Youth Participation in Governance and Structural Economic Transformation in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

This paper, Youth Participation in Governance and Structural Economic Transformation in Zimbabwe, assesses the level of participation in economic, elections and governance processes by Zimbabwean youth. It also depicts the barriers to such participation and issues that youths view as important to them. Finally, it proposes solutions that can be applied to achieve youth-inclusive structural transformation and enhance their participation therein. The study was carried out using quantitative methodologies. A survey was carried out to collect data, which in turn was analysed using SPSS. The analysis finds evidence that youth participation is low across all sectors. The youths are economically side-lined, largely unemployed and living in poverty given the low income they earn. They lack skills in business management, vocational and technical areas, civic education, elections as well as skills on how to engage government. Their participation in elections and governance processes is low and it is hampered by restrictive political structures, lack of interest, lack of information and lack of funds amongst other things. It was observed that decision making processes are not improving in becoming more participatory and youth inclusive. Whilst some youths are ready to run for public office or start their

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own businesses, they need support for their participation to be meaningful. The youths need space to freely participate in politics and development without restrictions as well as getting support through leadership training. Policymakers need to design programmes that close the skills gap, give youths more access to means of production and support them to be employment creators.

Key words: Youth participation, elections, governance, economic activities, structural transformation.

Introduction

Africa has a demographic boom of young people who not only need to be economically empowered but also need to participate in elections and civic processes. Given Africa's youth 'bulge', it would be expected to find young people being the majority of those who are participating in economic, electoral and governance activities. However, this is not the case. Youth participation in elections and governance processes is characterised by high levels of apathy. Young people, whilst being the most affected by democratic processes, are the least interested in them. For example, the RAU (2013) analysis of Zimbabwe's June 2013 Voters' Roll reveals that only 8% of people aged 30 and below were registered voters. Such trends are predominant across Africa. On the other hand, the youths are side lined from economic participation and very few opportunities for them are readily available. Sadly, hundreds of lives are being lost as many young Africans take the treacherous journey to Europe, via the Mediterranean Sea, in search for better socio-economic opportunities. The meaningful participation of youths in economic and electoral processes is not only their democratic right but also enables them to determine a better future for themselves as well as bring about socio-economic transformation.

The data presented in this paper were collected as part of my PhD in Peace-building study which I undertook between December 2016 and February 2017. The study set out to explore how social entrepreneurship can be used a youth peace-building tool to mitigate structural violence and social inequality in Zimbabwe. It sought out to identify areas in which youths can be supported to participate in democratic processes whilst also addressing their economic needs. This was premised on the fact that

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increased youth participation can contribute to sustainable peace and help address structural violence by allowing youths to contribute towards their countries' socio-economic solutions. Understanding the level of participation by young people in African affairs is imperative if structural transformation is going to work in their favour. Data needs to be availed so that the challenges befalling the youths are well articulated. The study findings presented in this paper can be used in developing such relevant policy positions.

The paper is based on the following research
    i.   What is the level of youth participation in economic and governance processes?
    ii.   What are the barriers to meaningful youth participation in elections and governance?
    iii. Is there a link between the youths' socio-economic status and the level of participation?
    iv. How can structural transformation be best undertaken to address the needs of youths?

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: in the second section I explain the research methodology applied. In the third I review literature on youth participation, structural transformation, and structural violence. In the fourth I summarise the findings of the survey on Zimbabwean youth. In the fifth I discuss the study's findings in relation to the research question. I then conclude with recommendations for further research and action in the final section.

Methodology
This study applied a quantitative research framework. A snap survey was carried out with 216 respondents from Zimbabwe. The survey was used to determine the socio-economic status of youths, the barriers to youth participation in elections and governance as well as identify the possible solutions to enhance youth participation. Purposive random sampling was applied with a volunteer sample being used to provide the data. Data collection was done amongst youths from Norton, a small town located 40 kilometres outside Harare. Data from the questionnaires were captured, cleaned, and analysed using the SPPS software. Descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations were applied to analyse the responses from the survey.

Whilst the research findings can be generalised, they may not be truly representative of the youth in Zimbabwe as they are from those who were conveniently selected in Norton during the field work. This limitation however does not preclude the generalisation of the study findings to reflect the views of youths in Zimbabwe. However, given the fact that the current socio-economic situation in that country equally affects people the same regardless of geographical location the data can be deemed to be representative enough to make key conclusions on the youth population in Zimbabwe. On the same note the findings of this study can further be tested through repeating the same survey using a paper-based questionnaire targeting a wider study sample.

Literature Review
Structural Transformation and Governance in Africa
It is undeniable that Africa needs to adopt a sustainable structural transformation strategy to effectively address her developmental challenges (UNDP-UN Environment, 2017). Such a strategy can become the bedrock for high economic growth across the continent. Structural transformation is defined as "the movement of labour from low productivity sectors to more modern sectors," (McMillan & Headey, 2014). However, it is worrisome that whilst structural change is taking place it is dominated by deindustrialisation and informal businesses (Lundvall & Lema, 2014; Nkurayija, 2011). Clearly the potential of structural change in Africa is not being maximised if less and less people remain in formal employment. The lack of employment opportunities in Africa is evidenced by the rise in intercontinental migration in search of greener pastures.

Structural change is reported to be higher in countries with better governance, effective education and efficiently competitive forex markets (OECD, 2013). The prerequisite of sound governance is highlighted in the African Economic Conference's, (2017) call for papers, which states that:

> structural transformation requires good governance underpinned by: democratic, responsive, transparent and accountable systems of governance; sound macroeconomic policies; adequate institutional and human capacities to design and implement development programmes; 'social contract' between governments and citizens on mutual roles and

responsibilities; sufficient investment in social and economic infrastructure; and an enabling environment or competitive manufacturing, agribusiness and services sectors.

It therefore follows that if structural transformation is to work for the youths the local authorities need to make development and governance processes more inclusive and open to young people. Politicians should be seen opening political structures so that young people are not just benchwarmers but also hold key positions. The youths need to be supported to equally run for public office without restrictions.

Youth Participation Defined

Before defining youth participation, it is exigent to contextualise the youth in Africa. It is no mistake that the African Union, (2006) identifies those aged between 15 and 35 as youth. This is indeed a reflection of the slow pace in which self-dependency and empowerment happens on the African continent. It is very common to find young adults in their early thirties still struggling to attain a social status that youths in their mid-twenties will have already surpassed in the West.

Youth participation enables youths to show their expertise and contribute to a democratic society whilst exercising their right (Evans & Prilleltensky, 2007; Flanagan & Levine, 2010; Lührmann, 2013). It is also an opportunity for self-development as well as knowledge and skills' transfer amongst youths (Checkoway & Aldana, 2013). Youth participation also helps young people to transition into adulthood and take on societal development issues at an early age (Arnot & Swartz, 2013; Checkoway, 2011). Flanagan & Levine, (2010) postulate that youth participation:
  i.   is a right;
  ii.   assumes youths as competent citizens;
  iii. is facilitated by young leaders and adult allies;
  iv.   aims to address the limitless issues faced by youths;
  v.   has several strategies and is not a one size fits all process;
  vi.   is active engagement and not passive presence or token roles.

Being able to understand these elements can help in identifying ways of improving youth participation.

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How Young People Participate

Several studies reveal that youth participation is multi-pronged and happens at both meso and maso-levels. It occurs whenever young citizens take part in junior councils, debate and dialogue sessions, self-employment, religious functions, community service and sports activities (Berents & McEvoy-Levy, 2015; Checkoway, 2009; Flanagan & Levine, 2010). Mutisi, Olonisakin, & Ismail, (2017) aver that in whatever way that youth participate, they will be trying to address their vulnerability and prolonged structural exclusion. In their report, Mutisi *et. al.* (2017) indicate that youth's activities go beyond earning and transcend societal boundaries. The report argues that:

> The coping strategies are also linked to solidarity and social networking, which provide platforms for exercising voice and citizenship in non-violent ways. In short, youth coping activities transcend mere wages and livelihoods to connect with social processes, including societal transformation in terms of progressive change in societal mind-sets, values and norms, structures, processes and outlooks. *(Mutisi et al., 2017)*

Barriers to Youth Participation

While youths are energetic, willing to act and can be great change-makers, there are some hindrances to participation that they face. Chief amongst them is what Checkoway (2011) terms 'mild ephebiphobia' or 'adultism'. This manifests when adults believe that they are the ones to prescribe solutions for youths because they know better than the young people. McEvoy-Levy, (2012) supports this view when she argues that adult idealism sees youths as lacking knowledge and experience. This results in adults being unwilling to give youths any political or economic space. Resultantly, most, if not all, political parties across Africa are guilty of closing political space to youths. This exclusion is achieved through socio-economically depriving the youths and making them dependent on adults. This renders them susceptible to exploitation and control by the 'empowered' few in the political hierarchy who have the political and financial muscle to 'buy' the energy of the youths. When it happens that the youths do participate in these processes it is more a gesture of tokenism. Their views are never taken seriously and are overridden by adults. This diminishes the desire by

young people to take part in any discussions or events when they feel that they are just adding to the numbers.

Aside from adultism the youths themselves are to blame for the low participation levels, due to lack of interest and their need to earn an income (Mercy Corps, n.d.). Other barriers include: lack of capacity, lack of financial resources, lack of information and the absence of a culture of positive engagement (Agbiboa, 2015; Lührmann, 2013; Qasem, 2013).

Ways to Improve Youth Participation

As a way of promoting youth participation, Checkoway (2011) proposes that youths should be viewed as vital sources of information since they are 'experts in being young.' This justifies the need for adults to give youths space and opportunities to meaningfully engage, since youths have first-hand experience in current challenges they face.

Policy makers and development agencies agree on the need to enhance youth participation (Argenti, 2002; Lührmann, 2013; UNDP, 2014; UNESCO Beirut, 2011; UNPY, 2012). To that very end the international community has made several resolutions and conventions for ratification and adoption at national level. For example, the UNDP (2014) Youth Strategy suggested a four-pronged approach towards youth empowerment and enhanced youth participation. This approach includes:

i. Support capacity development of young people and youths' organisations;
ii. Engage through outreach, advocacy and mainstreaming of youth issues in all spheres of development planning;
iii. Influence through thought leadership, global policy debates and networks;
iv. Sustain progress through support to national youth policy development and implementation.

The aforementioned solutions are in synchronisation with the International Labour Organisations', as cited in O'Higgins (2017) multi-pronged approach that is hinged on the following five pillars:

i. employment and economic policies for youth employment;
ii. employability – education, training and skills, and the school-to work transition;

    iii. labour market policies;
    iv. youth entrepreneurship and self-employment and;
    v. rights for young people.

Major Findings

This section narrates the findings from the survey. Questions pertaining to the levels of participation, youth preparedness, prominent barriers to participation and what needs to be done to improve participation were asked to elicit responses to the research questions**.**

Demographics

96% of the respondents were aged between 18 and 30 years, with 54% being female. 48% indicated O' Levels as their highest level of education. Table 1 shows this data.

Age	
18-23	32.4
24-30	39.4
31-35	24.5
35 +	3.7
Gender	
Male	46.3
Female	53.7
Highest level of education	
Primary	11.1
O Level	48.1
A Level	11.1
Tertiary	27.8
Prefer not to answer	1.9

Table 1: Respondent's demographics

Participation in Economic Activities

Only 9% of the respondents reported being formally employed with (36%), (30%) and (17%) either being self-employed full-time students or doing nothing at all respectively (Figure 1). The lack of employment opportunities was reported as the main reason for unemployment by 39% of the

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respondents. The lack of skills was also cited by 20%, with 14% stating that they were not employed because they did not have relevant contacts. The latter is an indication of the rampant corrupt practises in Zimbabwe when it comes to recruiting. Close to 80% reported monthly earnings between $0 and $60, thus classifying most youths as poor (Figure 2).
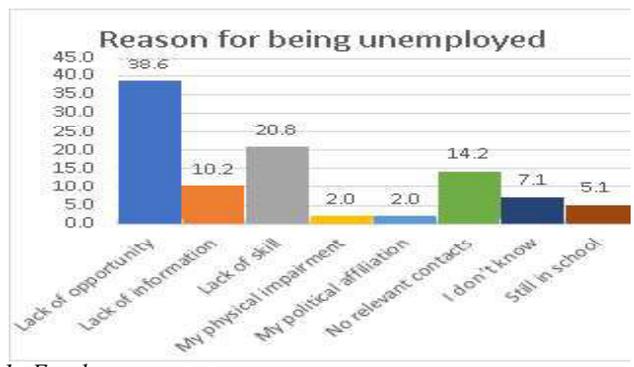
Figure 1: Employment status
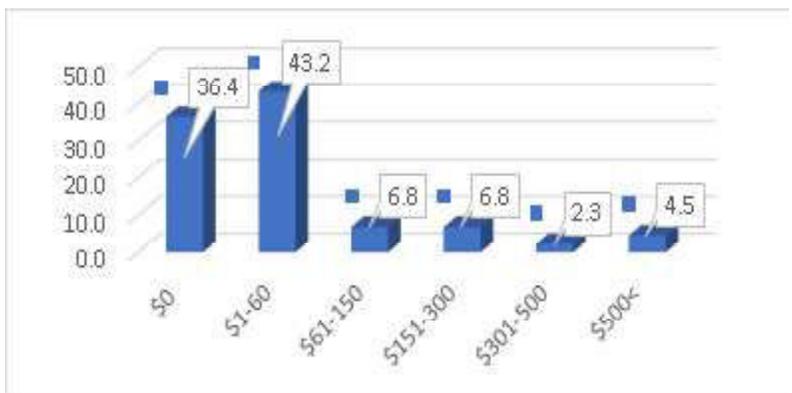
Figure 2: Monthly Earnings

Unemployment (85%), access to basic education (62%) and poverty (55%) topped the ranking of the major socio-economic challenges that befall youths in Zimbabwe.

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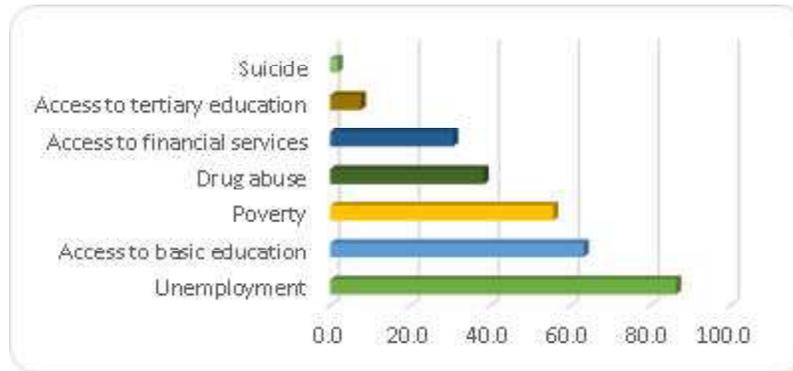
Figure 3: Major socio-economic challenges

Only 28% of young people reported ownership of an existing business with 22% likely to have owned one that has closed (Table 2). 98% indicated the plan to open a business in the future. Lack of capital, lack of access to markets, lack of skills and the restrictive economic situation were the major reasons why the businesses had either been closed or not been started (Figures 4 and 5).

Current ownership		Ownership of a closed business		Plan to open a business in the future	
Yes	27.7	Yes	21.5	Yes	98.0
No	72.3	No	78.5	No	2.0

Table 2: Business Ownership
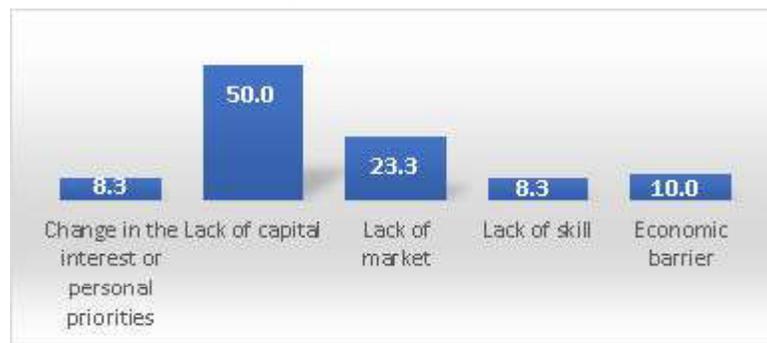
Figure 4: Reasons for Business Closure

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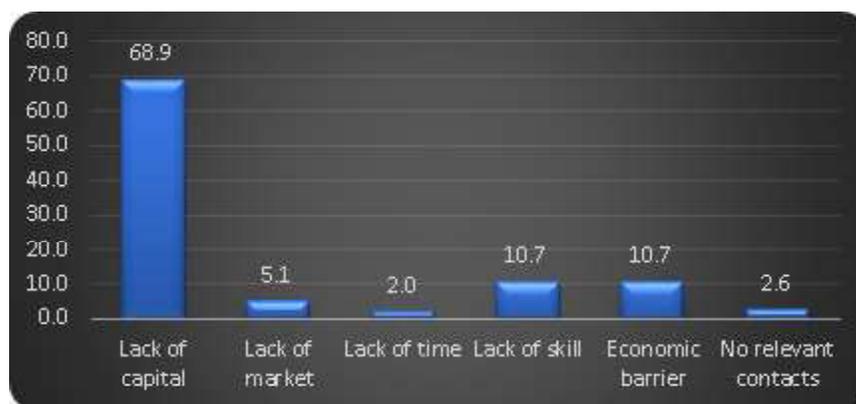
Figure 5: Reasons for not starting business

Despite the fact that the town in which the study was conducted had only 28% and 26% of the youths indicating that they had either received vocational skills' training or business management training (Table 3). This is a clear indication of the huge human development skills gap that needs to be closed if youths can equally participate in the small and medium enterprises sector.

Vocational skills		Business management	
Yes	28.2	Yes	25.9
No	71.8	No	74.1

Table 3: Business related training received

Participation in Elections, Governance and Civic Activities
Only 38% of the respondents were registered voters (Figure 6). 71% indicated that they had participated in meetings held in their communities at one stage or the other (Figure 7). However, only 23% reported that they regularly participate in these meetings (Figure 8).
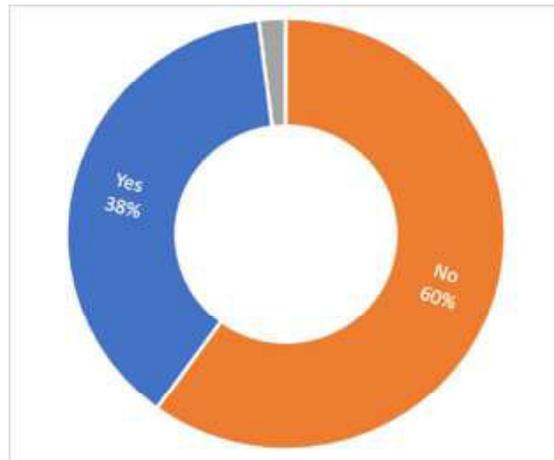
Figure 6: Registered voters
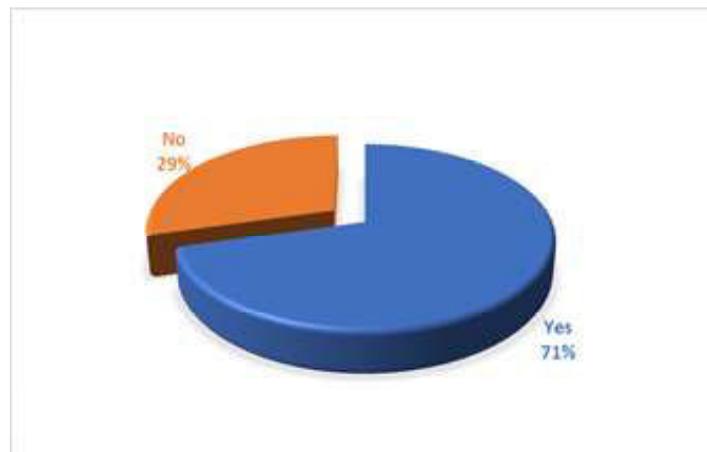
Figure 7: Individual Participation in local meetings
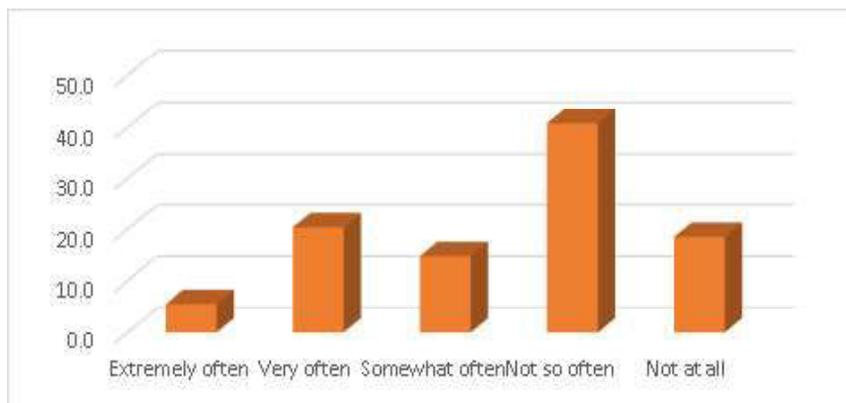
Figure 8: Frequency of Participation

Participation in violence

Respondents were also asked if they ever participated in political violence. There were indications of low participation with only 15% affirming this (Figure 9). This is in contrast with avowals that youths are violent and willingly take part in political or electoral violence. Unemployment (52%) and the payment of allowances by politicians (26%) were cited as the major drivers behind youth participation in political violence (Figure 10).
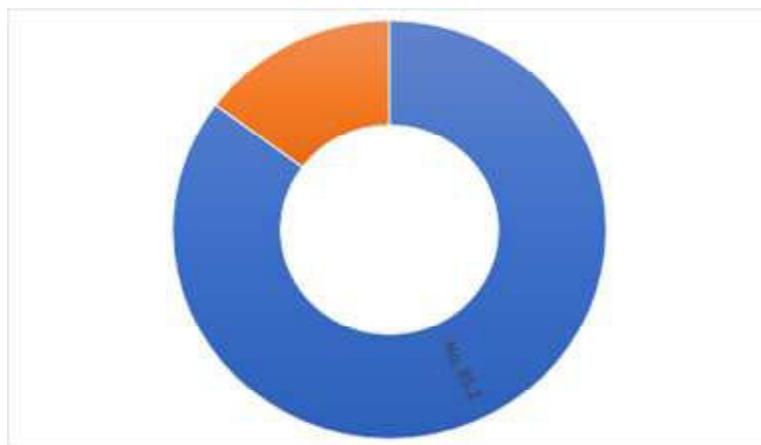
Figure 9: Participation in political violence
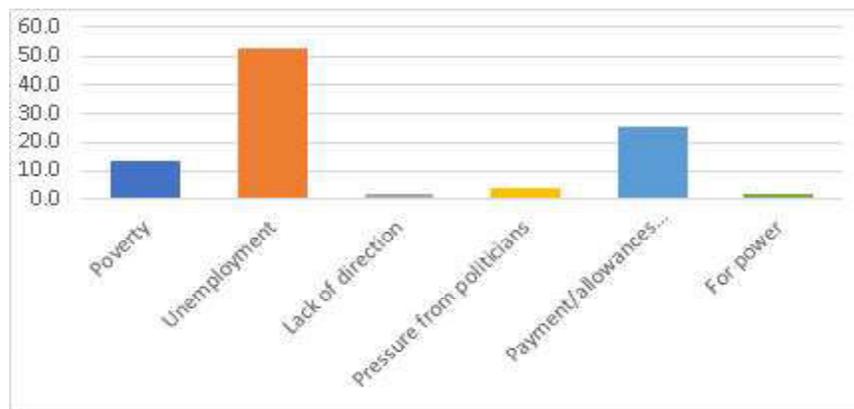
Figure 10: Drivers of youth participation in violence or conflict

Civic Engagement Skills
A small number of youths indicated that they have skills on civic engagement processes (Figure 11). 29% stated that they had skills on elections, democracy, governance and youth participation whilst 32% can communicate with government officials. On the same note, 42% are likely to have skills and knowledge on how to deal with conflict non-violently.
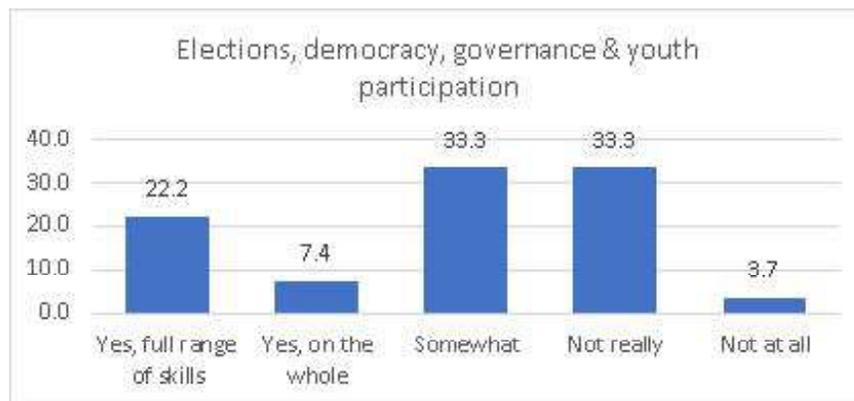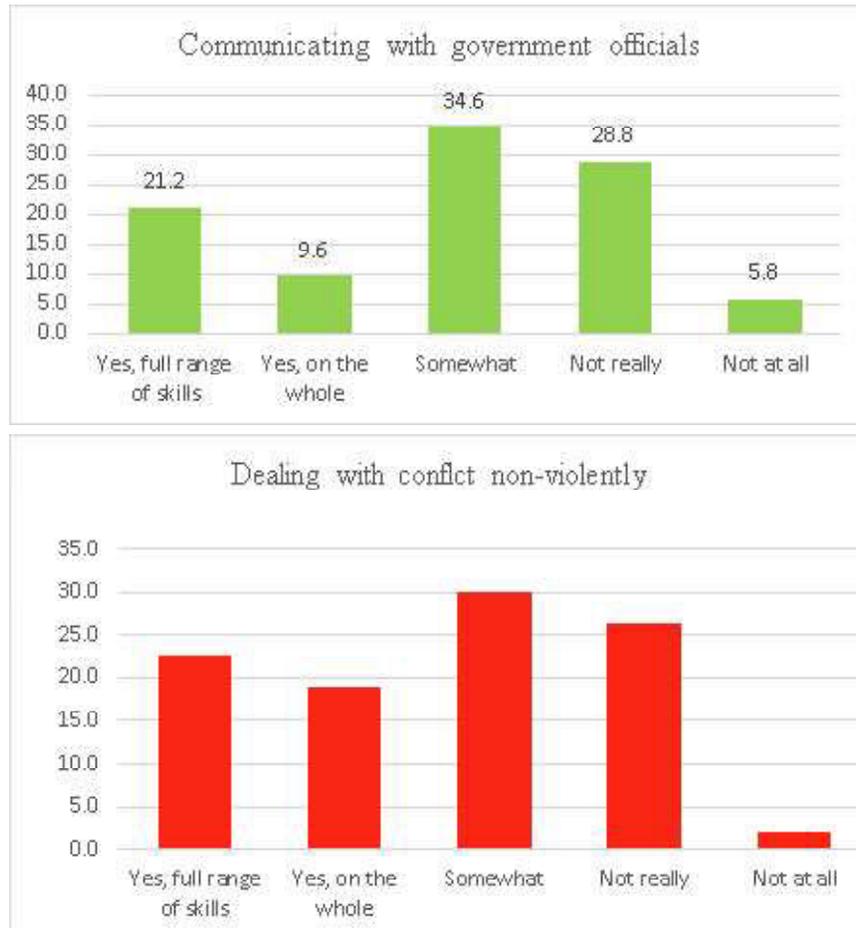

Figure 11: Civil education skills received

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Communicating with government officials

Yes, full range of skills: 21.2
Yes, on the whole: 9.6
Somewhat: 34.6
Not really: 28.8
Not at all: 5.8

Dealing with conflict non-violently

Yes, full range of skills; Yes, on the whole; Somewhat; Not really; Not at all

**Civic Participation by Age, Gender and Employment Status**

Figures 12, 13 and 14 investigate the relationship between age, gender, employment status and participation in elections and local meetings. The data indicates that levels of participation, voter registration and meeting attendance, among the younger age groups are low and characterised by high levels of apathy. However, participation picks up as one gets older. The same can be said about the frequency of participation.

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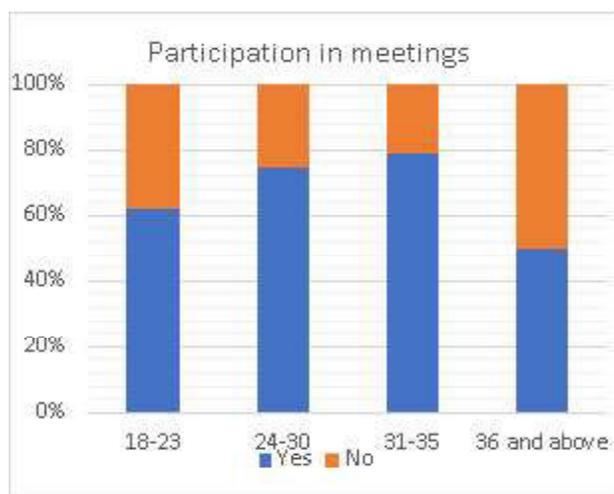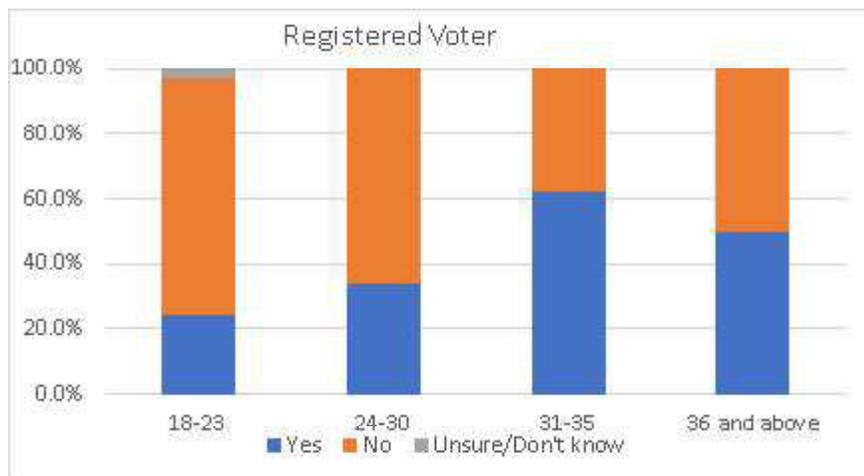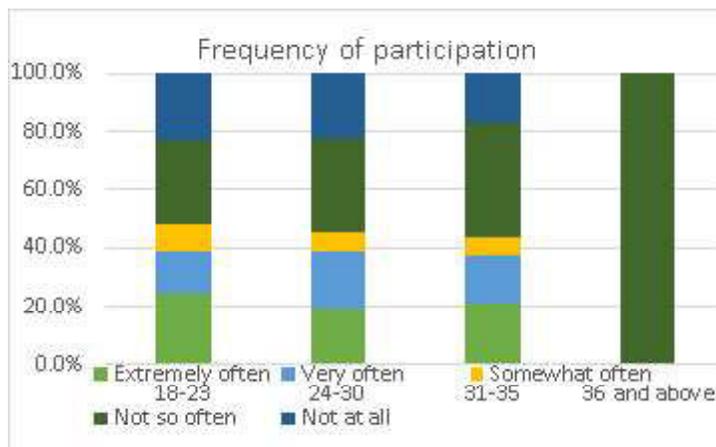
Figure 12: Age, voter's registration, participation in meetings and frequency of participation

It was observed that male youths were more likely to be registered voters than their female counterparts. On the contrary, more female respondents reported participation in local meetings. However, their frequency of attendance was lower.
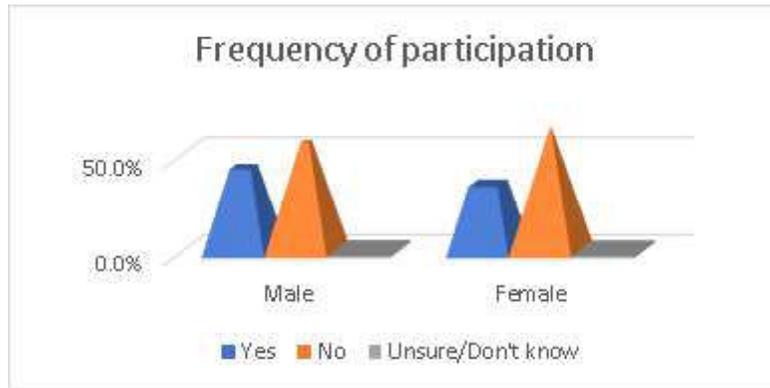
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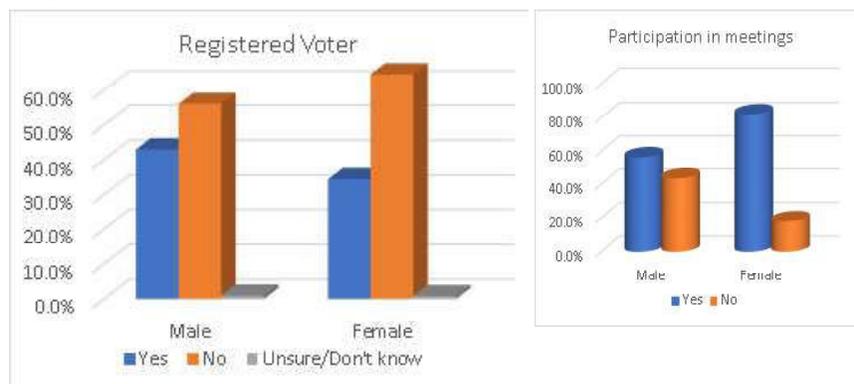
Figure 13: Gender, voter's registration, participation in meetings and frequency of participation

Formally employed youth were more likely to be registered voters than those doing nothing or in self-employment. The same trend was noted in their participation in local meetings. However, the youths who were doing nothing were more frequent attendees of these local meetings.

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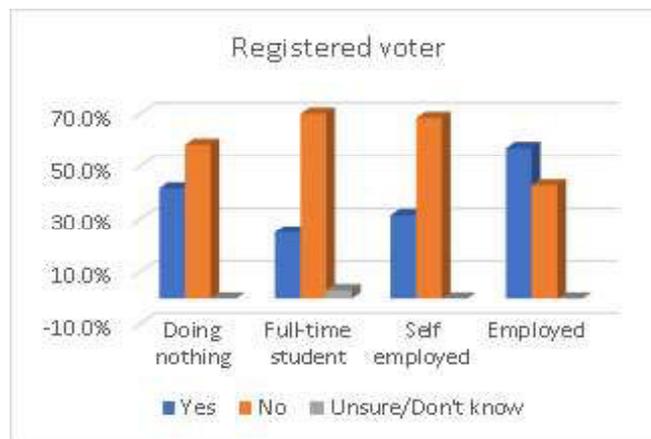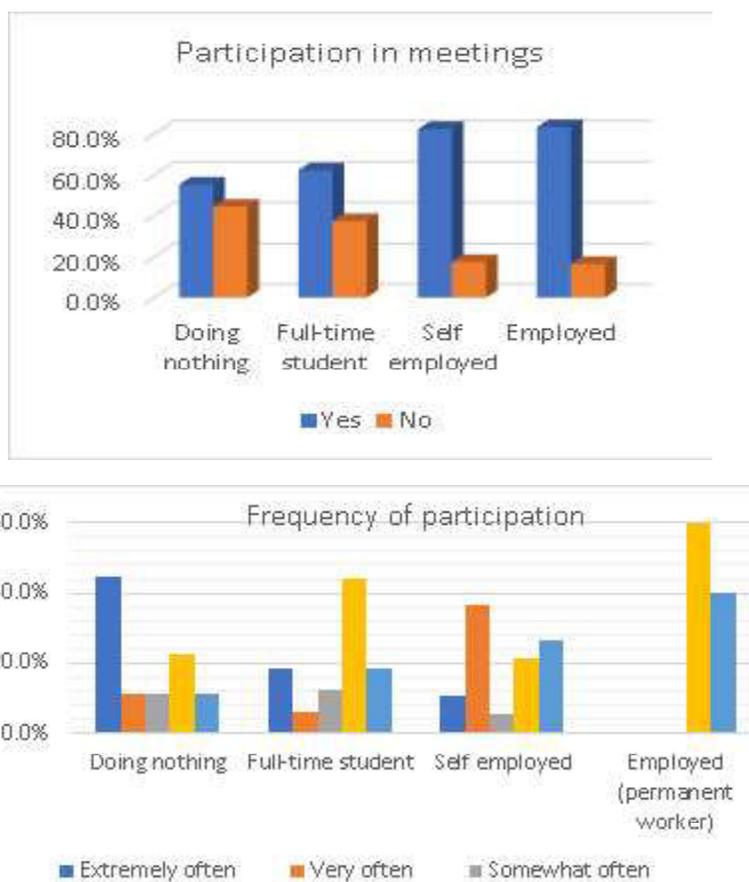
Figure 14: Employment status, voter's registration, participation in meetings and frequency of participation

Creating Participatory Structures for Youth
Preparedness to Run for Office and Open Political Structures
Most of the youths believed that young people were prepared to run for office in the 2018 elections. However, 47% of them indicated that young people needed more support in their preparations to run for public office (Figure 15). Only 17% of the youths believed that political parties were

creating spaces and making efforts to level the playing field so that they could participate in elections (Figure 16).
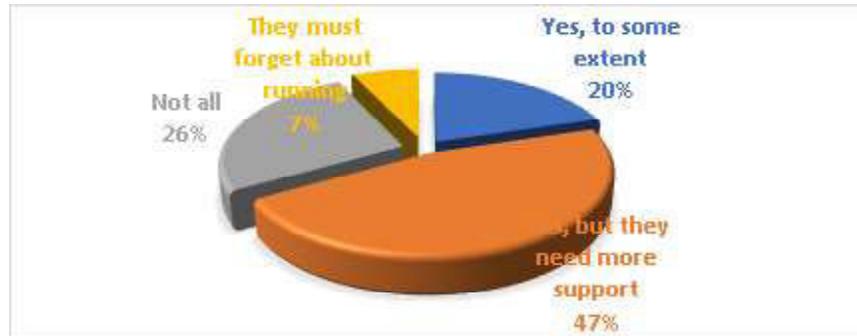

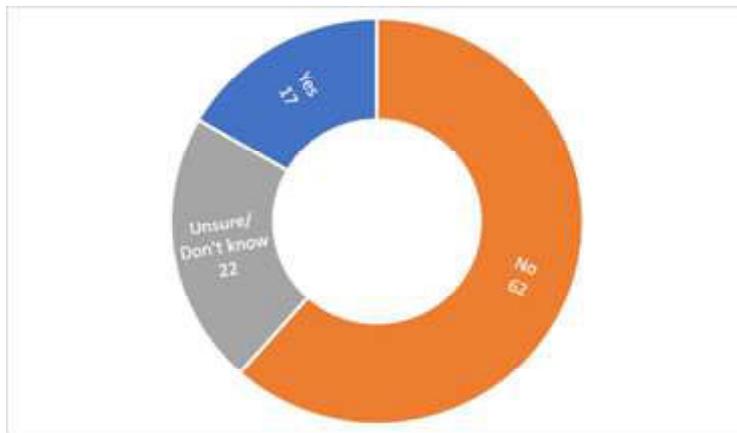*Figure 15: Youth preparedness to run for public office*

Figure 16: Political parties creating space for young people

Inclusive Decision-Making Processes and Activities

Only 18% of the youths agreed with the statement that said, *'local development decision making processes and activities are becoming more participatory and youth inclusive in your area, compared to two years ago'*

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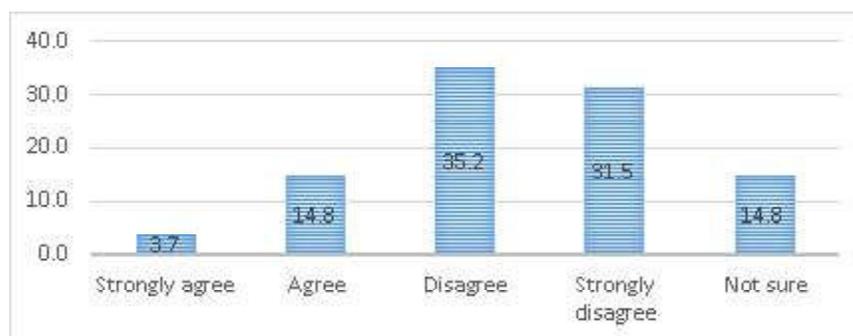
Figure 17: Decision making processes more participatory and youth inclusive

Barriers to Youth Participation

It was observed that 67% of the respondents cited political structures as not allowing meaningful youth participation. A further 40%, 37% and 35% reported lack of interest, lack of information and lack of funds, respectively, as the other major barriers. Only 6% indicated that their parents will not allow them to participate (Figure 18).

Figure 18: Barriers to youth participation

Actions Needed by Young People to Successfully Run for Office

52% of the youths indicated that for young people to succeed in running for office in 2018, they need to mobilise and sensitise other youths to register to vote. 30% indicated that training in elections, governance and democratic processes was also needed. None believed in the usage of violence to make their demands heard (Figure 19).
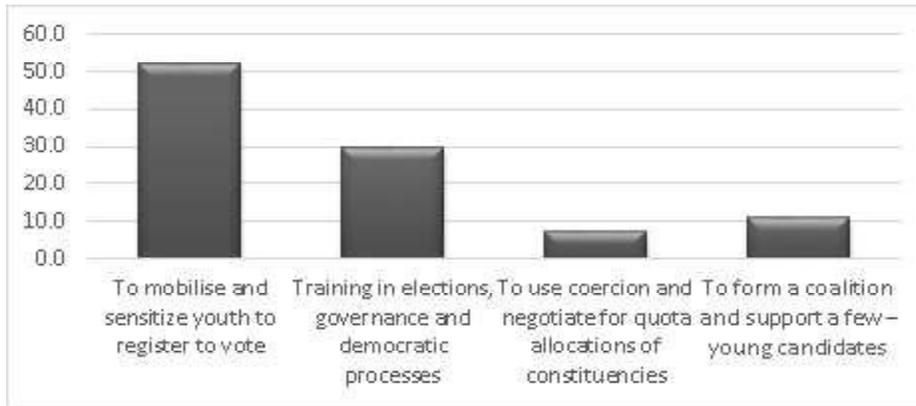
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Figure 19: What Youth need to successfully run for public office

Improving Youth Participation

As we seek for ways to improve youth participation, it is crucial to understand the issues that youths hold important. Respondents were therefore asked to indicate three issues they viewed as important and should be focused on when providing solutions to problems confronting the youths. Resultantly, job opportunities (54%), leadership development (48%) and collaboration with adult decision makers (33%) were the top three. Figure 20 provides the information.
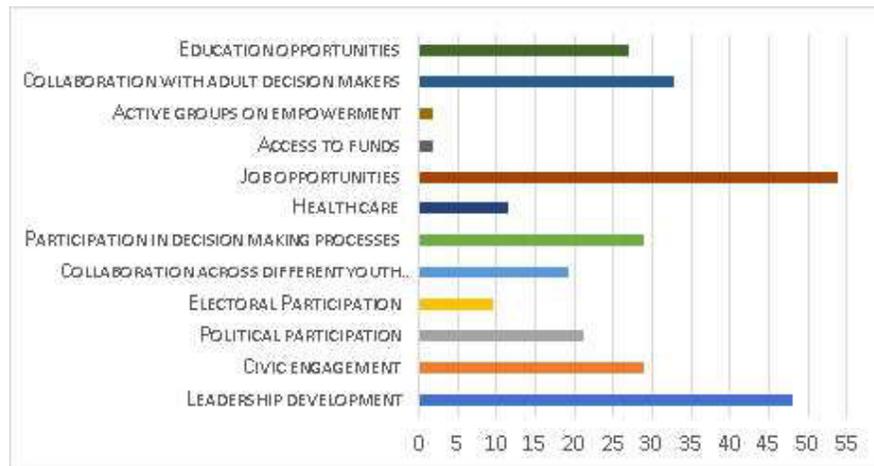

Figure 20: Issues important to youth

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Proposed Interventions

The top five solutions to improving youth participation were: (i) provision of leadership trainings (71%), (ii) freedom to participate in politics and development without restrictions (53%), (iii) setting up youth friendly centres (45%), (iv) effective engagement in productive activities (42%) and (v) engagement through entertainment (41%). Figure 21 provides this information.
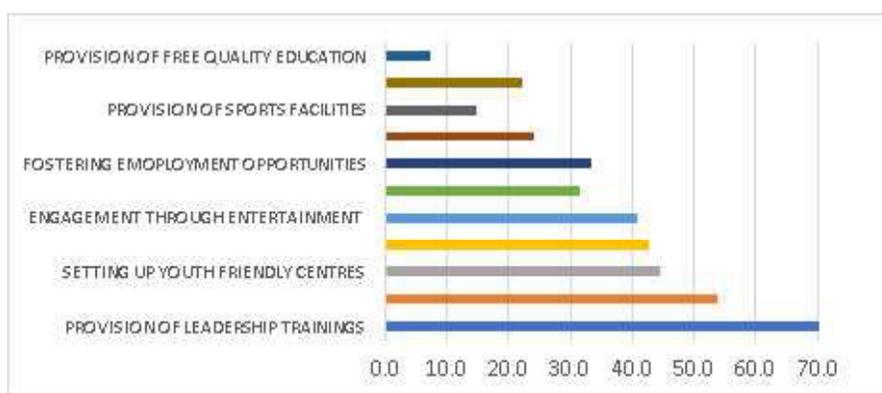
Figure 21: Ways to improve youth participation

Discussion and Recommendations

The results of the survey give an insight into the levels of youth exclusion in decision making and democratic processes in Zimbabwe. The data collected also corroborates findings made in other studies. The study also reveals that decision-making processes at local level are not becoming more participatory or youth inclusive. It was also observed that political structures are not being opened to allow young people to equally stand up as candidates in elections. This gives credence to the prevalence of adultism in Zimbabwe. Resultantly, young people will rightfully continue to see themselves as being side-lined from development and governance processes within their local communities. Apart from the closed political structures, the study also revealed that youth participation is hampered by lack of interest in governance processes, lack of information as well as lack of funding to campaign for office. The study reveals that even if there are youths ready to run for office they still need support. A notable observation is that they still need capacity building on

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elections and democratic processes as well as leadership development training. It was observed that for young candidates to succeed in their quest for public office, they need to mobilise and sensitise their peers on voter registration and encourage them to participate in governance processes.

Given the study's findings, it is recommended that government and policy makers need to increase the efforts to create participatory spaces, both physical and structural, that allow for the meaningful participation of youths. Moreover, in undertaking a participatory approach, the youths need to be equal partners. Therefore, their own proposed solutions need to be laid on the table. Meaningful participation will thus be attainable if youths are indeed afforded the space and resources to contribute to policy formulation through collaborative dialogue with adults. In this case the youths become co-creators and not just beneficiaries of economic structural transformation policies and initiatives.

The African Economic Outlook (2013) emphasises, in one of its four layered policy approach, the importance of "education, infrastructure and access to sufficiently large, regional markets." Deliberate efforts, which ensure that youths do indeed have access to these, need to be made. It follows that skills training in the key modern sectors needs to be expedited and rolled out through adult-learning settings. Business management skilling should also focus on identification and exploitation of opportunities in regional and international markets. This should be coupled with infrastructure support, for youth-run businesses, that enables efficient and competitive production. Chances are that if this does not take place, youths in Africa will remain job-seekers and not employment creators.

The development of a competent citizen through civic education programmes, targeting in and out of school youths, should be prioritised. Therefore, efforts should be increased to mainstream civic education in all areas where youths self-organise such as sport events, music shows, religious events, and community work projects. Support needs to be given towards youth leadership development with government, donors and the international community providing the necessary resources.

Conclusion
This study set out to determine the level of participation of youths in economic, elections and governance processes. It also identified the barriers to youth participation and laid down ways in which the participation can be improved.

Youth participation is a human right which allows for citizens to contribute to development whilst they, aside from highlighting their expertise, exchange knowledge and skills with other citizens. If youth participate in elections, governance, and development processes, they can develop leadership skills at an early age. This can indeed assist their transition into adulthood and make them more responsible citizens. While youths might be apathetic in some cases, their participation is hampered by closed spaces within political and local government structures which are dominated by adults. Aside from the closed spaces, the lack of competency and information on business management, elections and governance processes are other barriers to youth participation. This presents the need to intensify civic education efforts at the early stages of youthhood. Youth participation is also hindered by lack of funding and lack of interest amongst the younger age groups. While there are some young people who are ready to run for public office, they must be afforded the chance to freely participate without any restrictions. They should also be supported to mobilise and sensitise their peers on the significance of participation and to rally more support for their candidature. Resources and support must be given to youth-led initiatives that are reaching out to young people and ensure they play their part in democratic processes at all levels of governments.

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