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**Mainstreaming of policies and
institutions towards engendering a
pro-youth, consensual and progressive
empowerment policy in rural
Zimbabwe.**

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Mainstreaming of policies and institutions towards engendering a pro-youth, consensual and progressive empowerment policy in rural Zimbabwe.

Abstract

This article explores the impact of mainstreaming policies that seek to address the socio-economic challenges faced by out-of-school youth in rural Zimbabwe. It seeks to examine and evaluate the current youth empowerment policies as well as the institutions that are mandated to execute the task, and to explore the compatibility of these policies along with their intended goals of facilitating youth economic emancipation in a rural context. The study uses primary data collected through in-depth and key informant interviews with youths, government ministries and non-governmental organizations operating in Mwenezi District of Masvingo Province. In evaluating the successfulness of youth empowerment policies in Zimbabwe, the paper corroborates the interview empirical findings with secondary data so as to provide a clearer understanding of youth empowerment policies in Zimbabwe. The paper notes some shortcomings within the current policy framework. Firstly, there is little to no consultation in formulating, designing and implementing policies. Secondly, a shortage of funds and the existence of corruption often hamper the implementation efforts. Thirdly, poor coordination between actor organizations has negatively impacted on the deliverables. Panaceas to the realization of the youth empowerment agenda are thus argued in the paper as including context-specific policies that meet the real rural challenges as experienced by the rural youth and not imagined by policy makers or implementors. In coming up with such policies and programmes, the paper advocates for youth participation at every stage. The paper advances the view that it is prudent to empower institutions and policies that seek to enhance the welfare of youth in order to realize youth emancipation. By foregrounding the importance of mainstreaming youth policies as a conduit to enhancing their socio-economic emancipation, this paper makes a significant contribution to the discourse on African youth empowerment.

Key words: Youth empowerment, Policy implementation, Mainstreaming of policy, Rural Zimbabwe

1. Introduction

The youth empowerment drive has been quite topical across the African continent (Ile & Boadu, 2018). The main reason for the increased interest is that Africa is a young continent, with 60% of the population below the age of 25 (Mariam, 2015; Yahya , 2017) and investing in its youth is seen as critical in building important human capital. It is also evident that youth have been side-lined for too long not only in their personal development but also in the development of their communities. Researchers, policy implementers, socio-economists and youth advocacy groups concur that there is need for a comprehensive approach involving all youth groups in mainstreaming policies and institutions dealing with the youth. The demographic dividend argument on African youth demonstrates an impetus towards youth driven socio-economic emancipation (Gay et al., 2017: 2). Apart from examining how the Zimbabwe National Youth Policy has been enacted and mainstreamed, this article also evaluates its effectiveness.

In order to understand the operationalization of the youth empowerment drive in rural Zimbabwe, and Mwenezi District in particular, the authors contacted and interviewed policy implementers both from government and the private sector. The qualitative empirical investigation revealed that the prevailing challenges, within Mwenezi District, debilitate the realization of socio-economic emancipation amongst the youth. As lauded by other scholars, the establishment of multi-sectoral or stakeholder alliances in the equitable rights and participation discourse is of paramount importance (Chambers & Kopstein, 2006; Berten & Leisering, 2017). Similarly, this paper explores a multi-stakeholder approach (the mainstreaming of institutions and policies), towards engendering pro-youth, consensual and progressive policies. Through establishing the status of policy frameworks that promote empowerment amongst youth in Zimbabwe, this paper contributes towards the understanding of the existential link between policy and development within the context of youth socio-economic empowerment.

Related studies have noted, with concern, the conspicuous absence of youth empowerment, even in policies that are meant to advance youth interests. It is noted that such a weakness will prevent proper accountability and commitment on the part of policy makers at both national and local levels (Ile & Boadu, 2018). It is also widely shared that youth have been mere spectators and not active partners. This translates to a policy package devoid of their real interests as their voices are often excluded (Gwirayi & Shumba, 2011). This paper builds on such evidence and uses the sustainable livelihood lens to reflect on how policies and institutions can best be used to engender a pro-youth and consensual empowerment policy.

2. Literature review

The experiences of youth in various socioeconomic and political conditions, and their outcomes, largely define youth. This study focuses on the out of school category, i.e. 18 to 35, which, according to the Zimbabwean Constitution of 2013, is also classified as adult (Bhebhe et al., 2015: 52). This category of the population is arguably underrepresented in policy formulation as well as policy implementation. Even such initiatives as Indigenization and Economic Empowerment have not significantly transformed rural youth's access to strategic economic resources such as land. This is despite the fact that they represent the most productive and reproductive age category in the entire population.

Youth empowerment means not only greater extrinsic control, but also a greater intrinsic capability – greater self-confidence – and an inner transformation of one's consciousness, enabling one to overcome external barriers to accessing resources or changing traditional ideology (Batliwala, 2000 in Sen & Mukherjee, 2013:7). Youth empowerment is critical because the youth stage marks a transition from being economically dependent to being productive, economically self-reliant and taking on dependents in adulthood (Chalasanani, 2013). According to the African Commission (2009), in Africa, young people are the majority as they constitute up to 70% of the continent's population. Youths are also the engine of growth and development in any society because they constitute the bulk of the economically active demography (Idike & Eme, 2015). Youths play a critical role in the transition of society from one generation to the next and, for this reason, societies must be conscious of the imperatives of youth empowerment, not only for their future developmental needs but also as a way of preparing them as the next leaders – a move that conforms to the popular sentiment that today's young people are the leaders of tomorrow (Ozohu-Suleiman, 2006).

Further to the above, peace – or the absence of it – is in part dependent on the socio-economic status of the youths. Disgruntled youths are likely to cause social instability as they fight to claim a share of economic resources or opportunities (Ide & Eme, 2015). The xenophobic violence that regularly engulfs South Africa, for example, is a result of youths' feelings of disgruntlement and exclusion, with the ensuing violence being a means of venting out their existential anger (Mamabolo, 2015). For these reasons, youth economic empowerment is a critical area that every nation should invest in. This suggests that policies and institutions need to be streamlined to ensure that they advance the interests of the youth as a disadvantaged group. In other words, there is need to enact deliberate policies that spearhead sustainable livelihoods of the disempowered youths whom, in the context of this study, are rural youth. Given a conducive policy environment with requisite implementation of youth projects, youths' livelihoods can be enhanced and supported to allow their emancipation. There are a number of ways through which youth empowerment can be realized. These, according to Chalasanani (2013),

include high school education, vocational education or training, awareness and information sharing, employment creation, as well as self-employment.

Previous related studies have noted the strong relationship that exists between empowerment and sustainable livelihoods as emphasized by the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach's asset pentagon (Udoh et al., 2017; Dutta & Guchhait-Barddhaman, 2018). However, the emphasis on the livelihood asset pentagon overlooks not only the role of policies, institutions and processes in determining access, control and use of assets, but also the choice and interaction of different livelihood strategies (Scoones & Wolmer, 2003:4). Bureaucrats who work for the government and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) often influence the empowerment outcomes among those youths who are actively involved in self-help projects. This reflects the idea that individuals, through their institutions as well as through legislation, are critical in the emancipation of ordinary rural youth. Therefore, it is important to understand issues of rights, power and institutions as they influence policy, which has long-term implications on sustainable livelihoods (Carney, 2002:28). This study (through its focus on mainstreaming pro-youth policies), also seeks to determine the implications of adopting a multi-stakeholder approach in the implementation of youth empowerment policies.

Youths experience various controls in their attempt to realize socio-economic emancipation. These controls not only emanate from limitations in the operational environment but are also imposed by the policy implementers. Scoones & Wolmer (2003:5) argue that poor people in Africa face a "complex and messy institutional context" in establishing livelihoods, and that "lines of authority and control are constructed in overlapping and often contested institutional settings". Unless interventions are directly integrated within the local institutions/structures of governance, then significant positive change or impacts cannot occur (Toner & Franks, 2006:91). This revelation clearly demonstrates the need for mainstreaming pro-youth policies so that rural youth are "liberated" from the shackles of poverty and exploitation. The integration of efforts therefore calls for organisations to work in harmony towards this drive.

The obtaining policy framework that does not deliberately seek to promote the welfare of rural youth as a distinct group is inimical to the realization of their emancipation. The rural context imposes challenges such as limited market, higher prices of inputs and neglect by policy implementers. Within this policy environment, youths in rural Zimbabwe are unlikely to be as competitive as their urban counterparts.

Understanding policies, institutions and processes, and their relationship with governance, rights and power, helps to explain why people choose certain livelihood strategies and helps to identify where strengths lie and where restrictions, barriers and constraints occur (Scoones, 1998:12). It is also evident that an analysis of policies, institutions and processes helps explain social

processes that could influence livelihood sustainability among the rural youth in Zimbabwe. It also explains the environment within which the youth livelihood discourse is located, while also helping to establish how a more enabling environment for sustainable livelihoods could be achieved, i.e. how policy implementers could affect interventions.

Previous studies done in Zimbabwe have principally focused on youth employment creation through the provisioning of start-up kits (Zindiye et al., 2012; Gwiza & Hamauswa, 2015; Bomani et al., 2015). Most of them foreground the need for business incubation as a means towards supporting entrepreneurship. Nyika (2016) looked at the Integrated Skills Outreach Programme (ISOPs) and their capacity to transform livelihoods. ISOPs are outreach skills training initiatives normally implemented in rural areas to equip the rural youth with skills such as the crafting of coffee tables, keeping bees, soldering leaking pots, brick moulding, market gardening and so forth (Murinda, 2014:23). In addressing existential literature gaps, this study calls attention to the need to mainstream pro-youth policies and institutions in order to enhance youth socio-economic empowerment in rural Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwe's youth empowerment programmes are embedded in its National Youth Policy (NYP). The policy was first introduced in 2000 and later revised and republished in 2013. It outlines strategies designed by the Zimbabwean government in its quest to empower the local youth. This policy covers the development strategies that the government and other private organisations seek to implement to ensure that youth in Zimbabwe are emancipated. One of the emphases is on training the youth so that they develop some vocational skills. Training and skills are widely recognized for playing a role in equipping the beneficiaries with skills and capacity development, which in turn not only enhances employability but also prepares them for self-employment. Training initiatives also promote the well-being of society's vulnerable groups (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 1998; Masipa & Jideani, 2014), reduce household vulnerability, enhance earning capacity, self-sufficiency and livelihood diversification (de la Rocha & Grinspun, 2001). The International Labour Organisation (2008) is of the view that training initiatives promote the decent work agenda and improve the quality of jobs, which in turn improves the welfare and livelihoods of people. As a result, the government considers training as one of the key areas that its empowerment policy should address.

The NYP document recommends youth involvement in all stages of empowerment programmes from planning, decision-making, implementation to evaluation (National Youth Policy, 2013). It also synthesises the idea of mainstreaming youth concerns in national programmes. Accordingly, it seeks to "systematically integrate youth issues into all policies, plans, programmes and strategies at all levels and within all sectors and institutions of government, NGOs

and the private sector” (National Youth Policy, 2013:10). This emphasises the need to institute a consensual, collaborative and progressive pro-youth development agenda for Zimbabwe. However, the reality on the ground is that centrally planned policies have no input from the youth themselves. Charumbira & Chituri (2013) support this assertion and argue that policy formulation and implementation devoid of grassroots consultations often result in policies that fail to cascade down to the intended beneficiaries.

Paying lip-service to the pro-youth development agenda creates implementation gaps as well as disillusionment amongst the youth (Gaventa & Runciman, 2016). In Zimbabwe, the National Youth Policy (2013:27) suggests that the government, as the duty bearer, has set up some mechanisms to facilitate youth policy mainstreaming, with specific mention of strategies such as making “provision for the appointment of youth representatives or focal persons in all government departments to ensure that youth issues are mainstreamed in all facets of development”. However, this strategy has not been implemented, with the majority of Zimbabwean youth still being disfranchised from the mainstream economy.

Other than the NYP, the government and the donor community have also initiated various programmes aimed to engage youth in a variety of projects (Ncube, 2015; Nkonya et al., 2017). These include the Graduate Entrepreneurship Employment Programme (GEEP), Kurera/Ukondla Youth Fund (administered through Central African Building Society), Training for Rural Economic Empowerment (TREE), Youth Empowerment Fund (YEF), Wealth Creation Fund (administered through Stanbic, Commercial Bank of Zimbabwe, Industrial Development Bank of Zimbabwe banks) and the Skills for Youth Employment and Rural Development Programme (Bhebhe et al., 2015). These programmes are seen as critical in the promotion of self-reliance, critical thinking and wellbeing amongst the youth. Institutions, such as the Zimbabwe Youth Council, designed to enhance the welfare of youth in rural areas are also critical in answering how livelihood outcomes can be shaped in rural Zimbabwe. This reveals that there is need for a nexus between and among policies, institutions and processes that can facilitate the socio-economic empowerment of rural youth.

3. Theoretical framework

The study was grounded in the sustainable livelihood approach (SLA) which enables an assessment of the degree to which institutions and policies can enhance socio-economic empowerment. The SLA is an enhanced way of thinking about the objectives, scope and priorities of development aimed at better meeting the needs of the poor by looking at their vulnerability context and exploring their access to critical livelihood assets (Ashley & Carney, 1999). The SLA emphasizes the role of policies and institutions in constructing livelihoods assets, and the need

to understand how these factors shape, affect or influence livelihoods made this framework relevant to this study. Several scholars are also emphatic on the importance of institutions, arguing that they are the social cement that provides a means of exercising power while also linking stakeholders to various forms of capital (Davies, 1997; Saha 2019). In this study, young people's access to livelihood capitals is conceptualized as the means to exercising power or a form of empowerment.

According to Scoones (1998), understanding institutional processes facilitates the identification of restrictions or barriers and opportunities (or “gateways”) to sustainable livelihoods. In Mwenezi, the study identified how the ministerial district officials and NGOs are mostly responsible for implementing youth socio-economic (empowerment) policies, while the youth are actively engaged in sustainable livelihood strategy negotiations with local stakeholders. An institutional analysis helped shed light on the social processes, which underlie livelihood sustainability in rural areas. For that reason, the SLA was most ideal for the study on Mwenezi as it helped the researchers gain an insight into the existential social relations and institutional power dynamics, synonymous with youth self-help initiatives.

4. Methodology

This qualitative study used secondary data from documents such as the National Youth Policy of 2013, Indigenization and Economic Empowerment Act of 2008 and documented researches. The study also integrated primary data from semi-structured key informant interviews held between September 2017 and March 2018 in Mwenezi District. The key informants included three key officials in the Ministry of Youth, Ministry of Women Affairs and Ministry of Small Enterprises and Development as well as workers in the non-governmental organisations involved in youth empowerment in the district, namely, Mwenezi Development and Training Centre (MDTC) and Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED). Interviews also involved youths who took part in some of the empowerment programmes that were rolled out in Mwenezi District. Interviews were transcribed and thematic analysis was used to analyse the data generated by the interview transcripts. The main themes revolved around the need for a multi-sectoral approach in implementing youth empowerment policy, the gap between policy formulation and implementation, the need for transparency and accountability amongst policy stakeholders and the challenges involved in policy implementation.

5. Findings and discussion

This study aimed to probe into the experiences of street-level bureaucrats responsible for the implementation of youth empowerment policies in rural

Zimbabwe. This section therefore presents and discusses the results of data obtained from the semi-structured key informant interviews that were undertaken between September 2017 and March 2018 in Mwenezi District.

5.1 Youth empowerment programmes in rural Zimbabwe

5.1.1 Implementing national youth policy: multi-sectoral partnerships

Government, church organisations and NGOs have collaborated in various programmes within Mwenezi District, in line with the idea of mainstreaming youth policies and ensuring that they engender socio-economic empowerment for the unemployed rural youth. The study found that the three key ministries are coordinating with Plan International, Care International, Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED) and MDTC in the implementation of government programmes targeting youth in Mwenezi District. However, because the respective ministries have different result focus areas, the emphasis and target or scope has been quite varied. The following are the major empowerment programmes offered to rural youths in Mwenezi:

- Training in various vocational skills (building, motor mechanics, welding, hotel and catering, tailoring, cosmetology, driving and agriculture).
- Entrepreneurship training with courses like bookkeeping (record keeping), stocktaking, marketing and finance sourcing.
- Funding of youth income generating projects.
- Implementing youth advocacy and leadership development, by the Zimbabwe Youth Council.
- Coordinating awareness campaigns on health and well-being, by National Aids Council and Ministry of Health.
- Implementing Indigenization and Economic Empowerment, under the community share ownership trusts.
- Registering youth clubs and associations, under the Zimbabwe Youth Council.

Whilst the acquisition of skills is in keeping with the promotion of sustainable livelihoods, youth are not adequately supported to implement their projects. This has resulted in idle skills amongst the youth who, although now equipped with cosmetology, motor mechanics and dressmaking skills, still have no start-up capital to put their skills to practice. The literacy levels have also militated against the implementation of entrepreneurial skills, such as book keeping, because of youths' limited comprehension of financial matters. The main gap is clearly the funding of these programmes, hence the projects' sustainability after pulling out

of the NGOs is questioned. Mukuhlani (2014) raises similar sentiments in reporting a study on youth empowerment through small business development in the peri-urban areas in Gweru. As such, skills alone (human capital), in the absence of funding (financial capital), do not translate to complete empowerment and hence the need to ensure that youths have access to other important livelihood assets to realize total emancipation.

Ministry officials indicated that in implementing National Youth Policy, they often mobilize youth, train the youth, source funding for their programs, while also doing follow-ups to ensure the effective implementation of projects. In supporting income-generating projects for the unemployed youth, the government participants also mentioned how their ministries are responsible for coordinating responses through collaborations with NGOs. The research findings also confirm that the three ministries have teamed up with Plan International in the training of three hundred youth in 2017 as illustrated in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Training provided for youth in three wards in 2017

Type of project training	Ward	Number of beneficiaries
Building	1,2 and 5	62
Motor mechanics	5	21
Cosmetology	1,2 and 5	73
Hotel and Catering	5	25
Tailoring	1,2 and 5	69
Agriculture	2	20
Driving	1,2 and 5	30
Total		300

Whilst this looks impressive, numbers alone do not always translate to total socio-economic transformation. The study noted that some of the graduates or beneficiaries have not positively benefitted from taking part in some of these empowerment activities, and their livelihood situations remain unchanged. For example, beneficiaries of cosmetology, hotel and catering, and motor mechanics, among other skills, noted that what they were trained in is not relevant since these services are not available in their rural context. To utilize these skills, one has to move to an urban centre, which is, however, against one of the core objectives of rural empowerment, i.e. to empower rural people and their communities so as to curb rural to urban migration. One respondent noted, *“I am now a qualified cosmetologist but there are no opportunities in this township where I stay.”* Other issues raised by the youths who benefitted from the more relevant skills or trades, such as horticulture, were that the market is not readily available and thus they are forced to either ferry their produce to town (which attracts additional costs), or sacrifice their profits by selling them at giveaway prices. This inadvertently

weakens the livelihood outcomes, despite the youth having acquired requisite skills.

Although some of the activities being implemented by the ministries' project officers were not readily available, one participant mentioned that cumulative statistics are recorded in reports to capture the daily routine of work done. The Ministry of Youth representative had this to say:

“Alongside vocational skills training, once the youth is trained, we can issue loans if the funds are available. We have loans as the government from the Ministry of finance. We also have loans and start up kits from other stakeholders like non-governmental organisations who also help us a lot in the training exercise so that these youth can start their own business.”

The other two interview participants indicated that they do not work with the youth per se and therefore could not be expected to have finer details. However, they indicated that amongst their clients, there are people who fall into the category of youth. The Women Affairs representative said:

“In 2017, we have managed to do eight training programmes. Each training programme had forty participants training at a time. The ministry has also trained the beneficiaries in Income and Savings Lending Schemes (ISALS).”

Such training is understood to be supported in the policy documents of the concerned ministries. This reinforces the argument that mainstreaming of youth policies is a critical step towards engendering socio-economic empowerment among the youth. Acquisition of skills is something the youth esteem highly and it gives them the means with which to sustain their livelihoods. This view is also shared by Moore (2015) who argues that youth need such skills in order to make informed choices and have the assets (knowledge, confidence, networks, and physical and financial resources) to transition successfully into sustainable work for themselves or others. These are also elements that are articulated in the sustainable livelihood approach (Ashley & Carney, 1999).

5.1.2 Training and skills development

The sustainable livelihoods framework is built on the premise that individual youth need assets to achieve a positive livelihood outcome that is also sustainable. Training, knowledge and skills, which, together with good health and the ability to labour, are conceptualized as human capital by the livelihoods approach, are examples of assets important to achieve desired livelihood outcomes (Petersen & Pedersen, 2010). The participants from the interviewed ministries applauded the role of NGOs in ensuring that youth vocational skills training became a reality. It is also prudent to note that such interventions from civil society were only possible

thanks to the conducive environment created by the central government, i.e., where the operation of non-state actors in districts such as Mwenezi is allowed.

The arrangement is compatible with the sustainable livelihood approach, which gives pre-eminence to policies and the institutional environment, for positive livelihood outcomes. Street-level bureaucrats from both the government and the corporate world therefore constitute the principal partners whose involvement is key in implementing youth livelihood programs. It is prudent to understand that youth in rural areas may have limited power to influence their external environment and have to depend on the government to support them. This is where the SLA becomes useful, because it provides a way to incorporate a systemic and holistic way of describing the factors that affect the livelihoods of the poor (Petersen & Pedersen, 2010: 6).

Through Plan International (as the lead funding organisation), youths from various wards were mobilized to Mushagashe Training Centre where the actual training was undertaken. As illustrated in this scenario, the challenges to youth socio-economic aspirations can be successfully overcome through what Verma & Peterson (2018:467) term “multi-stakeholder partnerships”. Multi-stakeholder partnerships are collaborations that take on board youth interest groups, the private sector and the government in enhancing youth emancipation. Government ministries are part of the structures and institutions that shape the livelihood outcomes among the youth. Indeed, they determine ownership rights and laws to secure the rights of the individuals in a sustainable livelihood framework (Petersen & Pedersen, 2010). Contrary to the NYP talks about marshalling the requisite resources necessary for undertaking youth programmes, evidence in Mwenezi showed that the youth are mainly relying on donor sponsorship to undergo vocational training.

The government key informants reiterated that the training of youth in different life skills in the district is part of the drive to unlock opportunities for the rural youth in Zimbabwe. However, they had divergent views on how to go about the process as they represent different ministries with different visions. For example, the Women Affairs (Gender) representative emphasised the aspect of women emancipation with little regard to age, thereby excluding the male section of society (as well as not focussing on the 18-35 age category i.e. the main delineation of the study). Further to this, the participant from the Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs) argued that their prerogative had nothing to do with youth but rather, the capacity building of Small and Medium Enterprises. The SMEs Ministry participant, however, acknowledged that the bulk of their clientele comprised people classifiable as youth (18-35 years) (Africa Union, 2006; National Youth Policy, 2013: 5).

5.2 Youth socio-economic empowerment: implementation

Findings indicated that the failure to involve rural youth in the policy formulation process, as well as in the policy implementation stage, has adversely affected the effective implementation of such policies. It is evident that top-down externally driven interventions are unable to resolve the appetite for socio-economic empowerment. Thus, youth as beneficiaries need to participate in the policy formulation and implementation so that their interests are considered. This line of argument is also shared by the critical social empowerment theorists who jettison the idea of programming for the youth without their involvement (Jennings et al., 2006). Recommendations were that, in making the policy relevant and appealing to the intended beneficiaries, there was a need to make the policy consensual.

5.2.1 Civil society interventions

It was generally agreed among the respondents that implementing youth projects in Mwenzi District is a feasible solution to the challenge of youth unemployment. Civil society respondents echoed the same sentiments as government ministry informants, i.e., they emphasised the need to mainstream youth empowerment policy. They also agreed that pro-youth development initiatives could improve livelihoods of the whole family. One respondent from Plan International said:

“These are the people who are still energetic and they are at their most productive stage. Supporting youth will create opportunities for them as well as those of their families. Our organization therefore takes pride in supporting youth entrepreneurship through vocational skills training.”

Similar sentiments were echoed by the respondent from CAMFED who said female youth need to be given start-up capital to initiate income-generating projects. In concurrence with work on rural Zimbabwe by Chiweshe et al. (2015), the CAMFED respondent said that traditionally females were oppressed and denied socio-economic opportunities, hence the need to mainstream youth empowerment policies. She added,

“Whilst policies address youth as one common group, female youth have been subjected to exclusive exploitation that demands affirmative action to advance their interests.”

From a comparison of the two interview excerpts, it is discernible that the organisations conceptualize institutional or policy mainstreaming differently from government. What is common though is that the NGO sector also campaigns for the reinforcement of structures to ensure that the welfare of the youth is guaranteed.

Findings on how the concerns of the rural youth are being addressed by NGOs' projects indicate some marked variances. The CAMFED respondent revealed that the concerns of the rural female youth are largely being addressed. The organization helped the beneficiaries with capital, a gesture that has positively influenced the female youth who typically encounter financial constraints in implementing self-help projects. One female participant said,

“I am really thankful to CAMFED for they gave me the start-up capital to buy a sewing machine as well as garments to start my sewing project.”

Youth concerns were highlighted as having been addressed through:

- Accessing start-up capital through loans which are not charged any interest.
- Gaining financial independence and emancipation.
- Experiencing freedom from masculine oppression and dominance.
- Increasing self-esteem among female youth beneficiaries.
- Finding a voice to speak their minds within their villages.
- Experiencing business expansion and employment creation.
- Gaining critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

On the other hand, the key informant from MDTC indicated some limitations that pertain to meeting the concerns of the youth, i.e. most of the projects, such as tailoring, require markets. He also highlighted the challenge of funding, especially start-up capital, saying that funding needed for the procurement of materials has been a challenge. As aforementioned, these challenges render many (post vocational training) skills obsolete amongst the youth, as without requisite funding, the skilled youth remain idle.

With regards to changing the policy framework, the civil society participants' responses indicated a lot of scepticism. They said that their “hands are tied” as their mandate is to complement the government rather than compete with the government. However, they expressed the need to embrace the rural youth as an independent population with its own special interests, different from those in urban areas. They also suggested that training be extended to the unemployed youth in the rural communities, to put them at par with their counterparts in the contemporary world. More so, they highlighted the need to integrate aspects of critical thinking or problem solving within the youth training curriculum. In a similar vein, the study identified a need to prioritise practical subjects at school so that, when leaving formal school, the youth will be in a position to implement the self-help projects (even without any funding or further training).

The respondents, however, expressed ignorance on government legislations that promote youth empowerment. They could not give examples of provisions that need to be emphasised or gotten rid of. One respondent said,

“Unfortunately on that aspect...umm I would rather refer you to the relevant ministry. I am not sure of the correct provisions.”

Whilst the NGO respondents shared the idea of mainstreaming policies, they differed on emphasis, as has already been highlighted. This signifies the need to capture the interests of multiple groups when addressing the policy objectives of mainstream youth empowerment.

5.2.2 Government interventions

It was shared by the interviewees that many youths appear to be reluctant and defiant instead of being forthcoming, mostly because the projects are driven from outside their communities. Active participation by the rural youth is commensurate with critical social empowerment among the youth. Moreover, government ministry officials said that the policies need to be accompanied by resources. The resources singled out include material, financial and human resources. The researchers noted that the government personnel might be qualified in their job but do not have the resources to implement the policy provisions concerning the rural youth. In trying to improve the effectiveness of policy as well as enhancing awareness among the beneficiaries, an emphasis was made on the importance of adequate resource provisioning.

In the wake of the above, the interviewees (key policy implementers), suggested the adoption of a raft of measures to ensure that the self-help projects being implemented by government become workable and promote sustainable livelihood for the youth. This was done within the confines of a policy framework created by the government in a bid to cushion youth against the vagaries of unemployment and poverty. In the wake of an existential lack of requisite skills amongst the youth to sustain viable projects, with the end result being the abandonment of previously initiated projects, interventions to mitigate against this included:

- Selecting people or mobilising people to engage in projects that they have skills in and can implement.
- Running training workshops on entrepreneurship and business management.
- Encouraging youth to do projects that they have interest in.
- Doing away with the idea of giving cash for the self-help projects (giving cash might tempt the beneficiaries to use the cash for other unrelated purposes; hence giving equipment was seen as an alternative).
- Supporting beneficiaries who have running projects rather than those in need of start-up capital.
- Doing feasibility studies before the projects are given some funds.

These measures are understood to be progressive in the sense that they promote efficiency of the youth projects. According to the respondents, ever since the paradigm shift the number of projects being abandoned has significantly reduced. In a sense, they said promoting the marketing and diversification of activities reaped benefits for the youth to sustain their lives as well as helping in the acquisition of livestock, immovable property and cash. Training also equipped the youth with critical skills, increased their self-esteem, critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. Whilst key attributes such as critical thinking and improved self-esteem could be difficult to authenticate, it is imperative that the key informants were in agreement that policy driven youth entrepreneurship leads to the acquisition of such skills.

5.3 Challenges in implementing youth empowerment policy

Youth socio-economic empowerment is premised on the available policies and how these policies are implemented. Although the key informants acknowledged that available policies and policy documents are sound and attractively phrased, mention was also made of how it is unfortunate that the potential to fully empower youth is limited by a myriad of challenges. These challenges include limited financial resources, political interference from the ZANU PF¹ officials, defaults in paying back the loans and looting by public officers. There is a feeling that youth beneficiaries have rarely been from the poverty stricken, remote and rural areas. Rather, it is claimed that patronage and nepotism have affected access to the fund (Warikandwa & Osode, 2017: 23). Thus, the policy initiative has been riddled with some controversies from the onset. Despite these misgivings, the participants said the policies are nevertheless enhancing youth socio-economic empowerment mainly through:

- Providing the opportunity for training in vocational skills.
- Supporting youth projects with funding modalities.
- Guaranteeing a conducive operational environment for project implementation.
- Running awareness campaigns and information dissemination.
- Providing a sound institutional framework and active political administrative and technical support.
- Running a number of programmes out of these policies e.g. youth advocacy and leadership development.

¹ Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) has been the ruling political party in Zimbabwe since 1980.

Whilst there is an argument in support of the youth policy's contribution to youth socio-economic empowerment by researchers (Mambo, 2010; Murinda, 2014: 25) who suggest that these policies have nurtured some successful youth projects, especially the Zimbabwe Youth Employment Network (ZIYEN), some reservations were also expressed by the key informants. They indicated that the Indigenization and Economic Empowerment Act (IEEA) is not yielding much result for the youth in Mwenezi. Although Section 3(1) (a) of the IEEA [Chapter 14:33] of 2007 stipulates that "at least fifty-one per centum of the shares of every public company and any other business shall be owned by indigenous Zimbabweans" (Warikandwa & Osode, 2017: 2), the visibility of the IEEA is almost non-existent. Apart from participants complaining that most of the youth in the district do not even know about the existence of the IEEA, the Ministry of Youth respondent lamented over how the revenue realized from Community Share Ownership Schemes, such as the Mwenezana Estate (a sugar cane plantation in the district), were too little to bring any significant change.

Three key informants from different ministries reported similar challenges inhibiting the smooth implementation of the youth empowerment policy. It was revealed that implementing policies is not easy given how there are contestations that arise from the divergence in focus areas or scopes amongst stakeholders. The respondent from the Ministry of SMEs said,

"We struggle to find the youth when we want to train them. Conflicting programmes sometimes fall on exactly the same day. This happens on most Wednesdays when people will not be attending their fields or other chores..."

5.3.1 Political interference

The Ministry of SMEs' interviewee argued that the implementation of the youth programme is politicised. It is argued that members of the ruling ZANU PF determine who gets what, when and how. Such power dynamics are clear evidence that structural limitations determine the youth livelihood outcomes. Thus, policies and institutions, as emphasised in the SLA, determine the ability of youth to access livelihood opportunities in Mwenezi District. In essence the three respondents were sceptical of how the policies can suite local communal environments, all with uniquely divergent attributes of their own. Whilst the officers acknowledged that the policy is clearly worded, they said the government should be more serious especially on the allocation of funds for the execution of self-help projects in the district. Political interference and a lack of resources were mentioned as some of the impediments to the effective implementation of programmes.

It was also claimed that officials from the governing party (ZANU PF) usually interfere with the projects implemented by the Ministry officials as well as those

programmes funded by NGOs. Other scholars such as Alexander & McGregor (2013) also identify this as a common conduct amongst African political parties, whereby resources and opportunities are exploited for political control. Evidence of this interference was most notable when it came to shortlisting or selecting beneficiaries for funding or training programs. In Lesotho for instance, interference from political leadership was also found to be a problem incapacitating poverty reduction programs (Hapazari & Hapazari, 2019). In Zimbabwe, the ZANU PF party was equally blamed during the interviews for demanding that its loyal followers be given all the opportunities.

5.3.2 Limited resources: challenges in securing funding for youth projects

Regarding the issues of how youth policy can be mainstreamed to ensure that projects are successfully implemented, the three key informants expressed different views. Responses were that their ministries have different sources of finance (Youth Fund, Women Development Fund and SMEs fund). The Ministry of Youth indicated that funds allocated into their coffers by the Ministry of Finance as well as other stake holders, such as Old Mutual, are usually disbursed in the form of loans to the youth. Information obtained from the Ministry of Women Affairs highlighted that up until November 2017, around 41 groups had benefitted from the Women Development Fund. For example, the Rutenga Quarry Group got equipment worth US\$10,000. The Ministry of SMEs highlighted that the Oil Producing and Exporting Countries (OPEC) Fund for International Development (OFID) gave them US\$7.8 million for three poverty-stricken provinces, namely Masvingo, Manicaland and Matebeleland North. The proceeds were thereafter designated to both cooperatives and individuals undertaking community development projects, such as livestock production, horticultural projects, metal fabrication, wood carving and tailoring projects, among others. All three key informants shared the view that the introduction of self-help projects, funded by NGOs and the government, was indeed part of the youth empowerment policy.

Although the key informants in this study largely concurred that the national policy provides for the training of youth in various vocational skills such as carpentry, metal fabrication and garment construction (National Youth Policy, 2013: 15), the government lacks the requisite capacity to fund such training. In Mwenezi District, policy implementers help fund critical youth programs that include, but are not confined to, vocational skills training. Thus, as stated above, the Ministry of Youth and the Ministry of SMEs have had to heavily rely on financial assistance from the NGO community (Bornstein, 2004; Sithole et al., 2013). Findings in this study also indicate that, although quite willing, youths are unable to pay for the available entrepreneurial skills training. In response to this, the Ministry of Youth and the Ministry of SMEs explored strategic partnerships

with willing partners from the NGO community and committed to ensuring that such training is successful. Also, youths have had to rely on family, friends, government loans, grants, as well as funds from NGOs, to finance their self-help projects such as dressmaking, poultry production, carpentry and horticultural production. The assistance of family and friends, in the context of the livelihoods approach, constitute part of social capital, while loans from government and other funders make up financial capital, both of which are regarded as important resources, critical in the creation of sustainable livelihoods.

Although the respondents acknowledged the critical role played by the corporate world, they were quick to note that such support is limited to specific wards or genders, which adversely affects the progress of policy implementation in rural Zimbabwe. Also mentioned were challenges related to communication, transport, resources, as well as understaffing. It was reported that all the district offices have mobility challenges since they do not have cars, and, coupled with the other existential challenges, policy implementation initiatives are rendered impractical. The quest to understand the effectiveness of a multi-stakeholder approach (as a panacea to some of the said shortcomings), led the researchers to seek the perspectives of representatives from the Non-governmental organisations.

6. Conclusion

Evidence from this qualitative research supports the argument that successful policy implementation comes through a multi-stakeholder approach. Government on its own has no capacity to steer pro-youth development projects. This is because it lacks the necessary human resources, finance and technical expertise. The involvement of NGOs and other partners is critical, as demonstrated by the interventions made by Plan International, CAMFED, MDTC and Care International to train and fund the youth in Mwenezi District. However, it should be noted that many of the training programme beneficiaries are yet to execute some entrepreneurial projects as they lack start-up capital. The absence of start-up capital inadvertently means that the skilled youth may remain idle, even after having acquired training. In the wake of such challenges, the capacity for training to transform youth livelihoods has been largely compromised.

The selective approach of the donors in identifying beneficiaries has also extended and intensified clusters of inequality. Location according to wards is evidently critical for one to benefit from the Plan International sponsored projects. One's sex also determines one's qualification for CAMFED grants. This is against the spirit of gender-blind development and it has negatively affected the perception of youth in the district on policy implementation. Whilst the logic behind such programming rests with the relevant organisations, youth trapped in poverty barely understand such segregation. Besides, some female beneficiaries of the

grants have also developed signs of dependency, a significant drawback to independent development.

Although mainstreaming and involvement of youth is clearly spelt out in the National Youth Policy, the study noted that the youth in rural areas have been side-lined in the formulation and implementation of these policies. The key informants agreed that circulars from the Directorate in their ministries determine the day-to-day operations of their respective ministries. As an antithesis to what Bertin & Leisering (2017) term “inter-organisational exchanges”, such vertical top-down approaches to policy formulation and execution are problematic as they muffle the needs and interests of the rural youth. Thus, it is important that both Government and NGOs improve their development approach and institute a stream of needs assessment exercises to address the implementation gaps that consequentially arise from centrally planned policies.

The study concludes that pro-youth policies have the capacity to transform the lives of the youth who are leading hopeless lives due to unemployment and poverty in the rural areas. Facing artificial barriers and enormous compliance costs, the rural youth can be rescued through deliberate policies that remove burdensome regulations, inhibiting the implementation of successful entrepreneurial projects. Both officials working in government and those from NGOs concur that there is a need to mainstream pro-youth policies and institutions in rural Zimbabwe in general, and Mwenezi District in particular.

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