

The state of youth policies in the Central African sub region

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ABSTRACT

The growing population of young people in the world today makes them an indispensable factor in international, regional, national and local development today. The UN World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY) and the African Union's African Youth Charter all attest to the concern development stakeholders pay to youth development. This paper analysis youth policy within 9 member states of the Central African Sub region, showcasing the vital, yet significant role that polities are creating in fostering an enabling environment for youth participation. It explores the tenets of youth policy within this sub region by depicting how the participation of youths in societal activities and decision making instances should be an asset and a prerequisite for sustainable economic growth and social development. It also expresses abysmal concern about the magnitude of youth unemployment and underemployment throughout in Africa and its profound implications for the future of our societies, particularly those residing in the Central African sub region. The study is descriptive and applies a qualitative approach based on expert interviews and desk research. It employs the explanatory case study approach, and the combined anthropological research techniques through the use of key informant interview, written records and non-participant observations. The authors also conducted research in major databases like google scholar, PUB Med with the search phrase being youth policies, participation and youth governance. The 2016 Youth Development Index Report indicates that all 9 Central African countries have a low index, and 4 of the 9 countries are ranked in the bottom 10 of the classification. The findings also reveal that conflicts, underdevelopment and lack of political willingness are customarily accountable for the lagging of this Sub region in youth policy matters. The paper also proposes indicators to monitor and evaluate Youth Policies in the Central African Sub region, using the model proposed by Tanya BASARAB, develop initiatives to promote youth participation, and encourage networking among youth organizations and institutions with the Central African Sub region.

Keywords: Youth policy, participation, ECCAS, sustainable development.

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INTRODUCTION

According to the Commonwealth Secretariat, youths between the ages of 15 and 29 constitute 1.8 billion of the world's population. Close to 87 percent live in developing countries, and in Africa, one in three people is a young person.¹ Youths therefore constitute an important stake as far as the planning and implementation of global development agendas are concerned.

The United Nations has always recognized that the

imagination, ideals and energies of young people are vital for the development of the world. This dates back to 1965 when member states of the UN endorsed the *Declaration on the Promotion of Youth, the ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between peoples*.² The UN General Assembly observed 1985 as the International Youth Year: Participation, Development and Peace, drawing international attention to the important role young people play in the world, in particular their potential

¹ *Global Youth Development Index and Report 2016*, London, Commonwealth Secretariat, 2016, p 5

² *World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY)*, New York, United Nations, 2010, p i

contribution to development.³ This explains why in 1995, the UN adopted an international strategy; *the World Programme of Action for Youth to the year 2000 and beyond*. This was a mechanism to strengthen the UNs commitment to young people by directing the international community's response to the challenges of youth into the next millennium. Furthermore, the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution A/RES/58/133 in December 2003⁴ in which the UN decided to devote, at its sixtieth session, in 2005, two plenary meetings to review the situation of youth and achievements produced in the implementation of the World Programme of Action ten years after its adoption. This Resolution also "recognized the importance of the full and effective participation of youth and youth organizations at the local, national, regional and international levels in promoting and implementing the World Programme of Action and in evaluating the progress achieved and the obstacles encountered in its implementation".

Therefore, there is the need for governments to adopt policies that are youth specific so as to address youth related concerns. This was a major topic of discussion during the 1st Global Forum on Youth Policies in Baku, Azerbaijan from 28th to 30th October, 2016 convened by the United Nations, the European Youth Council, YouthPolicy.org and other development stakeholders. Based on statistics from youthpolicy.org, the Forum noted that as of April 2014, of 198 countries, 122 countries (62%) had a youth policy, up from 99 (50%).⁵ This meant that national governments were becoming increasingly aware of the need for adequate legislation and policies to meet the needs, aspirations and demands of young people.⁶ The outcome of this Forum was the Baku Commitment to Youth Policies and the Global Initiative on National Youth Policies (GINYP)⁷ highlighting a renewed engagement to developing and implementing youth policies globally.

This paper assesses the state of youth policies in the Central African Sub region. It presents an overview of Central Africa; the aim and organization of the paper; discussions of the major findings; and the way forward for youth policies in Central Africa.

BACKGROUND TO THE CENTRAL AFRICAN SUB REGION

The Central African sub region is an analogous term that includes 9 African countries. These are Angola, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Republic of the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the

Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, and São Tomé and Príncipe.⁸ It has a total surface area of 6,612,667 km² and a total population of 110,791,315 inhabitants. All of the states in the UN sub region of Middle Africa, plus those otherwise commonly reckoned in Central Africa (11 states in total), constitute the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS). But relative to this study, we shall mainly analyze 9 active member states of ECCAS. Thus, Burundi and Rwanda shall not be assessed in our study, because both countries mostly have affiliations with East African Community. (Rwanda pulled out of ECCAS in 2008 to concentrate on its membership to the East African Community (EAC) and COMESA. Rwanda officially confirmed its return to ECCAS on 18 August 2016)⁹ (Table 1, Figure 1).

An overview of ECCAS (Economic Community of Central African States)

This overview examines the formation of ECCAS, its objectives and organizational structure, and its socio-economic status.

Formation of ECCAS

In December 1981, the leaders of the Customs and Economic Union of Central African States (UDEAC) agreed to form a wider economic community of Central African States. The Economic Community of Central African States was established on October 1983 by members of UDEAC, Sao Tome and Principe and members of the Economic Community of the Great Lakes Countries, Zaire, Burundi and Rwanda.¹⁰ ECCAS was however inactive for several years due to financial constraints, conflicts in the Great Lakes area as well as the war in Democratic Republic of Congo where member States (Rwanda and Angola) were fighting on different sides. Nevertheless, in October 1999, ECCAS was formally designated into the African Economic Community as one of the eight pillars of the African Union.¹¹

Objectives and organizational structure of ECCAS

The objectives of ECCAS as per the Treaty establishing it are:

a) The elimination of customs duties and any other

³ *Ibid*

⁴ A/58/PV.77 22 Dec. 2003 GA/10223 on Policies and programmes involving youth

⁵ *Report of the 1st Global Forum on Youth Policies, 28 – 30 October 2014* Baku, Azerbaijan, p 11

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.* pp 20 – 26










⁸ <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methods/m49/m49regin.htm>. Accessed on 24th February, 2017 at 10:37 am

⁹ <http://www.uneca.org/oria/pages/eccas-economic-community-central-african-states>. Accessed on 24th February, 2017, at 10:40 am

¹⁰ <http://www.uneca.org/oria/pages/eccas-economic-community-central-african-states>. Accessed on 24th February 2017,

¹¹ *Ibid*

Table 1. Member states of the Central African sub region.

Name	Capital	Currency	Official languages	Area (km ²)	Population
 Angola	Luanda	Kwanza	Portuguese	1,246,700	25,022,294
 Cameroon	Yaoundé	Central African CFA franc	French, English	472,710	23,344,878
 Central African Republic	Bangui	Central African CFA franc	Sango, French	622,980	4,900,000
 Chad	N'Djamena	Central African CFA franc	French, Arabic	1,259,200	14,037,106
 Democratic Republic of the Congo	Kinshasa	Congolese franc	French	2,267,050	77,267,000
 Republic of the Congo	Brazzaville	Central African CFA franc	French	341,500	4,620,266
 Equatorial Guinea	Malabo	Central African CFA franc	Spanish, French	28,050	845,000
 Gabon	Libreville	Central African CFA franc	French	257,670	1,725,665
 São Tomé and Príncipe	São Tomé	São Tomé and Príncipe Dobra	Portuguese	960	190,506

Source: <http://unctadstat.unctad.org/CountryProfile/GeneralProfile/en-GB/004/index.html>. Accessed on 24th February, 2017, from 11 am to 11:24 am



Figure 1. Map showing the 11 countries of the Economic Community of Central African States. Source: <http://www.uneca.org/oria/pages/eccas-economic-community-central-african-states>. Accessed on 24th February 2017, at 11:28 am.

charges having an equivalent effect on imports and exports between member States;

b) The abolition of quantitative restrictions and other trade barriers;

c) The establishment and maintenance of an external common customs tariff;

d) The establishment of a trade policy vis-à-vis third States;

e) The progressive removal of barriers to the free movement of persons, goods, services and capital and to the right of establishment;

f) The harmonization of national policies in order to promote Community activities, particularly in industry, transport and communications, energy, agriculture, natural resources, trade, currency and finance, human resources, tourism, education, culture, science and technology;

g) The establishment of a Cooperation and Development Fund;

h) The rapid development of States which are landlocked, semi-landlocked, island or part-island and/or belong to the category of the least advanced countries;

i) Any other joint activities which can be undertaken by member States for achieving Community aims.¹²

The ECCAS Treaty provides for the following institutions:

i) The Conference of Heads of State and Government, which is the supreme body of ECCAS;

ii) The Council of Ministers;

iii) The Court of Justice;

iv) The General Secretariat which is the executive organ of the Community;

v) The Advisory Commission;

vi) Specialized Technical Committees.¹³

Socio-economic status of ECCAS

The Central African Sub region is rich in oil and mineral

¹² Article 4 (2), Treaty establishing the Economic Community of Central African States signed on 18th October 1983 in Libreville Gabon

¹³ Article 7 (1), Treaty establishing the Economic Community of Central African States

resources. According to the African Development Bank, it is the richest region on the continent in terms of natural resource endowments.¹⁴ Oil reserves are estimated at 31.3 billion barrels, representing 28 per cent of total continental reserves,¹⁵ and is considered as one of the main engines of growth.¹⁶ Hence, overdependence on oil will slow economic growth when oil process plummet on the world market. Angola, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo have a rich variety of minerals and ores, especially diamonds, uranium, gold, copper, iron, cobalt, manganese, etc.¹⁷ the Table 2 shows some selected regional economic indicators for the ECCAS region.

According to UNECA, overall growth in Central Africa dropped from 3.5 per cent in 2014 to 3.4 per cent in 2015, despite improved mining performance.¹⁸ Although most countries maintained relatively high growth, UNECA notes that security concerns in the Central African Republic and lower oil production in Equatorial Guinea contributed to a decline in Sub regional GDP.¹⁹

According to Angela Meyer, Central Africa is one of Africa's most fragile and vulnerable regions, having witnessed a majority of all the coup d'états, crisis and conflicts that have taken place in Africa since 1990.²⁰ The current security challenges which include cross-border crime and terrorism, maritime security, the risk of electoral violence and the unsettled crisis in the CAR²¹ means this region can be referred to as the "hot" zone of Africa. This has had a negative impact on the political, economic and socio-cultural development of Central Africa. Youth policies, youth issues, youth budget and their participation is still very blurred in this sub region. Such a climate of uncertainty means the sub region would be lagging in the 15 priority areas of the WPAY (Education, Employment Hunger and Poverty, Health, Environment, Drug abuse, Juvenile Delinquency, Leisure-time activities, Girls and young women, Full and effective participation of youth in the life of society and in decision making, Globalization, Information and communications technology, HIV/AIDS, Armed conflict and Intergenerational Issues). However, this paper critically analysis how these priority areas are taken into consideration in policy making and implementation in countries focused by this study.

¹⁴ *African Development Report 2015: Growth, Poverty and Inequality Nexus: Overcoming Barriers to Sustainable Development*, African Development Bank, 2016, p 18

¹⁵ African Development Bank, *Central Africa Regional Integration Strategy Paper (RISP) 2011 – 2015*, 2011, p 11

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p 6

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p 5

¹⁸ UNECA, *Greening Africa's Industrialization: Economic Report on Africa 2016*, Addis Ababa, United Nations, 2016, p 10

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Angela Meyer, *Preventing Conflict in Central Africa: ECCAS caught between ambitions, challenges and reality*, Central Africa Report Issue 3, Institute for Security Studies, August 2015, p 3

²¹ *Ibid.*

Table 2. Selected regional indicators for ECCAS (2014).

GDP	US\$ 257.8 billion
GDP per capita	US\$ 1631.4
Area (sq. km)	6.5 million sq.km
Total population	158.3 million
Total imports	US\$ 63.7 billion
Total exports	US\$ 108.1 billion

Source: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development statistical database (2016) on <http://unctadstat.unctad.org/EN/Index.html>. Accessed on 24th February 2017, at 11:40 am.

Status of youths in the Central African sub region

Generally, youths in all the Sub regions of Africa have almost similar characteristics. The African Union Commission noted in 2014 that of Africa's 1.03 billion population, 60 percent are youths under the age of 35 years.²² According to Lori Ashford (2007), 44 percent of Sub-Saharan Africa's population in 2006 was under the age of 15; hence it is the youngest region of the world.²³ It is estimated that by 2050, one third of the world's population will live in Africa with West, Central and East African countries projected to experience large youth population increases.²⁴ African governments, especially those in the Central African Sub region are therefore faced with the daunting task of providing opportunities and meeting the needs of this fast growing youth population.

Youth unemployment rates are relatively high in Africa. According to Gyimah-Brempong and Mwangi Kimenyi, youths constitute about 37 percent of Africa's labour force, and account for about 60 percent of total unemployment in Africa.²⁵ Most jobs in Africa particularly for youths are generated outside the formal economy according to UNECA.²⁶ The informal economy absorbs nearly 70 percent of workers in Central, East, Southern and West Africa, and informal workers have limited protection, poor working conditions and low incomes.²⁷

As concerns decision making, youths in Africa are not represented or are underrepresented in formal decision making bodies. Most often, youths under the age of 35 are rarely found in formal political leadership positions, and it is common to refer to politicians as 'young' if they are below 35 to 40 years of age. In most Central African countries, youths are underrepresented or absent in formal political institutions and processes such as

²² *African Development Report 2015*, p 115

²³ Ashford L., *Africa's Youth Population: Risk or Opportunity*, Population Reference Bureau, 2007, p 2

²⁴ *African Development Report 2015*, p 116

²⁵ Gyimah-Brempong K & Kimenyi M. S., *Youth Policy and the Future of African Development*, Africa Growth Initiative at the Brookings Institute, Working Paper 9, 2013, p 6

²⁶ *Economic Report on Africa 2016*, p 28

²⁷ *Ibid.* pp 28 - 29

Parliaments, political parties, local councils and public administrations.

THE AIM AND ORGANISATION OF THE PAPER

This paper is written for the purpose of sharing knowledge concerning the state of youths in the Central African Sub region. In that focus, the paper particularly seeks to assess the state of Youth Policies in this sub region. It is assumed that having a clear understanding of policy issues and participation in socio-economic development and political life, then it becomes possible to understand the key areas for improvement in Youth related policies. Furthermore, it could pave the way to realize valid initiatives that can enhance policy implementation and promote participation for the welfare of the young people in the sub region.

In its design, the paper is descriptive in nature and has applied a qualitative approach. The paper has been written based on the secondary information collected from various sources. The documentary review method was used to facilitate access to such information needed to write this paper. The discussion part on in this paper has centered on two main areas of focus. These include the discussion on the state of youth policy and participation in the Central African sub region, and the challenges hindering youth participation and development in the Sub region. The conclusion and recommendations have also been provided in relation to what is discussed in this paper.

DISCUSSION

The discussion focuses on the state of youth policy and participation in the Central African Sub region on the one hand, and the challenges hindering youth participation and development in Central Africa on the other hand.

The state of youth policy and participation in the Central African Sub region

This part describes the state of youth policy and participation in the region. It presents an overview of youth policy and participation in the sub region, and specific issues on youth policy and participation among Central African countries.

An overview on youth policy and participation in the Central African Sub region

Since 2000, African governments and various development partners have put in place numerous mechanisms to promote youth policy and participation on the African continent. Some of these mechanisms include

the African Youth Charter (AYC), the African Youth Decade 2009 to 2018 Plan of Action (AYDPoA), and the African Youth Reports (AYR).

The African Youth Charter was adopted on 2nd July, 2006 at the Seventh Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of States and Governments of the African Union in Banjul, The Gambia. This Charter is the political and legal document which serves as the strategic framework orientating the direction for youth empowerment and development in Africa. The AYC states that every young person shall have the right to participate in all spheres of society, and state parties shall take every necessary measure to promote active youth participation in society.²⁸ It equally calls on state parties to develop a comprehensive and coherent national youth policy.²⁹

The Decade on Youth Development in Africa 2009 to 2018 was declared by the Heads of States and Governments of the African Union during the Executive Council meeting of January 2009 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The African Youth Decade 2009 to 2018 Plan of Action was adopted in May 2011, and it is a road map towards the implementation of the African Youth Charter. It is meant to strengthen national capacities and make them results-oriented in aligning donor collaboration and partnership for youth empowerment and development. The objectives of this Plan of Action are: to serve as a road map on the accelerated implementation of the AYC; to mainstream and operationalize the implementation of the AYC with a youth perspective in financing and monitoring African development goals and indicators; and to establish a benchmark of standards, indicative criteria and accountability in designing, implementing, and monitoring of youth development policies, programmes and activities in Africa.³⁰ The major concern however is the extent to which state parties particularly in the Central African Sub region have implemented the strategies and focus areas of this Plan of Action.

The African Youth Reports produced by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) analyzes the various challenges African youths face, and formulate proposals on how to better enhance youth development in various domains. The inaugural AYR produced in 2009 entitled *African Youth Report 2009: Expanding opportunities for and with Young People in Africa* provides a comprehensive and up-to-date analysis of the current status and trends in selected key economic and social development dimensions relevant to youths. These include education, employment, health, and participation in political and decision-making processes.³¹ The second AYR produced in 2011 entitled *African Youth Report 2011: Addressing the youth education and*

²⁸ Article 11, African Youth Charter

²⁹ Article 12, African Youth Charter

³⁰ *African Youth Decade 2009 – 2018 Plan of Action: Accelerating Youth Empowerment for Sustainable Development*, Addis Ababa, African Union Commission, 2011, pp 3 – 4

³¹ *Africa Youth Report 2009: Expanding Opportunities for and with Young People in Africa*, Addis Ababa, UNECA, 2009, p 1

employment nexus in the new global economy focuses on the youth-education-employment nexus in a global economy. This is because access to education and later to employment is a precondition for poverty reduction, political stability, peace and security, and sustainable development.³² The peculiarity of these AYRs is UNECA's emphasis on the need for African governments to draft and implement relevant policies that directly tackle youth challenges with a positive and sustainable impact on youth development on the African continent.

Countries in Central Africa or ECCAS are yet to draft a sub-regional youth development plan. However, as one of the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) of the African Union, ECCAS is supposed to collect and submit annual reports on the status of implementation of AU youth development plans within Central Africa. This might be impossible given that since its reactivation in 1998, ECCAS has focused its activities and resources so much on promoting peace and security within Central Africa. Moreover, some issues of youth policy and participation in Central African countries might be affected by the membership of some of these countries in other inter-governmental organizations which have youths as a priority area of work. Such organizations include the Commonwealth of Nations and the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie.

Specific issues on youth policy and participation among Central African countries

This section focuses on specific issues related to youth policy and participation among Central African countries. It makes reference to some of the priority areas of WPAY, using statistics from youthpolicy.org³³ and the 2016 Youth Development Index and Report³⁴.

Angola

The National Youth Plan of Angola does not clearly define a specific age range for youths although a USAID youth assessment report defines youth as 15 to 30. This plan also identifies several areas of action, including: integrating youth in governmental institutions, promoting leisure and exchange, improving education and teaching, invest in citizenship education, improving health outcomes, the establishment of a youth/student discount card, promoting sports as well as youth entrepreneurship. The Ministry of Youths and Sports is charged with implementing this National Youth Plan.³⁵ The National

Youth Council of Angola founded in 1991 represents the voices of Angolan youths and is present in all 18 provinces. Other activities of the Council include inter alia training youth leaders, HIV/AIDS education and prevention.

Since the end of the civil war in 2002, there has been a rapid improvement in education. Tertiary education is reported to have experienced exponential growth with enrolment in higher education growing by more than 50% annually since 2002.³⁶ The number of graduates in 2010 was approximately 6,000, up from 304 in 2003.³⁷ Angola has a low rate of HIV prevalence due to the 30-year civil war that constrained population mobility. However, economic boom could lead to an increase in prevalence rate.³⁸ Despite the steady progress in improving social conditions since 2002, Angola still faces massive challenges in reducing poverty, unemployment and increasing human development.³⁹ Angola has a YDI of 0.443 and is ranked 3rd in Central Africa.

Cameroon

Cameroon adopted a National Youth Policy in 2006 which defines youths as persons between the age of 15 to 35.⁴⁰ This policy was adopted in response to the problems of youths in a bid to transform them into ideal agents of Cameroon's emergence, and to respect the local and international engagements of Cameroon in priority areas that would lead to an exemplary, prosperous and peaceful republic.⁴¹ In 2009, a National Youth Plan 2009 to 2013 was drafted to ensure the implementation of the National Youth Policy. The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Civic Education was created in 2004, and is charged with the coordination and implementation of the National Youth Policy.

Young people in Cameroon face difficulties in accessing decent employment as unemployment and underemployment levels are very high among them.⁴² Approximately 11% of youth aged 15 to 29 years are unemployed, particularly in urban areas. Underemployment affects approximately 94 % of young people aged 15 to 19 years and 84 % of those between 20 and 24 years.⁴³ The majority of job seekers abandon studies before completing the primary education (only 56% of the population that went to school also completed primary education). In addition, there is a preponderance of informal jobs – 95 percent of young workers, who are

national/Angola_2005_National_Youth_Plan.pdf, original version in Portuguese

³⁶ *Angola Country Report for the 2014 Ministerial Conference on Youth Employment, 21 – 23 July 2014*, Abidjan, p 16

³⁷ *Ibid.* p 17

³⁸ *Ibid.* p 15

³⁹ *Ibid.* p 10

⁴⁰ *Cameroon National Youth Policy*, MINJEC CAB, 2015, p 3

⁴¹ *Ibid.* p 30

⁴² *Ibid.* p 14

⁴³ *Ibid.*

³² *Africa Youth Report 2011: Addressing the youth education and employment nexus in the new global economy*, Addis Ababa, UNECA, 2011, p 1

³³ www.youthpolicy.org, last accessed on 24th February, 2017 at 1:51 pm

³⁴ *Global Youth Development Index and Report 2016*, London, Commonwealth Secretariat, 2016, pp 126 – 129

³⁵ Government of Angola – Ministry of Youth and Sports, *National Youth Plan 2005*. Retrieved from <http://www.youthpolicy.org/>

becoming more and more precarious and independent with low wage earnings.⁴⁴ Recently, the government launched the Special Three-year Youth Emergency Plan with a budget of 1.2 billion CFA francs. This plan is expected to facilitate and accelerate the economic integration of youths thereby enhancing 'economic patriotism'.⁴⁵

Young people are more affected than other age groups by HIV. The rate of HIV prevalence in the age group 25 to 29 years is 7.8% against 5.5% in the general population. 10.3% of young women and 5.1% among young men are affected.⁴⁶

The situation of young people concerning participation in social life and decision-making is characterized by a low level of involvement. This can partly be explained by a lack of organization and the reluctance of adults to involve young people in the decision making process.⁴⁷ This reluctance is the consequence of generational conflict, lack of spaces for dialogue between adults and youth, and low representation of young people in decision bodies such as parliamentary assemblies, municipal bodies and the community.⁴⁸

However, the Cameroon National Youth Council (CNYC), which was created in 2009 as a representative platform for Cameroon's youth, though it has been criticized for not effectively representing Cameroon's youth. Cameroon has a YDI of 0.449 and is ranked 2nd in Central Africa.

Central African Republic (CAR)

The scarcity of documents on youths in the CAR makes it difficult to determine the age range for youths. Recently, this country has been plagued with political and religious turmoils which have weakened its health care system, led to the collapse of the country's economy, and an almost complete shutdown of the educational system as school facilities were looted or destroyed, and thousands of children lost several years of schooling.⁴⁹

Apart from the chaotic political landscape, youth policies and legislation is yet to be implemented. A National Policy for the Advancement of Central African Youth was drafted since 2009 under the youth guidance programme. The aims of this policy are citizenship education programme for young people; and literacy programme and support for social and educational facilities for young people.⁵⁰ The Ministry of Youth and

Sports in charge of youth issues, the National Youth Council of the Central African Republic, coordinates the actions of young people and defends their interests at national and international levels.⁵¹ The National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan recognizes the fact that youths are prevented from fully participating in political processes, and their access to socio-economic opportunities is restricted.⁵² This undermines stability and peace as disenfranchised youth become easy targets for recruitment into militias. Thus, this plan proposes addressing the specific and often differentiated needs, roles, and potentials of young women and men in the economic recovery and the construction of a society that is more fair, equitable, and cohesive.⁵³ This situation hence could explain why the CAR has one of the lowest youth development index in Central Africa and the World, 0.308 and is ranked last in the world (183rd of 183 countries).

Chad

Chad has a Youth Council though it is unclear, and a Ministry in charge of youth affairs but there is no clear indication of a total commitment on youth related issues. In 2012 a forum on the "Implication of Youth in Chad's Development Policies and Programmes"⁵⁴ was organized by the Coordination of Chad Youth Networks. The forum called for greater participation of youth in the country's development framework given that youths are marginalized, and for the formulation of a national youth policy.

According to the 2015 IMF report on the Poverty Reduction Strategy, Chad improved significantly in healthcare⁵⁵, and enrolment rates in schools increased significantly in 2013 (7 percent annually for primary schools and from 28 to 30% for secondary schools between 2012 and 2013).⁵⁶ Also, the African Development Bank's Country Strategy Paper 2015 – 2020 for Chad notes that Chad has made encouraging progress in combatting diseases especially HIV/AIDS and malaria.⁵⁷ All of these have been made possible by the peace and stability Chad has enjoyed since 2010. However, youth participation in decision making still remains a major concern as they are still marginalized. Also, despite the improvements, Chad like the CAR has a very poor YDI of 0.312, ranked 182nd of 183 countries.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ <http://www.cameroon-info.net/article/cameroun-developpement-le-gouvernement-lance-officiellement-le-plan-triennal-special-jeunes-279012.html>, accessed on 24th February 2017 at 3:35 pm

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* p 17

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p 23

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Central African Republic, *National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan 2017 – 2021*, pp 5 - 8

⁵⁰ *CAR Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper 2009*, p 59

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Central African Republic, *National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan 2017 – 2021*, p 21

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Government of Chad, *National Development Plan 2013*

⁵⁵ *Chad: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper – Joint Staff Advisory Note on the 2013 Monitoring Report of the National Development Plan 2013 – 2015*, IMF Country Report No 15/125, Washington D. C., IMF, 2015, p 5

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* p 6

⁵⁷ Republic of Chad, *Country Strategy Paper 2015 – 2020*, Regional Department Center, 2015, p 6

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

The population of the DRC is young and rejuvenating over 68% of people aged less than 25 years, a majority of whom live in rural areas (over 60%).⁵⁸ The DRC has been experiencing frequent conflicts for many decades now, mostly armed conflicts. Youths were the main victims of these armed conflicts as some were members of armed groups, while others were traumatized due to the violence and rape.⁵⁹ Perhaps this explains why the DRC has a low youth development index (ranked 175th of 183 countries with a YDI of 0.408) despite the existence of a national youth policy, a youth council and a ministry in charge of youth affairs.

The National Youth Policy covers 15 domains among which are education, HIV/AIDS, employment and vocational training, sports and leisure, agriculture and rural development, human rights and democracy.⁶⁰ The policy also has a decentralized framework as it is supposed to function at national, provincial, and local level.⁶¹

The National Youth Council of the DRC is among the institutions charged with the implementation of the National Youth Policy, and it is also very decentralized at national, provincial and local level as per the ministerial decision on its organization and functioning.⁶² Also, there is a National Youth Parliament which has been very active in the public life of the DRC. They are consulted on numerous national issues, the latest being the controversies surrounding the electoral calendar of the DRC.⁶³ Like in the other Central African countries, the state of youth participation is still very questionable as the DRC's Youth Parliament decried the fact that youths are underrepresented or absent in major decision making institutions and the current generation of rulers has left nothing for the youths.⁶⁴

Republic of the Congo (Congo Brazzaville)

Congo Brazzaville, is another country from the Central African Sub region, without a youth policy. Policies on youths are still in thoughts, they are not yet documented, talk less of being enacted. In September 2014 during a meeting to evaluate projects on youth centers in Brazzaville, the Minister of Youth and Civic Education called on Senior Officials to work towards the

⁵⁸ Government of Congo-Kinshasa – Ministry of Youth and Sports, *National Youth Policy, 2009*, Original in French.

⁵⁹ Government of Congo-Kinshasa – Ministry of Youth and Sports, *National Youth Policy, 2009*, Original in French, p 9

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.* p 25

⁶² Arrête Ministeriel MJS/CAB/2100/024/99 du 31 decembre 1999 portant organisation et fonctionnement du Conseil Nationale de la Jeunesse en Republique Democratique du Congo

⁶³ <http://jeunescongo.e-monsite.com/pages/rapport-annuel-des-activites-du-parlement-des-jeunes-2014.html>, accessed on 24th February 2017, at 2:16 pm

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

development of a National Youth Policy to better animate youth activities.

A Code of Conduct for New Congolese Youth (NJECO)⁶⁵ was setup to focus on ethics and promote civic values such as peace, patriotism and respect, but much still needs to be done. The Ministry of Youth and Civic education is in charge of youth development and the Minister chairs the annual conference of the National Youth Council of Congo (CNJ-C). The Minister is also very instrumental in the selection of the executives of the CNJ-C which raises the question of the loyalty of these executives.⁶⁶ Will these appointed executives be responsive to the government or the young people they are supposed to serve? This equally raises the issue of the extent to which youths in Congo Brazzaville participate actively in decision making because they are yet to even select their own representatives in their own Youth Council. Congo has a YDI of 0.434, and is ranked 170th of 183 countries.

Equatorial Guinea

Equatorial Guinea does not have a National Youth Policy although there are a couple of other policy instruments put in place which affect youth development like the National Economic Development Plan: 2020. This plan commits finances to enhancing social development in the domains of education, gender equality and community development. Another Plan is the National Economic and Social Development Plan (PNDES) which seeks to diversify the economy, and put in place measures that would indirectly improve on youth employment.

According to the African Economic Outlook 2012, the economy of Equatorial Guinea is unable to generate enough jobs for the rapidly growing active population as about 60 percent of the population are under 25. The oil sector which accounts for 78 percent of the GDP only absorbs 4 percent of the workforce, construction offers only short-term opportunities and there is no specific policy to promote youth employment.⁶⁷ However, a new law requiring the administration to take on young people with qualifications and university diplomas was partially put into practice in 2011. The law lays down a maximum quota of foreign workers that a business can recruit (30% of the work force in the oil industry and 10% in the non-oil sector).⁶⁸ Substantial progress has been made in secondary and higher education in recent years. Higher education is free and private education in the secondary sector is available and affordable. The basic secondary education programme (ESBA), launched at the beginning of the 2000s, has been completed and the amount of

⁶⁵ Journaldebrazza.com. (2013, September 27). *Congo: adopt a model for youth policy*. Original in French.

⁶⁶ <http://www.adiac-congo.com/content/jeunesse-la-3e-conference-generale-du-cnj-prevue-dici-la-fin-du-mois>, accessed on 24th February 2017, at 2:25 pm

⁶⁷ *African Economic Outlook Equatorial Guinea 2012*, p 13

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

technical training increased, especially in the private sector.⁶⁹

Equatorial Guinea has a Ministry in charge of Youth affairs, but lacks a national youth platform in the form of a National Youth Council or a national youth organization. This means that youths do not have a platform for concertation of their own hence limiting their active participation in the decision-making process. Equatorial Guinea is ranked 179th of 183 countries with a youth development index of 0.384.

Gabon

In 2011, a youth forum was organized, which led to the creation of a youth policy, with the following outcomes⁷⁰: sharing positive experiences for building an emerging Gabon; youth self-awareness of their role; the adoption of the youth policy document by all actors; the reinvigoration of the National Youth Council of Gabon as a common platform and federation for youth organizations and movements; the creation of an observatory for the evaluation of the national youth policy; the provision of office space for the National Youth Council of Gabon; the launch of the President's prize to celebrate the best youth entrepreneurs.

Though Gabon enjoys one of the highest GDP per capita in the continent, youth unemployment remains high. The government, with support from the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the country's civil society organizations, has developed the Country Programme for Decent Work (PPTD). The Employment Forum report (2010)⁷¹ highlights the heterogeneous nature of youth unemployment. The report places emphasis on encouraging entrepreneurial initiatives, through training youth experts, bridging the gap between education and the skills in demand in the labour market.

However, the Gabonese government's commitment to youth development has not been very impactful in terms of youth participation. This is because youths are still underrepresented in decision making institutions at every level like the Senate, Parliament, and local government. Gabon has a youth development index of 0.435 and is ranked 169th in the global classification.

São Tomé and Príncipe (STP)

STP is one of the smallest economies in Africa with over 180,000 inhabitants and a per capita Gross National Income (GNI) of about US\$2,080 (2011, PPP, current international \$)⁷². Though STP has a ministry in charge of youth affairs, there is no national youth policy, no youth

network or council, therefore, much still needs to be done in order to revitalize youth inclusiveness.

According to the African Economic Outlook 2012, the government of STP in 2009 set a minimum wage for youths below that for those with similar qualifications but greater experience. The initiative, which was intended to foster youth employment, was conceived in partnership with the private sector with the authorities paying half the youth's salary. However, the scheme failed to have an impact due to the lack of a legal framework to sustain the arrangement.⁷³ Furthermore, youth integration into the labor market is hindered by the absence of a youth employment policy and the lack of an information exchange mechanism between job seekers and employers.⁷⁴

STP has a National Youth Parliament for water which participates actively in matters relating to the water sector. This Parliament also promotes youth participation in the democratic process. STP has made remarkable improvements in youth education and health, thus it occupies the 1st position on the YDI in Central Africa and the 150th position globally with a score of 0.485.

Analysis of the country specific issues

Among the 9 countries involved in this study, 4 do not have youth policies, while the other 5 either have a youth policy or a draft as noted by the Youth Policy Press in 2014.⁷⁵ All the 9 countries have signed the African Youth Charter, 5 have ratified the Charter (Cameroon, Chad, Gabon, the Republic of Congo, and Angola).⁷⁶ The existing youth policies were drafted taking into consideration the recommendations of the United Nations WPAY, and the African Youth Charter. Although 4 countries do not have youth policies, they have other policies which prioritize youth development in the domains of employment, education, health, sports and leisure. This means that the absence of a youth policy does not necessarily mean that the governments do not promote youth development.

All 9 countries in Central Africa have ministries in charge of youth affairs. Some are solely in charge of youth affairs and civic education like in Cameroon and the Republic of Congo, while the others are in charge of youths and sports. In the latter situation, there is the tendency for sports affairs to overshadow youth affairs. Moreover, youth development is not the sole responsibility of the Ministry of youth as other ministries like education, employment, health also have activities aimed at promoting youth development.

⁷³ African Economic Outlook Sao Tome and Principe 2012, p 15

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ The State of youth policy in 2014, Berlin, Youth Policy Press, 2014, p 19

⁷⁶ African Union Commission, Concept note for Banjul + 10, 10 years Implementation of the African Youth Charter: Accelerating youth development in Africa, 21-25 May 2016, Banjul, The Gambia, p 1

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ National Youth Council of Gabon (CNJG), Brochure, 2014

⁷¹ Government of Gabon, National Youth Forum 2011

⁷² World Bank, Sao Tome and Principe Overview, 2013

As concerns the existence of national youth organizations or associations, 6 of the 9 countries in the Central African sub region have National Youth Councils with the exception of Chad, Equatorial Guinea, and Sao Tome and Principe (STP). The DRC has a Youth Parliament, STP has a Youth Parliament dealing with water issues, and Cameroon recently introduced a Youth Parliament which in its first session focused on issues of agriculture and animal husbandry. However, the mode of designation of the executives of some of these youth platforms is problematic. In some countries, the youths do not elect their leaders as these leaders are appointed by the Minister in charge of youth affairs. At times, even the members of the Youth Parliaments are selected by the Minister of youth affairs. So, it is difficult to determine if they represent the interest of the youths or the officials who appointed them.

Youths who constitute almost half of the population in Central Africa are underrepresented in decision making institutions. For example, the average age to run for a Parliamentary seat in the Central African sub region is 25.44 years. However, most of the Parliamentarians are above the age of 35 years. The justification is that young people are inexperienced in matters of politics and decision making. So how will youths become better leaders and decision makers if they do not learn at the young age?

According to the 2016 Youth Development Index (YDI), all 9 countries have a low YDI, while 4 of the 9 countries in this study (DRC, Equatorial Guinea, Chad and CAR) are classified within the bottom 10 countries of the YDI classification. The YDI classification indicates Sao Tome and Principe is classified best in Central Africa (0.485, ranked 150th of 183 countries) while the CAR is classified last (0.308, ranked 183rd of 183 countries). This implies that youth development is a major challenge in the Central African Sub region. What are the factors that impede youth development in Central Africa?

Challenges to youth participation and development in the central African sub region

The participation of youth at local and national levels is crucial to enhance socio-economic development and political stability. However, youth participation and development are hindered by numerous challenges. In the case of the Central African sub region, the following challenges were identified to be hindering effective youth participation and development.

Conflicts and insecurity

Youths are always at the core of conflicts as they are often victims or protagonists. Conflicts and insecurity have been among the serious issues preventing effective youth participation and enhancing their socio-economic

development. Conflict and insecurity as hindering factor in the sub region is manifested in various ways according to Angela Meyer.

Cross-border crime and terrorism: During the extraordinary summit of the Head of States of CoPAX in February 2015, the then 10 ECCAS states in the Yaoundé Declaration clearly acknowledged the 'risk posed by the terrorist group Boko Haram in the destabilization of the entire Central African Sub-region.'⁷⁷ The criminal activities and increasing expansion of Boko Haram pose a direct security threat, especially for Chad and Cameroon, whose territories bordering Nigeria have been attacked by the radical Islamist movement.⁷⁸ Many disillusioned youths have been recruited by this terrorists group to carry out their barbaric acts. In Cameroon for example, most of the suicide bombers in the Far North are youths, likewise the victims of such terrorist attacks.

Furthermore, border porosity, limited territorial control, and weak state authority in remote zones beyond the capital have especially threatened border provinces as fragile and vulnerable areas in almost all Central African states.⁷⁹ The emergence and activities of centrifugal movements, rebels and armed groups often remain outside the reach of state control. The ability to cross borders easily increases the risk of a spillover of violence across neighboring countries.⁸⁰ There is growing concern in the East Region of Cameroon that the conflict in the CAR could spill over to Cameroon. In such tensed environments, socio-economic activities are stalled and the preoccupation of governments is to ensure peace and security, hence impeding youth development.

The risk of electoral violence: Elections were held in 5 of the 11 ECCAS member states in 2015 and 2016. As concerns the countries under study, elections were held in Chad, CAR, the Republic of Congo, and Gabon in 2016. Central Africa also has some of Africa's longest-serving heads of state. The Presidents of Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon and the Republic of the Congo have been in power for more than 30 years, while Chad's President has been in power for a quarter-century.⁸¹

Whereas crises and conflicts in Africa have tended to start, in most cases, after the holding of elections, some observers see in Central Africa a growing security risk in pre-election tensions. The tensions are mainly due to constitutional changes to allow incumbent presidents to run for another term, or a controversial candidacy; a postponement of elections; or opposition parties'

⁷⁷ Yaoundé Declaration by Member States of the Council for Peace and Security of Central Africa (COPAX) on the fight against the terrorist group Boko Haram, Yaoundé 16 February 2015

⁷⁸ Angela Meyer, *Op. cit.*, p 3

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.* p 4

anticipation of election fraud.⁸² In Gabon for example, the anticipation of electoral fraud led to post-electoral violence during the Presidential elections of August 2016. During electoral violence, most of the protagonists are young people who are manipulated by politicians and called upon to fight for their vote. In the end, they are the victims as they are either killed, or arrested and jailed. Election-based violence in one state can have various negative impacts on the stability in other countries.

Very limited participation

Youth participation is the process through which young people and their organizations influence and share control over development initiatives, decisions and resources which affect them and the society as a whole. It can take different forms ranging from information sharing and consultation methods, to mechanisms for collaboration and empowerment that give young people more influence and control (McCracken and Narayan, 1998). According to the African Youth Report 2009, the establishment of national youth councils and youth parliaments does not really promote effective youth participation in Africa. This is because most often, participation is confined to an urban elite, marginalizing certain groups of young people such as younger adolescents, young women, poorer young people and those in rural and remain areas.⁸³

The Central African Sub region is not indifferent from these challenges to effective youth participation. Moreover, like other African youths, youths in the Central African Sub region do not have entry points in political and decision making processes.⁸⁴ In the Central African Republic for example, the National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan notes that youths are prevented from fully participating in political processes, and their access to socio-economic opportunities is restricted.⁸⁵ This undermines stability and peace as disenfranchised youth become easy targets for recruitment into militias.⁸⁶

Poverty at local and national levels

According to Meyer (2011), Central Africa is suffering from the 'resource curse'. This is because although Central Africa is one of Africa's most resource-endowed regions, it is paradoxically made up of the poorest and least developed countries on the continent. Although the CAR is endowed with diamonds, gold and uranium, it has one of the lowest Human Development Index (HDI) in

Africa (0.350, ranked 187th of 188 countries).⁸⁷

The overall HDI in the region is very low, as 5 of the 9 countries in this study (Angola, Cameroon, DRC, Chad, and CAR) all have a low HDI, while the remaining 4 (Gabon, Congo, Equatorial Guinea, and Sao Tome and Principe) are classified as having medium HDI.⁸⁸ Apart from conflicts most of the economies in Central African sub region are plagued by poor governance, poverty and very low infrastructural development. Thus, governments in Central Africa focus more on ensuring peace and security, promoting infrastructural development, and alleviating poverty, rather than thinking of drafting and implementing youth policies, or setting up and empowering national youth organizations.

Insufficient political willingness

Governments of the Central African Sub region have demonstrated some political willingness with regards to youth development and youth participation. This is evident in the drafting of national youth policies and the setting up of national youth councils to represent youth interests. However, this is insufficient as most of the national youth policies are still on paper with neither implementation, nor monitoring and evaluation mechanism. National Youth Councils are not sufficiently empowered to effectively carry out their functions. There are no budgetary allocations in national budgets for youth councils. Rather, their subventions from the government are at the discretion of the Minister in charge of youth affairs. These youth institutions are tokenistic as it gives the impression that governments put in place these institutions to show the international community that they are committed to youth development in their countries.

Some people are of the opinion that national youth councils are extensions of the youth wings of the ruling political party. A glaring example is the Cameroon National Youth Council which has organized numerous outings to ask the President of Cameroon to run as a candidate for the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) in the 2018 Presidential elections, which contradicts the apolitical nature of the Council. The Action for Peace and Development (ASSOPED) wrote a blog post on April 3, 2011 in which they referred to the Cameroon National Youth Council as a 'crippled child from birth' as it is a recycled version of President Paul Biya's Youth (PRESBY).⁸⁹ In other countries, executives of national youth councils are appointed by the Minister in charge of youth affairs hence they are not freely chosen

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Africa Youth Report 2009*, p 4

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Central African Republic, *National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan 2017 – 2021*, p 21

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Human Development Report 2015: Work for Human Development*, New York, UNDP, 2015, p 211

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* pp 208 – 210

⁸⁹ Action for Peace and Development (ASSOPED). (2011, 3 April) *The Cameroon National Youth Council. A Crippled Child from Birth*. Retrieved on 12 December 2012 from <http://assoped.blogspot.de/2011/04/cameroon-national-youth-council.html>.

by the youths whom they represent.

THE WAY FORWARD

This part of the paper formulates recommendations that may help to improve the situation of youth in the Central African sub region in relation to policy framework to guide their welfare and promote participation. The recommendations have focused on the issues discussed in the paper.

Enforce the formulation and implementation of National Youth Policies

In the Central African sub region, there are countries like Equatorial Guinea, Chad, Central African Republic, Sao Tome and Principe, and Congo Brazzaville, which do not have national youth policies, meaning that there is no specific legislation for youth. On the other hand, other countries like Angola, Cameroon, DRC and Gabon have National Youth Policy since 2006, but till date the texts do not match with the realities as most of these policies are only on paper. Therefore, an urgent adoption and legislation of youth policies is required. These National Youth Policies should take into account the recommendations of the 2014 Baku Commitment to Youth Policies adopted at the 1st Global Forum on Youth Policies in Baku, Azerbaijan. Hence, the Youth Policies should be Rights-based, inclusive, participatory, gender-responsive, comprehensive, knowledge-based and evidence-informed, fully-resourced, and accountable.

Furthermore, there is a need to ensure full implementation of these policies, by ensuring their inclusion in national policies. These policies should be implemented at every level from national to local level with the involvement of government and stakeholders at all these levels. Effective implementation of National Youth Policies should be accompanied by effective monitoring and evaluation. Tanya Basarab proposes 11 indicators that can be used to monitor and evaluate youth policies: non-formal education, youth training policy, youth legislation, youth budget, youth information policy, multi-level policy, youth research, participation, inter-ministerial cooperation, innovation and youth advising bodies.⁹⁰ The formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of youth policies in Central Africa should take into account the context of the sub region.

The policies need to promote full independence and participation of youth networks in socio-economic and political affairs. Hence, the countries of Central Africa should all create National Youth Councils which should be independent, inclusive, and apolitical. Also, these

governments should create outreach programs and ensure that these youth councils constitute a strong and steadfast network.

Allocation of a special budget for youth welfare in the sub region

Due to poor governance and the lack of political willingness, there is no clear data regarding the budget allocated to youth related activities. In all the countries of the sub region, there exist ministries in charge of youth affairs, but a greater proportion of their budget is for office supplies, outstation allowances and other non-youth-related activities. The policy for youth and other related legislation should ensure a youth development budget. The National budget of each country should have a specific budgetary head for youth development either within the Ministry of youth affairs or separate from the budget of the ministry. Also, adequate amount of money (and other resources) should be set to support youth institutions, councils and other efforts in youth movements. The budgets allocated to youth councils and youth empowerment activities should be detached from other priority areas and governments need to institute control mechanisms for better outcomes.

Developing and enforcing initiatives to promote youth participation in socio-economic and political development

As regards participation, a majority of youths from the Central African Sub region only participate in conflicts and coup d'états, rather than in national development. They are shunned in all the arms of power, be it legislative, judiciary or executive. All decisions are taken by aged government bodies and political leaders pushing the youths to a yes-yes machine.

The way forward is an inclusive mechanism, one that will put the youths in these decision-making bodies. Therefore, governments in the region should adopt a quota for youth representation in Parliament, the Executive and local government institutions which must be respected. There is a need to improve access to information to enable young people make better use of their opportunities to participate in decision-making. Some specific measures to be undertaken include the following:

Online presence: Youth councils and youth bodies should initiate online forums to share information and opportunities. This can be done through having functional websites for greater visibility and participation. In the sub region, only the youth councils of Gabon and Angola have functional websites, the rest are either inexistent or non-functional. Youths should also network on social media.

⁹⁰ Tanya BASARAB, Youth Work Development Project Manager, European Youth Forum http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/documents/CoE_indicators.pdf

Opened dialogue mechanism: Bottlenecks should be disrupted; the gap between government bodies (especially ministries in charge of youth) should be bridged. Forums on youth policies should be created for dialogue, thus developing and/or strengthening opportunities for young people to learn their rights and responsibilities.

Participatory monitoring: this means making sure that young people themselves are assisting in assessing how their country's policies and programs are affecting them, and to what extent meeting their needs this will help to; measure progress, identify strengths and weaknesses, assess effectiveness, determine the costs and benefits, collect information, share experiences, improve effectiveness, allow for better planning and be accountable to stakeholders.

Encouraging and promoting youth associations through financial, educational and technical support and promotion of their activities.

The presidents of youth councils or their entire bureau should participate in decision making instances like law making, voting of budget, political appointments and the judiciary, thus taking into account the contributions of youth in designing, implementing and evaluating national policies and plans affecting their concerns.

Promote networking among youths and supporting institutions

A sub regional network of youth ministries as well as a cross-sectorial approach in their intervention such as youth led NGOs, youth councils, youth legislators and youth policy practitioners should be instituted in the Central African sub region. This will create an enabling environment on best practices as regards youth policies. The network of youth policy practitioners can be affiliated to the two regional economic blocks, CEMAC and ECCAS and later on link up with other sub regional networks, the African Union. This move is experiencing a positive stride as CEMAC and ECCAS held a meeting on Dec 07 2016, to decide on how the two institutions can be merged.⁹¹

When ECCAS was revived in 1998, it focused its mission on promoting peace and security in Central Africa. However, the role of youths in promoting peace and security was not valorized as they were treated as beneficiaries of government actions, whereas they are the most affected. Hence, ECCAS member states should involve youths in peace building initiatives as per the recommendations of the UN Security Council Resolution 2250 on youth involvement in peace and security. These

governments could even draft a Sub regional youth development plan in line with the objectives of ECCAS and the African Youth Charter. In a build up to any Conference of Heads and States and Governments of ECCAS, National Youth Councils, Youth organizations and other actors in the youth sector should have a side event so that the youths contribute to the outcomes of such high level meetings in the sub region.

CONCLUSION

Young people constitute almost half of the global population today. This requires that national governments adopt policies that meet their needs and aspirations. Recognizing the importance of youths, the UN put in place numerous mechanisms for their development among which are the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY) and the convening of meetings like the 1st Global Forum on Youth Policies in 2014 to assess the implementation of WPAY. Effective National Youth Policies would promote youth development and ensure active youth participation in decision making.

The state of youth policies in the Central African Sub region (9 of the 11 ECCAS member states with the exception of Burundi and Rwanda) indicates that 5 of these countries (Angola, Cameroon, CAR, Gabon, and the DRC) have adopted a youth policy or at least a draft. These policies take into account the recommendations of the WPAY and the African Youth Charter. The sub region however has one of the lowest Youth Development Index (YDI) scores globally as 4 of the 10 countries in the bottom 10 on the YDI ranking are from the region. Some factors that could account for this low YDI ranking are conflicts and insecurity, limited participation of young people and their organizations, poverty at the local and national levels, and insufficient political will among governments in Central Africa.

In other to improve on youth development and participation in the sub region, there is the need to enforce the formulation and implementation of National Youth Policies; allocate specific budgets for youth development within national budgets; develop and enhance initiatives to promote youth participation in development at all levels; and promote networking among youths in the Central African sub region.

Youths should no longer be looked upon as "the future of tomorrow, but as today's upholders". It all begins with good policies, legislations and political willingness. Their energy, vitality, creativity and innovation is imperative in any development agenda. Youths from the Central African sub region are shunned, generally because they are regarded as part of the problem and not the solution. The African Development Report of 2015 projects that Central Africa will experience large youth population increases. Hence, Central African governments must take the necessary measures to adopt and effectively implement youth policies that promote youth

⁹¹ <http://www.uneca.org/stories/time-converge-international-development-agendas-central-africa>, accessed on 1st February 2017 at 6:00pm

development and effective youth participation so as to reap the promise of this 'demographic dividend'.

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