Working Document
on the
Zimbabwe National Youth Manifesto

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

Youths[1] in Zimbabwe have for long been the vanguard of national processes and progress. Leaders, think tanks and the economically active portion of the population have largely been drawn from the youth demographic group. Young people across the globe, and especially in the developing world have concurrently been marginalized, and given little or no space to ensure that government and other stakeholders are responsive to issues that affect them. There are a complex combination of factors surrounding youth marginalization in national processes and youth related policies and due to these factors, youth continue to be ostracized, and excluded from decision making on decisions that ultimately affect them.

The Government of Zimbabwe in 2013 launched the revised **National Youth Policy**, *'as a framework to provide common aspirations and priorities for youth development across Zimbabwe.'* The policy document identifies **12 priority issues**[2] that government believes, if addressed, are a panacea to solving the myriad of problems confronting the young people of Zimbabwe. It is therefore the duty of every citizen, and particularly the young people, to ensure that the government lives up to its statement of intent as laid down in the policy. It is also more critical that young people as a collective demographic group are able to ensure that government is aware and alive to their most pertinent issues.

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[1]http://www.youthpolicy.org/factsheets/country/zimbabwe/
The 2013 national youth policy defines youth as persons between 15 and 35 years of age. This age range is stipulated in the new Constitution and is also in line with the continental definition of youth as defined in the African Youth Charter.

[2] The 12 strategic priority issues for intervention according to the policy are: education and skills development; youth empowerment and participation; youth employment and sustainable livelihoods; youth health; gender equity and equality; national youth service; cutlture, arts, sports and recreation; information and communication technology; youth and protection of the environment; youth migration; data and research and youth coordination and mainstreaming.

2 THE IDEA BEHIND THE WORKING DOCUMENT

Organizing for Zimbabwe (O4Z) Trust as a capacity development forum for activists and their community organizations, committed to mobilizing and organizing citizens for informed and active participation in developmental processes, carried out a survey in 2013, with a view to assess and find out from young people their five (5) priority issues from the list proposed by government in the national youth policy.

This is based on the prevailing reality where the government is working within a very tight fiscal space, and is unable, in all intents and purposes, to meet its targets as set out in the policy. Moreover, the strategies proposed in the policy are intrinsically linked and have reciprocal impacts. For example, in improved in youth education can impact on gender equality and youth migration.

The idea of coming up with a 'manifesto' is primarily hinged on helping inform government and other stakeholders, on what the young people think are priorities, which if fulfilled can be a solid foundation to the attainment of all the other youth issues outlined in the youth policy. The rationale has been to help in coming up with an advocacy tool that young people can use in pushing for government to address the most pertinent needs of young people, alive to the changing realities and dynamics in our country. This advocacy tool seeks not to challenge the National Youth Policy, but rather provide the youth perspective to the aspirations of young people, and help inform government and other stakeholders on youth perspectives to addressing their salient issues.

As the title of the document suggests, this 'working document' is not final, but rather, seeks to be an advocacy tool to assist all stakeholders including the youth themselves, to have a starting point around collective conversations towards the genuine addressing of young people's issues and the attainment of their aspirations – all towards the sustainable and inclusive development of our country, Zimbabwe.

2.1 THE SURVEY

The survey was carried out through structured questionnaires and administered by volunteers to 2000 respondents in 10 administrative provinces of Zimbabwe. The majority of respondents were able to fill out the questionnaire by themselves while a handful needed the assistance of enumerators in filling the questionnaires. There was a wide and random selection of respondents by geo-location and an equal segregation by sex. An analysis of the data gathered reflected the following as the five (5) most salient issues that young people perceive as a priority for their development:

1) Education and Skills Development
2) Youth Employment and Sustainable Livelihood
3) Gender and Equality and Equity

4) Youth Empowerment and Participation
5) Youth Health

It is these five (5) priority issues that therefore inform the 'working document'. As the title suggests, this document is not final and should be regarded as work in progress, as young people seek to be at the fore-front of informing any interventions that seek to assist and direct their development as a demographic group.

3 THE FIVE (5) PRIORITY ISSUES FOR YOUTH

3.1 YOUTH EMPOWERMENT AND PARTICIPATION

Youth empowerment according to the national youth policy is '*the creation of an enabling environment for the youths to have the freedom to choose, to participate in and take decisions to matters affecting them and be ready to accept the consequences of their decisions.*' The key issue for young people is their ability and capacity to be involved in the decision making processes that inform policy interventions. For young people, participation is not just be about 'making up' the numbers, but rather should be genuinely driven by prior capacity development so that their participation is well informed, structured and relevant to the issue or sphere in question.

While the policy affirms the right of youth to be involved in, meaningfully and peacefully participate in national political, economic and social processes, realities on the ground have an impeding effect on realizing this. This starts from the very exclusion of young people in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programmes, interventions and policies that ultimately seek to benefit them.

Of importance is the call by young people for stakeholders to facilitate the establishment and funding for youth groups, particularly the community-based groups as avenues for helping young

people to organize themselves for effective participation and input into development processes. This must be coupled with robust education and training for young people's effective participation. It is equally important to utilize effective affirmative action tools such as introducing a quota system for young women in leadership position, much in the same way as this has been used as an empowerment tool for women in leadership.

3.2 EDUCATION AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

The National Youth Policy affirms that education and skills development are lifelong processes that are relevant to the holistic and integrated development of youth. In the words of former South African president and apartheid struggle icon Nelson Mandela, education is the most powerful weapon in the fight for development.' It is therefore critical that the priority by stakeholders towards according young people an opportunity to having basic education up to first tertiary qualification is actualized.

Key milestones in the realization of this strategic goal include the review of education and training curricula towards a more practical as well as entrepreneurial thrust, that is also responsive to the realities of Zimbabwe, political, economically and socially. This should be done side by side with the expansion and equipping of education and training centres with modern and up-to-date facilities that are in line with global standards of educations, also taking into consideration the

advances made on the technological front, with specific focus on the role that information and communication technologies (ICTs) are playing in advancing education worldwide.

It will also be critical that stakeholders prioritize life skills and health education as an intrinsic component in all education and training curricula. This should as well be tied and implemented through popularizing and strengthening of civic education programmes so that 'education' is not necessarily tied to the 'classroom'.
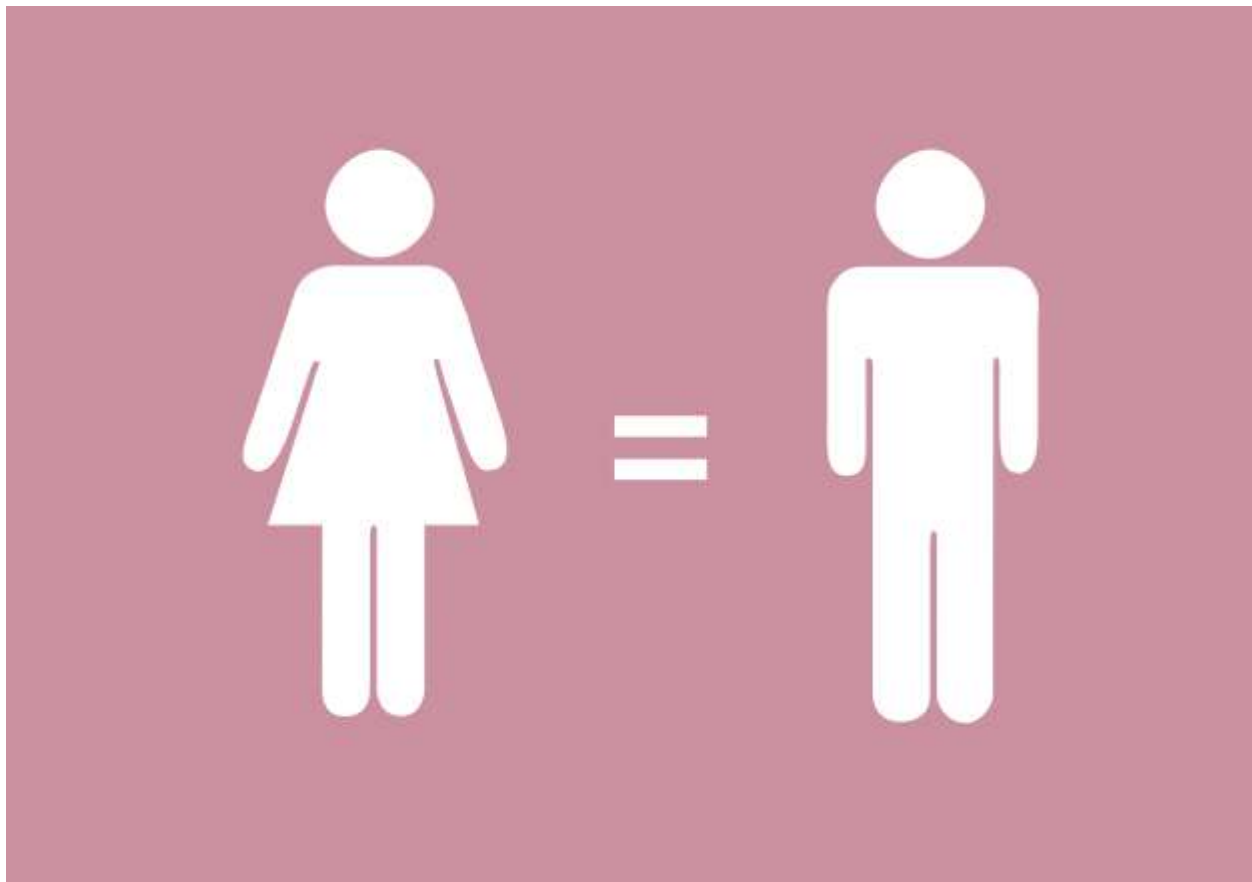
3.3 YOUTH HEALTH

Health is a fundamental and cross cutting issue which has important bearing on youth's wellbeing and capacity to partake in education, skills development, poverty eradication, and participation in the national economic, political and social processes.

Of fundamental importance to young people is being given the opportunities and space to identify their sexual and reproductive health issues and needs, and that they are allowed to participate in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programmes to addressing these. It is also critical that all stakeholders work on establishing new and strengthening already existing youth friendly health services. This is one sure way of ensuring increased accessibility to health services for young people.

The other issue on health is also around affordability, and given the current state of the economy, this is an area where government ought to liaise with various stakeholders including development partners and the corporate sector in facilitating for the subsidizing access of young people to certain youth health services and products. This also goes for education and awareness raising on topical youth health issues.

Many young people also share the sentiment that all stakeholders should work towards promoting social values and norms that encourage responsible sexual behavior and family planning, which should also be tied to the fight against harmful practices such as child marriages, gender-based violence and genital female mutilation.

3.4   GENDER EQUITY AND EQUALITY

The National Youth Policy acknowledges the desirability to eliminate discrimination against all young people, and protect and promote gender equity and equality. It is commendable that with the collective efforts of countries across the globe, the fight for gender equality and equity has achieved significant strides, with affirmative action strategies being a key tool in this regard, including the quota system in leadership.

There is a general sentiment among young people that they are better placed to embrace gender equity and equality than their adult counterparts. Advocacy around the notion of the boy and girl child as equals should therefore begin at childhood, so that it is not an import to the child at a later stage. Government, with the support of other stakeholders must continue to work on eliminating all forms of discrimination against young women and girls, especially where these emanate from and are perpetrated by adults. Government in particular, also has to continue to make bold decisions around the repeal and reforms of laws. Processes and customary practices that demean and discriminate against young women and girls, notable child marriages.

3.5 YOUTH EMPLOYMENT AND SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD

The revised youth policy recognizes that decent employment and participation in agricultural, industrial, commercial and services sector provides sustenance and sustainable livelihood to the majority of youth. It is important that this assertion recognizes the realities of our current national economy, particularly the challenges it is facing and how citizens are coping.

Poverty and unemployment continue to retard the youth's quest to improve their lives. Young people continue to suggest that all development strategies and programmes, especially on the economic front must take into account youth employment concerns. This includes economic blueprints such as ZimAsset as well as other bilateral and business agreements that the country enters into with both local and foreign investors. Given the informal and entrepreneurial thrust that the economy is taking, there is need to ensure that young people are given basic training and capital to run small enterprises, which if given support can have the potential to grow and help to bridge the unemployment gap.

A critical element in making this successful is around making credible statistical data and information on the current realities of young people available, so that interventions seeking to

remedy youth unemployment and help secure their livelihoods are well informed and responsive to their needs.

4   CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Having conducted both field and desk research on youth perspectives towards the realization of the most important strategic issues for youths, O4Z has came up with recommendations can help in ensuring that the priority issues affecting the young people are addressed. The recommendations are centered on the genuine inclusion and participation of youths as a determinant factors towards the crafting and realization of pro-youth policies by the Government and other stakeholders.

In addressing the priority issues as outlined above, stakeholders are challenged and encouraged to:

1. Ensure grassroots awareness of the National Youth Policy, the constitution and related national laws, regional and international statutes such as the African Youth Charter, other strategies and policy papers that have been put forward as tools in the fight for youth development.
2. Take note to genuinely engage with young people, in their diversity, through open and non-partisan platforms so that at any given stage, the voices of young people are heard, and therefore included in the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies that seek to address their issues. More importantly, it is critical that the identification of problems affecting young people is done with the proper and ethical inclusion of young people themselves.
3. Take advantage of the growth in significance and relevance of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in advancing youth development. Significant effort should also be put towards ensuring the safe and secure engagement of young people in the cyberspace, and particularly on the internet, which should be made accessible and affordable to all citizens including young people.
4. Proffer opportunities for the constant monitoring, evaluation and review of this policy, so that it is up-to-date and remains relevant to the issues, needs and aspirations of the young people concerned in an ever dynamic world, with changing technologies, mind-sets and thinking. Tailor-made score-cards and other monitoring and evaluation tools should be developed so that progress towards the achievement of the policy's strategic goals is measured in real-time and that adjustments can be readily and easily made in pursuit of the overall goal of youth development.

This *Working Document on the Zimbabwe National Youth Manifesto* was produced by Organizing for Zimbabwe Trust in 2014. It is an evolving document and all young people and other interested stakeholders are encouraged to input and give feedback on the document.
Email: o4z.info@gmail.com
Facebook: Organizing for Zimbabwe
Twitter: @organize4zim
Website: www.o4z.org.zw