

Opening Session of the Forum on Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law

Theme: Widening the Democratic Space: the role of youth in public decision-making

Proposed Topic: Locating Gains, Drawbacks and Lessons Learnt from Youth Inclusion in Public Decision Making.

Democracy as a form of governance continues to gain currency as a key pillar or pre-requisite for the development of nations in the 21st century. With it is the increasingly accepted notion that the voice of citizens ought to be an integral part of governance. This has transcended to encompass previously non-recognised social groups such as women, youth and children. The global development movement continues to champion the inclusion of these erstwhile socially marginalised groups to be genuine participants in the promulgations of policy and law that seeks to develop our societies.

Whereas, at the beginning of the 20th century not so many countries recognised women as voters, this has vastly changed and today, women have gone on to assume very influential positions at global political, social and economic levels. The demographic dividend of women has been very influential in driving their recognition as a key player in development.

Contemporary times have also become dominated by recognition of the youth demographic dividend, most notable in Africa. This has led to the proliferation of movements premised on affording young people an equal stake in charting the developmental discourse both within and across nations. This has naturally included youth inclusion in public decision making. Equally important has been youth taking up leadership in the civil society movement at various levels.

The inclusion of youth in public decision making has had its gains and drawbacks. In consolidating these gains and also learning from the drawbacks, it is imperative that there be conversations on this particular issue. There have been instances where youth inclusion has paid dividends, and also some where success has been minimal or even non-existent. And there are factors that have been decisive in conferring this success or failure. It is only when we get to interrogate these factors that we can begin to know the key factors that can drive success when youth are included in public decision making, and resultantly be able to manipulate these for greater success and replication elsewhere.

The topic as proposed will therefore seek to hear from the youth themselves, youth practitioners and servicing entities on their experiences as they have fought for inclusion in public decision making. Youth speakers as invited will speak to their own experiences participating in public decision making, to highlight the successes and failures, with a view to learning from these, on what worked and what did not work. It is from sharing and learning from such experiences that we can collectively begin to develop a successful model for youth inclusion in public decision making.

Submission by Terence Chitapi

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