

**BOOSTING
DECENT
EMPLOYMENT
FOR AFRICA'S
YOUTH**

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PROMOTING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT FOR DECENT EMPLOYMENT: ADDRESSING THE DISCONNECTS

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List of acronyms

AFDB	African Development Bank
ALMPs	Active Labour Market policies
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
DYLG	Democratic Youth League of Ghana (Ghana)
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council
ILO	International Labour Organization
MELR	Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations (Ghana)
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MMDA	Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assembly (Ghana)
MOFA	Ministry of Food and Agriculture (Ghana)
NASPA	National Service Personnel Association (Ghana)
NDPC	National Development Planning Commission (Ghana)
NEET	Not in Employment, Education or Training
NEP	National Employment Policy
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NGOs	Non-governmental Organizations
NUGS	National Union of Ghana Students
NYA	National Youth Authority (Ghana)
NYC	National Youth Council
NYOC	National Youth Organisation Commission (Ghana)
NYP	National Youth Policy
NYP	National Youth Policies
MDA	Ministry, Department or Agency
MMDA	Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assembly
MGCY	Major Group for Children and Youth
ODA	Oversees Development Assistance
PAREJ	Support Project for Resilience of Youth Enterprises
PFJ	Planting for Food and Jobs

S4YE	Solutions for Youth Employment coalition
SMEs	Small and Medium Enterprise Development
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children Emergency Fund
YEI MD TF	Youth Entrepreneurship and Innovation Multi-Donor Trust Fund
YIAP	Youth in Agriculture Programme
YOUDRIC	Youth Development, Research, and Innovation Centre
YAC	Youth Advisory Committee

Recently, there have been increasing calls for meaningful youth participation in policies and programmes that matter for youth employment. This paper explores how youth engagement takes place across a range of policy areas relevant to youth employment, drawing on desk research, case study research in Ghana and data from interviews conducted with policy advisors based in various African countries and donor headquarters.

Overall, the findings show multiple gaps and disconnects across the landscape of actors and policies that matter for decent jobs for youth. Youth engagement is generally restricted to National Youth Policies (NYP) and to Ministries of Youth, which tend to have limited power within the wider policy landscape and are themselves underfunded. It is evident that young people are rarely engaged in policy making or implementation for broader issues of economic development, labour rights, national employment strategies or rural agricultural policy. However, beyond NYPs, this paper demonstrates important lessons from emerging initiatives that promote youth engagement at the intervention level. Certain international development partners seek active youth participation within programmes which have the potential to create direct engagement between government actors and youth constituencies. On the other hand, since the overall policy landscape remains fragmented, it will be difficult to assess where and how youth engagement is substantive and where it needs to be strengthened, in both the short and longer term. Organising adequate representation and downward accountability to youth constituencies is a key challenge across all initiatives. Youth civil society, while vibrant in all contexts, may lack the technical expertise to engage in certain policy processes.

The paper concludes by outlining recommendations to governments, bilateral and multi-lateral donors and development partners, and civil society organisations with respect to how they can promote youth engagement with various policies relevant to youth employment. Not only can they create more entry points for promoting youth engagement within the policy landscape, they can also increase their efforts in creating more inclusive and meaningful youth participation. This includes enhancing the representation of diverse youth groups, in particular youth from remote and rural areas and poorer youth, as well as strengthening their accountability to youth constituencies. Democratic governance interventions offer valuable lessons for increasing young people's influence in policy formulation. For example, building the technical expertise of youth organisations around policy processes, and building alliances between different civil society groups (youth civil society, women organisations and worker associations) to collectively advocate around decent work issues. Youth sections within unions and farmer associations can be strengthened to meaningfully represent young people in tripartite social dialogues. Donor-funded youth employment programmes can be used strategically to create dialogue between youth and various sectoral ministries, beyond the Ministry of Youth, with policy advisors in embassies leveraging their access to government actors. These programmes should also integrate strategies for building young people's civic and political capacities, necessary for negotiating safe and decent labour conditions.

1. Introduction

Promoting youth employment has been a key priority for governments and development partners for several years and will be for some time to come. This is driven by concerns over the continent's young population and their current, and future, needs for decent employment, as well as concerns about what might happen if these needs remain unfulfilled. Africa has the youngest population in the world and 70 per cent of Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) region is under the age of 30. Africa also has the youngest labour force (Fox and Gandhi, 2021, p.7). The majority of young people are economically active and simply cannot afford to be out of work, but find themselves in informal and often precarious employment. The Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated these existing labour market challenges for young people. The International Labour Organization (ILO) (2022) showed that the shifts to inactivity were most acute for young people, in addition to severe disruption they experienced to their education and training, global youth unemployment rates are still below pre-pandemic rates. The informal economy was also severely affected, for example, mobility restrictions affected informal, supply chains and markets, and informal domestic workers were laid off in large numbers (WIEGO, 2022). The number of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) rose to the highest levels in 15 years (ILO, 2022). With the 'Global call to action for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis', the ILO has stressed the urgency to address the needs of young people within post-pandemic recovery (ibid.). This builds on the Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth, a multi-stakeholder initiative established in 2015 to scale up action for youth employment in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and specifically Goal 8.5 on decent and productive employment (DJ4Y, 2015). The push for decent jobs for all is important in its own right, but some of the policy discourse continues to reflect concerns over the risk of youth unemployment to instability, even though the evidence for a direct and casual relationship between youth unemployment and violence is weak and often contradictory (Cramer, 2010; Dowd, 2017; Ismail and Olonisakin, 2021).

Young people, youth movements and organisations around the world have been calling for meaningful participation in decision-making processes that affect them, asking for 'nothing about us, without us' (MGCY, 2021; UNFPA, 2022). Frameworks such as the United Nations Peace and Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security also call for meaningful youth participation, as does the Africa Youth Charter. Youth participation at the level of development programmes has received considerable attention, especially those implemented by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (Oxfam, n.d.; Plan International, 2021). However, according to Chelangat et al. (2021) substantive youth engagement is still lacking with respect to policy making and policy implementation. This is particularly the case with policies relevant to youth employment, as this report will demonstrate, with most efforts targeting youth policies, often narrowly defined, rather than a broader spectrum of policies that matter for the creation of decent jobs for youth.

Our paper aims to contribute to the understanding of the policy landscape for youth employment, which should help identify entry points for not only more plentiful, but also more meaningful, opportunities for youth engagement. The scope of the research deliberately extended *beyond* youth policies. Starting from the notion that youth unemployment is a 'missing jobs crisis' rather than a 'youth crisis' (Sumberg et al., 2021), the

study considered multiple policy areas that are relevant to promoting decent jobs, such as labour policies which should protect decent and safe working conditions, and agricultural policies as large numbers of young people work in agriculture. The study addressed the question of where and how youth engagement occurs with respect to different policy areas relevant to youth employment. The research involved a desk study, interviews with policy advisors based in various African countries and donor headquarters, and case study research in Ghana. The analysis mapped the different spaces for youth engagement across various policy actors, policies and programmes and explored the extent to which youth engagement was substantive and inclusive. The analysis enabled the exploration of key barriers to meaningful youth engagement, as well as opportunities for promoting youth participation.

The findings show multiple gaps and disconnects in the policy landscape of actors and policies that matter for decent jobs for youth. Youth engagement is generally restricted to National Youth Policies (NYP) and of Ministries of Youth, which are usually underfunded and have limited power within the wider policy landscape. A Ministry of Youth may not connect to other government actors and policy processes relevant to youth employment. Young people are seldom included in policy making or implementation to address broader issues of economic development, labour rights and policies, national employment strategies or agricultural policy. However, beyond NYPs, this paper demonstrates important lessons from emerging initiatives that promote youth engagement at the intervention level. Certain international development partners seek active youth participation within programmes which have the potential to create direct engagement between government actors and youth constituencies. On the other hand, since the overall policy landscape remains fragmented, it will be difficult to assess where and how youth engagement is substantive and where it needs to be strengthened, in both the short and longer term. Organising adequate representation and downward accountability to youth constituencies is a key challenge across all initiatives. Youth civil society, while vibrant in all contexts, may lack the technical expertise to engage in certain policy processes.

The report is structured as follows. Section 1 presents the conceptual framework used in this study, explaining the concepts of spaces for participation, levels of youth participation, and youth empowerment. Section 2 explains the research methodology. Section 3 presents the analysis of the entry points for youth participation in the policy landscape of youth employment, which mostly involve Ministries of Youth rather than other ministries. Some donors have made progress in promoting substantive participation at programme level. Section 4 illustrates these findings with case study research in Ghana. The final section concludes and provides recommendations for supporting both more entry points for youth engagement, and more substantive participation.

2. Meaningful youth participation for employment: critical concepts

Calls for 'meaningful youth engagement' and/or 'substantive youth participation' are commonplace in international development, including in the field of youth employment. In this section we explain the concepts that will be used in this study, for the analysis of youth engagement in the 'policy landscape' of youth employment. The section will first explain the notion of the policy landscape and the concept of 'spaces for participation' embedded within this landscape, followed by a discussion of the terms meaningful and substantive youth participation and youth empowerment.

2.1 The policy landscape for youth employment

A notion of policy landscapes is common in various fields of study, for instance with respect to social policy and educational policy. Part of the policy landscape are the various government institutions as well as stakeholders relevant to the issue. Embedded in the landscape are the range of opportunities and (structural) barriers to stakeholder engagement, which points at the inherent power dynamics in policy processes (Graham et al. 2019). These -often shifting- dynamics may require stakeholders to adjust tactics and strategies to reach and influence policy actors (Cohen et al., 2018). A notion of policy landscapes recognizes that there may be a lack of policy coherence, with various policies contradicting and even undermining each other, thus countering the objective of, in this case, youth employment (Davies, 2013).

Youth employment is a policy area that involves multiple policies and policy actors, though in colloquial discourse and practice this complex field is often reduced to a focus on youth policies involving the Ministry of Youth. The current study deliberately adopts a broader perspective on the policy landscape for youth employment. This follows the problem analysis that youth employment is not merely a 'youth problem', but a 'missing jobs' problem (Carreras, Sumberg and Saha, 2021; Sumberg et al., 2021). Hence, youth employment is shaped and affected by, in particular, National Employment policies and labour policies, as well as trade, finance, education and agricultural development policies. On the other hand, acknowledging the wide range of policies that matter for youth employment may present practical challenges to those wanting to support youth engagement. After all, within limitations for budgets and staff resources, which policies and government actors should be prioritised when supporting meaningful youth engagement?

In countries receiving overseas development assistance (ODA) the policy landscape for youth employment is influenced by the range of international development partners, including different entities of the United Nations, which fund youth interventions and support to the development of youth-specific policies. Funded programmes ought to align with national development plans. These international actors may influence discourses around youth participation and employment. UN Agencies like UNICEF, UNFPA and UNDP, often in collaboration with one or more bilateral donors, have supported the development of national youth policies and strategies in various countries, which tend to emphasize youth as 'positive change agents' for instance (UNFPA, 2017; UNICEF, 2021). While such discourse may have been adopted and integrated into country-level policy discourse, this is not necessarily indicative of the genuine implementation of policies and interventions that claim to strengthen youth voice and promote youth employment and empowerment (Murphy and Sika, 2021). In various contexts, relationships between regimes and youth populations are contentious and regimes have used youth interventions to co-opt or silence young people,

which underscores the political economy of youth policies and employment policies alike (Aalen, Oosterom and Gukurume, forthcoming; Izzi, 2020; Murphy and Sika, 2021; Oosterom and Gukurume, 2019).

2.2 Spaces for youth participation

When studying the how and where youth participation happens and is or can be supported, this report uses the conceptualization of 'spaces for participation', which are the moments and opportunities for influencing and participating in decision making processes (Cornwall and Coelho, 2007; Gaventa, 2006, 2019). The concept spaces for participation distinguishes three sub-types, which refer to the different actors and power dynamics involve in these spaces, in particular with reference to who 'holds' or initiates the space and on whose terms. Firstly, 'closed spaces' are decision-making processes that occur with no engagement from the wider public and the groups most affected by any decisions taken by actors involved in closed spaces. While parliaments should in principle have oversight over all policy processes and represent a wider population, including youth, many policy and decision-making processes are in practice inaccessible to young people themselves. Moreover, representation of young people through parliament could be considered weak, because young people in various countries refrain from voting out of distrust in electoral systems and political elites (Resnick, 2020). According to Inter-Parliamentary Union (2021) only 17.5 per cent of the world's Members of Parliament are under the age of 40.

Secondly, government actors and development partners, but also civil society organisations, may create 'invited spaces'. With respect to youth employment, decision-makers can open up opportunities for young people to participate and give input into the design of new policies and interventions. International development is awash with invited spaces, in particular at programme level. Development partners and civil society may initiate these 'invited spaces' throughout the programme cycle. Importantly, the agenda and rules of engagement are set by those actors that create the invited space, which means they get to decide about the parameters for youth engagement: they set the agenda and decide about the extent of influence and control by participants (e.g. is it a consultative process or decision-making process). An important question for invited spaces is representation (Cornwall and Schattan Coelho, 2007). Interventions making provisions for youth inclusion have often uncritically assumed genuine youth representation, while 'youth' constitute a highly diverse social category. Government actors and development partners organising youth participation in invited spaces, decide who gets invited (and thus who is excluded), which has a bearing on how inclusive a space is and who is represented by who. Development partners may influence representation by enabling and resourcing procedures through which representative can consult and send to feedback to their (assumed) constituencies. Even if programmes are 'youth-led', with all good intentions, the responsible funding agency sets the parameters of engagement. The extent of youth influence in the decision-making process is thus a key issue in invited spaces, which connects to the concept of 'meaningful participation' as discussed in the next section. In addition to power dynamics around who sets the agenda and rules for engagement, other dynamics are at play. Society's social hierarchies and socio-cultural and gender norms strongly influence which voices count more than others among those represented in invited spaces, with especially young women and those belonging to lower-income groups or minorities being silenced or ignored even when present in invited spaces (Miller, Veneklasen and Clark, 2005; Veneklasen, 2019). Gerontocracy and social norm governing interaction between elderly and youth, even more so when adults have leadership positions, require young people to defer to their authority (Johnson, Lewis and Cannon, 2020; Oosterom, 2018a).

Finally, 'claimed spaces' are spaces created by the relatively powerless actors, in which they can set their own agendas, priorities and terms of engagement. In existing literature, these are often the spaces initiated by social movements and collectives of groups who feel they are underrepresented in formal decision-making processes, and they advocate for their voice and issues to be heard and included. While it is often stated that young Africans are disengaged or even apathetic, others have argued that they are strongly politically engaged but usually outside of formal political institutions, in their own informal networks and organisations (Honwana, 2021). Many young people are addressing community issues at the local level in their own ways (Resnick, 2020; Turner, 2015). This suggests that a lack of formal policy spaces for youth is not due to apathy, nor disengagement. Rather, power dynamics exclude young people from many policy space, silence them when present, or remain disconnected from their realities. Hence, in the absence of accessible avenues for participation and transparent and responsive state institutions, young people have mobilised independently to push for policy change, as individual activists, in organisations and movements. Here, too, adequate representation of diverse youth constituencies by youth organisations can be an issue, as well as internal power dynamics informed by gender norms and urban-rural divisions. Furthermore, youth civil society itself may be politically divided, for instance in conflict-affected settings (Oosterom, Pan Maran and Wilson, 2019).

The framework of participatory spaces has been used by development practitioners and civil society organisations to think about the various power dynamics affecting the actors and spaces, in order to design appropriate strategies for opening up decision-making spaces and making them more inclusive. For instance, an understanding of how relatively powerful actors keep certain issues of the agenda, or exclude and repress certain voices, can help design strategies to raise issues and support voices of marginalised groups. The boundaries between the different spaces may be fluid and can change over time. Where youth organizations have mobilized to frame and raise a policy issue (e.g. a claimed space), they may eventually achieve in securing a 'seat at the table' and speak to policy actors, although that opportunity itself might be an invited space in which the terms of engagement have been set by government actors. Open spaces might close in times of political repression, while closed spaces may open up thanks to advocacy efforts (Anderson et al., 2021).

2.3 Meaningful youth participation and empowerment

Meaningful participation has been conceptualized as the possibility for young people to have a 'real effect on the process, influence a particular decision or produce a favourable outcome' (Checkoway 2011: 341). A vast literature exists on meaningful youth participation, all of which see participation as core to youth empowerment. Various frameworks have been developed to analyse whether participation is meaningful and substantive. One is Roger Hart's (1992, 1997) Ladder of Youth Participation, which visually represents the degrees in which young people have control over and direct decisions; and to what extent adults may have control in the process. It was born out of a critique on tokenistic forms of youth inclusion and participation. With eight rungs, the Ladder of Youth Participants represent levels of youth and adult influence starting with the three bottom-end rungs depicting 'non-participation' of young people; e.g. manipulation at the bottom, moving up to decoration and tokenism; and then five rungs representing levels of participation: assigned but informed; consulted and informed; adult initiated and shared decisions with youth; youth initiated and directed; youth initiated and shared decisions with adults (Hart 1992, 2008). Hart (2008) later argued that the ladder should not be used as a measure against which programmes should be evaluated, but as a tool for critical reflection concerning the motives, purpose and desirability of youth participation (ibid.). Therefore, Hart's ladder does not imply that the highest rung, whereby youth initiate issues and take decisions with adults, is the best option

in normative terms and/or should be set as objective (Hart, 2008). Similarly, Jennings et al. (2006) emphasize that the extent of youth participation (from none, little to a lot) should not be seen as a dichotomy and that there are many dynamics in adult-youth relationships. Contributing factors to meaningful youth participation include the availability of 'safe spaces' where young people can learn from each other, gain confidence and build civic competencies before facing decisionmakers. Certain levels of adult support can be welcome to support youth engagement. The presence of youth role models has been signalled as particularly important for young women (Jennings et al. 2006). In addition, with respect to policy influence and agenda setting, broader learnings from civil society involvement in democratic governance has highlighted the need for supportive alliances and working across the local to national levels, sometimes reaching out to the international level, like alliances of women organisations, informal workers associations etc. (Brown et al., 2010; FNV Mondiaal, 2019; Moksnes and Melin, 2014).

Various programmes might use the discourse of youth participation and empowerment, while in practice youth are being consulted as users of key services, rather than having a more influential, substantive voice in actual decision-making (Checkoway and Gutierrez, 2006; Percy-Smith, 2010). Head (ibid.) also points out that terms such as 'collaboration' and 'empowerment' should not be used when young people are merely consulted even if well-intended. It is, however, debated whether youth should have full decision-making power. Head (2011) speaks of the right of young people to participate *where appropriate* and that any improvement in services requires their views, whereas there can be rationales for different forms of youth participation, from information exchange to more open and self-managed participation. Other have highlighted attempts to *deliberately* manipulate youth participation or deploy tokenistic forms of participation to achieve other political goals or rubber stamp decisions, in particular in fragile or repressive regime environments (McGee and Greenhalf, 2011; Murphey and Sika, 2021; Oosterom and Gukurume, 2019).

A lack of decent livelihoods and access to economic opportunities are intimately linked to power inequalities (Gaventa and Marturano, 2016; Oswald et al., 2018), which takes us to a notion of empowerment. Within gender and feminist studies, empowerment has been defined as the capacity of women to exercise strategic control over their lives, which involves their ability and willingness to question their subordinate status Kabeer's (2008:27). This definition underlines the relational aspect of empowerment as it implies a (re)negotiation of relationships with other, which takes awareness, certain capacities, and self-confidence. Empowerment then means a transformation in power relations, whereby power relations need to change in the advantage of those in relatively powerless positions (Cornwall and Rivas 2015; Kabeer, 2004, 2008, 2017). Within the field of *economic empowerment* interventions, it is often assumed that improvement in economic conditions such as earnings and assets can lead to a redistribution of power and resources and enhanced political agency, because improvement in economic conditions can increase one's bargaining power (Cheema, 2017). There is, however, no evidence for the *assumed* spill-over effect of an increase in employment or earnings on social and political agency, or broader societal changes such as change in social norms (ibid.). Also youth employment programmes tend to deploy a discourse of youth empowerment, based on similar assumptions on the link between increase in earnings and enhanced political agency and voice (Oosterom, 2018b). A review by Linssen et al. (2021) finds that some youth employment programmes positively influence *social* empowerment at the individual level, like enhanced self-esteem, confidence and mental health (Banks, 2017; Adoho et al., 2014; Bukuluki et al., 2020). Social empowerment is also strengthened when interventions positively impact on the expansion of (peer) networks and increased social standing in the community (Banks, 2017; Isesolo et al., 2019). However, the extent to which youth employment programmes support *political*

empowerment is unclear as many programmes do not monitor or evaluate for their impact on political empowerment. Few interventions integrate explicit strategies for building young people's civic and political skills that would enable them to negotiate fair pay and safe and decent working conditions (Mpofu et al. 2022). Especially for young women, these civic and political skills are needed to demand employers for safe working conditions and addressing social and gender norms that maintain gendered hierarchies at the workplace and workplace sexual harassment (Oosterom et al. 2022). Youth political empowerment, then, refers to enhancing their confidence and individual and collective capacities to further their interests and shift power in their advantage. With respect to youth employment this would refer to their ability to negotiate with employers as well as relevant government bodies about policies affecting them.

This section has presented the overview of our conceptual framework encompassing the policy landscape for youth employment, spaces for participation, debates around substantive youth participation, and youth empowerment. The following section explains how this framework was applied in the study and explains the research methodology.

3. Research design and Methodology

3.1 Policy landscape review

While the 'ecosystem' for youth employment has often been hinted at in policy debate, the exact policies often remained unspecified. The desk research explored existing approaches used by donors to promoting youth engagement, and how participation is organised in large donor-funded programmes for youth employment. The policies and range of actors implementing them and opportunities for youth engagement together shape the 'policy landscape'. Youth organisations are actors situated within the policy landscape and they (seek to) influence it through various strategies. As part of the landscape review, we conducted key informant interviews to obtain expert perspectives on the question of which policies matter for youth employment. We interviewed 11 policy actors working at headquarters and regional and country offices of the ILO and bilateral donors based in nine different African countries. All were identified through snowball sampling. Respondents worked as central youth focal points or youth advisors or were overseeing youth employment programmes, with many having direct experience with facilitating youth participation. Some ILO respondents were involved in supporting national governments to organise tripartite social dialogues and not directly working 'on' youth employment, but could provide valuable insights into the inclusiveness of these processes. The interviews also addressed how these actors supported youth engagement in their programmes and within the wider policy landscape. We asked about the extent of youth influence and when and how youth get to take decisions beyond the level of consultation, according to Hart's Ladder of Youth Participation. The findings, presented in section 4, elicited that most policy actors consider job creation and growth policies (incl. policies for raising productivity; value chain growth; agricultural transformation); policies safeguarding decent jobs and labour standards; and youth and education policies most relevant to youth employment. This helped to focus the next stage of the research in Ghana. Within the project's limitations, we needed to make a selected of policies as not all could be explored in the Ghana case study. Youth participation with respect to educational policies is relatively more common and therefore we decided to focus on employment policies and agricultural policies, as the study would then make a more original contribution to knowledge with regards to existing gaps in the policy landscape.

3.2 Ghana case study

Case study research in Ghana focused on mapping the policy landscape and youth engagement at the country-level. It is acknowledged that participatory processes are relatively easier to facilitate in stable political contexts, when enabled by responsive and functioning institutions. Ghana has performed relatively well and is considered a relatively open and functioning democracy, based on global rankings (108 out of 170 on the Fragile State Index and 54 in the V-DEM ranking). It has a National Youth Policy and National Youth Authority: a constitutionally established body responsible for providing an enabling environment for youth participation in socio-economic and political development, while facilitating private sector investments in youth empowerment initiatives. We would therefore expect Ghana to be a country where youth engagement in the policy landscape is, in principle, possible. This justified our selection of Ghana as a case study to explore the reality of youth engagement in policy in greater depth. However, Ghana is not representative for the African continent and the dynamics of youth engagement will always need to be assessed within their respective political context.

As indicated, we explored how youth engagement happens within the policy landscape with respect to two policy areas: (1) Employment policies and especially the National Employment Policy which is to promote gainful and decent employment opportunities for the labour force, with emphasis on dignity, fairness and security, and protection regulations (including workplace sexual harassment); and (2) Agricultural policy. Of the agricultural development policies, the Planting for Food and Jobs (PFJ) policy aims to enhance productivity and connects to the Youth in Agriculture Programme (YIAP). Finally, we also included the review of the National Youth Policy because it addresses youth employment; and because the consultation evolved over 2022 and enabled us to study a 'live' process.

After an initial desk review of these policies, we conducted 19 key informant interviews. These included 10 policy actors: representatives of national government ministries, departments and agencies; five youth civil society actors; and two youth leaders of informal youth groups. We also interviewed a representative from ILO Ghana and one international NGO. Bilateral donors were unavailable. To identify interview respondents in Ghana and other African countries, we used snowball sampling starting from existing contacts in the ILO, international donor agencies, and youth civil society organisations in Ghana. The criteria for selection included active experience with supporting or facilitating dialogues or consultations with regards to youth-related employment policies. In the next section we present the findings about the overall policy landscape, followed by the findings from the Ghana case study.

4. Youth engagement in a fragmented policy landscape

This section outlines the policy landscape of youth employment and perspectives on which policies matter, followed by a discussion of existing entry points for youth engagement and where they are missed. Respondents largely agreed that youth engagement in the wider policy landscape is important, but that the exact 'how' of youth participation needs to be improved. The findings suggest that the often-heard statement that youth are *never* part of decision-making processes may need some tempering because various avenues and opportunities for youth engagement do exist. The analysis demonstrates the disconnects within complex policy landscape, which can be fragmented. Whereas youth engagement within discrete aid programmes can be substantive, young people's influence in policy formulation and implementation is far from substantive and tends to occur within a limited section of the policy landscape: around the Ministry of youth. This is in part due to a lack of policy coherence. Secondly, multiple avenues and spaces for youth engagement at programme level do not necessarily connect and might fail to connect to the level of national policy making, although some development programmes do create connections between youth actors and different parts of government.

This section starts with a discussion of the policies themselves, followed by the analysis of existing spaces and avenues for youth participation in the policy landscape: at national government level, in ILO-supported social dialogue processes, at the level of development partners and programmes, and at international level. The challenges resulting from power dynamics will be discussed for each of these. The latter part of the section presents reflections on the barriers and opportunities with respect to youth engagement in decision-making processes that emerged from across the policy landscape.

4.1 Which policies and actors?

One of the key findings from interviews was that respondents unanimously agreed that youth participation in youth employment policies is generally narrowed down to processes evolving around Ministries of Youth (or equivalent)¹ and is rarely extended to other Ministries that are mandated to create and implement policies relevant to youth employment. At the same time, there is such a wide range of policies that are relevant to youth employment, each requiring significant technical expertise, hence organizing youth participation for all of them would be an onerous and costly endeavour. This raises critical questions for reflection: which are priority policies and how to promote youth engagement that is meaningful; and what can be done to mainstream youth engagement?

When asked, respondents prioritised and ranked a set of policies important for youth employment. A first category of policies comprises the policies and frameworks that promote job-rich growth, which included macro-economic policy, national employment policy, and active labour market policies (ALMPs). ALMPs aim to keep people in employment and increase employment opportunities, increase employability through upskilling and reducing skills mismatch, improve mechanisms for matching, and support to micro-entrepreneurs (Brown and Koettl, 2012; Yeyati, Montané and Sartorio, 2019). ALMPs are usually targeted at job seekers who face particular labour market integration challenges, which can be youth but also other groups (ILO PROSPECTS, 2021). Since many young people

¹ Ministries of Youth may be autonomous or have broader portfolios like Ministry of Youth, Culture and Sports; Ministry of Youth and Social Development. Departments of Youth Affairs may be integrated within composite Ministries as in, for instance, Uganda where it is part of the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development.

work in the agricultural sector, respondents mentioned policies aimed at agricultural transformation to generate decent and productive jobs in agriculture as second important policy area. A third policy area emphasised were labour policies that help ensure that work is 'decent' according to all dimensions of the ILO decent work frameworks, including those that ensure gender equality and protection against workplace sexual harassment. A fourth area is that of educational policies (including skills training), for which respondents noted this was a more likely area where youth engagement happens, for instance supported by UNICEF, but this would not necessarily connect to design of ALMPs. This indicates a much broader range of policies than National Youth Policies alone could benefit from youth engagement.

This range of policy areas would involve Ministries such as the Ministry of Trade, Industries and Commerce; a department or Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprise Development (SMEs); Ministry of Labour; Ministry of Agriculture; and Ministry of Education. Departments responsible for SME development were highlighted in particular because they are directly relevant to informal economy, in which many young people are active. As subsequent sections will show, youth engagement is usually anchored on the Ministry of Youth. Also, Ministries of Education are likely to use participatory approaches to policy development that involve young people, often with the backing of development partners. However, respondents in this study stated that other Ministries lacked avenues and mechanisms for youth engagement. These Ministries will only be exposed to youth engagement in case ODA-funded programmes initiate connections between them and youth constituencies. However, the findings suggest that these funded programmes often only and/or primarily involve the Ministry of Youth.

4.2 Ministry of Youth and National Youth Councils

A Ministry of Youth can be the 'go to' authority for initiating youth engagement at national and sub-national levels, as well as implementing country-wide youth surveys and consultations. Of the respondents interviewed, both representatives from policy and civil society, many commented that Ministries of Youth generally organise youth participation quite well. They would, for instance, organise conferences with representation from youth civil society organisations from across the country, which would then result in input or advice on a range of youth policy issues, from reproductive health to employment. Bilateral donors, especially those that have youth as development priority, directly engage with Ministries of Youth and some may promote direct engagement between youth constituencies and these Ministries. In countries that do *not* have a responsible Ministry of Youth (or department), it is a major challenge to find alternative entry points for youth engagement. Yet, in countries that *do* have a dedicated Ministry of youth, other line ministries might not see it part of their role to address youth. For instance, one policy advisor commented their efforts in Tunisia, where government departments were 'too concerned with other pressing issues' to open up to youth engagement. Trade unions would in principle provide another avenue, however these were dominated by gerontocratic values that undermined youth participation.

However, while the Ministry of Youth is anchor for youth engagement it is not the locus of power with respect to decision-making over the broader range of policies relevant to youth employment. Hence, much time and effort is going into supporting youth engagement in and around this Ministry, while this engagement remains disconnected from other Ministries

relevant to decent youth employment, like the Ministries of Labour, Trade and Commerce, and Agriculture. One representative of a multilateral agency commented that the internal coordination within government may produce such a disconnect within the policy landscape. In the above-mentioned example of the development of Uganda's National Employment Strategy, representatives from the department of youth were invited to the Tripartite social dialogue. These officials are part of the composite Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development. The Ministry of Labour had invited officials from the Youth division for one day, but our respondent explained that it would have been important to have them on all days of the dialogue process. This is a matter of how Ministries view their mandates.

National Youth Councils (NYC) exist in many countries, which are government-recognised structures with formal mandates for youth engagement. NYCs may offer a representative structure for young people to effectively participate in the planning of services, to review and inform policies and potentially take decisions over budgets earmarked for children and youth (Checkoway, Allison and Montoya 2005; Guerra 2002). It is noted that participation NYC itself can contribute to the political development as NYC members learn skills such as dialogue and negotiation and gain knowledge of government functioning (ibid.). They may become implementing bodies of government youth funds (Oosterom and Gukurume 2019). Few national youth councils have been studied systematically, but existing evidence suggests that they 'lack teeth' as they fail to connect with formal political structures (McGee and Greenhalf 2011). Their budgets may be limited, the councillors are not involved in real decision-making processes beyond narrowly defined 'youth issues' or their recommendations are ignored even in issues relevant to youth (Cubitt 2012; Bangura and Specht 2012; Racelis and Aguirre 2006). Youth councils face representation challenges as elite and urban youth councillors may have little interest in connecting with poorer, rural youth, and are unable to come up with policies that serve the interests of marginalised youth (Oosterom *et al.* 2017; Racelis and Aguirre 2006). Representation depends on whether councillors are elected or appointed and whether sub-national structures exist that can feed into the national level. In conflict-affected and adverse political settings, national youth councils have functioned as vehicles for co-optation, have been reserved for young people linked to political elites, or have been hampered by political divisions (Cubitt 2012; Oosterom and Gukurume, 2019; Oosterom, Wignall and Wilson 2017; Traore 2011). Some of our respondents, too, indicated that some of the formal youth structures they had engaged with got 'too close to government', leaving it unclear whether representatives were echoing government leaders for their own benefit or representing an independent youth voice.

Leaving the politics of these bodies aside, even if NYCs were representative and autonomous, they remain disconnected from the broader scope of economic and labour policies indicated in the previous section. They depend on other Ministries to be invited to, for instance, social dialogues, if these occur in the form of Tripartite-plus mechanisms or in the development of policies that are within the remit of other Ministries. Our research participants could not recall examples whereby an NYC liaised with Ministry of Trade and Commerce or Ministry of Agriculture, but this may have been due to the relatively small number of respondents. Nor did this study find evidence that Ministries of Agriculture and Trade and Commerce had taken initiatives to institutionalise youth engagement systematically within their own Ministries.

4.3 Social and tripartite dialogues

Social dialogue is defined by the ILO to include all types of negotiation, consultation or exchange of information between, or among, representatives of government, worker and employers, on issues of common interest relating to economic and social policy (ILO, 2008, 2018). In tripartite social dialogues, the government is a party to the dialogue, whereas social dialogue can take place between just employers and worker organisations in bipartite dialogues. Tripartite social dialogues need to contribute to long-term social and economic stability, by fostering collaboration across government, employers and workers, specifically with regards to labour standards and working conditions. In essence, social dialogue is a form of governance that creates 'spaces for participation' whereby workers are represented through their unions and associations as partners and decision-making about issues such as pay, working conditions and social security get democratised (Hermans, Huyse and Van Ongevalle, 2017). Social dialogue can therefore only function when there are strong, independent workers' and employers' organizations; political will on the part of government; and respect for the rights and freedoms of association and collective bargaining (Sultana et al. 2021). Social dialogue is not in all countries an effective mechanism for inclusive decision-making on labour policies and the process tends to be biased towards formal workers (FNV Mondiaal, 2019)

The ILO supports member states in establishing or strengthening legal frameworks and institutions for effective social dialogues. Central to tripartite social dialogues at country-level is the Ministry of Labour. According to one respondent, other ministries than the Ministry of Labour are less likely to work in tripartite fashion and will engage private sector actors, but to a lesser extent the workforce, depending on the sector for which policies are being negotiated. Ministries of Agriculture, for instance, would liaise with private companies but not necessarily farmer associations in all situations, whereas a Ministry of Trade and Commerce may reach out to just business experts. Ministries of Agriculture might undertake some form of dialogue with farmer organisations and then it would depend on whether these harbour any kind of youth structures for young people to represent their interests. Similar dynamics of hierarchies and representation apply to these associations. Social dialogues take place in different forms and often involve a mix of formal and informal processes. They can be organised for a sector or involve groups of businesses and industries. The ILO claims that social dialogue promotes inclusiveness (Sultana et al. 2020). The process can be adapted to a Tripartite-Plus arrangement to include civil society organisations in consultations, which can in principle facilitate the inclusion of diverse and marginalised voices, and informal workers (FNV Mondiaal, 2019; Sultana et al., 2021). However, one ILO representative explained this is far more challenging to organise, in part because the ILO cannot establish a formal youth entity in its governance structures as this would be seen to deviate from the tripartite structure.

However, according to Hermans, Huyse and Van Ongevalle (2017), social dialogue is not well known or understood within the development community, which means its potential to contribute to sustainable development and its governance is not fully realized. As a well-established structure for engagement between government and non-state actors, it could potentially be an avenue for promoting youth engagement. In the current study, representatives from bilateral donors that were directly involved in funding and implementing youth employment interventions were mostly aware of ILO-funded youth employment programmes. However, they had limited awareness of the mechanisms of tripartite social dialogues, or how these could provide entry points for youth participation.

While social dialogues are meant to be inclusive, findings from interviews with ILO representatives indicated that the inclusion of young people into social dialogues is not straightforward. For tripartite dialogues, clear structures and systems for identifying workers representatives and employers' representatives are in place: they are elected and have the official mandate to represent workers and employers in a given country and join dialogues with government actors. For identifying 'youth' there is no such system. Considering the diversity in the youth population, one respondent summarised the challenge of representation: 'How could I find or identify a youth representative and know it is someone who has a mandate to speak on behalf of youth?'. In the specific case of Uganda, where the ILO supports the creation of a National Employment Strategy in a Tripartite-Plus process, the National Youth Council is invited as the formal government body mandated for youth representation.

Youth representation in social dialogue is first and foremost indirect: young people may be represented within unions and worker organisations, which may have youth wingers or chapters. The substantiveness of youth engagement will then depend on how unions are organised internally: whether they have recognized chapters for young workers, to what extent their 'youth leaders' have decision-making powers within the larger union and can put issues on the agenda. Especially larger unions and federations may have youth chapters that may be well-organised and even have structures at sub-national level, but this is not necessarily the case. For Tunisia, for instance, one of our respondents indicated that young people were politically marginalised within the labour union. All leaders were relatively older males who had little appreciation for youth voices. This is illustrative of norms around age and authority prevailing in various countries, which require young people to be subdued in the presence of older men, especially when they are in a position of authority. Interview respondents indicated that it is less common for organisations of employers to have youth chapters. One respondent indicated that both worker and employer organisations might make big statements about supporting youth in global fora, but once 'back home' they will focus on conventional battles over minimum wages, industrial policies and labour laws. In view of this respondent, it is only when international development partners initiate a fund for a youth employment programme that employer organisation may be open to youth engagement, but not within the existing social dialogue mechanisms. Furthermore, social dialogue and tripartism are considered to be essential policy tools to advance gender equality in the world of work. However, trade unions are influenced by hierarchies based on gender and class, as well as age. Women are undeniably and persistently underrepresented at all levels and in all arenas of social dialogue, including within employer and organisations and government bodies (Briskin and Muller, 2011; Budlender, 2011). Studies have shown that female workers may not get issues heard within unions, for instance in cases of sexual harassment (Brandt, 2022; Kenny, 2018).

In some cases, a 'Tripartite-plus structure' is used, which can involve other actors than the conventional three parties. These mechanisms then become invited spaces for participation. Hermans et al. (2016) give the example of Cambodia's garment industries, in which transnational stakeholders in the global supply chains like international buyers and other civil society organisations are represented, who monitor implementation of steps to improve working conditions. For the present study, we interviewed an ILO representative involved in the development of Uganda's new National Employment Strategy. Designed as a Tripartite-Plus process, consultations with employers and worker organisations were followed by several days of consultations dedicated to meetings with youth organisations, and farmer

and women organisations. The National Youth Council, as formal government body, was invited to some days of the dialogue. The national-level process had been preceded by dialogues at district-level, which was hoped to be an opportunity for young people to give input at the local level, including in rural areas.

All respondents indicated that broadening social dialogues to 'Tripartite-Plus' mechanisms that open the dialogues to youth participation, will presents the challenge of adequate representation: how to identify and select youth organisations for these 'invited spaces' (and who is excluded), who do these organisations actually represent, and how do they liaise with their constituents and are accountable to them? Respondents expressed concerns over elite bias and an urban bias in the selection of youth organisations and their presumed representatives, who sometimes turn into 'usual suspects' and 'serial participants' as they are repeatedly invited as *the* voice of youth. Another respondent indicated that some youth organisations are more akin to interest groups that, for instance, represent certain issues but do not seek to represent a diversity of young people. The inclusion of young rural voices presents a challenge in large countries in particular, where substantial resources would be needed to ensure the engagement of young people from remote areas. Others felt that, while the issue of representation matters, some form of youth engagement is better than none. Budget constraints will dictate how extensive a process can be.

4.4 Development partners and programmes

Several development partners have taken steps to promote youth engagement, like the African Development Bank and bilateral donors such as the governments of Denmark and the Netherlands. They have created mechanisms for youth engagement within funded programmes and are increasingly inviting youth engagement to advise their development strategies, focus and directions. This has produced a plethora of opportunities for youth participation at the level of large programmes and entry points for influencing policy advisors at for instance the embassy level. This section presents some examples, demonstrating that these mechanisms have the potential to create spaces for dialogue between youth and government if incorporated as a deliberate strategy, whereby it is necessary to determine which spaces will align with the country's longer-term development agenda.

Multilateral agencies and development banks have started creating dedicated mechanisms for youth engagement in addition to programme-level consultations, with for instance the African Development Bank setting up a Presidential Youth Advisory Group in 2017 (AFDB, 2017), but there is no documentation available on its activities and influence. NEPAD had noted the absence of youth engagement in policy-making in Strategic Framework for youth as early as 2005 (NEPAD, 2005). The African Union Development Agency-NEPAD launched its programme 'Energize Africa' in September 2022, which is focused on youth and includes a component on improving policy and legal frameworks (AU-NEPAD, 2022). Funded programmes nearly all incorporate some form of youth participation at the start.

It is often not documented how wide consultations were held, like at sub-national levels and whether deliberate attempts were made to include relatively marginalised groups. It also not clear how substantive participation was: how were participants prepared for a consultation in order to contribute in meaningful ways, and to what extent consultations informed actual decisions with regards to the scope and focus of programmes. There appears to be limited space for supporting linkages between young people and government

actors within programmes, with some exceptions. Of these, the Support Project for Resilience of Youth Enterprises (PAREJ) programme is implemented by Chambers of Commerce in various Sahel countries, funded under the Youth Entrepreneurship and Innovation Multi-Donor Trust Fund (YEI MDTF) (2017-2022). PAREJ has documented a participatory consultation at the start and states that representatives of the Ministry of Youth and NYCs are in the PAREJ steering committee. The extent of influence of NYC participations is not clear, but the programme institutionalised their involvement.

Some of the bilateral donors are institutionalising youth engagement beyond the programme level. The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs adopted the 'Youth at Heart' strategy and list of principles for involving and working together with young people in 2020. It launched a Youth Advisory Committee in 2020, which is advising on the implementation of the development cooperation strategy of the Netherlands. A toolkit for meaningful youth participation was developed by the Ministry in collaboration with civil society, involving young people in the design process (MFA Netherlands, 2020). Several Dutch embassies in Africa have set up (or are in the process of setting up) institutionalised networks of youth organisations and individual representatives to inform their programmes. The Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) has prioritised youth since 2017, not just within its international development strategy, but also in its domestic policy processes and for European engagement. The development cooperation strategy 'The world we share' has youth as an integrated priority. In several of eight focal countries in Africa, embassies have set up youth sounding boards. Like the Dutch MFA, the Danish MFA has developed a range of programme management tools that embassies can use, from youth situational analysis to guidance on how embassies can organise youth engagement (MFA Denmark, n.d.).

Embassy-initiated youth participation takes various shapes and forms. For the design of a Jobs and Skills programme, the Dutch embassy for Somalia embassy designed a consultative process to determine gaps and needs, involving government and youth organisations, which informed a call for proposals for pilot projects. Out of these projects, a consortium was established that will have a youth advisory council. The embassies organise quarterly learning meetings with various government, international and youth civil society partners. Youth organisations involved in the Jobs and Skills programme collect impact stories which are shared within these meeting for learning purposes. In addition, the embassy is working towards establishing a Youth Consultative Council that will advise the work of the embassy overall. In Burkina Faso, the embassy deliberately includes informal youth actors in its networks for advising the embassy alongside formal civil society organisations. It hopes to reach rural youth through its programmes rather than bringing them into its advisory networks. In Tunisia, the embassy involved a member of the Department-level Youth Advisory Committee to be at board meetings and review reports of an agricultural value-chain programme funded by the Netherlands and implemented by the World Bank, which involved negotiating with the World Bank *and* supporting the YAC representative to have the knowledge and confidence to be able to use this space of participation well.

Danish embassies meet their youth sounding boards periodically at the embassies, whereas policy advisors may join them on fieldtrips to learn from them. In some countries, Danish embassy staff and members of sounding boards take joint decisions about the directions and focus of programmes, indicating substantive youth engagement.

Interviews with embassy staff indicated that embassies leverage their role in policy dialogue to create openings and platforms for youth, often young members of the advisory councils or sounding boards, to liaise directly with government actors. This engagement tends to be limited to the Ministries of Youth and the Ministries of Education. However, in various countries this provides one of the only avenues for direct engagement between young people and government. Through their engagement in policy dialogue about concrete issues, policy advisors at embassies have deployed 'quiet diplomacy' to prepare their government counterparts for youth engagement, opening doors to youth engagement at the level of different ministries and multi-lateral agencies. According to several respondents, the support of the embassies to youth engagement has symbolic and material value, as they signal the importance of youth participation to other development partners. Likeminded donors join forces at the country-level and create visibility for their initiatives, which would be conducive to an enabling environment for youth participation.

4.5 Global, regional and Pan-African policy spaces

At global and Pan-African level, a number of processes exist with entry points and spaces for youth participation. Some of these take the shape of conferences and fora, while other processes are actual processes of policy formulation.

One example of a large youth conference is the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Youth Forum, which has met annually since 2012 and has developed into a platform where young people can contribute to policy discussions at the United Nations, in particular with regards to the SDGs and Agenda 2030. The ECOSOC Youth Forum is an invited space. Participants are selected by National Youth Councils, regional youth organizations, and youth organisations affiliated with the Major Group for Children and Youth (UN-MGCY) and the International Coordination Meeting of Youth Organisations (ICMYO). The 2022 conference focused on post-pandemic recovery. The Youth Forum contributes to the review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs and to shaping policy recommendations at the HLPF and other Intergovernmental fora, such as the UN Transforming Education Summit, and the Financing for Development Forum (UN ECOSOC, 2022). It is not exactly clear how the insights and advice generated at larger conferences would inform decision-making at ECOSOC or other international fora. Evidence from other global youth fora suggests they do not translate into meaningful engagement (Kwon, 2019). However, it is also the case that policy formulation is an ambiguous process, and it is not documented how proceedings of youth fora are actually taken up and which youth participants are also directly involved in policy formulation and take insights forward in that capacity.

An example of an actual policy formulation process is the development of a joint youth employment strategy by the African Union (AU) and the ILO. From the AU, the office of the AU Youth Envoy is involved. It was decided that an initial draft would be produced by technical experts, with the drafting process happening over the course of 2022. After an initial draft, the AU is responsible for organising some form of youth engagement to review the first drafts (Key informant interview, 2022). Respondents indicated that the AU's technical advisors would ordinarily not collaborate with the office of the Youth Envoy. While the outcome of this interaction between different parts of the AU and the substantiveness of the engagement on the part of the Youth Envoy is unclear at this stage, it is a new opportunity for high-level policy engagement that does involve youth voices. Plans for direct

youth involvement in the drafting process are tentative and within the remit of the AU. There appeared to be no funding in place for a wide consultation for this specific process. However, since the office of the Youth Envoy was established in 2018, it has engaged in various consultations and engaged a diverse network of youth movements and organisations to gather young people's perspectives on participation and development, including employment (ALI, 2020). Involving the Youth Envoy's office in the drafting the strategy could therefore result in meaningful engagement and the outcome could include a diversity of youth perspectives.

While important, these international fora and processes are unlikely to be widely known to ordinary young people on the ground. Many of these processes face similar challenges of representation and inclusion as those taking place at the national level.

4.6 Barriers and opportunities: Lessons from practice

Across the different initiatives and entry points for promoting youth engagement, a number of challenges emerged in addition to the cross-cutting issue of inclusive representation. One challenge was not necessarily the lack of entry points for youth engagement, but policy incoherence. Inconsistencies within the policy landscape itself hamper the identification of the right avenues for youth engagement. In the case of South Africa, for instance, it was suggested that there is no coherent strategy for employment, let alone for youth employment. Policies include, among others, the expanded public works program, the youth employment tax incentive, the Harambe youth aggregator, the Youth Employment Service, the public employment service, the presidential Youth Employment Pathway Management project. In other contexts, however, not having a Ministry of Youth meant there were no obvious entry points for youth participation.

Secondly, on the part of young people themselves, respondents noted that some may miss the 'big picture'. Youth civil society and individual young people might offer valuable points from a micro-economic perspective but were ill-equipped to give input on macro-economic policy like trade, private sector development, investment climate, and tax regulations. Some respondents noted that government actors could feel frustrated about young people demanding micro-credit and loans, or agricultural inputs and specific trainings, whereas the kind of questions that need answering are at the macro-level: what a country needs to achieve job rich growth, agricultural transformation and a labour force that is skilled for future jobs. Considering the highly technical knowledge required to answer these questions, it might be unfair to expect young people to come up with sound technical advice. A further barrier were the sometimes highly bureaucratic procedures that had to be fulfilled to be able to even see government officials or be part of consultations.

A third barrier reflected known challenges of social and gender norms that prioritise the voices of males and adults over those of youth and especially young women. One youth advisor based at an embassy recalled the effort it took to persuade government actors to welcome youth, because they would be 'ignorant'. One gender expert interviewed commented about trade unions. While they are important actors in the policy landscape, they cannot be relied upon to advocate for women-specific issues in the workplace due to patriarch norms, thus confirming existing studies. Even within youth civil society, young women may get side-lined. Here, one respondent noted that young women may be strategic and agile: for certain issues they may side with youth organisations, while for other issues they may liaise with women organisations that are vocal on issues also affecting young women, like gender pay gaps and sexual harassment.

A fourth challenge concerned the capacity to 'do' youth engagement on the part of various actors. International and national non-government organisations (NGOs) have gained significant experience with youth engagement at programme level over the years. The knowledge of programme staff and organizational learning on how to organise youth engagement is not always documented systematically but some practice-based documented learning does exist (Oxfam, n.d.; Plan International, 2019, 2021; Restless Development, 2017). Oxfam (n.d.) stresses the diversity of young people and the need to recognize and address gender dynamics in youth programmes. Plan International (2021), for instance, has specifically developed a 'roadmap for promoting meaningful youth engagement in youth employment programs' based on lessons from practice, which highlights the participation of young people not just in the design of programmes, but also monitoring and evaluation. It also underlines the need to address bias and promote intergenerational trust. Restless Development (2017) recommended ways for the Solutions for Youth Employment coalition (S4YE) to include youth representatives in their board and governance mechanisms, and partner with youth. Bilateral and multilateral donor organisations have embarked on the implementation of mechanisms for youth participation, first at the level of programmes and expanding this to policy level. Youth focal points have been appointed across donor organisations. Respondents indicated that this position does require specialist knowledge about youth participation as well as employment; as well as experience in facilitating participatory processes across programme cycles. Donors have developed guidance notes and toolkits, and some invest in staff capacities. ILO representatives indicated that the ILO is rolling out a capacity building process for its staff to enhance its capacity to organise youth participation. The advantage of this would be that staff that have the technical knowledge of certain labour market policies and tripartite social dialogue, would add these capacities to their skill set. Others 'delegate' organising youth participation to NGOs and thus benefit from practitioner knowledge. We did not find examples of learning exchanges between civil society organisations and embassies around how to organise meaningful participation, which would be particularly relevant to learning about representation, inclusion and accountability to youth constituencies.

Finally, respondents highlighted that the perceived risk of youth unemployment for political stability has motivated governments and political elites to address it, especially since the Arab uprisings in 2011. One policy advisor said: 'Even if it is not in formal documents, this is what is on their minds', despite the evidence that unemployment alone is not sufficient explanation for violent conflict or political instability to erupt (Blattman and Ralston, 2015; Brück, Ismail and Olonisakin, 2021). This creates the risk that youth-centred initiatives are instrumentally used to appease youth populations, widely promoted by state-owned media outlets, while they remain under-resourced. Not only youth participation, then, is tokenistic, but the very youth intervention itself could be considered a way of co-opting youth. This has, for instance, been argued for the Youth Livelihood Programme in Uganda (Reuss and Titeca, 2017) and youth loan schemes in Ethiopia (Balcha Gebremariam, 2020; Di Nunzio, 2014).

Box 1. Fragile, violence and conflict affected settings.

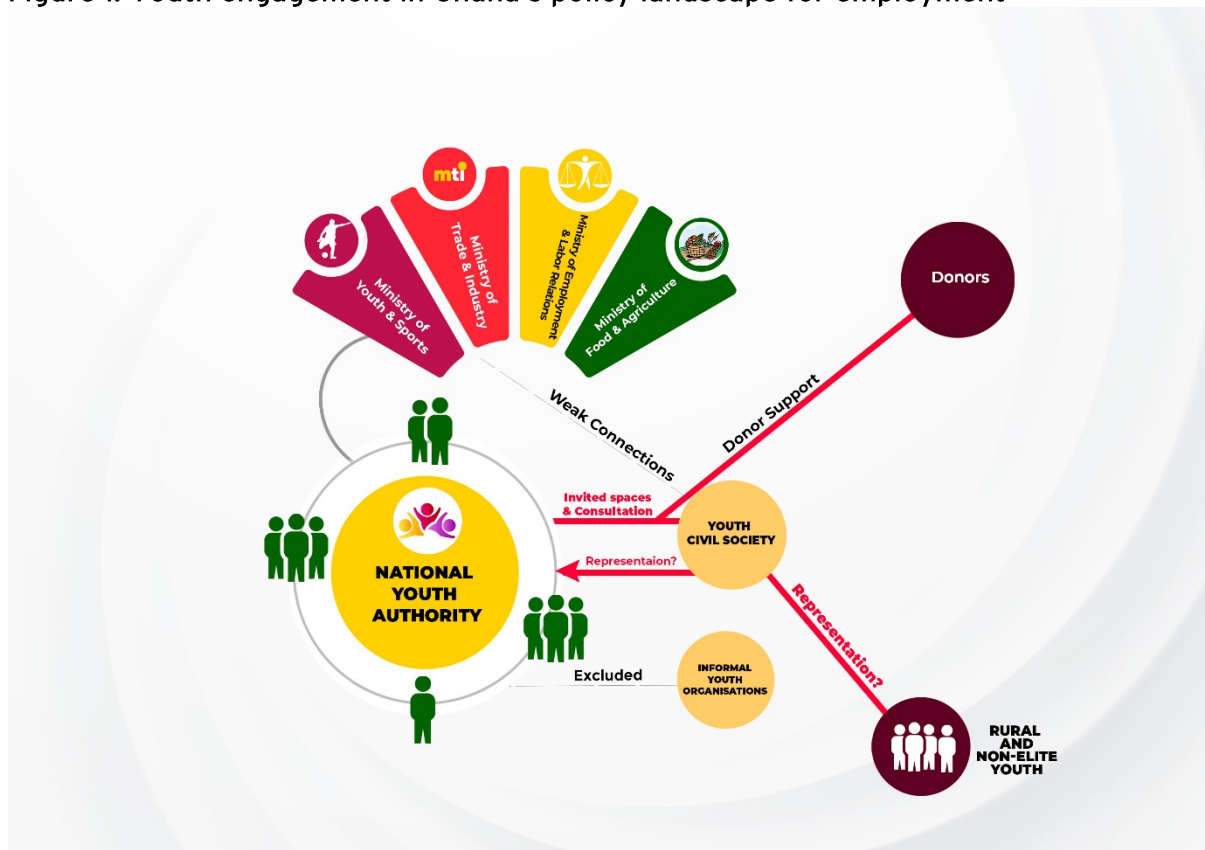
The history of promoting participatory governance is premised on the assumption that there is a functioning state that is open to citizen voices. Youth participation in contexts where state institutions are affected by -and sometimes responsible for- violence and conflict is important, but challenging. In other contexts, state actors curtail civic space and civic and political freedoms and see large youth populations as a threat to national stability (Ismail and Olonisakin, 2021; Nordås, Davenport, 2013). In these contexts, state actors may not be receptive to youth engagement. In our research, policy advisors working on youth participation in Tunisia and Somalia noted that the governments were focused on promoting stability and did not consider youth participation as a priority. Deep distrust in state institutions may hamper willingness on the part of young people. On the other hand, vocal youth may put themselves at risk. Within civil society, political divides and distrust may exist that hamper collective action (Oosterom et al., 2019). Supporting active youth engagement in these settings requires a risk analysis and conflict-sensitive ways of working with respect to promoting youth voices and empowerment.

Since many youth civil society organisations exist in all contexts, one opportunity for promoting youth participation in the policy landscape is to strengthen the capacities of existing actors: with more technical knowledge of relevant policies and policy processes, and with the right and timely support they can be well-prepared for dialogue with government. Respondents observed that, where youth civil society is stronger and well-organised, including in networks between CSOs and to sub-national actors and constituencies, they are able to push for certain policy issues, demand a legitimate space at the table, and promote the inclusion of relatively marginalised groups. Engagement will work both ways: governments will be inclined to strong and vocal organisations, whereas government actors will have somewhere to go to if there is a strong network with representation from various parts of the country and diverse youth groups. However, it was noted that there appears to be limited funding available for youth civil society to develop expertise in employment and labour policies as compared to, for instance, reproductive health. While consultants are paid for expert advice, youth civil society is often asked to give input without being resourced to a) first obtain in-depth technical knowledge; b) spend ample time preparing for and spending time in consultations; c) connect to constituencies and reach out to relatively marginalised groups to ensure adequate representation. They are then expected to give sound advice to technical experts and government officials while ill-equipped, which may produce notions of youth being unable to engage in policy dialogue.

5. Youth engagement in Ghana's policy landscape

This section presents the findings of the Ghana case study. It will demonstrate that the Ghanaian government relies on the National Youth Authority (NYA) to promote youth engagement, while the NYA is no longer an adequate representative structure. The NYA promotes youth engagement mainly with respect to youth policies, hence youth engagement in the wider policy scape is limited even in a country where civic space would allow for more direct participation. Findings suggest that most youth civil society actors focus their efforts on the NYA, which is under the Ministry of Youth and Sports, and have limited awareness of other policies relevant to youth employment, which is partly due to how funding streams steer them towards the Ministry of Youth rather than other government actors. Donor agencies seek to integrate youth engagement at programme level and connect youth to ministries to some extent, but on a case-by-case basis. By and large, the findings from the Ghana case study reflect the findings from the overall policy landscape review, as is captured in Figure 1. It shows the central role of the NYA in organising youth engagement, whereas rules for engagement exclude informal youth groups. It also shows the weak connections between youth civil society and other Ministries that matter for youth employment. Finally, the links between youth civil society and youth constituents is unclear and there appear to be challenges in the representation of non-urban and non-elite youth.

Figure 1. Youth engagement in Ghana's policy landscape for employment



We organize this section into three sub-sections. Section 5.1 explains the government actors and policy spaces in the policy landscape; section 5.2 discusses strategies by civil society

actors seeking to promote youth engagement; and section 5.3 elaborates the barriers to youth engagement from the perspective of different actors.

5.1 Policy landscape and disconnects

The policy landscape comprises the different Ministries, Departments and Agencies, youth civil society (including informal youth groups), bilateral and multilateral donor agencies. Our desk review and key informants' interviews revealed that the Ministry of Youth and Sports and its agency called the National Youth Authority (NYA) are the core actors for promoting youth empowerment, participation and employment, whilst other relevant ministries include the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations and its agency called the Youth Employment Agency, the Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Ministry of Trade and Industry, Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection.

5.1.1 The National Youth Authority and National Youth Policy

The NYA is constitutionally mandated to oversee the development of the youth and therefore spearhead every youth development policy. It was established in 1974 by the National Redemption Council Degree (NRCD) 241 and is mandated to coordinate and expedite youth empowerment activities across Ghana to develop Ghanaian youth (National Youth Authority, 2022). Prior to 1981, NYA was called the 'National Youth Council', but it obtained Commission status as 'the National Youth Organisation Commission' (NYOC). The mandate of the then NYOC was to facilitate a mass national youth movement called the Democratic Youth League of Ghana (DYLG) (NYA, 2022). Following the enactment of the 1992 constitution, its status was changed once again to a Council and based on the (Revised Edition) Act 1998 (Act 562), the nomenclature of the Authority was changed to the current National Youth Authority (NYA). A representative from NYA provided some context for the changes in name and status of this entity:

When the organization was first established in 1972 under the National Redemption Council. It established a National Youth Council and during the revolution time it became known as National Youth Organizing Council (NYOC) then it was changed back to National Youth Commission and because it didn't have the legal backing it has to revert to National Youth Council and when the judicial system did the analysis of the status, they said the name should be National Youth Authority.

In terms of its structure, NYA is overseen by a Chief Executive Officer who is appointed by the President, but reports to the Minister responsible for Youth, and a Governing Board. The CEO is supported by two Deputies, one each responsible for i) programmes and Operations, as well as ii) Finance and Administration, both of which are supported by other directors. In principle there are Regional Youth Secretariats in all sixteen administrative regions of Ghana who are expected to coordinate and supervise coordinators at the district level, and are responsible for promoting youth development and service delivery (National Youth Authority, 2022). Thus, in principle NYA operates in all districts of Ghana. However, findings from interviews show that the NYA is not adequately represented across the country. Moreover, its current structure makes no provision for youth representation, but only top-down implementation. This has important implications for the NYA's role in representing the youth to the government.

According to respondents, NYA has a three-pronged function as formulated in Act 939 (2016). These include developing the creative potential of young people, developing a dynamic and disciplined youth imbued with a spirit of nationalism, patriotism and a sense of propriety and civic responsibility, and ensuring the effective participation of civic youth in the development of the country. The NYA is expected to facilitate youth engagement mainly through policies, programmes, and activities. However, the mechanisms for doing so are not standardised, nor institutionalised. Youth engagement may be organised on occasion, as with the review of the National Youth Policy (NYP) in 2022.

The NYP was first developed in 2010. The recent review process in 2022 was funded by the Commonwealth Secretariat, UNFPA, Star Ghana Foundation and Action Aid. The new NYP (2022-2032) sees youth unemployment as a critical developmental and national security challenge and recognises the stresses and desire of Ghanaian youth to gain decent employment with secured remuneration and in an attractive working environment (see also Yeboah, 2021). The policy is intended to serve as a “framework and direction for all stakeholders involved in the implementation of policies, programmes and projects for the development of the youth” (National Youth Policy 2022: p. 24). It calls on stakeholders to develop strategies and programmes to respond to and provide employment opportunities for young people and consider technology and innovation. At the heart of the policy is the call to strengthen youth participation in the formulation and implementation of programmes and interventions designed for youth. In fact, its overarching theme reads ‘benefit for youth involve youth: together for a prosperous future’ (National Youth Policy, 2022). The NYP’s implementation plan highlights that the Ministry of Youth and Sports has the primary responsibility for coordination, monitoring, evaluation, and review of the NYP, working through the NYA with active participation of youth and in collaboration with government agencies, ministries and departments, NGOs and other actors (National Youth Policy, 2010). The implementation plan for the NYP also stipulates that youth associations across the country are key actors in the implementation of the NYP. Such associations are expected to function as mediators between youth and the government at the district, regional and national levels to ensure that policy makers are abreast with the concerns, views and aspirations of the youth (National Youth Policy, 2010, 2022).

For the 2010 Ghana NYP, existing documents make mentioning of a youth consultation, but without any further detail. According to respondents, both the design of the NYP in 2010 and its implementation involved consultation of stakeholders including the youth, CSO actors, international organisations, government departments, ministries and other relevant departments. The NYA was responsible for organising the consultations. Speaking about youth engagement in the NYP, one respondent narrated:

This one [NYP] in developing it, we engaged all stakeholders including the youth themselves. We did whole lot of consultation to get their views and understanding on issues affecting them. The youth were involved.

Several of the CSO respondents reported that either they themselves or other youth focused CSOs they knew participated in consultation process during the 2010 design, by invitation. Between the creation of the 2010 NYP and its recent review in 2022, the NYA engaged the youth through the Ghana Youth Federation to solicit their views and concerns. The federation was tasked with mobilising the youth across the country to consult them about their concerns, challenges and aspirations over employment.

As the NYP review process was unfolding in 2022, this presented an opportunity for the present study to explore how youth engagement was organized. A national youth conference which coincided with the celebration of the International Youth Day was organised by NYA in August 2022 to consult youth groups. One youth representative who participated in the 2022 review process commented on the involvement of several stakeholders including young people:

When I went there, I saw representatives from the National Union of Ghana Students, market women, traders' association, tailors' association, dressmakers, church leaders, a whole lot of leaders coming on board. Even some young traditional rulers also came on board for that consultation. I would say that the consultation was broad.

According to respondents, among the key issues brought up by the youth and CSO actors during the 2022 review of the NYP were the need for more and better jobs especially for University graduates, better information sharing for youth to make informed decisions, improving the health and wellbeing of youth, better coordination of youth employment policies and programmes, and fragmentation of the policy landscape with multiple agencies, departments and ministries running different youth employment initiatives without proper coordination.

However, the conference took place in Accra and only registered youth civil society organisations were invited. Hence, one concern raised was the issue of representation, reflecting the findings presented in section 3. Participants in the consultation stressed the need to shift from urban-biased consultations whereby the NYA only consults few Accra-based stakeholders and some in other regional capitals, to the neglect of rural youth and non-elites. This had also been observed by Adu-Gyamfi (2013; 2014), who noted that the 2010 consultation was exclusive to urban areas. Also, a government representative confirmed the urban focus of the 2022 consultation:

During consultation they call these youth leaders like NASPA president, NUGS president, they identify some youth, a few youth leaders, sit them down and they may want to take their views as a representative of the entire youth. That is when even they are thinking of consulting the entire youth.

Youth organisations and young people indicated that the NYA should have undertaken a widespread campaign on various media outlets about the consultation and processes leading to the formulation of the policy. It should have visited high schools across the country to solicit the views of young people on the policy. Youth participation was affected by the time set for consultation, when policy consultation took place at the time when schools were still in session and mostly in the regional capitals (Adu-Gyamfi, 2013; 2014). A CSO representative for instance said:

There were regional consultations, mainly at the regional capitals. Most of the youth who were in school did not get the chance to be engaged except the leaders of the school unions. I can't remember any events that were organised at the district levels. I for instance I did not participate in the consultation because I only received a link with some questions asking for my views on what the new policy should look like. I felt this was not a proper way to engage so I decided not to respond to the questionnaire.

Several CSO actors and young people interviewed suggested that the lack of presence of NYA in all parts of the country has important implications for its core function of mobilising the youth for effective participation and engaging other actors at the district level. Even where NYA is present at the local level, it lacks financial resources and personnel to perform its functions adequately.

Young people bemoan that the NYP and the Act that establishes the NYP provide no concrete mechanisms for their active participation in decision-making and governance at various levels. For instance, there are no clear mechanisms as to how district youth committees could interact with local councils, regional committee or ministries strategies to ensure meaningful youth participation (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2021). Respondents expressed the view that the idea of setting up 'youth parliaments' in every district as outlined in the 2010 NYP could have facilitated the mobilisation of diverse group of youth in policies and programmes at the district level. However, it is only in 2019 that the NYA set up youth parliaments in only some of the 265 districts across the country. Where they exist, lack of human resources and limited budget have stymied youth parliaments as adequate spaces for youth participation.

Furthermore, the rule that only formally registered groups can take part in the consultation of both the 2010 NYP and its review in 2022, resulted in the exclusion of informally organised youth groups and organisations (see also Adu Gyamfi 2014). This rule predates the 2010 NYP. A CSO actor explained new challenges related to registration, which was a concern widely shared by other respondents:

The space for engagement is very limited and that space is now reducing. The reason is that recently, the national youth authority came up with a new guideline to regulate youth organization which means you have to go register and you have to provide a lot of documentation of the work that you are doing, which is good alright... but the challenge is that some of these organizations are community-based. So once you bring guidelines, which are so difficult for them, it means that they are going to die out of the system. Because if they don't have the registration, it means they can't operate.

However, the NYA representative interviewed reported that NYA does not engage unregistered youth organisations simply because they do not know such organisations.

One of the power dynamics highlighted, is that the policy was thought to be over-politicised, which negatively affects the motivation of some young people and youth organisations to contribute to its formulation. Youth civil society actors indicated that the NYA is gradually becoming a political tool. Leaders of the authority are appointed by the government and thus answerable and accountable to the government rather than the youth. It was felt that the NYA thus pursues the agenda of government. One CSO representative for instance noted that the NYA may design good policies but the implementation of activities gets politicised. He suggested that for young people or organisations to be part of NYA activities and programmes, they need to belong to a political party in power. Another CSO representative stressed the political issues as follows:

NYA is becoming like a political tool where employees are supposed to be neutral, but they become political in their engagement with us. When there are programmes to be rolled out,

it takes a political direction. If you are not aligned with a particular political party, you will find it difficult to engage with them because of politics.

In terms of how the NYP and the NYA connect to the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations (MELR), the findings suggest that the NYA is part of a National Employment Coordination Committee (NECC) which is an inter-ministerial committee composed of 38 institutions that includes government and line ministries, social partners and other major stakeholders. NECC is chaired by the Minister for Employment and Labour Relations. Interviews with representative of the NYA revealed that concerns and views of young people regarding employment issues, gathered through broader consultations for the review of the NYP, would be relayed to the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations through the NECC. However, the NECC was only established in 2016, which suggests that any consultations prior to 2016 might have not found its way to the MELR. Respondents indicated that MELR supported the review of the NYP by participating in the consultative meetings and it assisted NYA with a situational analysis of the economic, financial, labour and employment issues. Here, a previous disconnect within the policy landscape may now get resolved, depending on the strength of interdepartmental coordination.

5.1.2 Employment Policies for Decent Work

Another Ministry relevant for youth employment and engagement is the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations (MELR). In 2014, MERL developed the National Employment Policy (NEP) in response to the government's commitment to coordinating and addressing employment issues in a cogent manner. The policy was expected to guide program/project implementation toward achieving set targets and development outcomes in job creation and decent work, providing gainful and decent employment opportunities for the growing labour force to improve living conditions and contribute to economic growth and national development while maintaining equity, fairness, security, and dignity (MELR, 2014). After a comprehensive review of documentation and zonal stakeholder consultations held across the country, a zero draft was created. Draft One of the National Employment Policy was completed in 2012 and reviewed in 2014 by a Technical Tripartite Committee in a social dialogue to align it with the Government's development objectives and the national development agenda (MELR,2014).

The revised NEP was then subjected to a national validation process in which stakeholders such as sector Ministry, Department or Agency (MDA), Metropolitan Municipal and District Assembly (MMDA), academia, parliamentarians, political parties, media, think tanks, training institutions and the tripartite constituents to discuss the changes effected for further comments and input. The Technical Committee was re-assigned to ensure that the comments and inputs of stakeholders and the tripartite constituents are incorporated into the final draft after which it was submitted to NDPC for policy alignment. The policy and its implementation plan were subsequently submitted to Cabinet (MELR 2014). In the acknowledgement section of NEP, special mention is made of organisations, including the ILO, who provided substantial technical support and funding, and other stakeholders who contributed substantially to the policy design and development process. Youth organisations were not mentioned in any part of the process, hence their involvement in the policy design process might have been insignificant or unrecognised. Our findings from the interviews suggest that the spaces for youth engagement at MELR is highly limited. An

official at MELR narrated that the 'Ministry is not for young people and therefore have no business engaging with the youth'. All the youth civil society organisations interviewed reported having no engagement with the formulation of the NEP. One CSO actor for instance narrated:

I know of the national employment policy. As far as I can remember Myself or my organisation was not invited to any consultation meeting during its formulation. When these policies are being designed mostly, they will consult the people at the top and not we the grassroots organisations. I am not aware of any youth organisation that participated during the consultation.

Beyond the NEP development process, respondents interviewed at MELR indicated that the NYA is part of the national employment coordinating team at the MELR. Moreover, MELR work closely with NYA and other relevant stakeholders on several policy arenas, including soliciting their views on issues relating to safety at work, risks, social security, and labour rights. However, the extent of this engagement is highly limited. It is restricted to soliciting the views of different actors rather than substantive input into the policy design process. Such engagements are not consistently organised. The youth CSO actors interviewed reported having no engagement in such consultative events organised by MELR which suggests that their input into the policy formulation process of NEP was minimal. One senior government official interviewed at the Youth Employment Agency under the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations as follows:

I've never seen a programme that the government is running such that the government has come down to community people, or even at the electoral area level to consult the youth. In Ghana, our governance system comes down to the electoral area level. So, the system is already there, but I have hardly seen a program being run or implemented that way.

Additionally, according to one ILO representative, substantive youth engagement is less likely to happen with respect to youth employment, labour policies, labour rights and economic development. This is mainly because of lack of clear-cut strategy for involving the youth as a stakeholder in the formulation of employment and other national development policies. Moreover, it emerged from the interviews that youth organisations have relatively less expertise in labour and economic development policy, which undermines their effective mobilisation for dialogue in these policy spaces. However, the representative mentioned that youth engagement might have happened at the level of youth groups who may have been invited to participate in validation meetings, rather than in the development or formulation of the NEP. Others may have been consulted through interviews and group discussions, if such consultation processes were designed. The ILO representative interviewed could not comment on tripartite social dialogues.

In sum, while various stakeholders had been invited for consultation in previous policy formulation processes emanating from the MELR, these are relatively closed spaces to youth and policy dialogue and coordination between MELR and NYA is limited. The study identified that one civil society organisation had directly targeted MELR with advocacy activities from the outside, to effect policy change in decent working conditions for domestic workers. Action Aid had been advocating for the rights of domestic workers for some time and engaged the MELR as part of the process. The engagement contributed to the drafting of the domestic worker bill which was passed by parliament to become the Domestic Workers' Regulations (LI 2408) which protect domestic workers from violence, exploitation

and harassment. The regulation, which is a domestication of the ILO Convention 189, came into force in August 2020 (ActionAid, 2020). Among other aspects, the Bill outlines what domestic service work entails, terms of payment and conditions of service. Moreover, Action Aid Ghana has been mobilising urban youth into groups to build an urban women movement, and built their knowledge, skills, and competencies to undertake campaigns on issues such as economic security and unpaid care work and to advocate for the ratification of ILO Convention No. 190 concerning the elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work. Action Aid conducted a situational analysis of economic and sexual abuse and exploitation in informal workspaces and the findings were used to design an awareness campaign and advocacy for the ratification of ILO Convention No. 190 with the involvement of the youth groups. The groups led the campaigns at the national and regional levels using digital and social media; and a petition outlining concerns over economic security, unpaid care work, and workplace sexual harassment was submitted to regional ministers and the MELR (Ghana Business News, 2022). This example of civil society mobilization illustrates how a relatively closed space was targeted with campaigns, which was built through strategic alliances and the strengthening of civic and political skills of women workers.

5.1.3 Agricultural policies

Considering the size of the rural population in Ghana and the extent of engagement of young people in rural livelihoods, the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MOFA) is highly relevant in the policy landscape, which oversees agricultural productivity policies such as Producing Food for Jobs (PFJ). Our findings indicate that youth engagement happens to some degree with respect to this policy area. MOFA engages directly with diverse stakeholders including other government ministries, departments and agencies, NGOs, and international organisations. However specific actor or stakeholder engagement is dependent on the policy area of interest. Specifically on youth and agriculture MOFA engages with the NYA, farmer groups, a civil society organisation like Youth Actions and international development organisations such as Action Aid, Send-Ghana. For example, MOFA engaged directly with NYA in the design of the PFJ and the recent Ghana Care (Obaatanpa) Programme, which is a post-COVID-19 intervention to stabilize and revitalize Ghana's economy and create jobs (Ministry of Finance, 2020). We also found that MOFA uses specific platforms to engage stakeholders where some youth (mostly educated youth) may be represented. They include the joint sector regime platform, agricultural sector working group platform, agricultural public-private partnership, and Life Chamber for Agribusiness. These platforms offer services to support its members. For example, the Chamber of Agribusiness offers technical, regulatory and marketing services to smallholder producer cooperatives and agribusiness actors. Additionally, the Chamber represents its members in policy dialogues and multiple stakeholder platforms and aims to facilitate the enrichment of agribusiness sector in Ghana through lobbying, rural financing, training and advocacy (Chamber of Agribusiness, Ghana (CAG), 2022). Representatives from the MOFA claimed that many young people are represented in the above platforms. However, interviews with CSO actors showed that youth are represented as members (farmers) of the platforms and not necessarily because they are youth. Moreover, engagement between MOFA and members of these platforms is limited to leaders, who in most cases are not young.

The findings show that the design and formulation of PFJ had little direct engagement of NYA and youth civil society. One youth civil society actor interviewed noted, for instance:

The Ministry of Agriculture formulated the PFJ, and they did not engage NYA to identify the youth for them which is wrong, because NYA have registered the youth at the district level and they know youth association and youth organizations that are registered with them. So, if you want to give jobs at the district level, they are the primary point of contact to help you identify farmers who are youths only. The NYA should be empowered and be given the right to coordinate. That is why when you engage NYA, they cannot even tell you who is engaged at what point in time in the PFJ.

Even for youth CSOs who have the opportunity to interact with the MOFA, on respondent indicated that the engagement is often limited to commenting on already drafted policy rather than making direct input into the design or formulation of agricultural development policies. CSO representatives reported having no direct engagement in the formulation of the PFJ and were unsure whether young people at the district level were consulted. Overall, the findings show that direct engagement between MOFA and youth civil society is highly limited. Thus, in so far as general farmers' issues reflect those of young farmers, they may be represented by farmer associations. However, if there are youth-specific issues in farming and rural livelihoods, these are unlikely to emerge. Existing studies on rural livelihoods have demonstrated that certain issues can be youth-specific, while these vary per context (Boafo and Yeboah, 2022; Oosterom, Namuggala and Szyp, 2022; Sumberg, 2021; Yeboah et al., 2020), which suggests that creating more avenues for youth participation would be relevant.

To conclude, findings confirm what others have found concerning youth engagement in Ghana (Ile and Boadu, 2018): whether it is intended or otherwise, the landscape for designing and implementing national development policies and programmes other than youth policies have largely overlooked Ghanaian youth.

5.2 Youth civil society

The findings from interviews suggest all youth CSOs engage mainly the National Youth Authority under the Ministry of Youth and Sports, even regarding employment issues. Their engagement with other Ministries such as Food and Agriculture, Trade and Industry, and Employment and Labour relations is limited or non-existent. Some CSO actors noted that at the programme level they involve some government actors (e.g., Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education) as partners during project implementation. For example, one of the CSOs interviewed, i.e., Youth Development, Research, and Innovation Centre (YOUDRIC) works on three key thematic areas including education, health, and livelihood improvement for youth in rural areas. The organisations' strategy has been to work with the relevant Ministry or Agency responsible for a particular sector. The three core areas of work of the organisation fit with the thematic pillars outlined in the National Youth Policy. Interview respondents indicated that YOUDRIC supports young people with skills training and access to microcredit to venture into entrepreneurship or trade in conjunction with local government authorities and private sector actors, and further collaborate with the Ghana Education Service under the Ministry of Education to support less endowed schools through upgrading school infrastructure.

Engagement between CSOs and actors at NYA have largely taken the form of consultation and/or validation meetings and only when invited by NYA, while CSO actors prefer continuous and more strategic engagement. It is difficult for CSOs to influence decision-

making processes and get the input, buy-in or support of government actors in the implementation of their own programmes. When we asked CSO representatives to rate how easy or difficult it is to engage policy actors (with 1 being very difficult and 5 being very easy) they all rated it with 2, which indicated the challenges youth CSOs face in getting access to policy actors in rolling out their activities and programmes. Despite these challenges, the CSO actors noted that policy actors are open to their take their viewpoints more seriously during consultations. Nevertheless, the responsiveness of policy actors to act upon the concerns, opinions and suggestions of CSO actors is again limited.

5.3 Barriers and opportunities to youth engagement

Our findings furthermore indicate that there are strengths and weaknesses within the youth civil society itself, which makes it challenging for them to engage in the policy landscape. A key strength of the youth CSOs is that they are closer to youth constituencies and are in tune with their plight, concerns, and difficulties. However, while the CSO actors indicated to engage the youth on their rights, sexuality, education, health, employment and other issues of critical importance, lack of adequate human resources and funding has affected their ability to engage youth groups in their constituents (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2021).

Youth civil society actors and representatives mentioned some of the structural barriers. According to respondents, the absence of mechanism for direct engagement and the bureaucracy within the governance landscape make it challenging for youth CSOs or any individual young person to directly engage or take a step to engage government officials. While the NYA which is supposed to coordinate youth dialogue in policy spaces it is yet to develop well-structured mechanisms for youth engagement.

Two CSO representatives elaborated:

The main barrier is that there is no structured system of engagement that is known to whoever wants to engage them [government actors], apart from the bureaucratic process which is to write a letter, book an appointment, and if they invite you, you will go and meet them and talk and then you begin the process and that takes a long time.

For you to reach out to government actors is not easy. For example, meeting the Parliamentary Select Committee on Youth, you must write formally, and it has to pass through long processes, and it is possible that they would agree to listen to you or will not agree to listen to you.

The lengthy bureaucratic process causes delays in process and implementation. Some CSO actors lamented how one can only engage policy actors if one has personal connections or networks. One respondent shared:

Sometimes you need to know somebody as a friend before you will get a government institution to team up with you or collaborate to roll out activities. Sometimes I don't know whether it's the system, because when you approach even an agency, they will say you have to write a letter to the Minister. But how long will it take? Sometimes a whole six months is wasted, and the minister has not responded. And if you ask them, they will say 'if you push them too much, they will say you have personal interest' [e.g. if you follow up with calls or visit you are tagged as having selfish interests or an attitude]

Thus, the only time that youth CSOs or youth representatives get the opportunity to engage government actors is when they have been invited to meetings or dialogue by government actors. Others recognised the power differentials between youth and senior officials which is often reinforced by the prevailing cultural norms to subordinate the position of youth. Ghanaian culture provides little to no room for young people to have a dialogue with senior officials over critical issues, and young people are expected to respect the elderly. This makes it challenging for the youth to be assertive over issues that concern them during consultations and dialogues (Boampong, 2021). According to respondents, power hierarchies and prevailing cultural and gender norms are likely to be a significant barrier for especially young women. A CSO actor interviewed stressed:

Young women face more problems than young men. Yes, cultural norms are a barrier especially for women's participation. As you know in our society, sometimes women are not given the chance for education. The opportunities that men get, women don't get. In our organization, we always encourage young ladies to make their views known, but it is not easy. Some of them ladies think about their family and how they can take care of the home, and this rather prevents them from participation in any policy or programme that is meant for them.

Gender differences also emerged on the opportunities for youth participation in invited spaces in policy dialogue. CSO officials narrated that young men are more likely to be invited or get chosen by youth representatives to represent them in policy dialogue in contrast to young women. A CSO acted narrated:

When you go for these consultation meetings there aren't many youths but the few that you would see there, they are mostly the young men. I always ask where are the young women? We have a culture where young women mostly do not get the chance to come to public spaces. Mostly young men get the opportunity than the young women

Moreover, interviewees expressed the view that even if young people are invited or get the opportunity to engage with government actors, many senior officials look down on them. One CSO actor interviewed recounted how a young person was scolded during a consultation meeting:

Sometimes our [referring to youth CSOs] contributions are not welcomed. When you go for meeting you see only few young people, which is really a problem. There is limited recognition that the youth can bring fresh ideas and creativity to the decision. One time I was at a meeting and a youth was shut down for expressing his view. If you are not strong you won't go to such places again. Is really challenging that you go for a meeting, and you are not welcomed by our senior brothers who have positions, who see youth as a threat to them.

On the other hand, government officials universally agreed that youth have limited interest and capacity to better engage in policy processes. They stated that, when invited to policy dialogue, they do not bring good ideas or critical insight. Others intimated that youth only show up for consultation when they know they might receive a reward for participation, not to bring their insights and concerns. They recognised the need that young people need the capacity to make any meaningful contribution to policy making and dialogue. The international actors also recognised lack of voice, power inequalities, bureaucracy, and a lack of commitment to spend resources on youth engagement initiatives on the part of

government, limited capacity on the part of youth, and challenging socio-cultural norms that privilege the voice of senior officials over young people, as key barriers inhibiting youth engagement in policy dialogue. They noted that young people appear to lack confidence and knowledge on issues pertaining to economic policy, labour rights and national development policies. This could, according to international actors, stem from young peoples' own lack of interest as well as the failure of the educational system to provide youth with skills and knowledge needed to participate effectively in decision making processes.

In terms of opportunities for youth engagement, the findings suggest there are many vocal youth civil society actors and youth groups, which can contribute meaningfully to formulation of policies if provided with the right avenues and supported to develop skills and knowledge. Respondents expressed the view that donors must create platforms to strengthen leadership structures within youth civil society and build their capacity to effectively engage with local and national government. Mainstreaming youth participation in programme design at all levels could help empower both young men and women by offering them safe spaces to learn such critical skills and knowledge.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

This report has analysed the policy landscape for youth employment. It has demonstrated that there are numerous entry points and spaces for youth participation at country and international levels, but the influence of young people is limited to consultation and is rarely substantive. It is unclear how (and how much) these consultative processes actually inform decisions, for various reasons. Often, a lack of documentation means it is unclear how the advice and recommendations by young people influenced and altered plans for design and implementation. This makes it difficult to verify whether input was taken on board and whether decisions can be attributed to youth engagement, which establishes the extent of influence. But policy processes are also complex, and many other factors are at play aside from youth participation. However, it is quite likely that youth engagement remains limited due to other vested interests and more powerful actors shaping policy processes in open and invited spaces for participation. In essence, more opportunities for voice (by creating more entry points and interfaces for dialogue) does not necessarily lead to more influence. Therefore, opportunities for open dialogue with government actors and consultations usually need to be supplemented with advocacy planned and mobilised by strategic coalitions, as evidenced by lessons from civil society mobilization for democratic and accountable governance (see Gaventa and Barrett, 2012).

Firstly, the key findings demonstrate that most efforts for promoting youth engagement are anchored in the Ministry of Youth, which is not the most powerful actor within the policy landscape when it comes to decisions about labour and employment policy. It is unclear whether and how Ministries of Youth or apex bodies such as National Youth Councils properly channel the outcomes of youth consultations to relevant sectoral ministries and departments. Youth might be indirectly represented within unions and farmer organisations and thus have alternative entry points into Ministries of Labour, Trade, and Agriculture. However, youth engagement and influence then depend on the existence of strong youth structures within these organisations, as well as their openness to the voices and priorities of young women and men. In many contexts, gerontocratic and gender norms hamper young people's voice and leadership.

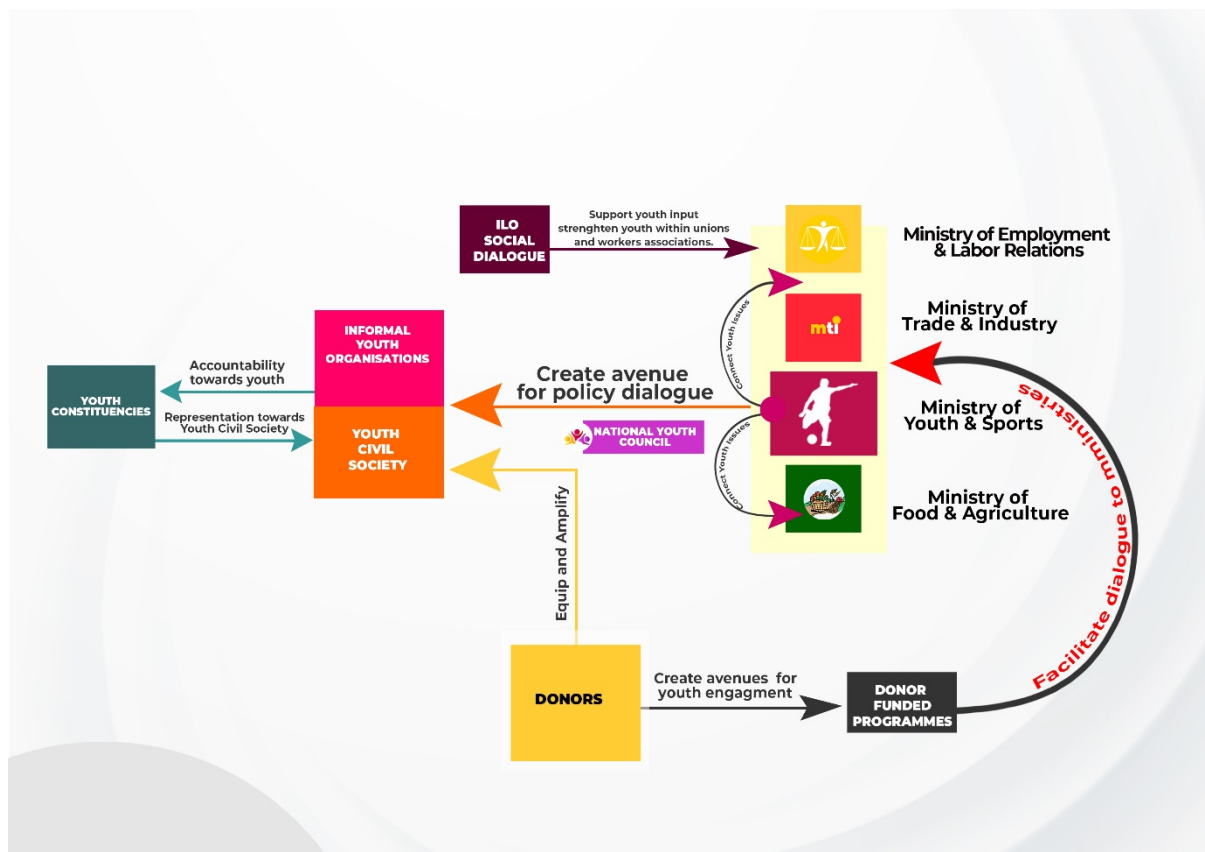
Secondly, new and progressive practices have emerged among some of the international development partners to promote youth engagement both within their own programmes and in relation to government actors. Some donors leverage their relationship to government counterparts to initiate spaces of participation and dialogue between youth and government. When the policy landscape is assessed in its entirety and the absence of entry points have been identified, efforts could strategically focus on creating new avenues for participation, or strengthening capacities of youth actors in existing spaces. However, there appears to be limited openness from government actors in various contexts, especially in the absence of funding. There also appears to be disconnects between young parliamentarians and parliamentary portfolio committees on youth, where they exist, and between youth organisations and other relevant civil society actors. Here, important lessons from scholarship and practice could be used, in particular, civil society mobilisation and democratic governance, which has underscored the importance of strategic alliances for effective policy influence (Gaventa and Barrett, 2012). Furthermore, many international development partners could promote decent jobs for youth through skill building and loan and grant-making schemes programmes. While the effectiveness on job creation itself has been questioned (Fox and Kaul, 2017; Sumberg et al., 2019), these programmes lack strategies for supporting youth engagement with respect to the policy environment and do not build the civic and political skills that young men and women need to negotiate decent

jobs (Mpofu et al., 2022; Oosterom, 2018b). These programmes need to integrate such strategies to promote decent jobs for youth, helping some youth (employment)-focused organisations to also become 'policy entrepreneurs' (a phrase coined by FNV Mondiaal, 2019).

Thirdly, youth civil society itself is often focused around the Ministry of Youth. Policy processes such as tripartite social dialogue for labour policies (including on workplace sexual harassment); and policies targeting the informal economy may not be on their radar, while highly relevant to young people. Youth civil society generally has rich experience in mobilising young people. To influence policy, the findings suggest they need technical expertise and knowledge with regards to economic and employment policy, as well as the policy process itself, without which government actors might trivialize their inputs as 'simple demands' and 'missing the bigger picture'.

We finish this report with recommendations for identifying and improving entry points for youth engagement and for strengthening substantive youth engagement. The visual (Figure 2) represents an overview of entry points and linkages where youth engagement can be strengthened. The visual portrays a situation where an existing Ministry of Youth can, in principle, function as rallying point for youth participation. Where such a Ministry does not exist, entry points need to be created at the level of different Ministries. However, as the report has shown, the presence of a Ministry of Youth and/or National Youth Council does not necessarily translate into having influence on other government actors, hence supporting youth engagement in other ministries would be advisable in either case.

Figure 2: Strengthening entry points and capacities for youth engagement



The visual furthermore shows how, ideally:

- The different Ministries each find ways to initiate spaces for participation for young people, for instance through consultations and institutionalising interfaces with relevant youth organisations.
- National Youth Councils play a role in connecting diverse youth civil society actors to various ministries, while addressing issues of inclusive representation.
- Formal *and* informal youth civil society engage policy actors beyond the Ministry of Youth and have strong alliances with other civil society actors such as unions, informal worker associations and women associations.
- Youth civil society builds knowledge and experience of policy processes, and a range of relevant economic and labour policies.
- The leveraging role played by donors, to create avenues for youth engagement to other ministries, including through mechanisms like tripartite social dialogues.
- Funded youth programmes integrate mechanisms for dialogue with relevant ministries and strategies for strengthening young people's civic and political capacities.

We will now elaborate with a set of recommendations that flow from this diagram. As transpired throughout the empirical sections, ensuring adequate and inclusive representation and accountability to youth constituencies is a challenge for all actors that want to support and/or organise youth engagement. Supporting the participation of less privileged young people needs to be thoughtfully considered.

Recommendations for government actors:

As the report demonstrates, Ministries of Youth are usually at the centre of organising youth consultation within the policy landscape, possibly in collaboration with National Youth Councils, whilst other Ministries tend to have no institutionalised mechanisms for youth participation. While Ministries of Youth usually have good experience in organising participatory processes, often supported by development partners, young people could benefit from more entry points for youth engagement. Therefore, recommendations for national-level government include:

1. Governments need to increase their efforts to improve policy coherence around youth employment, mainstream youth engagement, and improve interdepartmental coordination concerning relevant policies and youth engagement. In particular, national employment strategies and youth employment strategies need to be aligned and not handled separately.
2. Ministries of Youth need to create more effective linkages, both to other Ministries, and between Ministries and National Youth Councils, to ensure that outcomes of consultations can be adequately channelled to other government actors.
3. As well as the Ministries of Youth, Ministries of Labour, Trade and Commerce, and Agriculture can also create their own platforms to engage young people on policy design and implementation, and create mechanisms for regular engagement with youth within programmes.
4. Ministries of Labour can strengthen youth participation by asking social partners to organise youth structures and organising tripartite-plus social dialogues.
5. Platforms for youth engagement need to include diverse categories of youth, in particular across urban and rural settings, educated and less-educated groups, youth from disadvantaged economic backgrounds, and those working in the informal economy.

Recommendations for youth civil society organisations

While an active youth civil society exists in all countries, the analysis suggests that few youth civil society actors have adequate knowledge and capacity to meaningfully engage in relevant national policies and government programmes to promote youth employment. This includes knowledge of policy making and implementation itself. Few youth civil society actors follow and target sectoral Ministries like Ministries of Labour, Trade and Commerce, and Agriculture. While young people might be represented within unions, informal worker and trader associations, and farmer associations, their voice and issues may not be incorporated into national-level negotiations due to age-based social hierarchies and they may remain disconnected from other civil society actors. Hence, recommendations for youth civil society include:

1. Increase expertise in policy areas beyond national youth policies, which are relevant to youth employment such as labour policies, economic trade and investment policies, policies regulating the informal economy, and agricultural policies.
2. Target advocacy strategies at various Ministries and not just the Ministry of Youth, in particular, at critical moments in the policy formulation and review process, for example, when social dialogue processes for key policy areas are scheduled.
3. Seek strategic alliances with other civil society actors, for instance with women organisations around gender inequalities in the workspace and workplace sexual harassment, and with informal trader associations to defend the rights of young people working in the informal economy.
4. Support young people who are active in trade and labour unions, and in worker and farmer associations, building their capacities for collective voice and organising, and connecting them into national-level policy influence and advocacy activities via youth civil society.
5. Ensure adequate, inclusive representation of diverse youth and strengthen accountability mechanisms to diverse youth constituencies.

Recommendations for international donors and development partners:

International donors can directly support youth engagement and also facilitate linkages within the wider policy landscape, where they do not (yet) exist, by strategically leveraging their access to government actors. However, creating spaces for youth participation needs to go hand in hand with building their knowledge, confidence, and civic and political skills, which are essential to engage in dialogue and negotiations with government actors. Lessons from policy areas such as building democratic governance, security and rule of law programmes can be used to enhance meaningful participation. For example, this might include the need for building collective voice and action and creating strategic alliances, which helps young people to advocate for their issues to be included in policy agendas, where decision-making happens in relatively closed spaces.

1. Assess the overall policy landscape and the existing and missing entry points for youth engagement, which can inform strategic decisions concerning where to create entry points, which existing relationships need to be strengthened, and which knowledge and skills need to be built.
2. Support the capacity building of youth civil society actors, in terms of technical expertise on relevant policies, advocacy skills to formulate their messages clearly, and how to use effective communication tools to engage with policy actors.

3. Embassies can create learning opportunities for youth civil society actors involved in youth employment and other national civil society actors, which have engaged in governance and policy influence, to increase the capacity of youth civil society.
4. Support youth structures and leadership within unions and farmer associations.
5. Support strategic alliances between youth civil society and other civil society to strengthen collective action capacities for advocacy and policy influence, for instance trade and labour unions, worker associations, women organisations, and human rights/labour rights actors.
6. Create opportunities for meaningful youth participation at programme level and at the embassy level. Most programmes have created opportunities for engagement during design stage in the form of consultations. More can be done to involve young people during implementation and enable adaptive management, and in programme monitoring and evaluation. Documenting adjustments in programme implementation as the result of youth engagement can help demonstrate that youth had actual influence beyond mere consultation.
7. Leverage their position in policy dialogues and use programmes to initiate dialogue between youth and relevant government ministries and other donors, whilst ensuring that young people's confidence and capacities for engaging state actors have been developed to make the most out of these opportunities.
8. Integrate strategies for building young people's civic and political capacities within funded programmes, which they need to negotiate with employers and develop the confidence to have meaningful voice.
9. Support networks between youth civil society and diverse youth constituencies, especially mechanisms for reporting back outcomes of consultations to local youth populations in youth-friendly formats.
10. Increase awareness that organising youth participation takes time and resources, and requires dedicated strategies and staff. In particular, organising meaningful representation by youth outside of urban elites requires efforts.
11. Incentivize government actors for promoting youth participation, for example, by making youth engagement a requirement when providing technical and financial support to government ministries and departments.

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About INCLUDE

INCLUDE was conceived in 2012 by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs to promote evidence-based policymaking for inclusive development in Africa through research, knowledge sharing and policy dialogue. INCLUDE brings together researchers from African countries and the Netherlands who work with the private sector, non-governmental organizations and governments to exchange knowledge and ideas on how to achieve better research-policy linkages for inclusive development in Africa. Since its establishment, INCLUDE has supported more than 20 international research groups to conduct research on inclusive development and facilitated policy dialogues in Africa and the Netherlands.