



National Youth Policy 2014-2019

"The NYP recognises that young people are not passive, but are champions of their own development and need space to actively participate in their own growth and in the development of members of society. Young people in all countries are both a major human resource for development and key agents for social change, economic expansion and innovation. Their imagination, ideals, considerable energy and vision are essential for the continuing development of the societies in which they live".

National Youth Policy Document

1. Introduction

On June 16th each year we celebrate National Youth Day, commemorating the courage of the youth of 1976 and acknowledging the contribution of our youth in forging the way to our democracy.ⁱ The publication of the National Youth Policy Document is both timeous and to be welcomed. Its release also takes place during the middle of the African Youth Decade, 2009-2018. The African Youth Charter and the Plan of Action (DPoA) articulated therein provide "a framework for multi-sectoral and multi-dimensional engagement of all stakeholders towards the achievement of the goals and objectives of the African Youth Charter."ⁱⁱ The DPoA will also "facilitate more coordinated and concerted actions towards accelerating youth empowerment and development."ⁱⁱⁱ The policies articulated in the Charter focus on youth participation in society and politics; youth's role in development; and commitments to young people regarding education, health, employment, eradication of poverty, the environment, peace and security, law, and culture. Importantly, the Charter also addresses itself towards specific groups of youth including young women and girls, as well as young people with disability who experience marginalization and social exclusion.

The African Youth Charter defines 'youth' as between the ages of 15 and 35.^{iv} In South Africa, the

Children's Act 38 of 2005 sets the 18 as the age of majority. Thereafter, policies regarding youth adopt 35 as the upper limit of the age of youth, which corresponds age limit of the African Charter. However, various United Nation's organizations, including UNICEF and the WHO, use the 15 -24 age limit, pointing out that the definition of youth may change with circumstances, "especially with the changes in demographic, financial, economic and socio-cultural [matters]; however, the definition that uses 15-24 age cohort as youth fairly serves its statistical purposes for assessing the needs of the young people and providing guidelines for youth development".^v Thus 'youth' is a very fluid and variable term.

2. National Youth Policy Focus

The principle objectives expressed in this policy document include the empowerment of youth; the cultivation of self-sufficiency; the presentation of a holistic programme; and the fostering of national pride and patriotism. The key challenges that the National Youth Policy (NYP) identifies are poor health (HIV/AIDS, violence, substance abuse); sport and culture (lack of access, lack of facilities); economic marginalization (unemployment, lack of skills, poor educational outcomes, post-school education opportunities, access to higher education); social cohesion (having young people

involved in volunteering, declining trust in political systems); weak youth development machinery (South African Youth Council, NYDA) and disability (dealing with exclusion).

While the intention of the policy is laudable, the proposals are at times rather vague and it seems that some of the arguments are based on dated data and research. Furthermore, it is important to explore how the draft policy articulates with other pertinent policy documents and legislation such as the White Paper on the Family; the Integrated Disability Strategy; the Children's Act; and the Substance Abuse Act.

It would also be useful if it kept in mind the United Nations Population Fund's (UNFPA) five strategic pillars on the advancement of adolescents and youth:

- reliable evidence-based advocacy for comprehensive policy and programme development;
- investment in and implementation of these programmes and policies;
- the promotion of comprehensive sexuality education which addresses the high level of teenage pregnancy, date rape, 'corrective' rape;
- building capacity for sexual and reproductive health service delivery (including HIV prevention, treatment and care);
- bold initiatives to reach marginalized and disadvantaged adolescents and youth, particularly girls, and to promote youth leadership and participation.

3. Investing in our Youth

Hitherto, the responsibility for planning and implementing policy regarding youth has lacked coherence. It was originally housed in the Office of the Presidency, before being moved to the now defunct Department of Women, Children, Youth and Persons with Disability.^{vi} It was removed from this Ministry and returned to the Office of the Presidency where it has remained. It is to be hoped that there

will be greater stability from now on as the need to address issues pertaining to young people is urgent and further neglect compromises their future and that of the broader society. Investing in our youth is to invest in our collective future. We need to ask 'what kind of society are we growing?'

4. Lack of Transformation

In spite of the important role played by the youth in the realization of our democracy, too many of them have grown up in a society that is largely untransformed. Geographically and spatially the living spaces of young people remain largely those of apartheid South Africa. While some progress has been made in the educational system, the matric pass rate remains poor and opportunities for higher education are few. Many students who have a matric certificate, and even some who may acquire additional qualifications, have expectations that may not realistically be met. The failure to find employment in spite of considerable effort and in the face of many difficulties results in considerable disappointment, often with deep psycho-social consequences. The huge disparities of wealth and opportunity which characterize the new South Africa compound these experiences for many young South Africans.

This experience of frustration, anger and resentment can spill over into crime, domestic and gender-based abuse, and violent service delivery protests. Commenting on the death of a small child during a gruesome hijacking, commentator Xhanti Payi wrote:

"Within that remarkable wealth creation and asset accumulation are an astounding millions of unemployed, with a further many millions discouraged and thus no longer even looking for work. Of our young people who are under the age of 35, nearly ten million are not economically active and likely unemployable. The growing and wealth-creating economy has left these millions of our energetic and aspirational young people outside - unemployed and unemployable. I wanted to imagine for a moment what that must do to their psyche as they watch our world of things and their aspirations".^{vii}

5. Youth Participation

At a recent dialogue facilitated by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR), a broad range of youth organizations were asked for their opinion of the document and what they would like to be included in an ideal youth policy. Salient points were that there was a lack of targets in the current NYP and hence there was no proper tool of evaluation. Furthermore, there needed to be an increase in the political participation of youth; steps needed to be taken to facilitate youth's involvement in the informal sector, and to enable participation in mentorship programmes and volunteerism; all of which would foster skills-development and sense of worth. It was also noted that better accountability measures were required for generally underperforming youth agencies. Lastly, the question of participation was important – who participated in informing the policy? And, if the youth age-group includes 14-35 year-olds, then how do we get 14 year-olds to understand the document and the policies it contains?^{viii}

The complexity of South African youth identities and experiences must be acknowledged; a 'one size fits all' approach will not help matters, especially since a substantial number of our youth continue to be disadvantaged. Parents and mentors to young people need to be engaged in policy development as well. For example, the SACBC, in so many aspects of its advocacy and pastoral work, stresses the importance of and need for positive parenting, mentorship and family preservation strategies that are critically important in the lives of children and young people. Other concerns expressed were that the document did not reflect much ground-level (NGO) input which translates into a lack of involvement by youth in the drafting of this policy. Young people do not want to be reliant solely on the government for solutions; they want a say in policies that affect them. However, as it stands, "the document is far away from youth. It is distant as we tend to think that it's government's document and not 'ours'. It should represent the voice of young people but is in actual fact out of the reach of youth as it does not include their voices".^{ix}

6. Youth and the Economy

It is an anomaly of our democracy that we are able to sustain payment of social grants but unable to

provide the opportunities for employment which would reduce dependence on grants and result in improved socio-economic circumstances. This, in turn, would release state funds for development. While social grants have done much to alleviate poverty, they are not aspirational, and the more that young people are forced to rely on grants, the more they can come to be seen as a drain on the economy than as one of its essential assets.

Many young people who are unemployed are confined to the informal settlements in which they live due their distance from economic centres and their lack of financial resources for public transport. This makes the search for employment more difficult. Some engage in substance abuse, petty crime and participation in gangs, which results in social alienation and undermines social cohesion. As always, those most affected by violence and crime are the poor.

The policy proposes that the participation of youth in the Expanded Public Works Programme should gradually be increased to 50%, and that a National Youth Volunteer Programme should be developed. There is also increasing awareness of the value of internships for young people as an opportunity to gain work experience in a supervised environment. This arrangement may include a small stipend to cover traveling and lunch expenses.

The fact that the draft policy calls for an impact study to be carried out on the effectiveness of the Youth Employment Tax Incentive scheme is to be welcomed, since a recent SALDRU study concluded that the scheme has had no measurable, statistical impact on youth unemployment in South Africa. The study uses statistical analysis of the past 14 Quarterly Labour Force Surveys (from 2011 to 2014) to show that the uptake of the Youth Employment Tax Incentive has had no measurable impact on youth employment numbers.^x

Related to this, the policy calls for subsidization of the job placement sector in order to help it 'identify, prepare and place matric graduates into work'. It must be asked, though, whether this would not function in the same basic way as the Employment Tax Incentive? In any event, there are other proposals in the draft policy that would make the need for such a subsidy unnecessary. The role played by the private sector and civil society is not clear, particularly in relation to developing youth

not only for jobs or in gaining a good education, but by helping young people to gain real-life soft skills (confidence, positive mind-sets, good character and work ethic) that would allow them to be successful in other areas of life. The importance of self-worth is crucial.

7. Conclusion

The NYP needs a lot of work regarding setting real specifics. “Having the voices of numerous NGOs and young people in one room showed me that engaging with the voices that actually work with youth and are youth is the only way this document will be able to achieve anything significant”.^{xi}

Nevertheless, the policy can certainly function as a catalyst for further engagement with the process of addressing the needs of our young people and investing in their development. This must be done with a sense of urgency: so many of our youth are ‘born frees’ who have yet to experience the benefits of the democratic South Africa. It is only if we invest creatively and wisely in our youth that we will ‘grow’ responsible adults and thus secure a brighter future.

Robert Kennedy’s words are apposite:

“Our answer is the world's hope; it is to rely on youth. The cruelties and obstacles of this swiftly changing planet will not yield to obsolete dogmas and outworn slogans. It cannot be moved by those who cling to a present which is already dying, who prefer the illusion of security to the excitement and danger which comes with even the most peaceful progress. This world demands the qualities of youth; not a time of life but a state of mind, a temper of the will, a quality of the imagination, a predominance of courage over timidity, of the appetite for adventure over the love of ease...”^{xii}

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ⁱ Former President Nelson Mandela saw the role played by the youth in the national democratic struggle as so important that he suggested that the voting age should be set at the age of 15 rather than 18.

ⁱⁱ The African Youth Charter (AYC) was endorsed on 2 July 2006 by the African Union Heads of States. It entered into force on 8 August 2009, which marked the beginning of the African Youth Decade.

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/youth/strategy-african-youth/african-youth-charter/>

^{iv} <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-definition.pdf>

^v <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-definition.pdf>

^{vi} <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-definition.pdf> The Ministry was originally called that of ‘Women, Children, Youth and Persons with Disability’

^{vii} “*Whose Savages are they anyway?*”, Xhanti Payi in *The Daily Maverick*, 23rd July 2014

^{viii} The importance of child participation is a central theme of the Children’s Act, 2005

^{ix} Research assistant Angelique Thomas’ notes from the IJR Dialogue

^x <https://ideas.repec.org/p/ldr/wpaper/134.html>

^{xi} Research assistant Angelique Thomas’ notes from the IJR Dialogue

^{xii} <http://www.rfksafilm.org/html/speeches/unicape.php> Senator Robert Kennedy’s speech at UCT, 1968