

Youth Participation in Youth Programmes: The Case of Ghana's National Youth Employment Programme

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Abstract

The essence of governance and representative democracy is for elected leaders to formulate and implement appropriate policies on behalf of the people to deal with the quagmires of poverty and under-development among them. In doing this, sometimes it becomes necessary to consult the people, especially, the particular group that a policy is targeted at, to ensure that first-hand and adequate information is gathered to facilitate the design and implementation of appropriate policies to deal with that group's problems. In Ghana, since 1992, development plans have been formulated and implemented with little or no participation of the youth even though they constitute the bulk of the nation's labour force and voting population. The youth were also marginalized in the formulation and implementation of the National Youth Employment Programme, a programme intended to benefit them and to deal with unemployment among them. Consequently, the programme is saddled with several challenges most of which could have been avoided if the youth had been part of the NYEP process. What is the NYEP all about? How was it formulated and implemented? What role did the youth play in the NYEP process? What explain their weak role in the NYEP process? What are the effects of the weak role of the youth in the NYEP process on the programme? What can be done to strengthen the programme to deliver on its mandate in solving the problem of youth unemployment? These questions are addressed in the paper.

Introduction and Problem Statement

It has been estimated that youth unemployment has risen from 14.8% in 1992 to 16.4% in 2000 and came close to 29% in 2009 (ISSER, 2010). While several development policies have been formulated by the National Development Planning Commission, these have not yielded sufficient employment opportunities, a situation which has disproportionately affected the youth. Though about 250,000 young people enter the labour market annually, the formal sector is able to engage only 2% leaving 98% to strive to survive in the informal sector or remain unemployed (ibid:189). Indeed, the youth are about 3.5 times more likely to be unemployed than adults, suggesting that they have substantial difficulty in the labour market (ibid: 187). It is therefore evident that there is a need for a holistic and sustainable youth employment programme, not only to help youth find meaningful work and a secure their future, but also to help avert the negative security implications youth joblessness could have on a country's peace, development and democratic dispensation (Amoo, 2011).

The essence of governance and representative democracy is for elected leaders to formulate and implement appropriate policies on behalf of the people to deal with the quagmires of poverty and under-development among them. In doing this, sometimes it becomes necessary to consult the people, especially, the particular group that a policy is targeted at, to ensure that first-hand and adequate information is gathered to facilitate the design and implementation of appropriate policies to deal with that group's problems. In many developed countries, several programmes have been put in place to tackle the employment needs of their youth. In the USA for example youth employment programmes including Jobs for America's Graduates, Youth-Build USA, and Job Corps have been formulated and implemented to deal with unemployment among different segments of their youth (Collura, 2010). Similarly, in Ghana, the National Youth Employment Programme (NYEP) is seen as a major programme initiated in 2006 by the administration of President J.A. Kufuor to deal with unemployment among the youth who according to the nation's 2000 Population and Housing Census constitute about 60% of the population of about 20 million. However, the programme has proven to be woefully inadequate in sustainably dealing with the huge problems of unemployment among Ghana's youth due to the serious setbacks it suffers. By the end of 2011, the NYEP had offered jobs to only about 108,000 Ghanaians (Attipoe-Fitz, 2010). But this can be described as a drop in an ocean considering the fact that this is statistically negligible and the programme does not address the specific interest of the youth to secure good and sustainable jobs for a sound future (Donkoh, 2010). Indeed, for the first time in the history of Ghana, the Unemployed Graduates Association of Ghana was launched in 2011 to protest about the alarming rate of youth unemployment among all segments of the youth in Ghana in spite of the existence and full operation of the NYEP.

How such important programmes like the NYEP are formulated is crucial in ensuring that they benefit those they were meant for. In this regard, it is significant to note that in formulating the youth employment programmes in the USA for instance, the youth were consulted and they actively participated in the process, particularly at the community level (Collura, 2010).

Indeed, the 1991 and 2001 Reports of the US Department of Labour clearly documents how different youth groups participated in the formulation and implementation of employment programmes meant for them in a manner that made those programmes relevant in effectively dealing with their joblessness. On the contrary, the situation is different in Ghana. The NYEP, a programme intended to benefit the youth is an elite-prescribed programme and has no room for the youth even in its implementation. If the youth had been part of its formulation and implementation, they would have made input and ventilated their peculiar challenges relating to unemployment and how the programme could advance their long term interest.

Studies of existing youth employment programmes show that they make less of a short-term impact but a few, particularly in the developed world have much more impact over the long term (Jekielek, Cochran, & Hair, 2002; O'Sullivan, 2000; Clymer, Edwards, & Wyckoff, 2002; Sum & Khatiwada, 2006; Small and Memmo, 2004; Cross, 2004; and Schochet, Burghardt, & McConnel, 2008). In general, youth employment programmes should emphasize long-term goals such as keeping a young person employed and advancing in the workforce (Attipoe-Fitz, 2010). Although youth in job training and employment programmes benefits from the immediacy of a paycheck, the long term benefits of excellent programmes can secure better jobs with higher salaries, benefits, and opportunities for advancement (Collura, 2010). This is the direct interest and aspiration of every young person that can effectively be championed by the youth themselves when they are made part of the process of formulating and implementing programmes meant for them (ibid).

This paper therefore takes an overview of the NYEP. It highlights how it was formulated and is being implemented with particular emphasis on the role of the youth, if any, in the processes. It explains the reasons for the particular role of the youth in the NYEP process and discusses the achievements and challenges of the programme. The paper concludes on the note that youth participation in the "NYEP process" could have strengthened the programme in effectively dealing with youth unemployment and averted the current situation where its challenges far outweighs its gains and threatens its viability and sustainability.

Conceptual Framework

The concept of participation underpins this study. The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (1948) emphasized participation by all segments of society in decision making as a matter of right. Scaff (1975) defines participation from two distinct angles. Briefly, one angle emphasizes the idea of sharing in common life and acting on the basis of reciprocity in order to promote the "public good". The other angle looks at participation as an act of exchange, as an instrumental means for gaining power in order to increase the probability of realizing private benefits (ibid:449). Drah (2003) however emphasizes 'participatory development', as being the engagement of the greatest number of citizens in the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of development programmes and projects in order to uplift their standards. Such programmes and projects are desirably community based.

According to the Karol Wojtyla's theory of participation, '...the term participation points to the ability of the person to exist and act together with others without losing oneself as he moves towards his self-fulfillment. As the antithesis of alienation, participation allows the person to fully experience himself as well as to experience the humanity of other persons. Participation is not simply the fact of being physically present to one another in a group activity. It is possible that people exist as a group yet pursue their goals individually or in isolation. Participation is not something which simply happens but is a result of a person's conscious striving for fulfillment...' (Mejos, 2007).

There are two levels of participation, 'pseudo' and 'genuine' participation. Participation is 'pseudo' when its purposes are to inform citizens about decisions, placate their complaints and manipulate their opinions. 'Genuine' participation which is encouraged by leaders who are willing to be accountable for their actions occurs only when the public is involved in administrative decision making and citizens are the owners of government and the co-producers of public goods (Wang, 2001:323). In 'genuine' participation, citizens are dominant discussants, decision makers and implementers and government's supplementary role is to set goals, provide incentives, monitor processes and provide information (ibid). Participation in decision making is seen as evidence of "genuine" or meaningful participation because it allows 'public beliefs and values' to be realized (Bryant and White, 1982: 208). According to Cohen and Uphoff, (1978:11), genuine participation has a notable counter insurgency quality, and it serves as an alternative to revolutionary movements. In the view of Dryzek (1996), participation in the polity is more crucial than participation in the state. Participation in the state is merely co-optation of a group's leadership into the state in a manner that weakens the group's ability to effectively advocate its interest (ibid: 478). On the other hand, participation in the polity on the other hand refers to the exercise of rights by oppositional civil society groups as citizens without any hindrance. This takes the form of lobbying, strikes, demonstrations in order to champion their own interest and to keep governments on their toes (ibid: 480).

Bryant and White (1982) have identified several factors that may encourage or block participation. Notable among them include the fact that people's income level could either boost or weaken their participation in a process. People may also participate when their contribution is more apt to be noticed and make a difference. Moreover, the composite elements of social environment including education, training and mentorship programmes may also influence participation negatively or positively.

In measuring participation this study employs four major indices namely: representation; meaningful contribution to planning process; influencing planning process; and ownership of plans. Representation according to Pitkin (1967) denotes trusteeship and means acting in the best interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them. There is substantive representative when leaders act independently and exercise discretion as well as judgment. Those who are being represented must have a say in the appointment of their leaders and their removal if such leaders fail to advance the cause of their constituents (ibid: 112).

She argues further that if superior wisdom and ability resides in the representative, he must not subordinate them to the opinions of his ignorant and inferior constituents. Conversely, to the extent that a representative and his constituents are relatively equal in wisdom, and in capacity, he would be required to consult his constituents (ibid:142). According to her, the more people identify and get attached to their interests; and the more decisions to be taken are likely to affect local interests, the more likely representatives would be required to consult the constituents and act in response to what they require. When consulted, citizens should be deeply involved and must be able to contribute meaningfully to the decision making process. Such contributions should be able to influence the decision making process in a manner that satisfies their interests (Rosener, 1978: 459). Influence is the ability to convince a decision maker to reach a certain decision (Adler and Bobrow, 1956). Finally, citizens must own the final policy outcomes that are made. Ownership is the feeling of an exclusive right conferred by a lawful claim and subject to certain restrictions to possess, enjoy, protect and defend an item of property (Mackin, 1996). The extent to which people own or attach a sense of ownership to programmes determines the level of their participation. According to Rosener, (1978), having a say in the selection of leaders and formulation of policies breeds ownership.

Clarifying Other Concepts

The term “youth” refers to those young men and women between the ages of 15-35 years as defined by Ghana’s 2010 National Youth Policy and the African Youth Charter. However, given that the NYEP employs Ghanaian youth between the ages of 18–35 years who are literate, illiterate, able and or disabled, the term is also used in accordance with the age bracket at which one could be employed under the NYEP. The term may be used interchangeably with “young people”. The term “NYEP process” is used in this paper to refer to how the programme was formulated and is currently being implemented.

Overview of NYEP

From 2001, several attempts were made in Ghana to address the problem of youth unemployment and underemployment. The government first registered about, 950,000 young people from different educational, trades and professional backgrounds who needed employment. Other initiatives that followed include the Skills Training and Employment Placement (STEP) Programme, an attempt to establish a National Youth Fund (NYF) as well as various micro-credit schemes to support small-scale enterprises (NYEP Guidelines, 2006:1). While the government’s efforts were largely acknowledged as being a step in the right direction, the problem of youth employment persisted and the unemployment rate among the youth rose to 25.6 percent in 2005 (NYEP Review Report, 2009:5).

The National Youth Employment Programme (NYEP), also called the National Youth Job Corps Programme, was a special policy initiated by the NPP government in 2006 based on a presidential directive to ensure that the youth including Junior High School (JHS) and Senior High School (SHS), Technical/Vocational School graduates as well as school dropouts and illiterate youth, would be actively engaged in some productive employment (Attipoe-Fittz, 2010). The objective of the programme was to help reduce unemployment, under-employment, satisfy national needs such as food security and equip the youth with some work experience for permanent employment (ibid). This programme was not backed by an act of parliament; it was designed to help achieve the Millennium Development Goal of reducing poverty (Donkoh, 2009). Young people recruited under the programme were to exit after two years to search for permanent jobs in other sectors of the economy or proceed for further education (NYEP, 2006:3). The programme was intended to cover a wide spectrum of economic ventures and social service activities in local communities.

The programme was initially developed as a Ten-Module Youth Employment Programme to form the first phase of a two-phased programme. The first phase focused on short term activities that would create jobs for the youth, while the second phase would take a long term view of employment issues within the context of the GPRS (II). The first phase of the programme covered all the ten modules; namely, Youth-in-Agri-Business; Youth-in-Trades and Vocations; Youth-in-ICT (Information, Communication and Technology); Community Protection System; Waste and Sanitation Management Corps; Rural Education Teachers Assistants; Paid Internships and Industrial Attachments; Vacation Jobs; and Volunteer Services (ibid:4). On assumption of office in January 2009, the NDC government added four more modules to the programme; namely, Youth in Eco Brigade, Youth in Afforestation, Youth in Road Repairs and Maintenance and Youth in Film Industry. The NDC government also extended the Trades and Vocation module to encompass Youth in Mobile Phone Repairs, Sachet Water Production and Bamboo Processing (Attipoe-Fittz, 2010).

NYEP: Policy Initiation

At a cabinet meeting on March 2005, the National Security Coordinator in the NPP administration, Dr. Sam G. Amoo presented a paper discussing the high incidence of youth unemployment in Ghana and its threat to national security, peace and stability. President J.A. Kufuor directed the National Security Coordinator to urgently put in place a team to identify the appropriate mechanisms and practical means to deal with the problem (Amoo, 2011). This directive marked the beginning of the processes towards the formulation of the NYEP, a quick a solution to youth unemployment in Ghana (ibid).

Formulating NYEP

Initially, the National Security Coordinator put together a ten-member committee to brainstorm and formulate the programme. The committee comprised the National Security Coordinator and five senior members from the National Security Advisory Team and three senior officials of the NYC. The members were:

1. Dr. Sam Amoo- National Security Co-ordinator/Chairman of Committee;
2. Major Abubakar Sulemana – National Security Advisor
3. Colonel Ebenezer Ghartey- National Security
4. Naval Captain Nathaniel Ankobea- National Security
5. Mr. S.D Afari- National Security
6. Mr. Fiiifi Mbiah- National Security
7. Mr. Achibald Donkoh - Acting National Coordinator, NYC
8. Mr. Amankwah Manu - Deputy National Coordinator (Finance and Administration) NYC
9. Mr. Alex Owusu- Director in Charge of Agric Project, NYC (NYEP Committee Report, 2005:2).

The tenth member of the committee, Mr. Kweku Adu Mensah, was recruited as a consultant by the National Security Coordinator to assist with policy formulation.¹ Membership of the committee was dominated by National Security in view of the security implications of youth unemployment and the need to find an immediate solution to it (Amoo, 2011). “It was also important to bring the top echelon of the NYC on board so that they could share their experience in youth development issues with the committee” (ibid). The Consultant was recruited to assist the committee because of his long standing experience in agricultural production and export. His knowledge and experience about the various sectors of agriculture that could provide employment to the youth and promote food sufficiency as well as national development was crucial (ibid). The main objective of the committee was to identify projects with economic potential that can generate immediate employment for as many young people as possible in order to check their idleness and drift from the rural to urban communities in search of non-existent jobs (NYEP Guidelines, 2006:2).

The meetings of the committee lasted six months during which a wide spectrum of economic and social service activities that could be pursued by the youth as employment were identified (NYEP Committee Report, 2005:10). However to ensure a cross sectoral planning and in view of the fact that issues relating to employment cuts across all sectors of the economy, the membership of the committee was later enhanced to include the ministers of Agriculture, Fisheries, Forestry, Local Government and Rural Development, and Trade and Industry and constituted into a Planning Team.² The Planning Team developed the first Ten-Module Youth Employment Programme and the implementation policy guidelines to form the first phase of a two-phased programme.

The programme was approved by cabinet and subsequently launched in March 2006 (Adu-Mensah, 2011). The MYS was then tasked to set up the NYEP Secretariat³ to commence recruitment and placement across the country (Adu-Mensah, 2011). As indicated earlier, the NDC government added four more modules to the programme (Attipoe-Fittz, 2010).

Implementing NYEP

The youth were expected to play crucial role in implementing the NYEP even though they did not participate in its formulation. However, even though the NYEP is expected to benefit the youth, they do not get the opportunity to directly participate in the implementation structures of the programme. A critical analysis of the implementation process of the NYEP shows that the participation of the youth in implementing the programme exists only in theory. First, an implementation task force on which youth groups in Ghana are represented was to be established to implement the NYEP. Indeed, the Youth Employment Implementation Guidelines (2006), states that “ there shall be established a National Youth Employment Task Force (NYETF) which shall have representation from the following state agencies as well as some relevant Civil Society Organizations (CSOs): Office of the President (Micro-Finance and Small Loans Center); Ministry of Youth and Sports (MYS); Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning (MoFEP); Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD); Ministry of Private Sector Development and Presidential Special Initiatives (MPSD&PSI); Ministry of Food and Agriculture; Ministry of Trade and Industry; Ministry of Communications; Ministry of Education and Sports; Ministry of Health; Two Members of Parliament; Ministry of Mines, Lands and Forestry; Ministry of Environment; Ministry of Interior; National Security Council Secretariat; National Disaster Management Organization; National Employment Task Force Coordinator; and Two representatives of the youth groups in Ghana” (NYEP Implementation Guidelines, 2006:12).

The functions of the NYETF include providing guidelines for the formulation of Short and Medium Term Strategic Plans for the NYEP; including: designing guidelines for implementing the NYEP; approving programmes and projects; sourcing and allocation of funds and other resources; sensitizing and training of programme managers at all levels; monitoring and evaluating the programmes’ activities; and setting targets and signing performance contracts with Metropolitan/Municipal/District Employment Task Forces (MMDETF); developing policy recommendations for government’s consideration through the Ministry responsible for employment to strengthen employment programmes; and undertaking any other functions assigned it by the Ministry of MMYE to ensure the success of the programme (ibid:13).

The implementation of the NYEP at the district level is to be monitored at the regional level by a Regional Monitoring Team (RMT). This Team has the responsibility only to monitor, evaluate and report on the implementation and progress of the programme (NYEP Implementation Guidelines 2006:14).

It is chaired by the Regional Minister or in his absence, his Deputy. A Regional Liaison Officer was to serve as Secretary to the Team (ibid). The RMT comprises: the Regional Minister or the Deputy Regional Minister; the Regional Coordinator for the NYC; the Regional Labour Officer; the Regional Cooperatives Officer; the Regional Director of Agriculture; the Regional Director of Education; the Regional Director of Health; and the Regional Liaison Officer (ibid).

At the metropolitan, municipal and district level, MMDETF chaired by the MMDCE is to assist in the successful implementation of the programme. This district body is entrusted with the responsibility of identifying, mobilizing and sensitizing the unemployed youth to participate in the programme; identifying potential economic and social activities in the districts for sponsorship; seeing to the timely disbursement of funds to the beneficiary groups and be accountable for the recovery of such funds; submitting monthly, quarterly and annual reports to the National Employment Task Force with copies to the RMT by the 10th day of the following month; and undertaking costing of programmes and projects (ibid:15). The MMDETF consists: the MMDCE; the Metropolitan/Municipal/District Employment Coordinator; the Metropolitan/Municipal/District Director of Agriculture; the Metropolitan/Municipal/District Director of Health; the Metropolitan/Municipal/ District Director of Education; two other members appointed by the MMYE; and two representatives each from youth groups at the district, one of whom must be a female (ibid:14).

Analyzing and Critiquing Youth Participation

Formation

The analysis of youth participation in formulating the NYEP is based on the indices of participation as already discussed. The Committee that initiated the processes towards the formulation of the NYEP was dominated by national security officials. These were not experts on issues related to youth unemployment; yet they made no serious effort to seek the views of the youth on the problem.⁴ Ironically, the 2008 NYP which was initiated by the same NPP government received direct input from virtually all the youth groups in the country through the nation-wide workshops and symposia that were organized (Donkoh, 2010).⁵ Given that no one can claim mastery and understanding of youth problems better than the youth themselves, it would have been appropriate to have consulted them in formulating the NYEP. Youth ownership of the 2008 youth policy was not in question. According to some youth leaders, its implementation would have been smooth and successful had it not been jettisoned by the NDC government in 2009.⁶ Because the youth were not consulted in formulating the NYEP, they could not influence the process. Youth ownership of the programme is therefore problematic. "...Most of them see the NYEP not as their own programme. They have no feeling that it belongs to them and must be protected and sustained. Their lackadaisical attitude to work and misuse and abuse of office equipment at the various NYEP offices is an ample testimony of their lack of ownership of the programme..." (Attipoe-Fittz, 2010).

Again, as argued by Pitkin (1967), the NYEP, which is a programme developed for the youth is expected to promote the interest of its beneficiaries. In reality the programme is bedeviled with several challenges that render it ineffective and weak in promoting the interest of the youth and dealing with the issue of unemployment among them. First of all, it is to be conceded that by the end of December 2011, the programme had provided employment opportunities to about 108,000 young people in Ghana. However in practice, this amounts to less than two percent of the youth in Ghana (ISSER, 2010) and therefore cannot be seen as a serious effort to advance the interest of the youth in the area of employment. The World Bank's 2011 country statistics for youth unemployment in Ghana states that 65 percent of Ghanaian youth are unemployed. Indeed, according to the Ghana Trades Union Congress (2011) every year, youth unemployment in Ghana increases by 250,000.

In the view of Obeng (2011) "even though the NYEP provides some employment for the youth, especially those with little or no education, its contribution to the fight against unemployment is seen as a drop in the ocean because only a few of the youth are employed under the scheme." Secondly, since 2006, funding for the programme has always been delayed besides being woefully inadequate. For example, by September 2010, the NYEP Secretariat had not received funding for that year. This had resulted in delays in the payment of employee allowances (Attipoe-Fittz, 2010). Table 1 tells the story of inadequate funding for the NYEP between 2006 and 2008.

Table 1: Funds Expected and Funds Received for the NYEP, 2006-2008

YEAR	EXPECTED FUNDS (GH¢)	TOTAL RECEIPTS (GH¢)
2006	93,055,075.67	9,048,532.57
2007	53,258,724.90	44,123,012.77
2008	63,065,502.60	61,123,629.31

(Source: NYEP Report to the Transitional Team in February 2009)

In 2006 the government promised to pay an amount of GH¢ 100 billion as subvention for the programme every year. However, this has never been fulfilled. As table 8 depicts, a small fraction of this amount is paid annually while the cost of running the programme since 2006 has always exceeded the funds received from the government. Furthermore, the monthly stipend paid to employees under the programme is inadequate. For example, by July 2010, those with no formal education received GH¢ 50.00; SHS graduates received GH¢ 80.00; diploma holders were paid GH¢100.00; and those with first degrees were paid GH¢150.00. Such poor stipend has further dampened the morale of the youth and forced some of them to quit their jobs in search of alternatives (Attipoe-Fittz, 2010). Moreover, the programme does not provide sustained employment opportunity for the youth, contrary to their aspirations to secure permanent jobs after school (Donkoh, 2010).

They are employed under the programme for a maximum period of 2 years. If they fail to secure jobs elsewhere by the end of this period, they revert to their unemployed situation. For example, between 2009 and 2010, over 90 percent of those who exited from the programme could not secure alternative jobs and had no means to further their education (Attipoe-Fittz, 2010).

Implementation

In implementing the NYEP too, the composition of the NYETF of the NYEP can be described as lopsided and ambiguous as far as youth participation is concerned. Given that almost 4000 registered youth groups exist in Ghana, two representatives from the youth groups in Ghana on the Task force is inadequate. Moreover, there is no clarity regarding which of the youth groups to be selected to represent the youth on the NYETF. This has the tendency to allow politicians to co-opt or hand-pick their favorite youth groups to serve as members. These co-opted youth groups may work to champion partisan and not necessarily youth interest.

On the average, there are about 180 registered youth groups in every region of the country (Etsibah, 2010). However no youth group is represented on the RMT. Even though this situation poses a challenge to youth participation, Attipoe-Fittz (2010) has argued that “the role of the RMT is not to implement but merely monitor the implementation of the NYEP at the districts where the chunk of the beneficiaries are located.” Perhaps, this explains why the Regional Co-ordinator for the NYC is made a member of the RMT and not the youth groups themselves.

At the district level, selecting two representatives from each youth group to represent young people on the MMDETFD would have brought views of the youth to bear on the implementation of the programme. In reality however, none of the Task Forces to be established at the national, regional and district level has been set up and made operational. It is the national secretariat of the NYEP that co-ordinates all activities relating to the implementation of the programme. Selasi Attipoe-Fittz, Deputy National Coordinator of the NYEP observed that “the Employment Task Force at the National, Regional and District Level have not been established and Regional offices of the NYEP merely exist in name. Everything about the NYEP and its implementation is done at the national secretariat” (Attipoe-Fittz, 2010). In effect, the youth are not only sidelined in formulating the programme. Their stated role and representation in the implementation process of the programme, as per the NYEP Implementation Guidelines (2006) is also not performed by them. Instead other institutions including the national secretariat of the NYEP play the role expected to be played by the youth themselves.

Explaining the Marginalized Role of the Youth

Elected leaders directly or indirectly through their appointees are expected to formulate policies for all segments of the population without necessarily consulting them (Pitkin, 1967). In this regard, the appointed officials who formulated the NYEP were not expected to consult the youth even though the programme was to deal with the problem of youth unemployment.

Therefore in formulating the NYEP, the decision making structure was dominated by appointed officials whose role was to formulate the programme and the youth were to assist in implementing it. Again, the youth were not involved in the process because apart from the fact that they were inexperienced, the problem of unemployment among them was seen as a serious national security problem that required immediate solution (Amoo, 2011). “Involving them in the NYEP formulation process could have dragged the programme and wasted much time” (ibid).

The reason for the failure of the national, regional and district Task Forces to take off is, according to Attipoe-Fittz (2010), financial. The cost of running the programme has never been met since its inception in 2006. In 2006, the expected amount for running the programme was GH¢93,055,075.67. However only GH¢ 9,048,532.57 was received. Again, in 2008, the programme received GH¢ 61, 123,629.31 from the government; its expenditure for the same year amounted to GH¢ 69,851,762.68; and by September 2010, the programme had not received any financial allocation from the government for that year (Attipoe-Fittz, 2010). The establishment of the National and District Employment Task Forces under the NYEP would require money to remunerate members and pay for their sitting allowances. However, as stated above, governments have not paid the annual subventions to the NYEP in full since 2006. Indeed, raising funds to run the programme has been difficult and this has triggered several criticisms, protests, withdrawal of services, and other forms of civil disobedience by the youth who have been employed under the programme (Donkoh, 2010). “Given government’s inability and lack of commitment to increase its allocation of funds to the programme one may risk compounding the situation and even grinding it to a halt by attempting to divert the little resources into setting up the Employment Task Forces” (Attipoe-Fittz, 2010). The lopsidedness of the Task Forces to be established, particularly at the national level, coupled with the enormity of financial challenges facing the NYEP has severely undermined the efforts to promote youth participation in the implementation of a programme meant for them.

Conclusion

From the foregone analysis, one can aptly come to the conclusion that the NYEP has been deficient and mediocre in solving the problem of youth unemployment in Ghana in a manner that truly promotes the interest of young people. In Africa as a whole, decision making structures are dominated by adults with the youth occupying peripheral positions (Drah, 2003). Young people are perceived as inexperienced and not too mature to be entrusted with the arduous task of decision making even on issues that affect them (Donkoh, 2010). Indeed, this explains the essence of the African adage expressed in the akan (one of the dominant ethnic groups in Ghana) language “abofra bo nwa na ommbo akyekyedee”, to wit, the child breaks the back of a snail but not that of a tortoise. Given that the back of tortoise is harder and more difficult to break, the task of crushing it is confined to adults. This contributes immensely to the weak and marginalized position of young people in Africa as a whole and in Ghana in the structure of decision making.

Admittedly, some young people all over the world may be inexperienced and immature and dealing with problems facing them may have to be swift, prompt and timeous enough to ensure that they do not revolt against society or allow themselves to be used as arsenals to foment conflict. However, this is not a license to exclude all young people in the decision making process particularly on issues that directly affect them. No matter how urgent the need to deal with their challenges may be, no one can claim to better understand the challenges of the youth than the youth themselves (Collura, 2010). Their knowledge about the challenges confronting them puts them on the same pedestal with policy makers and hence ought to be consulted as argued by Pitkin (1967). This could help avoid costly programme design errors and ensure that the youth reap the real benefits of programmes meant for them. Most of the challenges of youth employment programmes in Africa including the NYEP in Ghana that have rendered them deficient could have been dealt with from the beginning if the youth had been part of their formulation process as young person would not agree to programmes that cannot guarantee a sustainable employment for them (Drah, 2003; Donkoh, 2010). Youth participation in the implementation of programmes meant for them and for that matter, the NYEP in Ghana, is also crucial in ensuring that sound feedback regarding successes and failures of the programme among them are adequately reported for redress. Concentrating all activities regarding the NYEP implementation at the national secretariat sacrifices the need for proper implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the programme in an attempt to fine-tune it and make it an effective tool for reducing unemployment among the Ghanaian youth.

As a matter of urgency, African leaders must desist from using and manipulating the youth only during electioneering campaigns as foot-soldiers and “voting machines”. They must show commitment and political will to advancing the cause of young people who constitute the bulk of the voting and labour force in many African countries and deal proactively with the problem of youth unemployment. In Ghana, this can be done by first of all giving a legal backing to the NYEP. As it stands now, the programme remains an ad hoc initiative that can be scrapped at any time. Secondly, government must show interest in boosting youth participation in the NYEP process by revitalizing and reactivating the implementation task forces of the programme and increasing the physical youth representation on them to relieve the national secretariat of its huge burden and give it ample time to deal only with administrative issues. Better late than never, a cross-section of the youth must be invited to the annual reviews of the programme, for their input about how to sustain and improve it to deal with youth unemployment. In formulating the 2008 Draft National Youth Policy, virtually all the youth groups in Ghana participated in the process and this made them own the policy. A similar approach could be adopted in the annual reviews of the NYEP. The prospects for the NYEP in dealing with youth unemployment may be bright if governments show commitment in tackling the challenges of the programme, particularly youth participation in its process. Anything short of this may compound the problem of youth unemployment and the nation may continue to sit on a time bomb until it explodes and destroy the peace, tranquility and democratic gains made since 1992.

Endnotes

¹ In a letter to Mr. Kweku Adu-Mensah, the then director of the Ghana Export Promotion Council and an expert in agricultural production and export, dated on 15th April 2005 and signed by the National Security Coordinator he was invited to serve as a consultant to the committee to formulate a well-coordinated and integrated national programme which will address youth unemployment in Ghana.

² In a report of the first six months proceedings of the meetings of the ten-member committee put in place by the then National Security Coordinator, dated the 18th October, 2005, a decision was taken to enhance the membership of the committee to ensure a cross sectorial planning about how to tackle youth unemployment in the country. The specific ministries that were selected to be part of the planning team were the ministries of agriculture, fisheries, forestry, local government and rural development, and trade and industry. The ministers in charge of these ministries were accordingly invited to serve on the planning team.

³ In a letter to Hon. Joseph Kofi Adda, the then minister for Manpower, Youth and Employment, dated 10th April 2006 and signed by the Chief of Staff, Mr. Kwadwo Mpiani, a directive was given for the NYEP Secretariat to be set up under the then Ministry of Manpower, Youth and Employment (MMYE).

⁴ In an interview with Dr. Sam G. Amoo, former National Security Coordinator in the Kufuor administration in Accra on 26th January 2010, he admitted that he and his team who formulated the NYEP were not experts on issues related to youth unemployment and may have glossed over crucial issues that could have made the NYEP more effective in solving the problem of youth unemployment during its formulation process. He explained that the need to urgently tackle the problem of youth unemployment without delay was paramount and superseded “the luxury of consulting the youth themselves for their input”. This, according to him would have been a time consuming exercise.

⁵ The initiative to consult and solicit direct youth contribution and influence in the drafting of the 2008 national youth policy was in tandem with the view of Pitkin (1967) who argued that representatives must consult their constituents in areas where the constituents and representatives are relatively equal in wisdom and capacity.

⁶ The three NUGS Presidents who made contributions to the formulation of the *Ghana Vision 2020* (Haruna Iddrisu) and the *Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy I* (William Yamoah) & *Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy II* (Ken Abotsi) made this point when I interviewed them separately between 14th and 20th October, 2010 in Accra.

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