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Young people's participation in the formulation and implementation of Ghana's youth policy

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Abstract

The African Youth Charter requires African countries to formulate and adopt an integrated national youth policy to address youth concerns. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Children's Charter also confer on children and young people the right to participate in matters that concern them. Therefore in the formulation and adoption of national youth policies the perspectives of young people need to be incorporated. This research examined how young people participated as strategic stakeholders in the formulation of Ghana's youth policy. The paper presents a step-by-step analysis of the strategies used to involve young people

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in the formulation of the national youth policy of Ghana. Findings show that although young people had limited opportunities to participate in the formulation of the youth policy, they have been excluded from the implementation process. The paper concludes that the limited opportunities given to young people to participate in the formulation of the youth policy signifies a gradual drift towards youth engagement in the formulation of public policies in Ghana.

Key words: Ghana, youth participation, youth policy, policy formulation

Introduction

Policy discourse in recent years emphasises the need for public participation in policy making (Gyimah-Boadi, 2004; Harrold, 2000). However, Kpessa (2011) has noted that much of the study into citizenry participation in policy making has neglected investigating the process of involving citizens in public policy formulation. Public participation in the policy process is considered to be a major pillar of good governance (McFerson, 2009 cited in Kpessa, 2011). However, Save the Children argues that "good governance is not necessarily the same as governance that is good for children...children's well-being does not automatically follow nor equate to adults' well-being" (Save the Children, 2012:5). It is therefore important that children and young people's engagement in governance is properly and separately investigated. Kirby and Bryson (2002) have noted that in spite of the growing attempt to involve young people in public decision-making, research and evaluation of such efforts is lacking. Pinkerton (2004) adds that evaluation of young people's participation in public

decision-making is not easily undertaken. Consequently, children and young people's involvement in the policy process has been largely ignored. This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the strategies used to involve young people in the formulation of Ghana's youth policy, which began in 1999 and launched in 2010.

Methodology

The study aimed to analyse the formulation and implementation of Ghana's youth policy, and explore the efforts toward mainstreaming young people's participation in the process. It also sought to examine the ideas about young people's participation held by Ghanaian policy makers (civil servants), advocacy organisations and young people themselves. Finally, it was hoped that the study would gain knowledge of the processes that facilitate or hinder young people's participation in the policy process at national level. The questions that guided the study are:

•   What is the extent of young people's participation in the policy process?

•   Are there barriers to involving young people in the policy process?

•   How can young people's participation in the policy process be enhanced?

•   How is young people's participation in the policy process being promoted in Ghana?

Due to the exploratory and open-ended nature of the research questions, a qualitative case-study framework was preferred. As argued by Duncan et al., (2009) it is advisable to choose a qualitative research approach when one is unsure of what answers to expect and also when one wants to maintain an open realm of response. As noted earlier, young people's participation in policy processes has been given little attention, hence a qualitative methodology was an appropriate choice to explore this under-researched area. A purposive sampling strategy was used to identify participants in the study. According to Mason

(1996:93-94), purposive sampling involves "selecting groups or categories to study on the basis of their relevance to your research questions". The target population sampled were policy makers (civil servants), lobbyists/advocates, and young people (between 15 and 17 years). The sample for the young people was based on the assumption that younger children cope less with participation than older children (Pinkney, 2011) and also younger children may not understand policy issues. It is however acknowledged that age is not an accurate determinant of capacity. Settling on the lower age limit of 15 years is in accordance with the definition of youth as contained in Ghana's Youth Policy, while the upper age limit of 17 years is in line with the Convention on the Rights of Children's conception that anyone 18 years and over is an adult. The study involved interviews with 7 male key informants (4 policy-makers, 3 lobbyists) and focus group discussions with 13 young people (4 females and 9 males). In total 20 purposively chosen people were involved in the research.

The key informants were selected from organisations involved in the youth policy domain. As the key informants were from different organisations, slightly different interview guide was used for them. For example, key informants from the policy's implementing agency (National Youth Authority) were asked about how young people were engaged in the formulation of the youth policy. Whereas key informants from the other organisations (Strategic Youth Network for Development; World Youth Alliance; Young Men Christian Association) were asked about how they were lobbying the implementing agency to involve young people in the implementation of the youth policy. The key informants were selected on the basis of their knowledge about the youth policy or their participation in the formulation of the youth policy. Those at the National Youth Authority were selected because they were actively involved in the formulation of the policy or were involved in setting up the projects from which the young people for this study were selected. The other key informants selected from SYND, WYA and YMCA were selected because they had written newspaper articles or

granted media interviews criticising the formulation and implementation of the youth policy (See Ezekiel, 2011; Obeng-Yeboah, 2011). The 13 young people sampled were engaged in 2 participatory projects i.e. Youth Advocacy Assembly and Curious Minds. The young people were drawn from these projects because the National Youth Authority had identified the projects as platforms to promote youth participation in decision-making.

The Youth Advocacy Assembly is a local/district level platform for young people to engage with local politicians and street-level bureaucrats to influence decision-making at the local level. Membership of the Assembly is open to all young people aged between 15 and 22 years, and in junior and senior high schools. At meetings the advocates discuss youth concerns and pass a resolution for the relevant government department to consider and take appropriate action. The Curious Minds project is a radio talk programme for young people are aged between 8 and 25 years who are in primary school, junior high school, senior high school and university. Members of Curious Minds meet regularly to examine current events affecting the youth and choose an issue for discussion during the live on-air show. Policy-makers and politicians are invited to the programme to share ideas with young people. Other young people also contribute to the discussions through phone-in segment. The study's sample size of 4 females and 9 males was the total number of young people aged 15-17 years, who were current members of the 2 projects in the locality where the study was undertaken.

Data was thematically analysed by following constructivist grounded theory procedures: initial coding and focused coding (Charmaz, 2006). Recorded interviews were personally transcribed by the researcher to enable familiarisation with the data. This is in consonance with Darlington and Scott's (2002) advice to researchers to transcribe the interview themselves as it stimulates engagement with the phenomenon being researched. Transcripts of the interviews were then coded using Atlasti.6 computer software. Saldana (2009) outlines

29 different but not mutually exclusive ways of coding and argues that determining a coding method is influenced by the paradigm or theoretical approach to the study. In consonance with the constructivist/interpretivist paradigm of this study, and to honour young people's voice and ground data analysis in their perspective (as espoused by the sociology of childhood and children's participation rights), in vivo codes were predominantly used. In vivo codes use "direct language of participants as codes rather than researcher generated words or phrases" (Saldana, 2009:48) in order "to preserve participants' meanings of their views and actions" (Charmaz, 2006:55). The key findings and themes that emerged from the data indicate that (1) young people had limited participation in the formulation of the youth policy, (2) young people have limited knowledge and access to the youth policy, and (3) there is a secrecy about the policy's implementation action plan. In presenting the themes comparison and references are made to the literature, especially UNESCO's (2004) guidance on how to engage young people in the formulation of national youth policies. In presenting the findings interviewees are identified with excerpts of their interview data. The individuals identified gave written permission for them to be identified with excerpts from their interviews.

The process of formulating the youth policy

Ghana's effort at formulating the national youth policy was heavily influenced by the requirements of international governmental bodies. International declarations such as the 'the world action plan for youth to the year 2000 and beyond' adopted in 1995 emphasised the importance of developing national youth policies, and urged governments to formulate and adopt an integrated national youth policy to address youth concerns. Attempts at developing a youth policy in Ghana started in the late 1990s, when the government drafted a national youth policy in response to the 1995 UN world action plan for youth. The Ghana youth policy was originally drafted in 1999 but the policy could not be launched for implementation as many

criticisms were levelled against it for not actively involving young people and other youth organisations in the drafting of the policy. For example, one of the respondents in this study commented that among the criticisms levelled against the policy was that 'it had no action plan for its implementation' (Chibeze Ezekiel, Executive Coordinator of Strategic Youth Network for Development).

With a change in government on 7th January 2001 (from the National Democratic Congress, NDC to the New Patriotic Party, NPP) the 1999 draft policy was abolished and the process of formulating a new youth policy that would engage more young people and youth organisations began. As emphasised by UNESCO (2004), the importance of engaging young people cannot be underestimated. In reviewing the 1999 youth policy the New Patriotic Party (NPP) government, involved the youth leaders of the various political parties in the country to produce the 2008 draft youth policy. With a change in government again in January 2009, the 2008 draft policy was reviewed and launched in 2010.

Findings of the Study

The findings of the study indicate that to a large extent young people had limited participation in the formulation of the 2010 youth policy. The factors accounting for such limited participation are a) consultation by invitation, b) overly-politicised process and c) time and location. These are discussed in detail below:

Consultation by invitation

The process of formulating the new policy started with the comprehensive consultation of different youth groups, including those out-of-school, those in-school, universities, and other youth associations, government ministries and departments. However a proviso for the consultation was that groups should register with the National Youth Authority in order to be

invited for consultation. The National Youth Authority is mandated under the National Youth Act 1974 to register all youth organisations in the country. According to the Deputy National Coordinator, with the reservoir of youth organisations registered with the youth authority it became easier to involve young people in the formulation of the policy. He noted that the youth authority used the registered organisations to hold what was called 'youth rallies' where young people were given the opportunity to brainstorm what they thought should be incorporated into the policy.

A number of young people in a focus group discussion confirmed their participation in the youth rallies.

> I had the opportunity to have a look at the draft policy and if there were some things that were not addressed or not in the document that I think should be considered, I made it known at the conference (Osei, member of Curious Minds).

However from the perspectives of the young people who reported participating in the consultation process, the process was perceived to be dominated by members of the youth wing of registered political parties. The study found that the requirement of youth groups and organisations to register with the Youth authority resulted in some groups and organisations' exclusion from participation in the formulation of the youth policy. As commented by a key informant:

> We were not consulted as we had not registered with the authority. We have now registered, so now they invite us when they are having consultative meetings (Chibeze Ezekiel, Executive Coordinator of Strategic Youth Network for Development).

A similar view was shared by Mohammed Harmis (Country Director of World Youth Alliance, Ghana Chapter) that his organisation was not invited to any of the consultation exercises simply because his organisation was not registered with the youth authority.

There was general consensus from participants in the study (with the exception of those from the youth authority) that the youth authority did not undertake a wide consultation exercise with young people. In the focus group discussions the participants suggested the youth authority should have advertised widely on TV, radio and newspapers about the consultation exercise, and should have also gone to high schools to solicit the views of more young people instead of narrowly writing to invite organisations to comment on an already drafted policy. Furthermore, with the invitation to youth organisations to contribute to the formulation of the policy it is more likely that the respondents would have been the managers, who are adults. As commented by a young person:

> The NYA simply invited youth groups to the rallies but if you look at the people who came to the rally I will not say they are youth. The NYA has forgotten that these organisations are not managed by young people so if you invite them it is old people who will come (Patrick, member of Curious Minds).

Over-politicised policy process

The study also found that the process of formulating the youth policy in Ghana was highly over-politicised, which affected the morale of some young people and youth organisations to contribute to its formulation. It is argued that politics is an integral part of policy-making (Dowding, 1996; Mooij, 2003; Hallsworth, 2011) since policy is not made in a controlled environment with neutral policy-makers. Therefore some 'politics' is expected in the formulation of the Ghana youth policy, but the study found that the youth policy formulation was highly over-politicised to the extent that it took over 10 years for the policy to be launched. The policy was accorded different status depending on the political party in office. For the sake of clarity the year in which the policy was drafted will be tagged to the political party in power. In reviewing the 1999 NDC youth policy the NPP government, which assumed office on 7th January 2001, involved the youth leaders of the various political parties in the country. However in reviewing the 2008 NPP youth policy, the NDC government did

not involve the youth leaders of the other political parties. This resulted in a situation where

the youth of the opposition parties boycotted the launch of the policy by the Vice-President,

arguing that the policy was an NDC document and not a national one. This politicking

affected enthusiasm in the policy's formulation. As commented by a key informant:

> I lost interest in the policy and stopped attending any meetings about it.
> The NDC and NPP were more interested in scoring political points so
> they can say to young people we have a policy for you so therefore vote
> for us.

Another key informant also noted:

> Why must it take more than 10 years to draft one policy and even this
> current policy has been rejected by the opposition parties? Who knows
> what they will do if they win the next elections?

In a nutshell, the 1999 youth policy was drafted by the NDC government, which the NPP

government scrapped when it came into office in 2001. The NPP government drafted the

2008 youth policy, which was also scrapped by the NDC government when it returned to

government in 2009. The NDC government then drafted and launched the 2010 youth policy

without inputs from the other political parties. It is highly likely that the next new

government would scrap the 2010 youth policy. As noted by UNESCO (2004:4) 'a youth

policy which does not reflect the views, concerns and desires of all young people within their

community, will soon fade away through lack of support'.

Time and location

The final factor that led to young people's limited participation in the youth policy

formulation was time and location. The study found that young people had less opportunity to

participate in the policy-making because the time and venue of the consultation exercise were

unfavourable for them. Hence any participatory effort must ensure that the location and time

of the events are favourable to young people to ensure their optimum participation. Young

people reported that the time when the consultation exercise (i.e. youth conference and rally) took place was not favourable as they were in school:

> Most of us attend boarding school and we could not leave campus without exeats so we could not take part in the youth rallies (Emmanuel, member of Curious Minds).

Also the young people noted that because the policy consultation exercise only took place in the capital areas/district councils it inhibited their ability to contribute to the policy process. In focus group discussions a young person noted that:

> we had to board vehicles to go and express our views. Those without money could not have the opportunity to go and express their views (Edwin, member of Curious Minds).

Hence the young people were of the view that the National Youth Authority should have held the youth conference and rally during the school holidays or should have gone to individual schools to enable more young people to contribute to the formulation of the youth policy.

Limited Knowledge and Access to the youth policy

Findings from the focus group discussions suggest that the policy is not known to many young people due to difficulties in accessing the policy document. Of the 13 young people involved in the focus group discussions 5 stated that they had knowledge of the policy. However when asked to state what they knew of the policy they said they were present at the launch of the policy by the country's Vice President on 12th August 2010. Apart from their physical presence at the launching of the policy they could not state in any detail the content of the policy. See excerpts of group interview below.

> JAG (interviewer): have any of you heard of the national youth policy?
> BM, EEA & ES (interviewees): yes please.
> JAG: you have all heard of it. What do you know about it?
> ES: I was there when it was launched by the vice president. What I know is it entails what government plans to do for the youth.
> EEA: the policy was launched in August 2010 at Elmina castle. I think the youth policy is about helping the youth in the country.

> BM: I was not at the launch but I know it talks about the plans for the youth and what they expect from the youth.

There was a marked difference among the young people involved in the two projects studied with regards to their knowledge of the youth policy. Whereas all the 5 members of the Youth Advocacy Assembly did not even know of the existence of the youth policy, out of the 8 members of Curious Minds 5 knew of the existence of the policy. The difference in knowledge about the policy could be due to the different focus and area of operation of the 2 groups. While Curious Minds operates in all the 10 regional capitals in Ghana, the Youth Advocacy Assembly operates at the district level in 3 regions and therefore more concerned with local youth development. Members of Curious Minds have access to and interact with policy-makers and politicians at the regional and national level, hence were invited to the launching of the policy. However the Youth Advocacy Assembly does not have access to such policy-makers. Therefore in the formulation of the youth policy members of Curious Minds had the opportunity to contribute at the youth rallies and invitations to meet the National Youth Authority, whilst members of the Youth Advocacy Assembly did not have such an opportunity. In effect knowledge about the youth policy was facilitated by proximity to policy-makers.

Limited access to the youth policy

The study found that access to the youth policy was fraught with difficulty. According to the metropolitan coordinators at the Youth Authority there were limited printed copies available to be distributed to young people. Some members of Curious Minds noted that they have been told to download a copy from the authority's website. The limited availability of the policy is hindering young people's knowledge of the policy.

> But for some of us joining Curious Minds we would not have known about the youth policy. How can you read something that you don't know about or have access to? I had access to download a copy from the internet. But ask yourself, how many young people have access to the

internet apart from those of us in the cities (Justine, member of Curious Minds).

Promoting the youth policy

Another issue pertaining to knowledge and access of the youth policy was the methods used in promoting the policy to young people. In an effort to promote the policy to the general public the National Youth Authority launched a national campaign dubbed 'Better Ghana Youth Caravan Project' "to sensitise the youth and also create awareness on the dangers of drug related issues, conflict and HIV/AIDS" (Ghana Government, 2012). This is a nation-wide tour from district to district to promote the tenets of the youth policy. However the young people and other key informants expressed concern about the methods used in the dissemination effort. They described the tours as campaign platforms.

> Better Ghana was the slogan of the NDC in the 2008 & 2012 elections in which the NDC won. The country is preparing for the December 2016 presidential elections and the NDC is campaigning on the achievements of their Better Ghana Agenda and because they want to win votes from the youth the government is using the youth authority. They call it youth caravan tour but all they are doing is campaigning for vote (Charles, member of Curious Minds).

According to some key informants the caravan tour is frequently led by the political appointees at the national youth authority and other political appointees at the district level such as the district chief executive[1]. Consequently young people who do not share the visions and policies of the NDC government or those who do not vote tended to stay away from the tours, as the tour was perceived to have become political rallies. This issue run through all the focus group discussions held, as the young people stated that although they were aware of the caravan tours they had not attended any yet because they do not know how beneficial it was to them since they do not vote.

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[1] The district chief executive (DCE) is the representative of the president and the administrative/political head at the district assembly. The occupant is nominated by the president but the district assembly will have to confirm the nominee by 2/3rd majority. The president appoints 1/3rd of the membership of the assembly.

> Government has not created enough awareness about the policy among young people. They need to bring more young people on board, by moving from community to community to talk to young people about the policy. Going with politicians in a caravan will not create the needed awareness. As someone who does not vote I don't see the need to go to the caravan tours to listen to promises. The policy should be made readily available so that we know for example that in this sector this is what the government will do for the youth (Patrick, member of Curious Minds).

The final issue with the promotion of the youth policy is the language used to write the policy. Ghana is officially an English speaking country but there are numerous other Ghanaian languages. The policy is currently only available in the English language, and many young people were of the view that that was a hindrance to the knowledge of and access to the policy.

> The policy is also written in only English but we live in a heterogeneous society whereby we have all kinds of languages in Ghana. Is the policy only for people who can read English? We need the document in other languages and formats for the blind and deaf (Maclean, member of Curious Minds).

Limited participation in implementing the youth policy

As part of the implementation strategy the youth policy under section 10 required the establishment of a Youth Stakeholders Forum comprising various youth groups. The section states that:

> the National Youth Council shall facilitate and institute a Youth Stakeholders Forum that will play an active role with all identifiable youth groups at national, regional and district levels in the implementation of this National Youth Policy.

Consequently a number of youth groups committed themselves to this worthy cause and established the National Youth Stakeholders Forum to interact with policy makers at the national level. According to the deputy national coordinator the national youth stakeholders forum was intended to:

serve as a pilot exercise that was to be replicated at the regional and district level to ensure the comprehensive engagement of young people from the national to community levels.

However, the National Youth Stakeholders Forum could not be replicated across the country, as the national one was dissolved under circumstances that are not clear. There are different views about the dissolution of the stakeholders forum. According to the deputy national coordinator the stakeholders forum was dissolved on the completion of its task. However other key informants are of the view that the stakeholders forum was dissolved due to internal power struggles between officers of the National Youth Authority and the young people from the various youth groups. The key informants suggested that the youth authority was unhappy that the National Youth Stakeholders Forum was chaired by representatives from the youth groups, while the youth groups were also unwilling to have a chair from the youth authority. They believed a chair from the youth authority could compromise their stand in relation to the authority. There was a perception that some members of the stakeholders forum were co-opted by the youth authority with invitations to attend international conferences, support in fund raising and other incentives to antagonise the leadership of the stakeholders forum. This led to internal wrangling and as a result the national youth stakeholders forum was dissolved.

However, another group of youth development organisations has been formed (known as the Coalition of Youth Development Organisations in Ghana) to have a united voice to input into the implementation of the youth policy. Nonetheless from my observations this organisation does not command the same status as that of the National Youth Stakeholders Forum. The Ministry of Youth and Sports has instituted its own implementation team with oversight responsibility for ensuring effective implementation of the youth policy. The team has representatives from (1) t*he deputy minister for youth and sports, (2) Ministry of local*

government and rural development, (3) Ministry of education, (4) Ministry of youth and sports, (5) National youth authority, and (6) Office of the president.

One interesting observation about the Ministry of Youth and Sports' implementation team is that there is no young person or representative from any of the youth groups in the country on this implementation team, which is straight forwardly against the spirit and letter of the youth policy that seeks "to institutionalise youth participation at *all levels* of the decision-making process" (Ministry of Youth and Sports, 2010:7 emphasis added). With the dissolution of the stakeholders forum and the non-representation of young people on the new implementation team, young people are not actively participating in the policy's implementation committee.

Secrecy of the action plan

Young people's limited participation in the implementation process is further compounded by secrecy about the policy's implementation action plan. The study found that there was confusion about the existence or non- existence of the action plan. Whereas the youth policy explicitly states in section 11.3.1 that *the national youth council in collaboration with relevant stakeholders has developed the national action plan for the implementation of this policy,* the district and metropolitan coordinators of the national youth authority reported that they were not aware of the existence of the action plan. According to UNESCO (2004) national youth policies should be integrated into a country's overall development plan. Without such integration the formulated policy is bound to be futile and an inefficient exercise. As emphasised by UNESCO (2004:22) "youth policies need to be related to and coordinated with sectoral policies and relate to the overarching objectives for national development". An action plan will outline in greater details how the formulated youth policy is to be implemented and incorporated into the national development plan. UNESCO (2004:24) asserts that an action plan is "a strategic and holistic document incorporating all the

major stakeholders and should clearly define the specific actions to be undertaken, when they will be undertaken and by whom in order to meet the priorities of the policy".

In focus group discussions the young people commented on the non-availability of the action plan, as below:

> It is lamentable that the youth authority cannot clear the cloud surrounding what should have been a simple issue but for whatever reason has become a mystery, the existence or not of an action plan for the implementation of the youth policy (Osei, member of Curious Minds).

> we are told there is an action plan for the implementation of the policy but no one has seen a copy. It should be made available so that we know for example that in this sector this is what the government will do for the youth (Patrick, member of Curious Minds).

The over-politicisation of the youth policy process affected the willingness of some key informants to talk about it. There was reluctance on the part of some key informants at the National Youth Authority to talk about the action plan. For example, the Deputy National Coordinator stated:

> we have worked on the action plan with an indicative budget. It is only left with some fine tuning. When everything is done it will surely come out.

This response suggested that the action plan has not been fully developed yet, but when questioned about the statement in the youth policy that the action plan was fully developed, he declined to comment. Other key informants from the National Youth Authority were also reluctant to answer any question relating to the action plan, explaining that they did not want to comment on political issues.

According to UNESCO "national youth policies must be translated into local youth policy if it is to respond in a way that is flexible and appropriate to the particular needs, wants and culture of a specific population" (UNESCO, 2004:24). UNESCO further emphasises that to

effectively translate national youth policies into local youth policies it is essential to include local and regional agencies in the development of programmes in the action plan. This does not seem to be what is happening in the development of the action plan in Ghana. Although the Deputy National Coordinator said they did not want to sit in Accra (i.e. the Capital City of Ghana) and think of activities that can be done in communities, it appears that is exactly what is happening. This is due to the assertion of 2 metropolitan coordinators that the action plan is being developed in Accra, which would be sent to them for implementation. They bemoaned this development and argued for each district or metropolitan area to develop its own action plan to make it relevant to the young people in their catchment area.

In spite of the reluctance to answer questions on the development of the action plan, the study found that 15-17 year olds were not involved in the development of the action plan although some of them were 'consulted' during the formulation of the policy. The study could not confirm whether there is an action plan or not for the implementation of the youth policy because of the secrecy about the action plan. What is however evident is that the study's population (i.e. 15-17 year olds) were not involved in the development of the policy's implementation strategy. In an answer to a question on how the authority was involving this age group in the development of the action plan, the Deputy National Coordinator stated:

> looking at their ages they are either preparing for the Junior High School examinations or may be entering Senior High School. It is inappropriate to burden them with such things. They should be left alone to concentrate on their studies.

He reiterated that the young people being involved in the development of the action plan are mostly from the universities and the youth wing of the political parties.

Discussion of research findings

It has been argued that political upheavals in Ghana contribute to the barriers to young people's participation in the public sphere (Adu-Gyamfi, 2013). From independence in 1957 until 1992 Ghana experienced 5 coup d'états in 1966, 1972, 1978, 1979 and 1981. With every change in government the name, focus and management of the youth authority also changed, as each new government sought to gather the support of the youth through the Youth Authority. Youth organisation therefore became a centralised ideological entity that served the political interest of the government in office. The frequent changes in management of the Youth Authority has become a convention, such that even with the return to democratic rule in 1992 every new government changes the management of the youth authority by appointing its own party members to head the organisation. The frequent changes in government led to further marginalisation of young people in policy formulation since the military governments ruled by decrees.

Also, Ghana is currently so sharply divided along political party lines such that almost everything is seen through a political lens. Although the country is a multi-party democracy the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and National Democratic Congress (NDC) dominate and they are bitter opponents who compete to undo and/or malign each other. This attitude of undoing or maligning each other was exhibited in the formulation of the youth policy such that it took more than 10 years for the policy to be formulated and launched. As stated previously, the youth policy was initiated by the NDC government in 1999 but the NPP government assuming office in January 2001 refused to implement it. The NPP government drafted a revised policy in 2008. However, the NPP lost the 2008 general elections to the NDC. Having returned to office in January 2009 the NDC also refused to implement the 2008 policy because "the policy was not in line with the vision and ideology of the NDC" (Sekou Nkrumah, Former National Coordinator at the National Youth Authority) although many

observers in the youth policy domain agree that the 2008 policy was an improvement on the 1999 policy (Hoetu, 2010).

The over politicisation of the formulation and implementation of the youth policy resulted in a situation where the civil servants at the youth authority were very reluctant to publicly comment on the policy. Even political appointees at the youth authority whose comments do not support the government's views were dismissed. For example Sekou Nkrumah (Former National Coordinator 18/5/2009 – 22/7/2010) was dismissed for granting an interview to Joy FM (a private radio station) in which he said he was not impressed by the government's decision to reject the 2008 policy and called on the youth across the political divide to press on government to adopt the policy. This confirms the argument that politics and policy processes are intricately linked, hence attempts to 'professionalise policy-making' i.e. separate politics from policy-making is unrealistic (Dowding, 1996; Mooij, 2003; Hallsworth et al, 2011). According to Mooij (2003:9 emphasis in original) "policies act *on* people, but also *through* people". It seems that in the formulation and implementation of the youth policy the civil servants exercised less power compared to the politicians, and perhaps found themselves haplessly towing the lines of the politicians in office. This sharply contrasts with research on policy formulation and implementation in Nigeria (another West African country) by Aminu et al., (2012) in which civil servants were found to have "a way of constituting obstacles or frustrations in the way of policies formulated by the political officials" (Aminu et al, 2012:57).

Furthermore, young people's exclusion from the ministerial implementation team corroborates the findings of Fanelli et al's., (2007) study of youth participation in Zimbabwe's orphans and vulnerable children's policy, where young people were involved in consultations but in the implementation of the policy young people were missing from the

implementation committee at the national level. However at the local level Fanelli et al (2007) found that there were young people on the community level implementation committee. Williams (2004) in her study of 5 Asian countries also found that young people were more involved at the local levels than at the national level. These studies suggest that it is easier to involve young people in local issues than national issues. Some of the reasons for the difficulties in involving young people at the national level have been discussed elsewhere (see Adu-Gyamfi, 2013).

The study further found that associational membership increases the chance of participating in policy formulation. The National Youth Authority exclusively consulted organisations that it had registered during the formulation of the youth policy. This meant that young people who were not members of the registered organisations were not given the opportunity to contribute to the formulation of the youth policy. A similar finding was made by Ngai et al., (2001) during their study of youth participation in China's youth policy. They found that the Communist Youth League was dominant in the formulation process and was regarded as "the center for youth participation in policy formulation" (Ngai et al., 2001:258), therefore young people who were not members of the Communist Youth League or any other youth organisations had little chance to participate in the Chinese youth policy. Another study by Quintelier (2008) also found that young people's membership of voluntary organisations promote their participation in political activities, as they develop relevant skills such as speaking in public, working in groups and listening to other people's views. These findings suggest that young people must form or join recognisable associations and other youth groups to improve their chances of being involved in policy consultations and other political activities.

This study and other studies (e.g. Vromen and Colin, 2010; Percy-Smith, 2006; 2010) call for more informal structures for participation to be rooted in young people's everyday environments and interactions. Accordingly, the formation of young people's voluntary organisations could enhance ongoing dialogue between young people and policy-makers as it would be policy-makers being invited to young people's space instead of young people being invited by policy-makers to adult's space. This could help sustain participation, as it would be an opportunity to bring adult policy-makers and young people together around joint concerns (Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2010). Furthermore, such community based youth associations could provide spaces for young people to "contest the status quo and devise alternatives...help to develop traits of good citizenship in young people, since young people who are involved in such community groups are less likely to be involved in antisocial activities" (Flanagan, 2004:726).

Conclusion

The preceding presentation indicates that to a very large extent 15-17 years old young people (defined as minors by the African youth charter) have not been active participants in the formulation and implementation of the youth policy. This is primarily due to their invisibility in political activities, as participation in the youth policy process was dominated by political considerations such that youth groups that do not share the government's ideology were excluded from the process. Furthermore, the limited consultation offered to 15-17 year old young people had a strong urban bias and consultations were held in only the English language. Consequently, those unable to speak or understand English, disabled young people and young people in rural areas were not involved in the policy process. The success of the policy is however dependent on effective and adequate representation (UNESCO, 2004).

This study predominantly draws the attention of policy-makers that in order to increase youth participation in policy discourse there is the need to shift from their focus on formal structured participatory mechanisms to informal structures where young people are already grouped and familiar with each other. This requires that policy-makers search for the 'right places' in seeking to promote young people's views on the policy process. The 'right places' include schools, youth clubs, social networking sites/online forums, and other community based youth groups. Finally, policy-makers in developing societies need to be aware of the 'myth of community' whenever community consultations are held. It has been argued in this study that inviting young people to adult forums in the community would not encourage young people to talk due to some socio-cultural factors. Policy-makers need to hold separate consultation events for young people.

Notwithstanding the limited involvement of young people in the formulation and implementation of the youth policy, the mere fact that young people had some involvement in the youth policy process marks a paradigmatic shift in policy making in Ghana. Kpessa (2011) has noted that prior to the 1990s there was lack of openness and public participation in policy making in Ghana, which he attributed to colonial legacy in which "state officials viewed policy making as an art of secrecy" (Kpessa, 2011:39). In recent years however, there has been evidence of citizenry participation in the formulation and implementation of public policies in Ghana (see Kpessa, 2011; Adu-Gyamfi, 2013).

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