

Research Topic:

Contribution, Opportunities and Challenges faced by African Youth towards Sustainable Development, the case of Dete, Zimbabwe

Author Details

Nolwazi Ndlovu, MSc Project Management Liverpool John Moores University, BSc Development Studies, Lupane State University Zimbabwe. ndlovunolwazit@gmail.com

Session

Population & Economic Development: Leveraging Africa's Demographic Potential: Strategies for Sustainable Development

1. Abstract

Youth's role in development has gained consideration over the last few years, the words "participation" and "inclusion" dominating the development discourse. Literature has been generated emphasizing on the untapped potential of this demographic group, and how their creativity and energy can be turned into talent that responds to contemporary African problems. Over 60% of the population in Africa is under the age of 35 making the continent the youngest. Proponents of the youth bulge theory suggest that this population is a threat to peace and development in Africa. However, this paper argues that if fully invested in, young people can be turned into an economic dividend that will unravel Africa's challenges. Historically, youth and women have habitually been placed at the receptive end of development hence, their contribution to development overlooked. Using a desk view and qualitative research approach, the paper examines the contribution of youth, unpacking different interventions and initiatives, presenting challenges and putting forward possible recommendations to accelerate youth inclusion in development. A sample of 30 young people was randomly selected and questionnaires and focused group discussions were used as data collection tools. The data collected assessed knowledge of development goals among youths, participation in any of the goals in their community and the challenges that they face. Sample size was mixed including youth leading development initiatives those in school and out of school for diversity. Findings showed that youth have been active in community development initiatives such as climate action, smart agriculture, governance and politics among others. The paper examines whether or not Africa's policy systems are conducive and capacitating enough to enable youth to thrive as change makers. The paper highly recommended context; evidence-based research and effective documentation to rewrite and tell authentic success stories of African youth and their role in development.

Keywords: Development, Sustainable Development, Youth inclusion

2. Methodology

The study was conducted in a local community of Dete in Hwange National Park, Zimbabwe. Qualitative research method was used alongside with desk view research. It examined the role that young people play towards sustainable development in Africa. What they have been doing and what they can do. The study also navigated through some challenges that young people face in accelerating development looking at both technical and policy challenges. To collect data, a sample size of 30 youths was randomly selected, structured questionnaires were distributed and a total of two focused group discussion carried out separately with the youth males and females involved in community development. The study opted for a qualitative research approach because it goes beyond numbers and seeks to understand the why.

3. Summary of Findings

- Out of 30 participants 22 indicated to be involved in a development initiative and is actively participating in the activities. Sections that had the most participants included thematic areas of SRHR, advocacy, education and climate change.
- Females indicated support in one or more cause in their community than their male counterparts.
- While some youth did not have affiliations to organizations they still contribute to development through the silent African giving, volunteering their time and labor which is woven in the philosophy of ubuntu.
- **Finance Gap: More** than half of the 30 questionnaire respondents indicated that funding was a major constraint in doing development work. Some of the FGD participants indicated that when funds were not availed in time, the grassroots organizations/ initiatives were incapacitated because they were not in a position to carry out their planned activities The reliance on donor funding without any backup or financial sustainability plan results in unfinished projects.
- **Endemic Shrinking Civic Space/ Strict Laws and Regulations:** The research established that youth and women led philanthropic initiatives often bear the impacts of shrunked spaces in the philanthropy ecosystem. Laws and

policies that slow down the ease of operation or the processes of formalization results in less participation in development. This finding also relates to Njokus paper titled The State and the Securitization of Civil Society Organizations in Nigeria which addresses the growing challenge of shrinking civic space, which is becoming endemic in most African countries.

- **Inadequate Relevant Skills:** The study findings suggested that most youth and women from the sampled population did not have the technical know how to lead and implement sustainable development initiatives with less than half having completed a relevant course and without ordinary level education. The essential skills including basic project management skills, writing grant