

YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN GLOBAL GOVERNANCE: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

The inclusion of youth in government decision-making processes is an increasingly prevalent trend within the context of global governance. The world's population has more than 1.8 billion youths aged between 15 and 30 and therefore their integration into policy frameworks and decision-making processes is essential for achieving sustainable development goal, peace creation, and advancement of technologies. The youth are the key agent of change who are proficient in technology, optimistic about the future, and determined as they always seek to change. Unfortunately, they are on the other hand subjected to and required to endure in the face of tokenistic representation, disillusionment and institutions resistant to change. This paper seeks to evaluate the global governance youth participation by looking at the existing frameworks, examples of best practices, and the most systemic challenges that are preventing full integration of youth in global governance. Specifically, the findings show how emerging youth policies such as the African Union Youth Charter and the Commonwealth Youth Council, as well as youth-led social movements (e.g., Fridays for Future), are already influencing international policies. It also highlights the importance of significant institutional reforms as well as the infusion of consistent and sustainable investment to enhance the youth participation in global governance. This paper starts with practical policy recommendations such as capacity building and strengthening measures and recruitment case studies of inclusion of youth in governance. All in all, youth should be prepared with an active role in making the decisions that shape their future through strengthening measures through financial independence and meaningful educational reforms.

Keywords: ASEAN, democracy, youth engagement, urban youth, youth-led initiatives

INTRODUCTION

Young people globally stand to be the most influential in initiating changes in policies and legislatures at the government and societal levels. Considering their political energy and potential for innovation, youth have been found exhibiting initiatives and addressing urgent questions in the world today. This group of people has been, for instance, at the forefront of movements on climate change, social issues, and reforms in education, demonstrating their capacity to unite different groups of people and change the status quo.

Historical Context

In history, young people have always been seen as a subject in governance, and even as a resource when young, but their roles have always been symbolic and highly ceremonial, and which often even so do not allay their issues and concerns. Most decisions which affect young people have always been made by other members of society who are older and who might not understand the dynamics of the issues which affect young people. This neglect has been the cause of policies that do not resonate

with young populations.

However, history also contains very strong images of young people advocating for young people which has in most instances overturned the status quo. These include the civil rights campaigns of young people in the 1960s and the Arab Spring in the early 2010s, when young activists made attempts to call for amendments in the policies and order of governance. These movements emphasize the fact that young people can be at the forefront of structural changes if they have a common goal to champion.

over the past several years, the role of youth has changed from passive recipients of policies to being acknowledged as a key part within the governance structure. youth are identified as a priority within frameworks implemented by organizations such as the United Nations and the African Union. World Programmed of Action for Youth (1995) and the African Youth Charter (2006) have provided specific mechanisms for the inclusion of young people's voices in the decision-making organs. In spite of these developments, evidence suggests that there are still barriers between what policies seek to achieve and what actually happens on the ground, thus more work needs to be done to address these issues in order to ensure that the youth have a real opportunity to participate in the governance processes.

Objectives of the Study

This study attempts to provide answers to the following specific queries regarding youth participation in governance:

1. What are the factors that are more hindering youth participation in governance processes?
2. How have the youth projects contributed to addressing international problems through decision making mechanisms?
3. What measures can be sought to enhance the participation of youths in governance structures?

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This Qualitative research uses a research design which entails design of life case studies, institutional documents and interviews of young people in governance. This approach emphasizes why youth participation must be understood from the perspective of youth as an important context rather than focusing on the problem of generalization or even the ideal of total comprehensive analysis. The qualitative design provides the opportunity to deeply investigate both systemic barriers and best practices in the area of youth governance.

Data Collection

Policy Documents and Frameworks

A range of significant institutional documents and frameworks were provided in order to scope the emphasis of youth engagement at different levels of governance. These included:

- The report of SDGs by the UN.
- The African youth charter of the African union.
- The Commonwealth youth council.

These documents were analyzed in order to analyze their clauses pertaining to youth involvement and to analyze the influence policies have had in real actions. The relationship between the goals of the policy and the implementation of the policy was

the missing analytical part which highlighted the systemic disparities and chances of engaging youths in the issues meaningfully.

this approach is comprehensive, as it incorporates movement towards a more normative understanding of the key issues concerning youth's engagement into active governance processes and sets clear expectations for the analysis and the recommendations made in this report.

Case Study

This study integrated a comprehensive series of case studies in order to examine the intricate dynamics of youth participation in governance. Three major case studies have been analyzed, each highlighting different aspects of youth engagement and their impact on governance at various levels.

The first case study concerned Fridays for Future; a movement designed for young people that originated as a localized initiative subsequently evolved into a global campaign. with the objective of influencing global climate policies. Greta Thunberg's campaign demonstrated that local activism alone would not be enough and that the movement required significant expansion through digitalization. and the support of the public around the world. The research has shown how young people's persistent advocacy could force some policy makers to rethink more basic strategies such as climate targets that were set at major events like COP26. It illustrated the power of networked youth-led movements in disrupting the status quo and demanding climate justice.

The second case considered the Youth Councils in Rwanda as an example of a particular approach to youth engagement that has the backing of the government. These councils were created to give the youth a voice at local and national levels and they have enabled the youths participate in governance matters. including education, public health and peace-making processes. The research showed that these councils have emerged as important tools for amplifying community voices and enhancing inter-generational synergies. Rwanda's approach is quite distinctive mainly because of the strong focus on these councils as institutions, in particular the provision of funds and training programs that are necessary to make youth councils work as a governance structure.

The third case study considers the Commonwealth Youth Council, a sub-regional platform that allows young leaders from the Commonwealth countries to lobby for changes in the status quo. This council has been instrumental in championing youth initiatives in such areas as economic development, climate change, and gender equality. Through the establishment of a platform for dialogue and its influence on policy-making, the council has gone a long way in advancing cultural exchange and enhancing the representation of young leaders in global policy issues. It has been instrumental in bridging the gap between the aspirations of the youth and the actual measures taken by governments, hence setting a framework for youth activism across the region.

Interviews

To complement the case studies, semi-structured interviews were conducted with fifteen youth leaders and policymakers. These participants included grassroots activists, community organizers, and youth delegates representing their nations at the United Nations. The interviews aimed to identify both the bottlenecks and enablers affecting youth governance.

Across the interviews, certain themes recurred. Most youth leaders mentioned the absence of funds as a major constraint, and many of these constraints in getting funds for projects especially in less developed areas were noted. As for the policymakers, they identified the need for constructive engagement in mentoring and skill development processes as crucial factors for effective youth’s involvement. Both groups recognized the necessity for additional institutional changes which would ensure that young people are not simply part of governance structures, but are also given substantive responsibilities and authority in decision-making.

Data Analysis

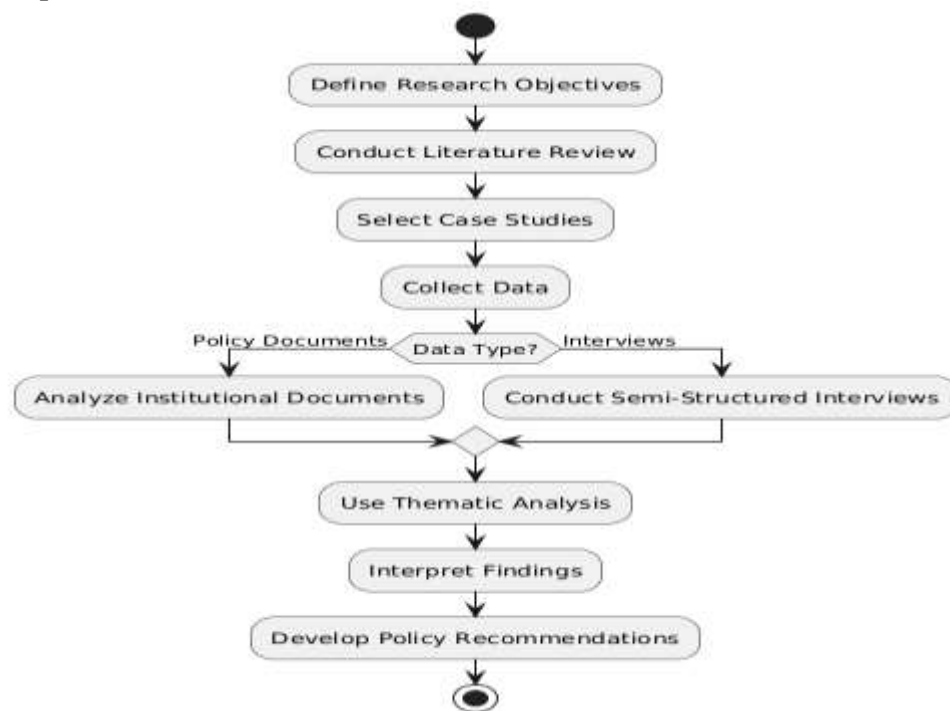
Thematic analysis was used to systematize and explain the qualitative research materials concerning documentary evidence including case studies and interviews. The employment of NVivo, a computer software program for qualitative data analysis facilitated the encoding and organization abstract data sets and patterns in a wide range.

This analysis identified significant challenges such as systemic barriers of tokenism and lack of resources, and substantial opportunities for advancing youth participation involve the use of technology as well as structural changes.

In a systematic analysis of the data, the study provided a comprehensive analysis of the existing status of youth engagement in governance structures for the purpose of suggesting workable policy frameworks.

All the case studies and interviews brought forward a balanced view of the various processes through which the youth interact with various governance systems, and the variables that affect their effectiveness.

Research process flow chart



Research Flowchart Explanation

In order to conduct a systematic analysis within this study to address the problem of youth participation in global governance, a stage of the research flowchart

corresponds to a sequential activity undertaken in such manner to ensure that the problem is analyzed in a structured and rigorous manner.

This particular new research is concerned with identifying some objectives that are specific to the understanding of the constraints and the opportunities provided to young people in governance. This basic step of the process serves to ensure that the research focus is on answering key questions and contemporarily adds to the existing knowledge on youth participation. This is then followed by a more extensive review of the literature on existing models as well as institutional documents and other scholarly articles. This allows for the understanding of what the literature has already captured and helps in the process of identifying case studies to be used.

Attention then turns to the choice of case studies that offer a relevant context and reasonable hope that some expectations of youth participation will take a practical form. The case studies featured were: Fridays for Future, Rwanda Youth Councils, Commonwealth Youth Council which had a good deal to do with the variability of youth participation in governance.

One of the defining phases of the project is the data collection process, which combines qualitative methods that include policy documents and frameworks, as well as semi-structured interviews. For a better understanding of the papers' relevance to youth engagement, the authors examine institutional documents such as the African Youth Charter and the UN SDG reports. In the qualitative research, youth leaders, policymakers, and grassroots activists were also interviewed making the data multidimensional in nature as it adds to the complexity of searching for challenges and opportunities at different levels in the governance structures.

These data were then analyzed using thematic analysis, a procedure that allows the recognition of themes and patterns that are recurrent. This qualitative analytical method aims to explain and provide context for the material so as to understand important aspects at play in youth governance. The results are then presented in detail as this allows one to understand the systemic barriers as well as the opportunities which were revealed within the research. Conversations tackled numerous areas, including tokenism, resource constraints, and the possibilities that political and institutional changes coupled with online activism offer.

At the last stage of the work, the policy recommendations which are practical and feasible are formulated. The recommendations are designed to increase youth involvement in governance through programs for their capacity building, financial mechanisms, and structural changes. By taking into account the difficulties as well as the possibilities, the study develops a concrete strategy towards ensuring the meaningful inclusion of young people into the decision-making processes.

This flowchart and the explanation of it emphasize once again the rational character of the research, which ensures clarity and transparency in the procedures and adds to the knowledge of global youth governance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Opportunities for Youth Participation

Institutional Frameworks

It is widely recognized that international frameworks and initiatives provide the needed avenues for the inclusion of young people in governance. The United Nations Youth Delegate Program and the African Youth Charter have been very instrumental in offering young leaders avenues to address the most pressing global issues facing the

world today, such as climate change, economic reform, and educational policies (African Union, 2006; United Nations, 2015). These programs do not only create avenues for participation but instead ensure that the youth participate fully in the decision-making process.

One interviewee, a youth delegate from Kenya, articulated, “Participating in the African Youth Charter’s discussions gave me the confidence to push for policies that address the realities faced by our communities. It showed me that my ideas could matter on a larger scale.” This sentiment underscores the manner in which structured frameworks enable young individuals to evolve from passive observers to active participants in governance.

This makes the African Youth Charter play a very important role in peacebuilding.

The youth peace committees in Kenya, which were established as a direct result of the Charter’s influence, have demonstrated their effectiveness in post-conflict reconciliation. A grassroots leader in Nairobi stated, “The peace committee I work with is more than a platform; it’s a lifeline for communities.” Through mediating disputes and facilitating dialogues, we have rebuilt trust where it was almost lost.” This shows how initiatives focused on youth lead to roles in leadership that have real effects within post-election conflict settings (Rwanda Ministry of Youth and ICT, 2020).

Grassroots Movements

In recent years, grassroots movements have emerged as a critical platform for youth engagement and activism. Greta Thunberg’s Fridays for Future movement is the best illustration of how one initiative can transcend into a worldwide campaign (Greta Thunberg Foundation, 2021). This movement has inspired millions of youths across the globe to ask for action from their governments regarding climate change.

A Swedish activist said during the interview, “Greta’s initiative taught us that one voice can create a ripple. Such an initiative emboldened many of us to speak on environmental protection and seek redress.” Such a claim also explains the role of grassroots movements in increasing the visibility of youth concerns on a global level.

A fellow participant from India emphasized the movement’s role in the development of international agreements by saying, “I joined Fridays for Future so that way it seemed like a last opportunity to make leaders accountable. Seeing how leaders discussed the Paris agreement after our protests showed the impact We can have.” Such experiences demonstrate how grassroots activism can bring about substantive changes and motivate young people to challenge the status quo (*Fridays for Future: A Social Movements Perspective*, n.d.).

Youth activism can become an important avenue for grassroots movements. A case in point is the Fridays for Future movement, initiated by Greta Thunberg; it is an epitome of how single initiatives can develop into a global movement about climate change (Thunberg, 2019). This movement has brought together and mobilized millions of youths worldwide, who have pressured the decision makers to revise their positions on climate action.

In Sweden, an activist remarked during the interview, “Greta’s initiative made us understand that through the use of a single voice, a ripple can be created. It made many of us bold enough to fight for the environment.” This assertion accentuates the role of grassroots movements in raising youth voices to the global level.

Another participant from India emphasized how the movement has changed the way agreements are made in the world by saying, “The reason I joined Fridays for Future is because it seemed the only opportunity left to hold those in power accountable. Watching strong leaders tackle the Paris Agreement after our protests puts into perspective how much power we have.” These experiences narrate vividly the potential that young people in particular mobilization of grassroots activism have in bringing about change in the wider structures (*Fridays for Future: A Social Movements Perspective*, n.d.)

Digital Platforms

The level of participation in youth governance has dramatically improved due to the digital revolution. With the presence of platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter, youths can share information, campaign, and lobby to an extent unheard of. Campaigns by #Youth4Climate proves how digital tools can provide means for global outreach and even doing advocacy during times of social upheaval.

One of the respondents from Nigeria noted, “When it was difficult for people to pay us any attention, social media spoke for us. Through #Youth4Climate, I have been able to reach out to other young activists and even make some policymakers notice our concerned.” This statement underscores the manner in which digital platforms democratize access to advocacy, thereby dismantling conventional barriers.

Furthermore, a participant from Brazil stated, “Digital technology allowed me to work with activists in Europe and Asia on a single campaign. It’s made the world smaller and our reach larger.” These remarks emphasize the remarkable ability of digital platforms to facilitate global collaborations and enhance youth participation in governance (Greta Thunberg Foundation, 2021).

Challenges

Tokenistic Inclusion

Tokenism is a major hindrance to meaningful youth engagement in governance. Many countries include youth representatives in their structure only to satisfy quotas, yet they have no say or partake in decision-making. One such youth advocate from South Africa puts it this way, “They invite us to the table, but when decisions are being made, we’re ignored. It feels like a checkbox exercise, not real inclusion.

This superficial commitment apart from undermining the contribution of the youth also compromises the element of trust in governance systems. According to one policymaker who mentors young leaders: “Tokenism sends the wrong message. It sends a message to the youth that their participation is meaningless, something that is against the values that we should stand for. To fix this problem, it is important to vest real power in the representatives of the youth, to give them voting powers, and resources that can allow them to meaningfully contribute to the process” (Rwanda Ministry of Youth and ICT, 2020).

Insufficient Funding

Financial constraints are also one of the biggest barriers to youth-led initiatives. Generally, most of the programs always lack enough funding, compromising the scope and sustainability. For instance, a recent study indicated that 68% of youth councils across Sub-Saharan Africa operate without statutory budgets and have to depend largely on voluntary donations (African Union, 2006).

A leader of a youth council from Uganda expressed, “We struggle to keep our programs running because we don’t have consistent funding. It’s exhausting to fundraise while trying to advocate for change.” Additionally, a participant from Sierra Leone remarked, “Without proper funding, our impact is limited. We have the ideas but not the resources to bring them to life.” These accounts exemplify how financial constraints impose excessive burdens on young leaders and reduce the effectiveness of their initiatives.

Lack of Role Models

Young people are naturally creative and passionate about leadership. However, most of them do not have a mentor who can help them through complicated politics and governance systems. This makes young leaders not have the habit of using policy making, negotiation, and advocacy in trying to change things, since they do not have any role model (Mayer et al., 2012).

One of the activists from Indonesia echoed the need for mentorship stating, “We are young, we are still energetic, but we do need guidance. This way, we do not make such great errors and learn how to work within the politics and governance systems.” Another policy maker who mentors young women pointed out, “It matters when older and experienced leads children and especially girls. It changes everything. It builds trust and boosts ability”.

Mentorship programs that allow young people to become in contact with older individuals that are in high officer positions are able to assist in tackling this problem. Not only do these programs increase the skills of the young people who will be future leaders, they also foster collaboration between generations which makes mentorship an important part of good governance systems (*Commonwealth Youth Council (CYC) – YourCommonwealth*, n.d.).

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Institutional Reforms

One of the critical measures of increasing the involvement of youth in decision-making processes at the political level is the changes in legal norms, which guarantee that each body that makes decisions at any level has a specified quota of young people. These individuals should not only have symbolic roles but also be given voting and budget powers, which would make it possible for them to be able to amend the majority of decisions made at the top level. Making a provision for this as a requirement of law, youth engagement is no longer just an option but a minimum standard across all the layers of governance. Further, there should be an adequate preparation and sponsorship to the youth representatives appointed to high-level decision-making bodies to be able to contribute to financial discussions and strategic plans so that their inputs are relevant to the organization’s goals and the society’s requirements.

Financial Investments

Funding young entrepreneurs is also important in advancing inclusive governance. Special international funds should be set up with a focus on supporting projects implemented by young leaders from poor areas. These grants would support the young leaders in training, project formulation, and taking the new ideas to greater heights. Also, exploring cooperation with the private sector could greatly improve the scope and viability of youth projects. From the point of view of the participants,

businesses can partner with youth organizations by providing sponsorship, know-how and other forms of support that meet critical needs such as funding and new ideas. The interaction of private business and youth governance can serve the purpose of economic development and equip young leaders with the skills necessary to address complex societal challenges.

Improving Competence and Skills

It is very important to ensure that the young leaders are equipped with the requisite skills to deal with the governance systems. This can be done through mentorship programs that link young people with experienced policy makers. These mentorships should aim at specific practical skill like negotiation, public speaking and policy analysis. Also, leadership academies meant to prepare youth representatives and aspirant leaders should be established. Such academies may include field training, workshops and even simulated governance structures where the trainees are fully equipped to take leadership positions. In addition, these programs can serve as a source, constantly molding and nurturing a generation of knowledgeable and able youths who are poised to effectively engage in governance processes.

Reorganization of the Educational System

The importance of education in grooming the youth for leadership can never be emphasized enough. Strategies should be developed to embed democratic and citizenship education into the school system, commencing from the elementary stages. It is through early learning of these aspects that children develop an appreciation of how governance, citizenship obligations and policy making work (Hanginiaina Emynorane et al., 2024). Furthermore, after-class activities which involve actively practicing governance should be promoted. Such programs may include mock parliament, topical debates, and attachments in local councils. Through combining the theoretical aspects of governance with the practice, the education system can help to shape the future generation to be more knowledgeable and participating in governance.

Increase the Use of the Online Campaign Strategically

With the contemporary times, the internet is also proving to be effective in advocacy, and bringing about change in many areas. Efforts towards promoting cyber literacy for the youth population are fundamental in ensuring that they are competent in online governance debates. These programs can actually assist these teens in being able to participate in online campaigns, awareness and outreach campaigns and community outreach programs. Collaborations with tech companies can help complement these initiatives. For example, tech firms can organize hackathons or competitions where youth are called to create solutions through technology to governance challenges. In so doing, the young leaders will not only increase their profile but will be able to create international networks which will support their endeavors in the future.

These policy suggestions can in one way or the other be said to empower these invisibles to be visible in the governance space. Their approach is directed at overcoming structural, economic, social structural and technological constraints directed at creating a space where leaders in young people are not just targeting inclusion but policy making that shapes their lives and their tomorrow.

CONCLUSION

It's essential, particularly for the young people of today, to contribute in the shaping of the society around them. Ignoring these social issues by classifying them under "we'll deal with this later" is unrealistic and fundamentally wrong. The present-day youth is undoubtedly rich in innovative ideas and unbounded energy that can drive societal transformation in the present. Involving young people in decision-making allows for better representation of all the needs of the members of the society as the entire population is comprehensively considered when formulating policies. Ushering them in enables the development of greater accountability which is required for the establishment of workable solutions.

But addressing the above institutions will be a challenge. Sociocultural norms advocating for the young people's presence but with the primary goal of showing public importance is a lingering issue. The barriers to scalability and persistence for young-led projects are further exacerbated by a lack of resources. This theory does raise some eyebrows as they can also get the underage involved in speculative tasks with little guidance and provide more assistance based on their preferences.

Youth involvement requires youth representatives as well as significant financial support and provision of education, skills training and investment in development programs that are aimed at allowing them to actively participate. However, investing in these kinds of programs also raises the need to go beyond simply supporting individual initiatives. Most importantly though, building collaborative networks that include youth, policymakers, and the private sector will strengthen and enhance the impact of these initiatives.

This youth-centric approach calls for a paradigm shift in how we perceive young people, from seeing them primarily as subjects to viewing them as contributors to action. It is this perception that informs governance reform and converts inactive young stakeholders to active strategic ones in all processes.

In the end young people have to be seen as investable as there are economic benefits accrued from investing in them. Young people in developing countries are the experts for their societies especially considering the fact that these societies are dynamic and rapidly changing. Because the focus of including youth in governance is to make strategies and programs that will change their present, especially reforming the systems for the better, and enabling the youth of today, who are prepared to contribute meaningfully to the future.

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