An Exploration of Domains Towards Unlocking Zimbabwean Youths' Socio Economic and Political Empowerment

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Abstract: Zimbabwe is at a critical juncture in terms of its political economy post-November 2017 political developments. After dollarization and resultant ephemeral economic stability achieved during the Government of National Unity (GNU) 2009-2013, Zimbabwe today faces: slowing economic growth; a financial crisis, particularly liquidity crunch; increasingly erratic weather patterns; rising poverty and inequality; and a political legitimacy crisis. The economy is unable to meet the needs of the ballooning urban youth community. The 2012 Zimbabwe Census found that 69.8% of the population is 29 years old or under, with approximately 41.7% falling within the 10 to 29-year-old range. Due to patriarchal and hierarchal structures, this "youth bulge" is presenting challenges in Zimbabwe, with issues like unemployment, high disease burden, and limited space to engage in socio-economic and political spaces as major factors. Both the socio-economic and political legacy in Zimbabwe has created such significant structural barriers to youth participation and influence. Through a literature review of commissioned reports, newspaper articles, and empirical research studies, this article interrogates the dominance and pervasiveness of socio-economic disenchantment embedded in Zimbabwean youths during turbulent economic times. We argue that political discourses and agendas dominate thwarting ways to expand economic opportunities for youth. We conclude with reflections on potential next steps for research and policy regarding the reduction of stigma and strengthening of youth policy pathways for the purpose of creating more transformative approaches to youth political, economic and social capabilities.

A rapid increase in the number of educated youths seems to precede episodes of political upheaval, as well-educated youth have often been observed in central positions in episodes of riots (Urdal,

2006). This is called the "Youth Bulge Theory", which theorizes that developing countries that have undergone "demographic transition"- moving from high to low fertility and mortality rates- are especially vulnerable to civil conflict (Hendrixson, 2003). According to the Youth Bulge Theory, young men and women below the age of 30 are a historically volatile and ever-increasing demographic, and the presence of more than 20% young people in a given population raises the potential for rebellion and unrest. The concept specifically equates a large percentage of young men with an increased possibility of violence, particularly in the Global South, where youths account for 60% of the population (Hendrixson, 2003). Such perspectives have meant it is increasingly important to examine how youth in Africa can become more active within democratic practices. According to Ndebele and Billing (2011), not only are there unique challenges regarding the promotion of youth participation in governance during transitional political contexts, but these are due to complex and shifting power dynamics that create difficulty for young people to penetrate decision-making structures.

For example, over the last decade in sub-Saharan Africa, policy and programme interest in both youth and employment has increased dramatically, with youth voter registration drives popping across the continent (Ayele et al., 2017). This reflects a perspective many young citizens hold that elections are pragmatic action to contributing to the governance of their country, and ensuring addressing youth exclusion by govern and youth apathy (Research and Advocacy Unit, 2017). Another key example is South Africa, which has been implementing manifold programmes at various levels of government since the end of apartheid with legislation like the National Youth Policy 2015-2020, National Youth Commission Act 1996, White Paper on Social Welfare 1997, National Youth Development Policy 2015-2020, and the 1998 Skills Development Act. These policies coexist with the nation's powerful youth-led political

party, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), which is currently the third-largest party in both houses of the South African parliament.

Today, a large majority of African youth have expressed interest in public affairs and assert they discuss politics with those around them, yet relatively low levels of civic engagement and political participation have been found across the continent, suggesting a disconnect between the aforementioned "youth bulge" and individual national democratic processes (Nkomo & Du Plooy, 2015). This article considers these issues in the context of Zimbabwe, exploring the aspirations of Zimbabwean youth in relation to socioeconomic turbulence. As a starting point, we look at various perspectives regarding Zimbabwe's socioeconomic dynamics. We then interrogate how the dominant narratives of youth-lived realities within the challenging context of Zimbabwe, with specific attention paid to how youth grapple to unlock opportunities that might enhance social functioning and better understand youth coping mechanisms. The article concludes by indicating and expanding on current gaps in present understandings of how what we call "youth-centred development" can apply to Zimbabwe, and where further investigative work is necessary.

Socioeconomic Context

According to Sachikonye (2017), Zimbabwe governance and development rankings in most indexes is very low. Zimbabwe is amongst the bottom 10 countries in overall governance in the Mo Ibrahim Index, and in the bottom 30 in development in the Human Development Index (Sachikonye, 2017). Zimbabwe's economy is heavily dependent on its mining and agriculture sectors. But these sectors and the economy at large severely contracted from 1998 to 2008. Then the economy recorded real growth of more than 10% per year in the period 2010-13, before slowing to roughly 4% in 2014 due to poor harvests, low diamond revenues, and decreased

investment (CIA World Factbook, 2017), and growth turned negative in 2016. Lower mineral prices, infrastructure and regulatory deficiencies, a poor investment climate, a large public and external debt burden, and extremely high government wage expenses all impede the country's economic performance (CIA World Factbook, 2017). Furthermore, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) notes Zimbabwean Foreign investment inflows stood at $387 million in 2011, then reached a high of $545 million in 2014 declining to $421 million and $319 million in 2015 and 2016. Among other issues, the lack of policy consistency, the government's disregard for property rights, and corruption have all been identified as factors dissuading investors from Zimbabwe's vast mineral deposits (Kachembere, 2017).

Politically, until late 2017, Zimbabwe had been ruled by Robert Mugabe and his ruling ZANU (PF) political party since independence in 1980. The military and others within the ruling party removed Mugabe.

In addition to Mugabe's long leadership, Zimbabwe had a devastating start to the 21st century, when it experienced severe economic decline, social turbulence and drought, resulting in much increased levels of poverty and vulnerability (Alexander and MacGregor 2013). Life expectancy had dropped sharply to 34 years for women and 37 years for men. Zimbabwe's substantial formal sector, strong post-independence history of service provision had marked it out as an 'exception' to West and Central African countries' experiences, which often providing the empirical basis for state 'failure' and social and political disorder theories. After 2000, Zimbabwe increasingly looked like such northern countries (Alexander & McGregor, 2013). At end of 2008, at the nadir of a decade-long economic slide, the inflation rate had reached world record-setting levels.

Politicians in Zimbabwe prefer to provide limited political space to the youth and restrict them to their youth league for-

mations. Depriving the youth socioeconomically is a modus operandi they use. It makes youths controlled by the politically and financially empowered' who purchase youths energy. It therefore follows that being able to address the social inequality challenges faced by the youth limits the ability of politicians to convince the youth to participate in violent acts (Musarurwa, 2016).

Conceptual Framework

Since the 1940s, sociologists and social anthropologists insisted that attention to youth, invariably referring to young men, is a panicked reaction to the impact of social change (Mate, 2014). In a country such as Zimbabwe calls to support innovative young activists and peace builders' efforts of addressing daily youth challenges are often dismissed by politicians and state media as political mischief and a push for regime change (Musarurwa, 2016). However, this does not tell us how young people are dealing with these challenges in different cultural spaces (Mate, 2014). Analysing youth means paying close attention to the social landscape's topology —to power and agency; public, national, and domestic spaces and identities, and their articulation and disjuncture; memory, history, and sense of change; globalization and governance; gender and class (Durham, 2000).

According to Ayele, Khan, and Sumberg (2017) renewed interest in youth and work reflects a heady combination of ideas, policy entrepreneurship, fear and crisis response, kicked off by the 2007 World Development Report, Development and the Next Generation (World Bank 2006). However, in many jurisdictions in Africa such interest faced an enduring politics of patronage and neopatrimonialism in which elected leaders are more concerned with using state resources to create and sustain clientelism and loyalty networks based around personal material benefit. Under neo-patrimonialism the media and oversight institutions such as the police, courts and

parliament become weak due to the illicit administrative practices that go unchecked (Research and Advocacy Unit, 2017). When neo-patrimonialism degenerates into a "predatory state", the consequences for citizens can be even more severe, as exemplified in Zimbabwe (Research and Advocacy Unit, 2017). In the same vein Honwana (2014) conceptualises the discourse of waithood encompassing the multifaceted nature of youth transitions to adulthood, which goes beyond securing a job and extends to social life and civic participation. For Honwana, waithood—youth's inability to access basic resources to become independent adults—does not result from a failed transition on the part of the youth themselves but rather from a breakdown in the socioeconomic system supposed to provide them with the opportunities to grow up healthy, get a good education, find employment, form families.

Chatora (2012) observes political participation forms include voting, regarded as the most common and most basic form of political action. Electoral participation also encompasses various other processes, such as citizens' involvement in election campaigns, attending meetings or attempting to access information on different political parties (Chatora, 2012). Citizens' engagement in grassroots politics within their local communities through community gatherings attendance and interaction with local political representatives are other forms of participation noted by Chatora. Political participation also includes actions such as attending civil protests or signing petitions on different issues and joining interest groups that engage in lobbying or political advocacy. Being a student is a transitory stage creating space for the youth population to experiment with various identities which protects them from exploitation, abuse, and exonerates them from onerous responsibilities (Chikwanha, 2000). Students played an important role in challenging ZANU (PF) before and after the birth of the MDC in 1999, which became the main challenger to ZANU (PF). For example, Hodgkinson (2013) is intrigued by the phenomenon of 'hardcore activism' among students

from 2000 in the context of subjection to acute political violence and deepening economic hardship and its effects on students' status and aspirations, represented by the 'University Bachelors' Association'. This comprised 'male students who lionised revolutionary struggle' and who engaged in 'aggressive debate' and 'working-class camaraderie' (Hodgkinson, 2013). He further notes after 2000, violent confrontations between student activists and ZANU(PF) created a hardened and militarised self-image that extolled bravery in demonstrations. Furthermore, adult idealism sees the youth as lacking knowledge and experience, and they are thus unwilling to give the youth much political space (Musarurwa, 2016). Youth aspirations and the challenges working against their realization are thus an important dynamic to Zimbabwe today.

Socioeconomic and Livelihoods Dynamics in Zimbabwe

The Zimbabwe 2012 population census notes the country has a young population with 77% of the 13 061 239 national population consisting of children and youth below 35 years of age. Youth aged 15-34 years number 4 702 046 which constitutes 36% of the national population and those aged between 15 -24 years are 20%. The youth aged 15-34 years constitute 56% of the economically active population (Murinda, 2014). While the education system churns out over 300 000 young people into the labour market annually, less than 10% of these are absorbed into formal employment. The rest have to find their way into the informal sector where they have to run their own enterprises for survival. The CIA World Factbook (2009) also cites a 95% unemployment rate for Zimbabwe, but cautions readers that, "true unemployment is unknown and, under current economic conditions, unknowable" (Central Intelligence Agency World Fact Book, 2017).

The government plans for improving employment are rendered impotent as the country is still reeling from a fragile economic cli-

mate. Zimbabwe is still struggling with the aftermath of the economic collapse and hyperinflation of the mid to late 2000s. The collapse of agriculture and attendant economic collapse of the economy precipitated by fast-track land reform in the absence of a programme of government support for small-scale farmers continues to undercut growth and economic diversification (Alexander, 2015). According to IMF:

> In the 1990s, Zimbabwe was one of the most developed economies in Africa. While many of the country's underlying strengths remain, some of its industrial and agricultural base has since eroded. The nominally dollarized economy now faces difficulties as diminishing net capital flows and an expansionary fiscal stance have generated an acute cash shortage that has prompted the use of quasi-currency instruments amid imposition of controls over capital and current account transactions (International Monetary Fund Zimbabwe Country Office, 2017).

Finally, the youth unemployment problem is multifaceted, and it has been attributed to some of the following causes:

i.   Mismatch between the skills possessed by the unemployed youth and labour market demands;

ii.   Poor economic performance (demand deficient unemployment) for a decade and half

iii. Increasing population growth;

iv.   Financial and social exclusion that reduce self- employment opportunities;

v.   Legal rigidities in labour laws (Muranda, Rangarirai, & Saruchera (2014).

Youth in Zimbabwe face limited access to credit to capitalise their micro-informal businesses. Despite potentially having brilliant business ideas, the youths are sometimes regarded as a high-risk clientele group as they do not have the prerequisite collateral. Therefore, they often cannot access project funding from the formal financial institutions. This has left the youth stuck in the vicious poverty

cycle as their businesses remain merely aspirational and micro in nature, providing income for subsistence purposes only.

Young people undertake a range of activities to "get by." Jones discusses *kukiya kiya*—Zimbabwe's 'economy of getting by' ranging from vegetable vending to illegal foreign currency trading to bribe-taking and pilfering at work. In local parlance '*kukiya-kiya*' refers to multiple forms of 'making do' (Jones 2010). To 'survive' youth will do what is 'necessary' towards that end and their lost faith—in institutions, in morals, in things 'straight'—is hard to recover, and frequently find another reason to suspend the rules 'just this once' (Jones, 2010, p. 286).

Furthermore, Department for International Development notes:

> An informal sector in Zimbabwe does not exist. Instead, there is an informal economy—the whole economy is an informal economy based on unwritten rules, relations, social capital and structures of power. Yet despite this, official government reports state that the informal economy contributes only about 20% of the Gross National Product.

> The informal economy is not just for the poor. A preoccupation with the poor fails to capture (i) the symbiotic interactions between the poor, the middle classes and elites; (ii) movements in and out of poverty; and (iii) deeper and more sustainable interventions based on opportunity rather than poverty driven understanding of local circumstances. (2017, p. 15)

The 2012 Population Census data shows that youths aged 15-34 years constitute 84% of the unemployed population and those aged 15-24 years constitute 55%. The statistics additionally indicate the highest concentration of 31% of the unemployed is between the ages of 20 and 24 years. There are higher levels of unemployment among female youths despite there being more females than males in the population.

The Zimbabwe 2011 Labour Force and Child Labour Survey (LFCLS) indicates the overall unemployment rate for youth aged 14-34 years is 15%, the majority (87%) of the employed youth aged 15-34 years are considered to be in informal employment; 9% in formal employment and 4% in unclassifiable employment (Murinda,

2014). Implemented labour market interventions like the Ministry of Youth, Indigenization and Empowerment non-formal skills training provision targeting school drop-outs and disabled youths are adversely affected by outdated equipment and prohibitive fees (UN Country Team 2014).

A Tech-Savvy Youth and Impacts of Extended ICTs Uptake

Internet users have thus evolved from consumers of web-based content to 'prosumers' who also produce content. This shift has led to the development of many different forms of social media platforms. These web-based tools include Internet forums, weblogs, social blogs, microblogs, wikis, podcasts, photographs, videos, rating and social bookmarking. There are six different categories of social media platforms: collaborative projects (e.g. Wikipedia); blogs and microblogs (e.g. Twitter, real-time information networks); video content communities (e.g. YouTube); social networking sites (e.g. Facebook); virtual game worlds (e.g. World of Warcraft) and virtual social worlds (e.g. SecondLife); and picture sharing sites (e.g. Flickr) (Chatora, 2012).

The youthful Nelson Chamisa, former leader of the MDC's National Youth Assembly, was elevated to the powerful Vice President position in his party and recently became leader after Morgan Tsvangirai passed away from cancer in 2018. Notably, Nelson Chamisa was the youngest government minister during the inclusive government between 2009 and 2013, heading the ICT ministry. During his tenure, he embarked on an extensive programme to improve internet connection and phone connection across the country and digitalising government departments earning him compliments from President Mugabe of being the supersonic Minister (Newsday, 2011). Resultantly, technological advancement in Zimbabwe has become a platform for anti-government protests mobilisation, as the majority of the youth own a mobile phone device. In Africa social

media has reshaped structures and methods of contemporary political communication by influencing interaction between politicians and citizens in Zimbabwe it remains a miss and hit process (Mushakavanhu, 2014). With a mobile penetration rate of 106 %, more Zimbabweans now access information and news via mobile gadgets. Data and Internet subscriptions are now in the region of 5,6 million and disgruntled citizens—particularly urban young people—have turned to social media, venting their frustration (Mushakavanhu, 2014). Protests and work stoppages have been encouraged by social media activists, most prominently Pastor Evan Mawarire, founder of the #ThisFlag movement, which was fronted when Mawarire deftly used social media in a quest for justice and rights. One of his videos went viral. "ThisFlag," he says in the video, "every day that it flies, is begging for you to get involved, to say something, to cry out and say, 'Why must we be in this situation?'" Social media's influential role has underlined the vast spread of internet use in Zimbabwe, primarily on mobile smartphones and, like in the so-called Arab Spring uprisings in 2011, it has political ramifications (Tendi, 2016).

Evan Mawarire has left an indelible mark on youth political activism as his cyber activism was based on uploading his videos on YouTube, Facebook and WhatsApp aimed at mobilising the youth to stand up and speak out against government led injustice and corruption. Professor Jonathan Moyo, then a government minister, went on to describe #ThisFlag supporters as "nameless, faceless trolls", and initiated his own social media campaign, #OurFlag, which has not been adopted with nearly as much enthusiasm. Mawarire insisted that he is non-partisan and has no ties to any political parties. He argued that politicians from across the spectrum have failed Zimbabwe—not just the ruling ZANU (PF).

#ThisFlag was very successful in this endeavour leading to the emergence of the leaderless #*Tajamuka/Sijikile* led by a coalition of youth organisations from both political and civil society organisa-

tion, *#Tasvinura* led by youth in Masvingo province, *#MyZimbabwe* led by MDC Assembly, *#BeatthePot* led by MDC Women's Assembly, the #NERA (National Electoral Reform Agenda) and *#ThisGraduate* led by unemployed youthful graduates. It seems, in most cases the protesters are young and leaderless but, united by social media. Most recently after the ascendancy of Nelson Chamisa as the president of MDC, and MDC Alliance presidential candidate we have seen the emergence of *#Generational Consensus*. This platform is championing for youth inclusion in politics, business and society, and it is openly supporting the candidature of Nelson Chamisa. It has presence on social media, as well as its programmes like #run for change. It argues that is the time for the post-independence generation to take over the reins of the country. The group clearly states that by advocating for general consensus, it is not declaring a war with the older generation but advocating for the inclusion of youth in mainstream. MDC has reserved 20 % of the parliamentary seats to the youth. Generation consensus has become a key rallying point of these candidates.

However, the media freedoms are limited, and freedom to assembly has not been fully freed, due to the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) and the Public Order and Security Act of 2002 (POSA) respectively. At one point on 5 August 2016, the Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe banned data bundle and airtime promotions by cellphone network providers, which was widely viewed as being an attempt to stifle impoverished youth from having access to internet and ultimately reduce protests. Although the new Constitution of Zimbabwe's Amendment No. 20 has rendered these laws unconstitutional, the ZANU (PF) government in the new dispensation post the November 2017 events has not proactively softened these laws application on people's rights, especially opposition and civil society sectors. This effectively means that internet access became significantly more expensive for Zimbabwe's unemployed youth. Further-

more, the government has crafted the Computer Crime and Cyber Crime Bill to control online activism, but it might find it difficult to keep track of services such as WhatsApp, which now operate with end-to-end encryption making them very hard to keep track of. 46 people in 2011 including Munyaradzi Gwisai, a professor and labour activist and former legislator in Zimbabwe were arrested, charged with treason or with attempting to overthrow the government by unconstitutional means, after convening a meeting in which they watched videos of the protests in Egypt and Tunisia and discussed their implications on the situation in Zimbabwe (Chatora, 2012). Forty of the activists were later freed due to insufficient evidence against them while the remaining six were offered bail by high court judge Samuel Kudya, who described the evidence against the six as unsubstantiated. According to Chatora (2012), in the ruling Judge Kudya said, "I see no iota of evidence that any Zimbabwean ever contemplated any Tunisian or Egyptian revolution."

For Chatora (2012), this statement indicates that these arrests were politically motivated and meant to dissuade people from copying protests in the Arab world. In October 2017 cabinet restructuring resulted in the new Ministry of Cyber Security, Threat Detection and Mitigation formation. Its creation came after the government said would now treat social media as a security threat after accusing users of spreading rumours about shortages of basic goods, which caused panic buying and price increases. This showed the government's unease with social media after activists such as Pastor Evan Mawarire and his #This Flag movement used social media to organise a stay-at-home demonstration, the biggest anti-government protest in a decade. The new ministry will also be responsible for bringing to parliament a long awaited cyber-crimes bill that criminalise false information posted on the internet, revenge porn, cyber-bullying and online activity against the government. Significantly, the new Zimbabwean president Mr Emmerson Mnangagwa on 11 January

2018 joined other netizens as part of the national dialogue and to better listen to the citizens' wishes (Chronicle newspaper, 2018).

Youth Participation in Governance and Accountability Issues

The 2011 State of the African Youth Report revealed that a realisation of a new emergent and integrated Africa can only emerge if the bulging youth population is mobilised, equipped to contribute to integration, peace and development agenda (African Union Commission & United Nations Population Fund Agency, 2011:1; see also Bartlett 2010). However, Honwana (2014) contends formal institutions and authorities often view youths' ways of operating as distasteful, dangerous and criminal and their relationship with the state and the formal sector is marked by tension and mutual distrust.

In Zimbabwe, the state enforces laws that delimit and control the spaces of legitimate activity and mark them as outsiders. Furthermore, Zhangazha (2017) argues Zimbabwe is straddled by an aged/ageing political elite (and its families, ethnic groups) using the state to not only enrich itself but also to co-opt masses into a specific silence that leaves them with no choice but to appear to accept the invincibility of the ruling party. They promote the view that change of leadership can only be found by being part of the ruling establishment (Zhangazha, 2017), as witnessed by the November 2017 coup when the 93 year old Robert Mugabe was replaced by the 75 year old Emmerson Mnangagwa, yet ZANU (PF) remained in power. In Zimbabwe this is heightened by the considerable polarisation along political lines. The greatest obstacle to participation for most citizens in both rural and urban areas as well as women and youth is the nature and structure of the state institution of the local government (Research and Advocacy Unit, 2016). Active citizenship is understood to mean the agency exerted by citizen through their voice

and participation in the socio-economic life of their communities (Research and Advocacy Unit, 2016).

In the same vein according to Chikwanha (2000), the absence for a long time of effective opposition in Zimbabwe left space that was filled by the students (especially university students) who translated and actioned many public concerns like violation of human rights by the government. However, as a privileged lot with access to information, it is amazing that their activism is not only largely political but also violent (see also Hodgkinson 2013). The biggest challenge observed in the youth activism activities in Zimbabwe is their piecemeal approach to doing things. An analysis of the demands made by the #ThisFlag movement, as well as *Tajamuka/Sesjikile's* 10 principles, shows that they are all advocating for the same things. What differs, then, is the manner in which they are laying out their demands and taking action (Musarurwa, 2016).

Student bodies began using any political event perceived to be unpopular, in order to vent their anger at the authorities (Makunike, 2015). Importantly, Zimbabwe's student bodies, are now split into two since 2004, one backed by ZANU (PF), i.e. Zimbabwe Congress of Students Union (ZICOSU), while Zimbabwe National Students Union is the oldest one, inclined to oppositional politics. This fragmentation and political inclination has rendered them less effective, though one could argue that it does provide a range of views to the student body politic, which could be valued in terms of freedom of expression. Finally, Madondo (2004), argued that barely six months after the June 2000 parliamentary election (in which the MDC took 57 of the 120 contested seats), the National Youth Service (NYS) proposal by government deliberately sought to hijack Zimbabwe's youth. According to Madondo (2004),

> The NYS also aimed to in still a "sense of responsible citizenship among the youth" and to prepare them for "the world and for work in their country". It proposed to inculcate youth with a sense of national duty, patriotism and responsibility to uphold Zimbabwean and African culture and val-

ues. The syllabus proposed to "integrate youth in all government policies", "provide opportunities for youth employment and participation in development" and "develop vocational skills". It also proposed to "reduce teen-age pregnancies, the spread of HIV/AIDS, alcohol and substance abuse… (and) promote gender equality". An NYS certificate of attendance became a pre-requisite for joining the army or police or for enrolling in government vocational training institutions.

Ominously, "politically conscious youth" creation, the catch-phrase of the Youth Brigades, was the main argument for the new programme by the then Minister of Youth, Gender and Employment Creation, Border Gezi (Madondo, 2004).

The Way Forward for Youth Empowerment

Existence of youths' exclusion undermines the pursuit of social justice and egalitarian ideals. The challenge for the government and civil society is therefore.to achieve inclusiveness in youth centred socio-economic development. The following section of the article proposes strategies that can galvanise youths' visibility and empowerment on socio-economic and governance discourse. Stereotypical perceptions of youth, politically and traditionally, as ignorant, problematic and useless have led to young people's exclusion from decision-making processes—even on issues that they could solely deal with. Youth are virtually left with no room to learn by doing. African governments are busy looking for miracles to solve the problems in Africa. Yet the biggest miracle is right in front of them: African youth (CODESRIA, 2017).

A shift in working with young people, and valuing them as assets - as advisors, colleagues and stakeholders - is crucial if development policies are to be truly representative and effective. Youth participation means the active, informed and voluntary involvement of people in decision-making and the life of their communities (both locally and globally) (Restless Development, 2010). Yet youths' engagement to promote their participation in decision-making in Zim-

babwe has been minimal. Over the past 30 years, youths have periodically been recruited into quasi-military groups or 'youth wings' of political parties, often to perpetrate politically motivated acts of violence (Ndebele & Billing, 2011).

A rights-based approach to addressing the needs of young people creates greater focus on the root causes of poverty by highlighting the importance of specific rights and the obstacles to realising those rights. Secondly, a rights-based approach makes it easier to specify the criteria for measuring outcomes. Thirdly, governments and other agencies need to give attention to finding ways to better involve youths in all of social, governance and economic activities. Governments need to involve citizens including the poorest, as far as practicable, in the development and implementation of public policy to give effect to their right (United Nations Population Fund , 2010).

In the backdrop of the country's perennial unemployment, Zimbabwe should try Employment Generation or Guaranteed Schemes (EGS) targeting the unemployed youth. The Overseas Development Institute (2011: 1) defines EGSs as a form of employment programme that guarantees employment, in return for cash or in-kind payment, to a specified population over a sustained or ongoing period. This is what the Zimbabwean government can do to remove the restless youths from the streets rather than resorting to teargas. In South Africa, for example, their EGS is the Community Work Programme whereby participants are provided with part time community useful work for two days per week, which amounts to eight days per month, 100 days spread throughout the year, earning R71. 00 per day (Mathende, 2015).   It is evident that EGS may have both workfare and welfare benefits for youth. If replicated in Zimbabwe, the country can enjoy youth induced crimes. However, from a political realist perspective (Kumar 2010), programmes like these can also be used to manipulate the youth by the ruling ZANU (PF) regime. The private sector in Zimbabwe is in its comatose state, and

unable to contribute meaningfully to job creation, therefore the government should take a principal role to create jobs by being the employer of resort, as long as it does not politicize such a scheme. A co-ordinated Labour Market Information System could be established to monitor labour market trends and facilitate the designing, planning and monitoring of policies and programmes geared at employment generation more broadly and for youth in particular (Chingarande & Guduza, 2011). Such help can also take the form of technical and vocational education and training programmes, as discussed by Kerr (2017). Another possible mechanism to assist youths includes the promotion of savings groups, informal groups typically consisting of 15 to 30 members who meet on a regular basis (usually weekly) to save and borrow money, can foster financial inclusion, financial literacy, entrepreneurship, and life skills. The central proposition is that access to financial services will support new income-generating activities and job creation.

Youth Development Advocacy and Capacity Building

For under-18s, the right to express one's views freely and have them taken into account in decision-making, in accordance with one's age and maturity, is set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child Article 12. The greater autonomy and participation rights of older youth (18 to 24-year-olds) are perhaps less visible, being dispersed across a number of civil, political, economic and social rights frameworks. However, participation in development "of the entire population and all individuals" is a theme of the UN Declaration on the Right to Development (1986) (Restless Development, 2010).

Africa is a young continent. Yet despite their numerical strength, many still regard the youth as a transitory social category driven by emotions and impulses and largely incapable of making informed political choices and decisions or 'matured' enough to

govern (University of Peace, 2017). Thus, age qualification is one the criteria for contesting political office in many African countries and the implication is that a gerontocratic culture flourishes in which the average age of Africa's heads of state is around 62 years. As such, a generational disconnect exists between much of the youth population and the rulers in Africa, which helps to account for the limited youth involvement in politics and mass migration for "greener pastures" outside their country, if not the continent (University of Peace, 2017).

Zimbabwean civil society have been very proactive and well organized in terms of their engagement on the Agenda 2030, which are the SDGs. SDGs are also known as "Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development." Interventions by civil society include:

The establishment of a national youth taskforce on SDGs titled 'Youth4SDGs' bringing together 100 youth organizations working in 10 provinces of Zimbabwe in 2016. The overall objective of the 'Youth4SDGs' is to provide strategic direction for youth inclusion and participation in the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs in Zimbabwe. The Youth4SDGS also seeks to educate youth in rural, peri-urban, mining areas, farms and urban areas on the SDGs, their importance and link to policies and national development in Zimbabwe (Government of Zimbabwe, 2017).

Other initiatives include finding space on public media for youth. For example, every Tuesday evening from 6.30pm to 7.00pm young people come into the studio on ZiFM, a radio station, to broadcast a weekly show hosted by UNICEF with support from the Swedish Government, called the Youth-Zone (Y-Zone). The goal of the Y-Zone is to serve as a voice for young people on their development needs (UNICEF, 2014). The Junior Parliament of Zimbabwe and other youths have been using the platform to advocate for various issues affecting their constituencies such as education, health, budgeting and water among other issues. Also, robust gender analy-

sis to ensure both young men and women are supported to enhance their levels of participation is also emerging (Ndebele & Billing, 2011). Furthermore, in pursuit of the 1999 Nziramasanga Commission, the Ministry of Higher Education, is rolling out the Science, Technology and Mathematics (STEM programme), encouraging youth and students in high school to take up science subjects. The government will then assist with the payment of their school fees. The programme aims to close the skills gap in the technology field while enabling the youths to be employable as technology is the mainstay of the Zimbabwe's developing economy.

However, given its political history the danger of the state or political parties in Zimbabwe advocating for "youth involvement" is high, given a long history of tendentious efforts to use youth for parochial political purposes, including intimidation and violence. Besides the economic role of the Ministry of Youth Indigenisation and Empowerment, the same ministry running the National Youth Services, which in the early 2000s unleashed violence on citizens. This programme has been manipulated by ZANU (PF). Though this paramilitary arm of the ministry went dormant during the time of the inclusive government, currently there are reports that the organ is being resuscitated to counter the various youth led protests as a way to safeguard the ruling ZANU (PF) government. Political inclusion of youth in countries like Zimbabwe thus run the risk of perpetuating non-democratic activities.

Conclusion

This discussion shows that Zimbabwean youths have a pivotal national development role despite manifold socio-political challenges they are experiencing. The situation calls for heightened political will and solidarity between youths and various duty bearers. As Ighobor, (2013) puts it, Zimbabwe's youth in particular and Africa in general should be viewed as either a "ticking time bomb" or an

opportunity. It is an opportunity if the government acts now; if not, the government and those to come will be haunted, for example, by chronic youth unemployment. If this continues, Zimbabwe in the future will have a generation of older persons who have never worked for wages in their lives, and without old age pensions to talk about. This is an indication that by solving problems of youths to-day, governments will be solving future problems, thus investing in future.

Given their energy, enthusiasm and innovativeness, young people have the potential to contribute immensely to the socio-economic development of the country. As such they must be placed at the forefront of building the economy of the country. This article therefore shows the need to create an enabling environment and opportunities for the socio-economic empowerment of the youth. It is the collective responsibility of a majority elected government, the private sector, civil society and development agencies to design and implement practical programmes to generate decent employment, reduce poverty among the youth and economically empower them to play a more meaningful role in the development and upliftment of their communities and the nation at large.

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