarching objective of youth development. Additionally, with respect to budgetary processes, mainstreaming youth development will ensure policy objectives have the specific budgetary allocations they require.

17.3.3 Listening to young people

Policy development processes must be participatory, with the inclusion of voices from all relevant stakeholders, including youth. Meaningful consultation provides a sense of individual and collective responsibility towards youth development outcomes, leading to improved ownership and accountability. Consultation should be considered an on-going process to be continued after policy implementation, throughout on-going monitoring and evaluation. Moreover, consultation must acknowledge the importance of inclusive participation and ensure equity in representation and engagement of minority groups and those who are traditionally excluded, such as females, rural youth and those with disabilities. Youth voices are important to include not only in youth-focused policies but also in the broader scope of development in Ghana. Consulting with young people on medium-and long-term national development planning strategies is equally important in mainstreaming youth development.

Having noted the significance of listening to young people, it is also important to reflect on the cultural ethos of Ghanaian youth life. Ghanaian culture sometimes teaches young people to be subservient as a way of showing respect (Twum-Danso, 2008; Boakye-Boateng, 2010). At the same time notions, such as 'A young person must be seen and not heard' can be characteristic of a culturally institutionalised power dynamic in various arenas (e.g. community, church or school) where young people find themselves. This practice can have negative consequences for young people's freedom of expression without fear. Thus, it is important that participatory mechanisms address this indirect barrier to encourage young people to *speak up* and ask questions on issues regarding youth development.

17.3.4 Capacity development

Meaningful youth participation in development issues and effective implementation of youth policies calls for improved capacities that will empower young people with the skills and tools for effective analysis, development, coordination, monitoring and evaluation, fundraising, advocacy and reporting on policy and programmatic issues affecting young people. In many developing countries, youth ministries are often charged with sport development as well. While sport can be an important element to enhancing the well-being of young people as well as society at large, in some cases the idea that sport development encompasses youth development remains prevalent, and youth policy and programme implementation does not receive the attention it requires. Deliberate effort must be enacted to ensure adequate financial and human resources are available to MOYS and the NYA at both headquarters and local levels, to ensure effective implementation of youth interventions. Facilitation and sponsorship of staff participation in youth development conferences and partnerships with academic institutions to develop mandatory training models for all staff members would help increase the capacity of both agencies to further support positive youth development.

Capacity-building can be a capital-intensive endeavour and, given recent donor fatigue and GoG's path towards a 'Ghana Beyond Aid' (GoG, 2019), new ways of forging partnerships and innovative fundraising approaches should be explored. Creating a dedicated unit or department in MOYS and the NYS would be an important step in raising funds for the ministry and its stakeholders. This unit can also train all NYA programme staff at the regional and district level on proposal-writing and fundraising to help with local office fundraising strategies. Equipped with new funding modalities whereby bilateral and multilateral donors can fund non-government entities, while encouraging civil society organisations to work closely with GoG, MOYS and the NYA can identify and work together with outside organisations to ensure effective youth development outcomes. These new funding modalities could include a 'youth donor trust fund', whereby various stakeholders interested in youth development can donate funding with clear disbursement and accountability mechanisms.

17.3.5 Monitoring and evaluation

Youth policy and implementation strategies are often limited in their effectiveness, owing to a lack of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the impacts and outcomes of policies and programmes. Data from monitoring and evaluation based on assessment of core youth development indicators can be useful in understanding what works and why. While there is no international agreement on youth development outcomes, frameworks such as the Commonwealth Secretariat's YDI, the Global Youth Wellbeing Index and the UNDP Human Development Index can be used to contextualise the findings. Developing indicators to serve as baseline measurements for monitoring the impact of new policies and initiatives across geographies, gender and age of youth populations can be effective in assessing their success. Baseline youth development indicators can be collected regularly or from national census data (see Annex 2). Evaluation of the data collected through monitoring processes is

critical to assessing the strengths and weaknesses of policy initiatives. Evaluation can be complex, intensive and expensive. Given the overlap between sectors, one cost-effective strategy would be to conduct joint evaluations on areas that are inter-related, such as health and education.

17.3.6 Research, knowledge management and policy advocacy

On-going research focused on youth can provide critical data for youth development policy-making and programme development. In some circumstances, even when research has been conducted, findings are not acknowledged, owing to problems related to inaccessibility. Knowledge management is a key step in conveying relevant research findings to youth development stakeholders, including policy-makers. One possible strategy to ensure relevant stakeholders have the evidence they need to make informed decisions is the creation of an online youth development knowledge hub, coordinated by the NYA, to bring together relevant research findings accessible to various stakeholders. A strategy such as this would ensure adequate evidence-driven policy advocacy and policy-making for youth development issues in Ghana.

17.3.7 Professionalising youth work

Youth work refers to 'all forms of rights-based youth engagement approaches that build personal awareness and support the social, political and economic empowerment of young people, delivered through non-formal learning within a matrix of care' (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2017). In Ghana, while there are several youth workers and youth-led and -focused organisations, no system exists that recognises the practice of youth work as a profession. Professional youth work is a key dimension in enabling, ensuring and empowering young people (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1992). Professional youth work in Ghana will mean the presence of a regulatory framework to direct the practice and check excesses, as well as accredited certificate courses to equip youth workers with the needed competencies to handle youth matters. A professionalised youth worker system will also be a major step in mainstreaming youth in development issues. It is therefore essential for Ghana as a state to put in place structures for the professionalisation of youth work. This could be implemented with academic institutions and international organisations. Having said this, it will be important to understand earlier experiences from certificate programmes organised previously by the Commonwealth Secretariat and the University of Ghana on youth development.

17.4 Conclusion

As Ghana advances towards a more sustainable future, youth development becomes more critical than ever before. The youth demographic represents not only the majority of the country's citizens but also the future. Policies and programmes focusing on youth development must take into account the diversity of the youth population and be based on lived experiences. Acknowledging youth *as partners* in development ensures their participation in the creation of policies that support their needs and wants and the challenges they face as they transition into adulthood.

References

Boakye-Boateng, A. (2010) Changes in the Concept of Childhood: Implications on Children in Ghana. *The Journal of International Social Research* 3(10): 104–115.

Commonwealth Secretariat (1992) *Harare Commonwealth Declaration*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.

Commonwealth Secretariat (2017) *Youth Work in the Commonwealth: A Growth Profession*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.

GoG (Government of Ghana) (2019) *Ghana Beyond Aid: Charter and Strategy Document*. Accra: GoG.

Henson, C. (2014) Country Analysis: GHANA. 28 September. https://prezi.com/w8o-niehdke0/country-analysis-ghana/

Twum-Danso, A.O. (2008) *Searching for the Middle Ground in Children's Rights: Implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Ghana*. Birmingham: University of Birmingham.

Note

1   Exemplified by https://gfmd.org/process/gfmd-structure/friend