

# Young People and Policy Narratives in sub-Saharan Africa<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

Both agriculture and young people are high on African development agendas. African governments, through the Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme, (CAADP) have agreed to commit at least ten percent of their budgets to agriculture with the goal of a six percent growth in the sector. By the end of 2010, 22 governments had prepared and signed regional compacts setting out a strategy and investment plan for agricultural development (IFPRI 2010). Greater attention on African agriculture is also reflected in an increased aid policy focus (de Janvry and Sadoulet 2012). The underlying rationale is to increase productivity across agro-industry so that agriculture can play its historic role as an 'engine' of economic growth in the transition to more industrialised economies. Interest in agriculture has been further heightened by the food, fuel and financial crises and the knock-on effects on both rural producers and consumers. There are concerns too about the impacts of the crises on young people, and in African policy agendas this is reflected in increased attention to high rates of youth unemployment and underemployment.

However, little research has been, or is being published, and presumably conducted, linking youth and agriculture in Africa. A rapid review of academic literature published between 1980 and 2010, and relating in some way to young people and Africa, found that 65 percent of 2,523 papers focused on *health, sexuality/reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, nutrition and disabilities/mental health* (Kuchanny and Sumberg 2011). Taken together, agriculture (23 articles), employment/livelihoods (70 articles) and child labour (48 articles) accounted for only six percent of all articles identified. The review suggests there has been a long-term decline in the relative research attention given to education and agriculture, work and migration. Despite this limited research base, policy pertaining to young people and agriculture is actively being argued, made and implemented throughout Africa.

It is well known that policy advocates use a variety of different strategies and tactics in order to reinforce or change attitudes to problems or particular policy options. One of these 'weapon[s] of advocacy and consensus' (Weiss 1989:117) is framing, 'the process of selecting, emphasizing, and organizing aspects of complex issues, according to overriding evaluative or analytical criterion' (Daviter 2007:654).

The basic observation underpinning the interest in framing is that in some situations small changes 'in the presentation of an issue or an event produce (sometimes large) changes of opinion' (Chong & Druckman 2007: 104). This is referred to as the 'framing effect'. While much of the research literature focuses on the effects of framing by elites (e.g. politicians) on public opinion, the same dynamic plays out among non-elites, for example, within policy communities and so on. Chong and Druckman (2007:111) suggest that framing can work at three levels: 'making new beliefs available about an issue, making

certain available beliefs accessible, or making beliefs applicable or 'strong' in people's evaluations'. Framing is best conceptualised as a process that evolves over time (Chong & Druckman 2007): it is a political act which, if successful, carries with it the ability 'to influence ensuing policy dynamics over the long run to the extent that the specific representation and delineation of policy issues shapes the formation of substantive interests and at times restructures constituencies' (Daviter 2007: 655).

Within policy processes, framing and narratives work closely together. A policy narrative is a story that provides a simple and accessible explanation of a complex situation (Keeley and Scoones 1999; Roe 1991). As such, a narrative highlights a specific problem and then identifies its cause and a preferred policy response. Policy narratives use stylised facts in an effort to engender action: they are not encumbered by theory, details, caveats, uncertainty or the often inconvenient truths of site and context specificity. Some narratives are surprisingly resilient despite a lack of supporting evidence or the undermining of their key elements by empirical research and bitter experience. Framing and narrative work hand-in-hand to cut through the disorder and complexity of the real world. Policy advocates use competing narratives, framed in particular ways, to push policy processes toward their favoured responses.

This paper is about the portrayal of youth in policy documentation in sub-Saharan Africa. Historically, young people's engagement with policy and the array of institutions that affect their lives can be characterised by two broad, interacting themes: marginalisation and mobilisation. Marginalisation is associated with deeply rooted tendencies to defer to age in 'gerontocratic' societies (see, for example, Harris 2004), leaving young people outside circles of power, or lacking in 'voice' (see also te Lintelo 2011). This can lead to youth disaffection, which may either catalyse young people to mobilise, or make them a fertile recruiting ground for the political projects of others (e.g. Peters et al 2003; Peters and Richards 1998; Richards 1995). Thus, mobilisation can be seen to be, at least in part, a consequence of isolation and disempowerment. These themes are evident, to varying degrees, in each of five study countries we focus on in this paper: Ethiopia; Ghana; Kenya; Malawi; and Senegal. It is based on a review of key national policy documents and other formal policy documentation in the five countries. The review sought to discover how rural youth and youth-related issues are portrayed. Major policy domains were considered including: agriculture and rural development; education; health; employment; economic development; crime and security; natural resource management; and climate change. The analysis focused on the visibility of young people within the policy domain; the content of policy frames and narratives on young people; and linkages between youth and agriculture.

The argument we develop is that over a number of key policy areas, youth and the issues and challenges associated with them, are often the objects of negative framings. These framings are associated with narratives

that portray youth as a problem that needs to be addressed by policy. As a consequence, the resulting policies are generally controlling rather than empowering, take little account of young people's views and perspectives and lack coherence. Further, in most youth-related policies and the narratives that support them, 'the youth' are presented as a homogeneous group, undifferentiated by gender, age, class or religion, and existing independently of families, communities and broader social relations. Such failure to consider youth in their social context means policy scenarios are unrealistic. In relation to policy addressing the young people – agrifood nexus we argue that there is a significant tension between what is perceived as 'good' for the development of the agrifood sector and what is 'good' for rural young people. Until this tension is acknowledged and addressed, it is unlikely that policy objectives will be achieved in either of these two areas.

Youth is often understood to be the period of adolescence during which young people make the transition from childhood to adulthood, become sexually mature and experience increasing social and economic autonomy. It can also be seen as a social category that is historically and culturally constructed (Thorsen 2007). As such there may be social or cultural 'events' that are understood to define the transition from childhood to 'youth-hood' to adulthood. In policy, youth is usually defined with reference to age brackets, although as

is evident from Table 1 there is little agreement as to either the upper and lower limits. In the remainder of this paper we use the terms youth and young people interchangeably.

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. The next section presents a policy analysis, addressing the visibility of youth in both 'national youth policies' and sector policies. Framings and narratives of youth emerging from the analysis are then discussed, with specific attention to framings and narratives linking youth and agriculture.

## Policy Analysis

### Visibility

The country studies analysed national policies and strategies across a range of policy domains. Policies fell into two groups: those that are youth-specific and those that are more sectoral (e.g. education, health, ICT, etc.). The analysis shows that while youth are visible in many policy domains, sectoral policies that are clearly formulated and targeted towards youth are very scarce.

Here we analyse: i) youth visibility in youth-specific policies; and ii) youth within sector policies.

### Youth Policies

There are youth-specific policies in each of the five countries which usually take the form of a 'national youth policy'. These policies to a greater or lesser extent highlight problems and challenges considered to have particular resonance for young people, identify categories of young people with special needs or to be given priority in attention, and explicitly consider youth participation as part of the process of formulating policy.

Ethiopia's National Youth Policy (2004) identifies democracy and good governance, economic development, education and training, health, and HIV/AIDS as the priority areas where young people are concerned, and outlines measures needed in each area. The policy highlights the importance of including a youth focus within policy arenas outside of the national youth policy, asserting that 'activities that enhance the implementation capacity and youth participation and benefits' will be mainstreamed in the strategic plans of various implementing agencies including ministries and their respective regional bureau, development institutions, civic societies as well as the private sector (FDRE Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture 2004:51).

Kenya's National Youth Policy (2002), developed under the Ministry of Gender, Sports, Culture & Social Services of Kenya, and the National Youth Action Plan emphasise youth participation and empowerment, employment creation, education and training, health, the environment, youth and the media, arts and culture and sports and recreation. The Kenyan National Youth Policy is based

**Table 1. Definitions of youth.**

Country	Definitions of "youth"
Ethiopia	15 – 29 years (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture 2004) 15 – 24 years (FDRE Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs 1996)
Ghana	15 – 35 years, with the upper limit of 35 years seen as the age where people assume "full adult responsibility" (National Youth Council of Ghana (NYCG), National Youth Policy 2010).
Kenya	15 – 30 years (Government of Kenya, National Youth Policy 2002) 18 – 35 years (The Youth Enterprise Development Fund (YEDF) 2011)
Malawi	14 – 25 years (Government of Malawi (GoM), draft National Youth Policy 2010); however, this is in practice kept "flexible to accommodate young people under 14 years and over 25 years depending on their social and economic circumstances" (National Youth Policy 1996:2). 18 – 35 years (The Youth Enterprise Development Fund (YEDF) 2010 and Malawi Rural Development Fund MARDEF 2010)
Senegal	15 – 35 years (The Youth Development Sector Policy Letter (LPDSJ) 2004) 15 – 19 years (teens); 20 – 24 years (young people); 25 – 35 years (young people of advanced age) (The National Agency of Statistics and Demography 2004)

on the assertion that youth remain on the periphery of the country's affairs and their status has not been accorded due recognition. On the other hand, Kenya also recognises the importance of youth being able to enjoy their youthfulness irrespective of social status and sex – suggesting some awareness of youth as a socially differentiated category - and young people's rights to, among others, education, good health, marriage at the legal age of consent, meaningful employment, freedom of speech; expression and association and participation in making decisions that affect their lives.

Ghana's National Youth Policy was launched in August 2010 by the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MYS). The policy clearly considers young people to be a resource, but it also recognises that this resource must be uncovered and developed, and thus argues for the need to intervene in order to 'empower' young people to fulfil their potential, for the sake of the common good. The policy is built around youth participation in formulating measures to address youth issues, stating:

The youth constitute the true wealth and future of our country [...]. A National Youth Policy provides the opportunity for Government to engage the youth and other stakeholders in meaningful partnership to develop appropriate interventions and services for youth empowerment (MYS 2010:1).

Categories of youth needing special attention are also highlighted. These are school dropouts, students in tertiary institutions, unemployed and under-employed young people, female youth, pregnant adolescent youth, youth in crime, youth at risk, youth with disability and health challenges, and youth with special talents (MYS 2010:19-20). While the previous policy on youth, National Youth Policy 1999, is not mentioned explicitly, there are continuities between the two, for example, in the emphasis on youth empowerment.

The stated goal of Malawi's National Youth Policy (1996) is 'to develop the full potential of the youth and to promote their active participation in National Development' (GoM 2006:1). In order to achieve this the policy identifies four priority areas for action: i) education, training and youth development; ii) science, technology and environment; iii) population, health and nutrition; iv) social services, recreation, sports and culture. Here too, different categories of youth are identified as priority groups: poor youth; street youth; out-of-school youth; youth with disabilities; semi-literate and illiterate youth; deviant youth; and young women.

Senegal's main dedicated youth policies are spelled out in the Letter of Development Policy for Youth and the National Youth Development Fund (FNPJ) (2001). This document assesses the assets and constraints related to young people in the following areas: i) social protection; ii) economic development; iii) voluntary work and citizen participation; iv) development; and v) institutional life. The objective of the FNPJ is to resolve problems of youth

integration by establishing funding channels and mobilising financial resources. .

## Youth within Sector Policies

Dedicated national youth policies aside, coverage of young people within other national policy documents is patchy; either they are scarcely mentioned or their visibility is inconsistent across different areas of policy concern. Specifically, youth feature to varying degrees in overall development policies and sectoral policies relating to education, employment, social protection, poverty and health, environment, agriculture and rural development. For example, Ghana's Medium-Term National Development Policy Framework – the Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda (GSGDA 2010-2013) – makes several references to youth and young people in relation to employment, and to a lesser degree, agriculture, health and demographic change. On the other hand, despite being prepared by the Ministry of Manpower, Youth and Employment, young people do not feature in any significant way in the National Social Protection Policy document. Again, the Ghana Educational Strategic Plan 2010 to 2020 makes little reference to youth, young people or young adults. Here youth are visible only in as much as they are 'out-of-school' and 'hard-to-reach' or having 'special needs'.

In the case of Malawi, while the long term strategic policy, Vision 2020, makes no specific mention of youth and the 2002 Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (MPRS) has no particular focus on young people, only referring to them under Education/Training and HIV/AIDS, the National Environmental Policy, which aims to promote sustainable social and economic development through sound environmental and natural resources management, is the most youth-focused policy outside the national youth strategy.

More often than not young people are identified in relation to a particular problem or vulnerability, or are listed alongside other 'marginal' groups as constituting a group meriting special attention or in need of empowerment. This has implications for narrative statements related to young people. Once a social group is presented as needy or vulnerable etc., it reinforces 'essentialisms', or generalised statements (see Edstrom 2010). Thus, Ghana's GSGDA and National Employment Policy describe young people as a group that must be targeted for intervention because of needs or conditions believed to be intensely and universally experienced by them. Kenya's most recent national development plan, Kenya Vision 2030, includes in its goals for 2012 to increase opportunities for women, youth and all disadvantaged groups. Similarly, youth are mentioned in Senegal's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) in the context of other vulnerable or marginalised groups. The National HIV/AIDS Policy (2003) in Malawi refers to young people in a specific section relating to 'vulnerable populations', which also includes women, children, orphans, widows, widowers, young people, the poor, sex workers, prisoners, mobile populations, persons engaged in same sex relations and people with disabilities, while

Malawi's long term strategic policy, Vision 2020, makes no specific mention of youth.

Recognising that young people have been disadvantaged or marginalised, has led to some attempts to redress this within policy, for example, Ghana's National Employment Policy identifies young people as a vulnerable group and proposes 'technical and vocational education and training to support employment creation through skills development programmes for the unemployed youth' (Government of Ghana, no date: xxv). Malawi's Policy Framework for Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) identifies the need to promote the 'increased participation of [...] youth in economic, social and political affairs by the provision of basic services that enable them to take advantage of opportunities' (GoM 1995:11). National Environmental Policy portrays young people as key players in 'sustainable utilisation of natural resources and other development programmes' (GoM 2004:20), and the policy seeks to 'integrate their concerns in environmental planning decisions at all levels to ensure sustainable social economic development' (Ibid:20).

This link between youth and sustainability, particularly in agriculture, is also evident in Ghana's Food and Agriculture Sector Policy – FASDEP II (2007). Youth are briefly mentioned in two contexts: first, the farming population is ageing but young people are reluctant to engage in agriculture; and second, in a section on 'Youth in Agriculture', that addresses the perceived problem of young people's lack of interest in agriculture. Kenya's Agricultural Extension Policy highlights the need to focus on young people as the clients of extension, and the sustainability of agricultural production is seen as dependent on this. Extension providers are encouraged to deliberately target young people with relevant extension information, and to involve school pupils and out-of-school youth in agricultural activities. In Senegal the National Agency for the Return to Agriculture Plan (A.N.REVA) has an overtly political youth focus, seeking the economic integration of young Senegalese through renewed attachment to the land through the development of integrated farming centres and private initiatives in the agro-silvo-pastoral field.

## *Framing and Narratives*

A number of framings and narratives emerge from the policy documents highlighted above and these are explored below.

### *Youth as the nation's future*

This common narrative, which frames young people as potential 'Nation Builders' (Ethiopia, Kenya) and 'Agents of Change' (Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Senegal), is the most positive narrative identified. A more instrumental variant frames youth as a critical resource for national development. An important element of this narrative is its emphasis on young people's potential contributions. The implication is that unless the more negative narratives (e.g. youth as unemployed, vulnerable and deviant) are

countered through policy, the potential contribution of young people to national development will not be realised. Two points are worthy of note. First, this narrative assumes that the nation they are expected to build is the one envisaged in the policy, but given that few of the policies explicitly involved young people in the formulation processes, these are not futures that young people themselves are being asked to help imagine or plan. Second, there is very little emphasis on personal development or fulfilment: the assumption is that personal fulfilment will result from contributing to the national project rather than vice versa.

In Ethiopia the image of youth as nation builders is often associated with the idea of empowerment. Indeed, empowerment is seen as a prerequisite if young people are to fulfil their potential as nation builders. However the interpretation of empowerment in this narrative is tightly circumscribed: the National Youth Policy suggests that youth should be empowered as good and disciplined citizens (i.e. democratically oriented, knowledgeable and skilled, organised, disciplined and ethical). The assumption is that with greater respect for diversity, greater unity and tolerance, and with better organisation, young people will be able to both exercise their constitutional rights and contribute to economic and social development (FDRE Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture 2004:21). Youth, especially the rural youth, are also portrayed as economic agents of change, most prominently in the agriculture and health sectors where rural youth (and especially those with some education) will be employed in extension programmes. The rural and agricultural development policy portrays young people as more receptive to new knowledge, ideas, technologies and methods; but also as instruments for showcasing such innovations.

In Kenya narratives around young people portray them as a potential resource for national development, whose skills can be leveraged for the benefit of the nation, support policies of capacity building and empowerment. Here personal development that enhances employability is closely aligned with national development goals. The emphasis is on supporting young people by, for example, creating 'financial and market linkages'.

The idea of youth as 'change agents' in Ghana's policy discourse is closely related to the framing of 'youth as a resource', but has an added connotation of the ability of young people – through their agency – to bring about social and economic transformation. This is not a framing that is common in policy documents. The National Youth Policy uses the specific phrase 'change agents' only once in the conclusion: 'The Youth are one of the critical resources of the nation considering their potential, numbers, vitality, and capabilities as change agents for national transformation' (Government of Ghana 2010:26). In the rest of the document the discussion of young people's role in national development is less about a youth-led or initiated change than about their participation in a pre-determined development agenda.

## *Youth as the unemployed and underemployed*

Closely related to the narrative of youth as the nation's future is one highlighting the problem of high levels of unemployment and underemployment among young people. According to this narrative a lack of productive work – or in some variants a poor attitude toward work – not only holds back national development but is also closely associated with vulnerability and negative behaviours such as risk-taking, crime and violence. This narrative is used to support policies toward economic growth and also education and training. Given limited opportunities in the formal economy, however, the preferred approach is self-employment through enterprise development supported by micro-credit. In rural areas this most often means engaging in farming or other agrifood activities.

In Ethiopia, PASDEP cites the 'serious' challenge posed by unemployed youth and asserts that 'creating employment and income-earning opportunities in the modern sector, the informal sector, and on farms is [...] central to the effort to accelerate growth' (Ministry of Finance and Economic Development 2006: 53). This is further manifested across various government programmes aimed at promoting youth employment including the Multi-sectoral Youth Development Strategic Plan, the Youth Sector Development Programs (YSDP) being implemented as part of the National Youth Policy, the education policy, the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) strategy and the Micro and Small Enterprise (MSE) expansion programmes – all aimed at facilitating the growth of self-employment and formal/informal employment opportunities.

Unemployment and underemployment among young people in Ghana's policy documents are occasionally linked to the idea that young people are resources to be developed, with employment the main channel for their energies and training. This is illustrated in the Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) Policy that explicitly frames young people as a resource to be unearthed, nurtured and leveraged. Here young people possess innate and inculcated qualities, including their numbers, youthful energies, imagination, training and skills. In some variants of this narrative, young people merely need the space to manifest these qualities; in these cases, policy documents indicate a need to give young people opportunity and recognition. More often, however, the talents and traits of young people are depicted in a latent or underdeveloped state, needing the government and others in society to develop and make proper use of them. In this portrayal, young people lack sufficient agency and need to be acted upon and guided for the expected societal benefits to be derived from them.

## *Youth as marginalised and vulnerable*

The framing of youth as marginalised, fragile and vulnerable, and as a consequence exposed to and affected by numerous social ills, is pervasive. Young

people are perceived to be marginalised and vulnerable as a result of their exclusion by others from opportunities and benefits. Vulnerability is also constructed in terms of young people's willingness to engage in risky behaviour and their susceptibility to self-destructive and anti-social influences such as drugs that undermine their morals, behavioural, culture and ethics. In this way, vulnerability is related to deviance (see next section). This narrative underpins much of the national youth policy referred to above, and in practice supports policies meant to address young people's health problems, where the emphasis is on almost exclusively on HIV/AIDS, justified by the fact that young people are over-represented among those newly infected (e.g. UNICEF 2011).

## *Youth as deviants*

The framing of young people's behaviours as deviant appears across a range of policy domains and countries including Ghana, Malawi, Senegal and Kenya. Commonly cited deviant behaviours include smoking, drug and alcohol abuse, delinquency, begging and prostitution.

Within the Ghana policy documents different sources of deviance are presented. One framing sees deviance as the consequence of leaving young people to their own devices and leaving their potential untapped – the converse of the common framing of young people as a potential resource. The Ghana National Youth Policy is very detailed in its listing of deviant attitudes and behaviour, corresponding to many of the stereotypes of young people in public perception. It is striking that this picture is painted without reference to any supporting evidence. Under the heading 'Youth Development' the Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda 2010-2013 (NDPC) (2007) similarly presents a list of issues facing or emanating from youth or resulting from their actions, including growing numbers of street children and increasing crime; under-mobilisation and utilisation of youth talents; continuing growth of youth unemployment; and channelling of youth energies into antisocial activities (NDPC 2007:115). Elsewhere in the same document, the rise in internet fraud is specifically linked to young people (Ibid 139). This suggests a relationship between deviance and social neglect of young people. Particularly in the GSGDA, the government's failures to provide policy direction, facilities and resources are mentioned alongside negative phenomena in which young people are said to be involved.

The link between the vulnerability of young people and deviant behaviour is also a key framing in Kenyan policy documents. Young people are described as fragile entities who are easily exposed and affected by social ills. The involvement of youth in criminal activities is noted to be on the increase. Policy documents state that young people are prone to moral, behavioural and cultural changes and take up trends and fashions in line with the times, and this is presented as a risk to economic prosperity. Similarly, Malawi's policy documents note that problems with smoking, drug and alcohol abuse among young people are on the rise, and more effort needed to combat these (GoM 1996:13).



## *Youth as the population problem*

It is ironic that for some policy purposes youth, or a youthful population, is framed as a major contributor to the population problem. Policy documents from Ghana, Malawi and Senegal for example draw a direct link between early pregnancies and child bearing and high population growth. This narrative is used to support policies to provide social services or to create employment for young people, and give more attention to youth issues in general, partly in the interests of young people's well-being.

Ghana's policies (the GSGDA, the National Health Policy, Education Strategic Plan, the ICT Policy and the National Employment Policy) refer to the 'youthful population' and some also warn of the consequences of this phenomenon, including: potential pressures on social services (see Ghana's National Health Policy); increased expenditure on social provisioning such as health and education (see National Health Policy, ICT Policy); and the inability of the job market to absorb these numbers.

## *Youth as future farmers*

There is a central and unresolved tension in how the young people – agrifood nexus is treated in the policy documents. On the one hand they highlight the necessity of mobilising young people if the ambitious plans for agricultural transformation and growth are to be realised. Here youth are framed both as a source of labour and as a potential entrepreneurial force for job creation. On the other hand, policy documents universally acknowledge rural young people's apparent lack of interest in agriculture, and the resulting problems of migration and an ageing farm population. These narratives are used to support policies to strengthen the place of agriculture in the school curriculum, sensitise young people to the dangers of the city, and improve rural service provision and access to agricultural technology and credit.

The tension described above is epitomised in Ethiopia's policy treatment of the young people – agrifood nexus. The agriculture sector is the centrepiece of the country's overall development plan, and the most detailed policy narratives around young people and agriculture appear in the agricultural and rural development policy. Here it is argued that agricultural sector transformation requires the adoption of appropriate labour intensive, capital saving strategies and methods that will allow the rural labour force to be employed more effectively. However, this will depend on a commitment to strenuous agricultural work. Rural youth are seen as the major source of labour required for agriculture based growth as they are likely to be relatively more educated, and therefore more receptive to new ideas, methods and approaches. As such, it is argued, their participation in and commitment to the agricultural transformation is more important than that of any other section of the rural society (FDRE Ministry of Information 2002:254).

Rural and slightly more educated youth, however, are also presented as a potential obstacle in the sense that they may not consider the agricultural sector as a viable or desirable means of livelihood (FDRE Ministry of Information, 2002). This is premised on the assertion that neither urban nor rural youth currently in school are interested in engaging in agricultural training or ultimately farming, and instead 'perceive agriculture as an embodiment of poverty and backwardness. [...] For this group of youth the apparent poverty and misery within which the vast majority of agrarian population is forced to live, and which this group of youth is witness to, is simply proof enough that any occupation in that field will lead to a similar fate (Ibid:42)'.<sup>9</sup> This is held up as being serious enough to result in a situation where work in the agricultural sector becomes only a last resort for the new generation of educated rural youth (Ibid:43). Collapse of the urban economy is seen as the 'inevitable' consequence of young people being neither willing nor possessing the means to become farmers, continuing instead to migrate to urban centres lacking the capacity to absorb them. This assertion is used to prop up the argument that at least up to 70 percent of rural youth and children currently attending school must remain in rural areas and should be prepared to pursue agricultural livelihoods. This ties in with the need to transform the agricultural sector by cultivating a new generation of farmers equipped with more scientific knowledge, skills and tools; not just because there are no viable alternative careers, but more importantly because that is the key ingredient in bringing about the growth sought in the agricultural sector (Ibid:47). Similar discourses about the tension between the need for a trained and better educated rural labour force and tendencies for rural young people to view agricultural work as undesirable and degrading are found in the Ethiopian government's capacity building policy (Ibid: 36-37;40). This is set against the acknowledgement that education and training policy should take into account the fact that agriculture will continue to be the major avenue of employment for most rural youth, stressing the need to devise an appropriate level of training that will prepare them for agricultural occupations, not only in terms of the required knowledge and skills but also in terms of their willingness and commitment to pursue these activities (Ibid:117-118, 128-129).

These narratives are evident in policy documents from other countries. Young people are linked with agriculture throughout the Ghanaian policy documents which strongly emphasise the need to 'attract' young people into the sector. Again, the assumption, both implicit and explicitly stated, is that young people are not interested in employment in the agriculture sector: they are dis-incentivised by the perception of the high risks and low income associated with most agricultural activities. The National Employment Policy suggests that the problem lies in the larger rural environment of poverty. The proposed solution is to make the sector a viable and attractive means of employment and income for young people, for example, through policies such as The GSGDA and FASDEP II, which explicitly position a modernised agricultural sector as having the potential to bring about

economic and social transformation, effectively driving the new development agenda (NDPC 2007:38). Both policies note that the sector does not live up to its potential, but they differ in their analysis of the problem, which informs the ways in which young people are brought into the discussion.

In the GSGDA policy, agricultural sector underperformance is seen as a problem of low productivity, low incomes, high risk, and lack of competitiveness in international markets. Youth are mentioned in relation to proposals to reduce the risks inherent in agriculture to make the sector more 'attractive' via: technology and mechanisation; provision of better facilities and infrastructure (for adding value to, storing, transporting and marketing agricultural products); sustainable land management; training and extension services; formation of farmer-based organisations; enhancing access to international markets; and development of domestic markets. FASDEP II highlights human resource constraints to agricultural growth. Young people are framed as a potential solution to this problem by virtue of their youth and higher levels of education compared to current farmers. Resource and support service provision are seen as the way to attract young people into agriculture, especially those with technical skills or who are unemployed. This perspective is echoed in the 'Programme for Youth Employment and Accelerated Agricultural Production' (n.d.) of the Ministry of Food and Agriculture, which offers incentives for young people to engage in farming, fishing and livestock rearing in the form of access to extension services and resources such as land, inputs and machinery.

Narratives around young people and agriculture in the Kenyan documents also relate very much to keeping young people engaged in agriculture, and, importantly, keeping them in rural areas. This is to be achieved via government support and provision of extension services targeting gender and youth programmes. The National Agricultural Sector Extension policy states it will disseminate gender-sensitive technologies and interventions that target young people, in and outside school, to help mould them as future farmers and agribusiness entrepreneurs. Irrigation is also seen as having the potential to create opportunities for youth to be economically engaged in agriculture while stemming rural-urban migration (ASDS 2010-2020). The need to frame agricultural engagement in more 'modern' terms, relating it to business, is also emphasised, the perceived need for this is based on narratives about young people's need to see quick results: 'Being dynamic and energetic, the youth are impatient and need quick and tangible results to be attracted to any business. To attract the youth into agriculture, attitudes must change among rural communities to perceive it as a business and make it commercially viable.' (ASDS 2010-2020: 81)

Senegal's Letter of Development Policy for Youth (LPDSJ) also sees youth involvement in agriculture as key to economic growth, underlining as assets: i) 'the political will to commit young people in agriculture'; and ii) 'the existence of real opportunities of economic

insertion in craft industry, agriculture and fishing' – thus framing agriculture more broadly than crop and livestock activities. This is also evident in The Agro-Forestry-Pastoral Guidance Law, which considers the involvement of young men in agriculture as crucial, underscoring the importance of 'modernity' in terms of how careers in agriculture are portrayed, as well as access to credit and land reform. The creation of financially rewarding employment in rural areas is a general objective of Senegal's REVA plan. Uniquely among the country policies examined, this includes explicit reference to improving the status of agricultural professions, in the first instance to attract those interested in farming as a profession and second, to create the right conditions for agriculture to absorb a significant proportion of the population of youth who might otherwise migrate internationally.

Policy narratives relating youth to agriculture in Malawi, where present, tend to be part of discussions concerning agricultural productivity and participating in economic activity (labour markets) in order to benefit from improved agricultural/rural productivity. Under its economic empowerment pillar Malawi's growth and development strategy includes a focus on youth participation in rural development in order to benefit from increased rural community and business productivity. While the policy does not mention youth directly under the economic growth pillar which features policies strongly oriented towards agricultural development, linkages between youth and agriculture are implicit. For example, the policies sketched out as a means to achieve economic empowerment, namely, ensuring rural communities' links to markets via targeted infrastructure development and the development of rural cooperatives to lower transaction costs, are also mentioned elsewhere in relation to increasing agricultural productivity. Malawi's Policy Alleviation Programme regards low agriculture productivity as a cause of poverty among youth, yet acknowledges the lack of a specific youth-poverty focus in the agricultural sectoral plan. To this end, PAP specifically puts Agriculture, Food Security and Irrigation as policy initiatives that should target various groups including 'Youth in Poverty'. The Youth Policy links agricultural issues directly to youth unemployment and rural/urban migration. It acknowledges that the agriculture sector accounts for about 86 percent of the total labour force in the country but it 'continues to lose its significance due to land pressure while the labour market in the industrial and social sectors remains small' (GoM 1996: 2). It is within this context that there is 'increased rural/urban drift and the increasing rate of unemployment and under-employment of the youth'.

## Conclusion

This paper has examined the way youth are portrayed in key national policy documents in five countries in sub-Saharan Africa: Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Ghana and Senegal. The analysis focuses on the visibility of young people, the framing and narratives relating to young people, and in particular between youth and agriculture.

Over a number of key policy areas, youth and the issues and challenges associated with them are generally introduced via negative framings. These framings are associated with narratives that portray youth as a problem that needs to be addressed by policy. These narratives resemble those used to justify policy focused on other identified vulnerable or problematic groups – the poor, women, disabled people, etc. – using similar terms, objectives and process (especially participation). Further, the resulting policies take little account of young people's views and perspectives and are generally not aligned or coordinated.

The two most significant themes emerging from the policy narrative analysis are closely related to each other: youth as 'the nation's future' and youth as underemployed or unemployed. An important element of the former narrative is the way it emphasises the potential of young people to contribute: it is thus forward looking. The implication is that unless policy counters the more negative narratives (e.g. youth as unemployed, vulnerable and deviant), the potential contribution of young people to national development will not be realised. According to the narrative relating young people to under- or unemployment a lack of productive work not only holds back national development but is also closely associated with vulnerability and negative behaviours such as risk-taking, crime and violence. This narrative is used to buttress policies oriented toward economic growth and also education and training.

In much of the policy documentation examined in this analysis a lack of data underpinning the framings and narratives is notable. Effective policies need to be based on sound data. We therefore need research that more clearly points to what young people are actually doing, where and with what end in view. In relation to policy addressing the young people – agrifood nexus there is a significant tension between what is perceived as good for the development of the agrifood sector and what is good for rural young people. Until this tension is acknowledged and addressed, policy objectives in either area are unlikely to be achieved.

## End Notes

- <sup>1</sup> This research was undertaken as part of the Future Agriculture Consortium's Young People and Agrifood theme. The Future Agricultures Consortium (FAC) is concerned with the politics around and potential implications of alternative visions of the future of African agriculture. The young people and agrifood theme considers the future engagement of young people with agriculture using a broad framing of the agrifood sector and the critical role that agribusiness plays within it going beyond often-dominant, narrow conceptions of an agriculture that focus on farming as crop and livestock production.
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<sup>8</sup> Anyidoho, 2011; Kayuni, 2011; Ndungu, 2011; Sall, 2011; Tadele, 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Translated from the original Amharic text

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