



Submission to the

Youth Desk

on the

National Youth Policy 2014-2019

1. Introduction

The publication of this Policy Document is both timeous and to be welcomed. We note that the release of this document takes place during the middle of the African Youth Decade, 2009-2018. The African Youth Charter and the Plan of Action (DPoA) articulated therein provides “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.”ⁱ The DPoA will also “facilitate more coordinated and concerted actions towards accelerating youth empowerment and development”.ⁱⁱ The policies articulated in the Charter focus on youth participation in society and politics; youth’s role in development; 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.

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 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 we support the intention of the policy, 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 to be mindful of 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; build capacity for sexual and reproductive health service delivery (including HIV prevention, treatment and care); take bold initiatives to reach marginalized and disadvantaged adolescents and youth, particularly girls, and promote youth leadership and participation.

3. Investing in our Youth

Hitherto the responsibility for the planning and implementation of policy regarding 'Youth' has lacked coherence. It was originally housed in the Office of the Presidency then moved to the now defunct Department of 'Women, Children, Youth and Persons with Disability'.ⁱⁱⁱ It was removed from this Ministry and returned to the Office of the Presidency where it has remained. 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 our youth have grown up in a society that is largely untransformed. Geographically and spatially the living spaces of young people remain 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 few. Many students who have a matric certificate and those 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 with 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”.^{iv}

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 own/their organizations ideal youth policy. Salient points were that there is a lack of targets in the current NYP and hence there is no proper tool of evaluation. “We would need to know what we evaluate results

against”. Furthermore, there needs to be an increase in the political participation of youth; steps need to be taken to facilitate the involvement the youth in the informal sector, and enable participation in mentorship programmes and volunteerism –all of which foster skills-development and sense of worth. There is a need to have accountability measures in place for youth agencies. The accessibility to participation- who participates in informing this document? If the youth age is at 14-35 year-olds then how do we get 14 year-olds understanding this document?^v

The complexity of South African youth identities and experiences must be acknowledged. Furthermore, it is clear that these complexities mean that one size fits all approach will not address them all. A substantial number of South African youth continue to be disadvantaged. Parents and mentors to young people need to be engaged in this policy as well. The SACBC in so many aspects of our advocacy and pastoral work the importance of and need for positive parenting, mentorship and family preservation strategies emerge as critically important in the life space 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. However, young people do not want to be reliant solely on the government for solutions. Closer collaboration between FBO’s and NPO’s working together on the youth issues would make more impact. “The document is ‘faraway’ from youth. It is distant as we tend to think that its governments 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”.^{vi}

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 social grants. This, in turn, would release state funds for development. While social grants have done much to alleviate poverty they are not aspirational. Young people should not be regarded as a liability but rather as an essential asset. Furthermore, the document lacks in identifying specifics issues in its social cohesion and leadership sections.

Many young people who are unemployed are confined to the informal settlements in which in which they due to distance and lack of the 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. Those most affected by violence and crime are the poor.

We support the proposal that the participation of youth in the Expanded Public Works Programme should gradually be increased to 50%, as well as the development of a National Youth Volunteer Programme.

The fact that the draft policy is calling for an impact study to be carried out on the effectiveness of the Employment Tax Incentive scheme is welcomed since a recent SALDRU study concluded that the scheme has had no measurable, statistical impact on youth unemployment in South Africa. Written by two senior researchers, it uses statistical analysis of the past 14 Quarterly Labour Force Surveys (from 2011 to 2014) to show that the uptake of the Employment Tax Incentive has had no measurable impact on youth wage numbers. Furthermore, the study claims that youth wage unemployment is almost exactly at where it would be if the government had not undertaken the Employment Tax Incentive.

The draft policy contains a number of proposal that are welcomed, however we are confused as to the policy's call for a subsidy to the placement sector '*to identify, prepare and place matric graduates into work must be created*'. Would this not function in the same way as the Employment Tax Incentive Scheme? 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. This is particularly in relation to developing youth not only for jobs or in gaining a good education but, by actually moulding young people to gain real life soft skills (confidence, positive mind-sets, good character and work ethic) that will allow them to use be able to be successful in all other areas. The importance of self- worth is crucial.

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".^{vii}

7. Conclusion

We look forward to further engagement with the process of developing policy that addresses the needs of our young people and invests in their development. This must be done with a sense of urgency. 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...”^{viii}

ⁱ 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.

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

ⁱⁱⁱ The Ministry was originally called that of ‘Women, Children, Youth and Persons with Disability’

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

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

^{vi} Research Assistant Angelique Thomas’ notes from the IJR Dialogue

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

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