

**DISCUSSION PAPER<sup>1</sup>:  
THE SCIENCE OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT  
AND GREEN ECONOMY**

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**INTRODUCTION**

There is a growing recognition we have reached a tipping point when it comes to ideas on how best to engage young people or youths to be conscious and responsible global citizens in various disciplines. Today, sustainable development and the green economy are the new focus of research, education, and development emphasis in most countries albeit they are new terms for what was earlier defined differently, for example, in natural resources management and environment.

Previously initiatives were by default foreign driven but recently this is fast changing given the emergence of savvy young people from across the developing economies and countries. This is an important milestone especially considering that developing countries lag compared to the rest of the world in terms of technological capabilities, social protection, manufacturing, and political will.

In the developing economies and countries, the emergence of new problem diagnosis and solving techniques is a critical step that fosters the build up local intelligence, creativity and innovation. Furthermore, their current steps are holistic and embrace a broad range of issues such as leadership, entrepreneurship, higher education, community development and outreach.

As each of the initiatives is aimed at addressing specific problems, closer scrutiny reveals a set of overarching questions whenever young people are the focus. The objective of this article is to contribute to knowledge creation in Africa. The premise is that immediately once an individual has useful knowledge they have the capacity to solve any kind of a problem.

**OVERARCHING QUESTIONS IN YOUTH DISCUSSIONS**

- 1) How do we fully engage /empower the young people?
- 2) What can be done to step up efforts that target youths?
- 3) What are the limitations of the approaches to engage/involve young people?

**PROCESSES IN YOUTH ENGAGEMENT**

With pressures mounting due to climate change, energy, food and water issues, solution seekers emphasize that young people are the missing link if these challenges are to be addressed comprehensively. Therefore, concerted efforts to draw young people in theory and practice across many disciplines have already started to trigger various reactions across the age divide. Even though it is premature to determine the rate and extent of progress, the sometimes eye-brow

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raising political attention young people receives signifies that there are stakes involved with this age group.

In an era of processes, individuals, institutions, and communities seek new ways to solve problems collectively. Again, in seeking to answer what do we know and what we can do with young people we have to consider each interested party on an individual basis and on its merit. This is because interested parties bring along with them own philosophies, systems, and practices. Therefore, to blindly group thoughts and opinions without a common points of agreement would have a negative side. As a precaution, an understanding of the different frameworks in use helps unpack the youth motivations.

## **FRAMEWORKS FOR THE YOUTH DIMENSION AND PERSPECTIVE**

### **a) Developmental:**

Here, youths are actively involved in the development spaces often experimenting with donor systems and ways of operation.

### **b) Research-oriented:**

Here, youths are curiosity driven, innovators, and alternate as knowledge brokers. It is largely a pursuit of knowledge for its own sake.

### **c) Technological:**

Here, youths are largely savvy with gadgets and internet based technologies. They also experiment with big data initiatives and would manage super computers and large networks, if given the chance.

### **d) Education and psychological:**

Here, youths express their artistic form as educators through familiarisation with nature, drama, theatre, visual arts, and photography. They also alternate as relays of extension messages.

### **e) Open movement:**

Here, the youths are global citizens, confident, and passionate about themselves. This group includes freelancers, bloggers, citizen journalists, and netizens.

## **INTERACTION THAT FOCUS ON YOUNG PEOPLE**

Youths should cultivate interests, ask what to do and know when to do it. The arguments for inclusion of youths are as follows:

### **Arguments for youth inclusion**

- 1) The need to carefully manage the energy and creativity of youths. A growing initiative here is in cultivating the intellectual capacity, moral fibre and will through centers of excellence and through structured instruction.
- 2) To encourage activism, public engagement and an understanding of community dynamics.
- 3) An exploration of the world outside the box prompting entrepreneurial spirit and self discovery.
- 4) Youths can be intermediaries in information and dissemination. A practical example is found in countries with weak extension systems. Youths present an alternative to extension service and delivery.
- 5) The motivation to train and empower youths with skills to attract funds and understanding of funding mechanisms.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The challenge in the African context of knowledge creation in emerging thought areas is partially being addressed through continent-based and foreign think tanks and through isolated pieces of action. The focus on young people in sustainable development and the green economy offers newly created centers of excellence an impetus to create useful knowledge in this regard. Through the institutions, it is possible to tailor programmes that enable youths to access to resources and opportunities in sustainable development and green economy. The spin off to this would be accurate documentation, nurturing of quality standards by youth achievers. In turn, this leads to their empowerment. Through specialised programmes such as mentorship and training, youths are better placed to seize opportunities in this generation. Lastly, a word of caution, is that interdisciplinary is not a substitute for discipline-specific interactions, though interdisciplinary is key to managing career and discipline risk in the future