

Roundtable discussion on youth employment The Hague, 31 May 2017

Organized by Ronald van Moorten (Oxfam NOVIB)

Participants

Eniola Edogameh (Nigeria)
Toyosi Oyebanji (Nigeria)
Mark Odong (Uganda)
Regis Umugiraneza (Rwanda)
Francis Arinaitwe (Uganda)
Carol Njeri Gathogo (Kenya)

Simone Reinders (INCLUDE)
Ronald van Moorten, Gwendolyn Parami, Inga Ferber (Oxfam Novib)

Note: Personal profiles of the youth participants are provided at the end of this report.

Introduction

On 31 May 2017, six young people from Uganda, Rwanda, Nigeria and Kenya were invited to attend a roundtable conversation with Oxfam Novib about youth employment and shrinking civic space. The participants were in The Hague to speak at the conference 'Boosting youth employment: what works and why?', which was organized by the INCLUDE Knowledge Platform and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 30 May 2017. The roundtable was organized by Oxfam Novib, as a side event to the conference.

A recurring topic throughout the discussion was that local youth should be included more in policymaking and programme design. Their inclusion would allow young people to provide more information on the challenges they face in gaining employment, including corruption, inefficient policy design and implementation, and exclusionary programme requirements. An example of such challenges is programmes designed with age limits, which exclude disadvantaged youth who take longer to finish their education. This is also relevant to programmes with high entry requirements, which tend to exclude youth from rural villages who often have low education levels. Another

challenge faced by youth is corruption, which can be enabled by certain programme designs. Finally, to gain employment, youth need both skills and job opportunities. To build skills and make youth more employable, it is important to use a combination of different interventions, like training and internships, while also giving them an opportunity to access the job market.



In relation to civic space, the participants discussed organized youth groups in informal settings, which can provide young people with opportunities to create and engage in the civic space. However, it was pointed out that civic

space programmes offered by NGOs should also offer youth some future prospects in the form of training or internships to engage youth long term. It was also argued that youth should manage their expectations when it comes to the job market. Expectations of high wages and entering the workforce at a high level, preferably in the public sector, after graduation are not realistic.

The roundtable was conducted in two parts: Part 1 consisted of a reflection on four thematic areas related to youth employment and an upcoming symposium on youth employment in Africa, and Part 2 consisted of a discussion on the shrinking civic space and the Oxfam Novib VOICE programme.

Part 1. Reflection on thematic areas

The following themes were covered in Part 1:

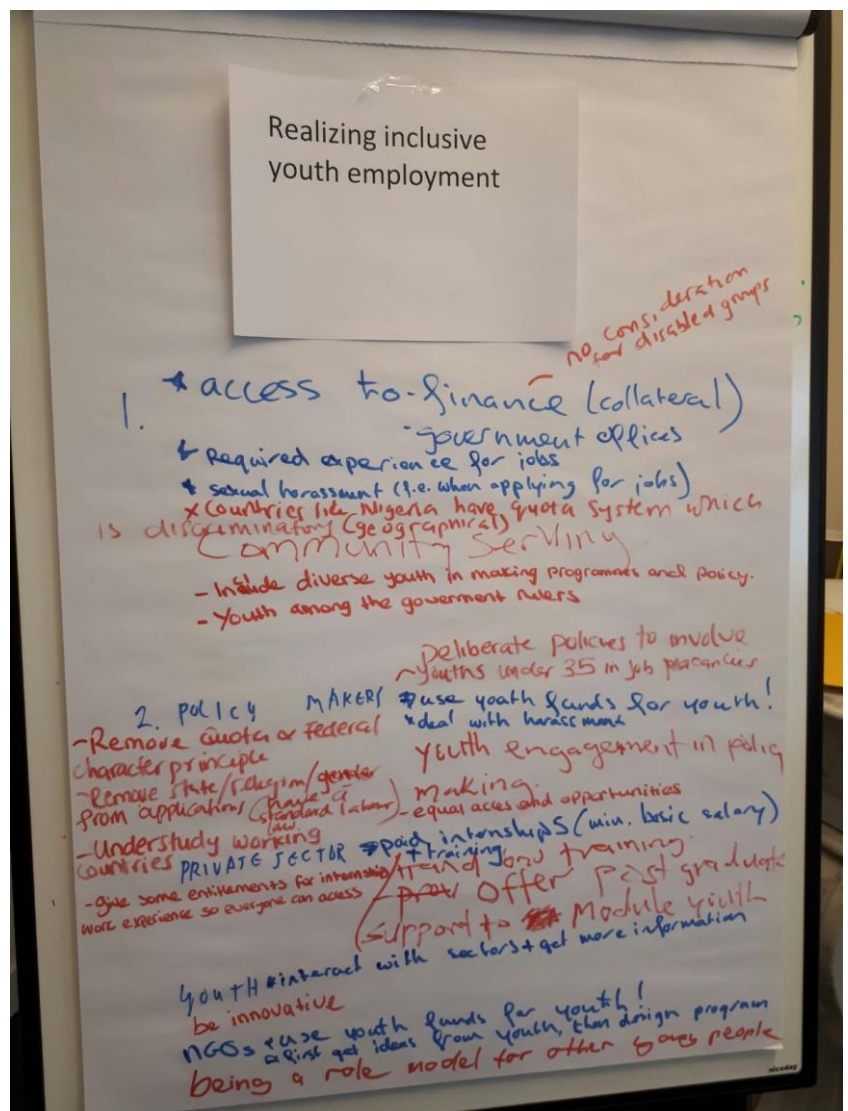
- Realizing inclusive youth employment
- Influencing policies, practices and power dynamics
- Support for, and development of, new and existing companies
- The link between education and the job market

The themes were presented on flip-charts by groups of two, who rotated to present what they saw as the main challenges and opportunities, as well as what should be done by policymakers, the private sector and youth to address the challenges and maximise the opportunities.

Theme 1. Realizing inclusive youth employment

At the outset, an addition to the chart was made by Ronald van Moorten (Oxfam Novib) concerning programmes by NGOs and the private sector to support women. The group agreed that these types of programmes make sense in terms of inclusiveness.

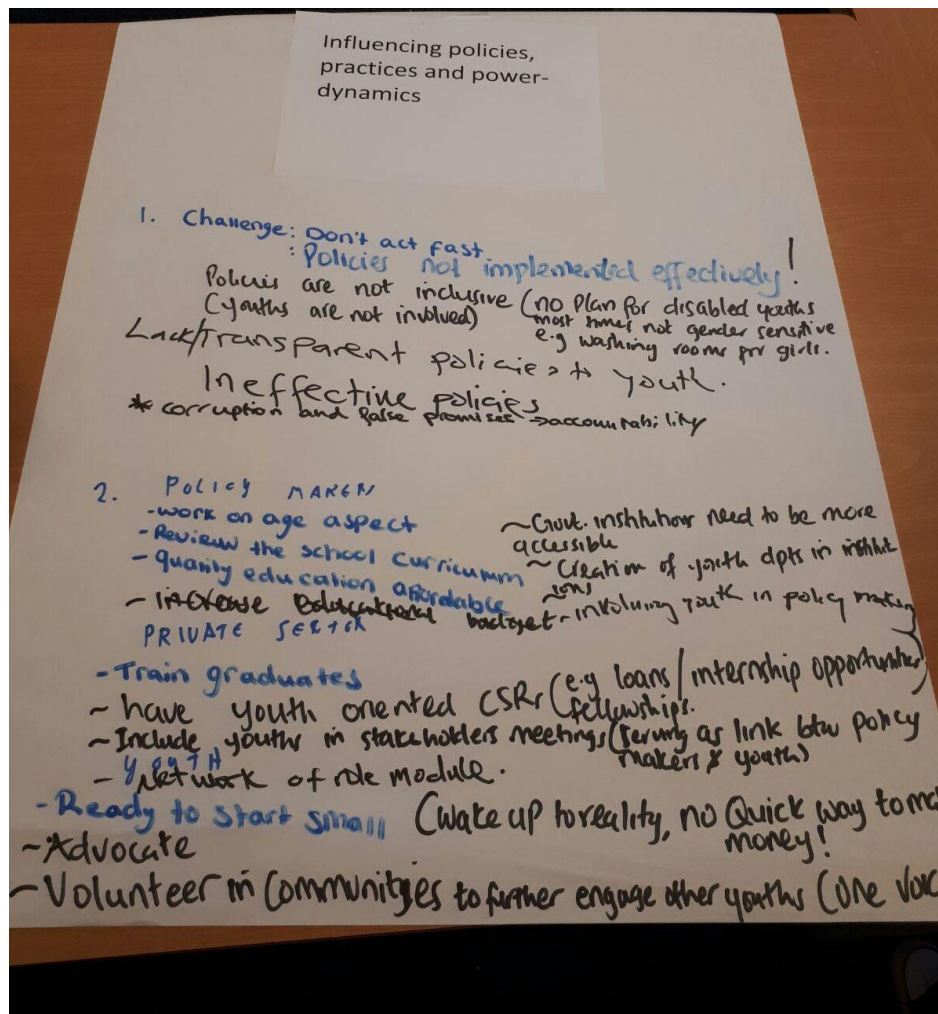
The rest of the discussion revolved around whether or not skills training without matching with private sector demand makes sense. It was pointed out that most young people do need additional training before undertaking an internship. Although some skills are taught in school, to gain the skills necessary for the job market, extra training (and funds) are required. In private schools, students acquire soft skills, which help young people to navigate through the private sector job market; however, such skills are not taught in the public school system.



Skills training is needed for capacity building and internships are a useful way to gain experience after graduation. Training combined with an internship can improve the inclusion of those youth who graduated from the public education system. Ronald proposed the option of women's leadership and networking programmes funded by the private sector. However, it was argued that this would exclude people from villages, as they do not have the basic skills and necessary Internet access to participate in such a programme.

Theme 2: Influencing policies, practices and power dynamics

In relation to policy implementation, the participants pointed out that most government policies for youth are not effectively implemented. Youth are not involved in the policy design process, which impacts negatively on the effectiveness of policies aimed at youth. An example is the setting of age limitations in programmes and policies. A young person, who goes straight from school to university, would usually graduate at the age of 24 or 25. However,



people from disadvantaged backgrounds often take longer to finish school and start university, and may even have to work first to acquire the funds. Such youth may graduate university at 31 or later. Age restrictions in government programmes exclude these young people from participating. Young people from elite backgrounds often go abroad to finish their studies, and take the prime jobs when they return. In addition, most jobs (public and private sector) are only available for people under 26. While international companies do not set age restrictions, they tend to hire young people with a good (often foreign) education – again excluding youth with a public school education and from rural areas. Restrictions are also placed on jobs in relation to gender and place of origin.

Finally, the participants mentioned that when young people think about getting a job, they have high expectations, which are hard to meet. Eniola Edogameh (Nigeria) said that it is important for young people to be prepared to start small and gain experience along the way. For example, Eniola became a 'jack of all trades', starting small to help her kids and family. She then saw the Next Economy programme on Facebook and applied:

I didn't have soft skills, but they [the Next Economy programme] trained us and gave us confidence. Somehow, along the line, I was able to find focus: there is still something good in me that can be useful. After my internship, I started in the kitchen. Now I am an accountant. If you don't start somewhere, how are you going to learn?

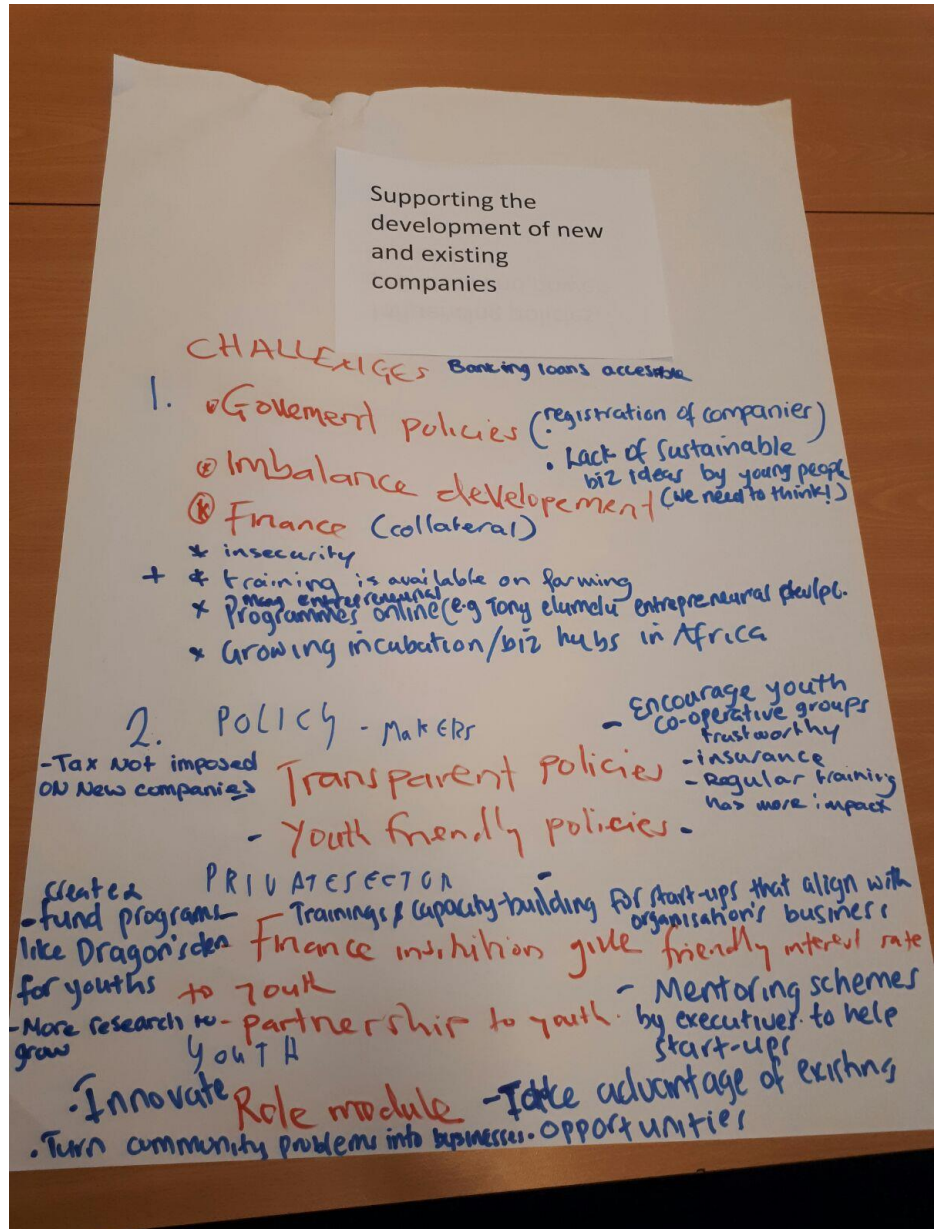
Theme 3: Support for, and development of, new and existing companies

For this theme, the debate started around the comment ‘imbalanced development’. Mark Odong (Uganda) explained that this is related to rural areas, which receive little focus in policymaking. Ronald asked if any of the participants had made use of incubation or business hubs. Toyosi Oyebanji (Nigeria) replied that they work with these in the Next Economy programme, and that she has seen the power of business hubs. The people running these hubs understand the context and are not as out-of-tune as policymakers and business people are. The hubs reach people in rural communities with fantastic ideas. Most youth are reached through radio, through which they are invited to come and discuss ideas. People in the villages are reached using different strategies (e.g., social media, churches, mosques and radio shows): “They [hubs] are the future because they are a melting pot; they touch everything and are good business mentors”.

Another comment made repeatedly throughout the themes was about access to finance, especially in relation to lack of collateral that youth can use. Many banks require collateral, which makes their financial services hard to for youth to access. Another challenge mentioned was corruption, which also impacts on the way young people use finance.

The high exposure of youth to corruption by politicians can result in them imitating this behaviour and becoming corrupt themselves.

Toyosi said that the main problem causing the failure of business ventures is not lack of finance, but skills, which is why incubators are so important, as they give youth the skills they need to be successful in business. Her experience in the cocoa sector has shown that money can cause arguments. Therefore, she suggested giving money to groups: “So many people have ideas, and we should let go of that individualistic mentality. In any project there needs to be either one person responsible for the cash flow, or access should be given in the form of materials”. She explained that giving money in groups would overcome problems related to youth not using loans for what they were intended for: “Even when faced with repercussions, people will spend the money on expensive items like motorbikes. They will try to go around the system”. The others in the room shared this opinion.

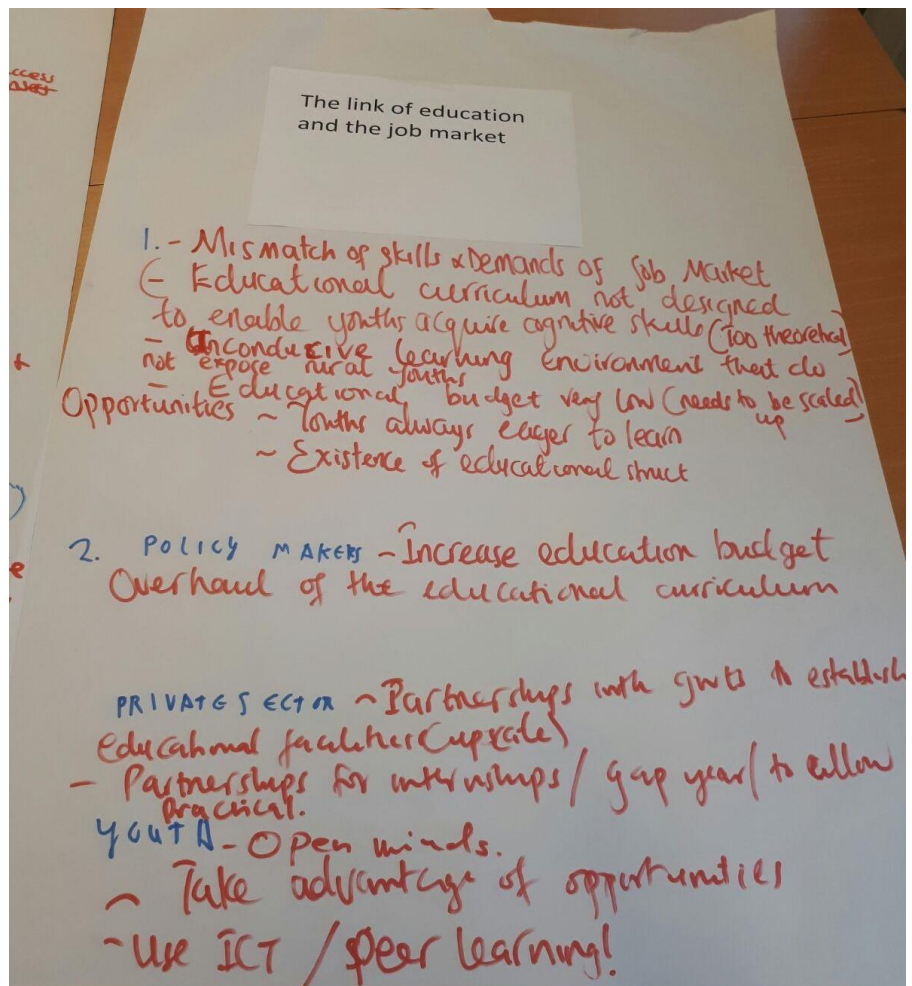


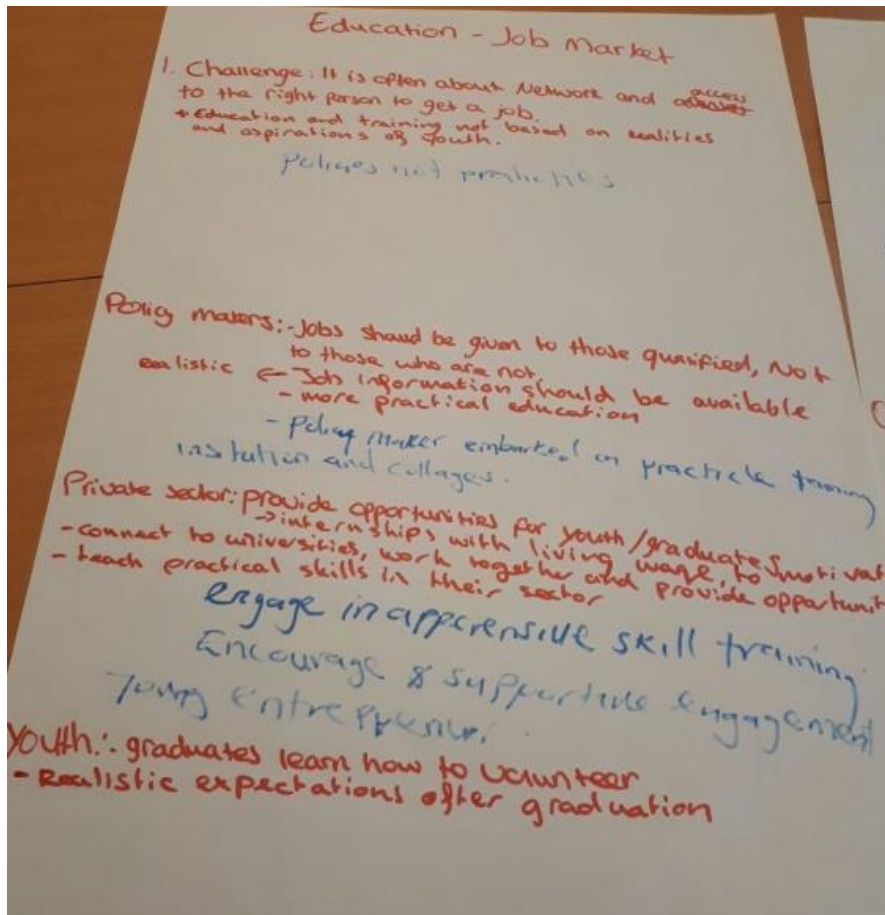
Francis Arinaitwe (Uganda) said that youth should not always be blamed for failure of a business or failing to pay back a loan, as they do not always know how to use the money they receive for their business. They try their best, but when a business fails no one inquires about why it failed and, hence, they do not learn from the experience: “You [programmes/banks] just give other people the same thing [loans]. Something should be attached [to the loan], like training. You have to analyse; it is not the problem of the young people, but that of policymakers and government”. Mark added that trainings, like in the livelihoods programme, are often given, but problems arise with corruption: “Even if 10 million is offered, 30% disappears before it reaches beneficiaries. What we receive is not what we asked for or need, so we collapse. The government cannot provide proper finance for us”. Francis pointed out that this is another reason why youth need to be included in policymaking: “We are the ones who face the challenges. Sure you ask us, we tell you and participate in the platforms, but sometimes we end up having this stuff [facing challenges]”. Eniola added that there should be more focus on education.

Theme 4: The link between education and the job market

Talking about aspirations and challenges, it was argued that youth generally want jobs (or internships) to make a living. Francis explained:

When we go through school the government thinks its preparing us for jobs. But its preparing us for the streets. The curriculum should focus on equipping us with the skills for self-employment. If vocational institutes prioritize agriculture, people will take up agriculture.





Eniola pointed out how political the job market is; she said that it is all about who you know and whether they have a name in society. Carol Njeri Gathogo (Kenya) said that the situation is the same in Kenya. She said that the first question asked in a job interview is often 'who told you about the job', not whether or not you have the necessary skills to do the job. These comments relate mostly to government positions, and less so to the private sector. Some participants shared examples where they had applied for a job and were asked about their relations, family, and place of origin. Some job advertisements even ask for people educated abroad. In some cases, it is possible to be hired for such jobs, as long as the applicant is persistent, confident about their own capabilities and has enough stamina. However, the participants

said that this process creates feelings of frustration and requires strongminded people to deal with the exclusion. Toyosi said:

This is why there is so much extremism. Before, people thought they would go to heaven in the end and it will all be fine, but people are now reaching the breaking point, things are changing. When people tell us that youth should hold our governments accountable for this, I get angry. We do try to hold governments accountable, but they only see the money. It's terrible. But it's going to change, these guys now go to communities, but people start scolding them. Saying he is a thief. My own opinion changed when I worked in rural communities and I realized how bad they have it.

Eniola added: "We need policymakers to help empower the youth".

Part 2. Discussion on shrinking civic space and VOICE: making the invisible visible.

The group received an introduction to the civic space context from the viewpoint of the OxfamNovib VOICE programme. VOICE is concerned with citizens claiming civic space and standing up against corruption. Governments, on the other hand, can be responsible for shrinking civic space through legislation that restricts freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. Oxfam supports organizations that seek to counteract this restriction of space. However, those seeking to protect our civic space often run into trouble – they are raided and monitored online, and sometimes even jailed – so voicing concerns is difficult. The question to the participants was how can they fight back, as members of the private sector and as citizens. Mark explained how most private sector companies work with the government for this reason: "otherwise they [companies] are targeted". He added: imposing your own policy ideas becomes a problem: "You cannot exercise your own vision". Francis, who works with youth the district level in Uganda, explained how last year he promoted sexual reproductive health and rights

(SRHR) and the media approached him to talk about it. Francis' group was then harassed by the government for promoting the topic, which he sees as a violation of the right to freedom speech: "We have a lot of bureaucracy to go through; [the government wants to know] who are you, what are you doing, etc."

Oxfam added that the new Non-Governmental Organisations Act 2016 in Uganda, which arguably narrows the legal civic space for NGOs, is another example of shrinking civic space. Toyosi mentioned that in Nigeria, a radio station was destroyed for speaking out. She argued that the focus should be on meetings and discussions in informal spaces – as these have potential. She explained that anything said in social media can get you into trouble and cause problems but: "in the informal space you cannot revoke a licence. The main challenge is keeping the motivation. In informal spaces you have to keep going and going".

Francis said that the local private sector has a role to play in creating and engaging in civic space, but mainly through the international private sector. Local companies use international companies as partners to create change. Toyosi added that youth can achieve things, but getting them together is a challenge. Francis agreed that it is possible: "we can do it". Swisscontact, for example, is a Mastercard organization with whom Francis works to set up groups to engage youth and advocate for their rights. Swisscontact have decided to match groups together, as they are facing challenges: "we have not been formalized, we are informal, but we are still going on. We want to formalize to gain partners and international organizations to support us".

Toyosi supports this approach of working through youth groups. When working on governance to create civic space, she found that there is no community that doesn't have a youth organization. However, these groups are not structured and are, therefore, can easily be used for political gain:

You need to reach them before politicians reach them. In that project we realized that. When you actually sit them down and promote them to be active citizens, they feel like you want to use them. This means that if you have these informal groups, it has to be all-encompassing: confidence, business start-ups, opportunities. Otherwise they will not come every week to speak about their activism and rights. Especially in rural communities there are associations, in churches or mosques, but not properly organized.

Regis Umugiraneza (Rwanda) shared an example from Rwanda of how to organize youth groups. Large groups of youth in agribusiness are organized in the Rwanda Youth in Agribusiness Forum. It has 10,400 members, some formalized, some informal (registration is easier in Rwanda). At the village level, there are two representatives per village. This goes up through the levels in the organization to a national board. Information is spread and used through WhatsApp, which is accessed collectively in rural areas. For this organization, the idea is to create role models and make farming 'cool' again.

The participants

Carol Njeri Gathogo is a small-scale farmer and a member of the Ndumberi Dairy Cooperative Society in Kenya. She owns one acre of land and seven cows, four of which are milk cows. She joined the cooperative to market her milk and to gain access to loans, which has allowed her to rent an additional half acre of land. She meets regularly with other youth in the cooperative and is positive about the outcomes and the growing energy in the group. Last year, she participated in the Youth Leadership programme of Agriterra and spoke at the International Dairy Summit in Rotterdam.



Francis Arinaitwe is a volunteer with Restless Development and a youth leader at the district level in Mayuge, Uganda. He was one of 16 young people from East Africa selected for The MasterCard Foundation Youth Think Tank, a group of young people who conduct qualitative research to better understand the economic challenges facing African youth. In his other role, as Youth Chairperson, Francis represents his district during sub-country and district convening and supports young farmers by helping to ensure their priorities are addressed. He also helps connect young people to government programmes. He is currently pursuing a diploma in Social Development at YMCA College of Business Studies in Jinja, Uganda.



Regis Umugiraneza is the co-founder and chief executive officer of the CARL Group, a business owned by four young entrepreneurs in Rwanda. It started with the idea of making spaghetti from sweet potatoes, a crop grown widely throughout the country. This has been a great success in Rwanda, as it is an affordable and nutritious source of food. In addition, he is the head of the Rwanda Youth in Agribusiness Forum (RYAF), a forum of all youth agribusinesses across the country. The forum serves to build the capacities of member agribusinesses, support members to access investment opportunities and incentives, promote access to markets, effectively advocate for its members and create awareness, marketing and the promotion of members. He graduated in Agribusiness from the University of Rwanda.



Mark Odong is an executive director at Consult Agri-Query Solutions, located in the north of Uganda. Consult Agri-Query is concerned with horticultural production and marketing. Its mission is community empowerment through the development of agro-skills, business incubation and marketing, in order to achieve self-reliance. It mobilizes youth (aged 15–35) and convinces them farming can be a viable, marketable business, offering them hands-on skills training and demonstrations. The young farmers are then registered as out-growers of a larger farm, offering them inputs with discount to facilitate their start-up. Agri-Query helps them market their produce for fair prices, while 10% of returns are shared with the larger farm. Within 2 years, the company was able to employ 500 youths within the sub-county.



Eniola Edogameh is an intern at the Accounts Department of Transcorp Hilton in Abuja, Nigeria. Eniola was posted to Hilton under the Work and Learn phase of The Next Economy programme in Nigeria, to help her acquire skills to make her more employable. She has discharged her roles diligently and has grown more and more relevant in the organization, especially given the fact that she started as an intern in the kitchen department, before her current posting to the accounts department – a result of her outstanding performance. She graduated in accounting from the University of Mkar, Gboko, Benue State and aims to build a career in this field.



Toyosi Oyebanji coordinates The Next Economy programme in Nigeria and is a Youth Coach at SOS Children's Villages. The Next Economy programme seeks to empower young Nigerians to unleash their potential by offering capacity building, a platform, and support so as to help them succeed as entrepreneurs and employees with decent jobs. Within a year of programme implementation in the northern part of the country, about 600 young people have attended or are still in the programme; about 100 are currently undergoing internships across different organizations, and 5 have secured permanent jobs (as of April 2017). Toyosi has been working actively in youth development across different organizations for the last 5 years. She holds a Bachelor of Political Science and is currently pursuing a postgraduate degree in peace and conflict resolution. She intends to work in the youth development sector, which is her passion.

