



Graduate School of Development Studies

**Retrenched to Oblivion?
Examining the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy
through the Spectrum of Youth Participation**

A Research Paper presented by:

DANIEL MSONDA
(Malawi)

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for obtaining the degree of
MASTERS OF ARTS IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Specialisation:
Governance and Democracy
(G&D)

Members of the examining committee:

Dr. Sylvia Bergh (Supervisor)
Dr. Auma Okwany (Second reader)

The Hague, The Netherlands
September, 2009

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Inquiries:

Postal address: Institute of Social Studies
 P.O. Box 29776
 2502 LT The Hague
 The Netherlands

Location: Kortenaerkade 12
 2518 AX The Hague
 The Netherlands

Telephone: +31 70 426 0460

Fax: +31 70 426 0799

Special Dedication

This research paper is dedicated to my late Dad, Russell Msonda, who was taken away from me much too early. I love you and I miss you with all my heart. You always believed in me and encouraged me to create my own destiny. I know you are always by my side, and I trust that you are proud of me. Your spirit continues to provide me with the strength to achieve my goals. You will always be a great Dad and there is not a day that goes by without thinking about you. You were always there when I needed you, and I know you will continue to watch over me and the family.

I love you Dad.

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List of Acronyms

AIDS	Acquired Immuno-Deficiency Syndrome
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DoY	Department of Youth
DYO	District Youth Officer
G&D	Governance and Democracy
HIV	Human Immuno-Deficiency Virus
ICPD	International Conference on Population and Development
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISS	Institute of Social Studies
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MEPD	Ministry of Economic Planning and Development
MGDS	Malawi Growth and Development Strategy
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NSO	National Statistical Office
NYCOM	National Youth Council of Malawi
PRS	Poverty Reduction Strategy
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infection
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WHO	World Health Organisation
YECE	Youth Empowerment and Civic Education

Abstract

Living in poverty as a young person may mean an inability to get an education, get a decent job, or secure ample shelter. It may also mean being more vulnerable to preventable diseases, crime and violence, inadequate access to justice, as well as exclusion from political and development processes in one's community. For young people, poverty is deeply about equality, specifically in relation to opportunities and decision-making, or the lack thereof. There has for many years been general acceptance, in principle, that young people are entitled to the full realization of their social and economic rights – to education, to health care, to an adequate standard of living for proper development. Various international organizations (UN bodies, the African Union, and various international NGOs) now recognize that young people are subjects of rights, rather than mere recipients of adult protection, and that those rights demand that young people themselves are entitled to be heard and to meaningfully participate in development processes, including poverty reduction strategy (PRS) processes. In this research I investigate the extent to which the Malawi Government respected young people's rights to participate in the development of the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS), which is the country's version of the PRS. I also examine the reasons behind the (non)participation and the implications of this on the content of the MGDS with regard to issues that affect young people in Malawi. I use theories of power and agency; participation; rights based approaches; democratic discourses; and social construction of youth to explain my findings from the primary and secondary qualitative data collected for this purpose. In a nutshell, the findings point to the fact that young people are not a priority target group in the MGDS and there are structural and institutional explanations for this state of affairs. With a prevalent youth bulge in Malawi's population, this could be a recipe for social unrest in the near future.

Relevance to Development Studies

The adoption of socio-economic reforms by most developing countries, including Malawi, has led to a breakdown in social support institutions, in the context of retrenched state support for social services that have a direct impact on young people, including health, education, social welfare and other services. While these problems are not unique to young people, they tend to disproportionately affect young people. One of the most competent groups to highlight the impact of poverty on young people and propose solutions for addressing these problems are the young people themselves. It is therefore imperative that young people are involved in all aspects of planning, implementation and evaluation of development strategies, including Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRSs).

This research paper highlights the potential contributing factors to exclusion of young people from PRS processes, with a focus on the case of the Malawi. It is hoped that the findings of this paper will contribute to the current ongoing debates on participatory development and particularly highlight the importance of providing a political space for the participation of the significant proportion of the population of the world: Young People.

Keywords

Youth, participation, poverty, MGDS, PRS(P), power, youth bulge, youth rights, Malawi

Acknowledgements

Foremost, I would like to thank God for blessing me with all the gifts and special favours in my life.

I register my special appreciation to Dr. Sylvia Bergh, my supervisor who has guided me through the entire research process. Sylvia, your encouragement and support gave me a lot of strength in conducting this research. Your unwavering advice was nothing short of inspiring. I appreciate your talking to me and keeping me focused when you could tell I was getting off track. I also appreciate the guidance provided by Dr. Auma Okwany, the second reader of this Paper. Auma, your direction was instrumental in shaping up this study.

My special gratitude to Dr. Karim Knio, the convenor of the G&D specialisation, for making the specialisation very exciting and stimulating. Thank you Karim for always expecting better from your students, especially myself. Your exploratory approach to academic and real life issues will always be admired. All G&D teaching and administrative staff also earn special appreciation for all the support you rendered to me during my academic life at ISS.

Mom, you are awesome. You have never stopped believing in me and we have gotten through a great deal together. I thank you for all your support, prayers, and encouragement over the past year. Tinkhani, my kid brother, thanks for taking over the mantle of “first born” during my absence. I appreciate your resilience.

All friends and classmates in G&D, thanks for the good times... we were such an amazing family! I will live to cherish all the great moments we shared academically and socially. Manako Chipumbu, you will always stand out from the bunch. Thanks Manako for all the wonderful support you gave me. You are such a cherub.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“Poverty is inseparably linked to lack of access to or loss of control over resources, including land, skills, knowledge, capital and social connections. Without those resources, people have limited access to institutions, markets, employment and public services. Young people are particularly affected by this situation. Therefore, specific measures are needed to address the juvenilization and feminization of poverty”. – Paragraph 40, World Programme of Action for Youth (United Nations, 1995)

This chapter provides a background to the study and attempts to link youth participation to broader debates in the field of development studies. It further sets out the research objectives, questions and the methodology that was followed to answer the questions. It also informs the reader about the scope and limitations within which this research should be read.

1.1 Background

Poverty reduction strategies emerged largely in the last 15 years as national policy frameworks for addressing poverty. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund launched the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS)¹ initiative to help make public policy in low-income countries more effective in reducing poverty. Poor countries seeking debt relief have been required to show how they plan to use the savings from debt relief to reduce poverty

PRs act as road maps by setting priorities for poverty-focused domestic policies and programmes. They describe the macroeconomic, structural, and social policies and

¹ Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) are but one stage in the development process of the full Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS). I believe it is important that young people are involved in both the PRSP and PRS processes. For that reason, I will use the terms PRS and PRSP interchangeably throughout this paper.

programmes that a country will pursue over several years to promote socio-economic growth and reduce poverty, as well as to secure financing from international sources. In theory, PRSs are supposed to be prepared by governments in low-income countries through a participatory process involving domestic stakeholders² and with the coordinated support of international financial institutions, bilateral donors, and the United Nations. PRSs are results-oriented, containing targets and indicators. The World Bank and the IMF view ownership of the PRSs by key stakeholders as a major departure from their past practice of reliance on elite level, often private agreements (Curtain, 2006). Most of the PRSs are set within a three to five-year rolling timeframe and reported on (and reviewed) annually. PRSs are supposed to be processes, as much as they are documents, and there are several steps to formulating, implementing, and monitoring the strategy. As of the end of 2006, over 60 countries had prepared PRSs (*ibid*). The Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS) is Malawi's version of the PRS and is the overarching development strategy for the country for the period from 2006/07 to 2010/2011 fiscal years. The purpose of the MGDS is to serve as a single reference document for policy makers in Government; the Private Sector; Civil Society Organizations; Donors and Cooperating Partners and the general public on socio-economic growth and development priorities for Malawi (MGDS, 2006).

PRS processes have considerable impact on young people, who form a significant proportion of the population and a large number of those living below the poverty line in a majority of developing countries (UNFPA, 2005). Often the conditions of living in poverty negatively affect the ability of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged youth to defend their rights and responsibilities. Young people living in poverty are, owing to their situation, disempowered and excluded from society, and their capacity to secure their own rights may be extremely limited. Wratten (1995: 17) asserts, and I agree, that 'against the backdrop of poverty, which has aspects of vulnerability and dependency, impoverished youth are left defenceless, insecure and exposed to risks, shocks and stress'. Involving young people in the PRSP process could therefore be a way to build the

² Stakeholders include government departments, civil society, private sector, politicians and, to the extent possible, the general public.

capacity of young people to understand and claim their economic and social rights. This may be particularly critical for youth living in chronically poor households, young women living in societies that pay no attention to their basic human rights, and young people living with a disability, among others.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, however, young people are often disregarded in the formulation of poverty reduction strategies. This assertion is based on an analysis³ of 55 PRSPs developed by the end of April 2006, which shows that young people are under-represented, despite their large share of the populations of poor countries. Only one in five poverty reduction strategy documents identify young people as a major group vulnerable to poverty. Another one in three PRSPs identify in a minor way young people's vulnerability to poverty. One in four PRSPs identify youth as merely one of several groups vulnerable to poverty and only 41% of the reviewed PRSPs recorded that young people were consulted during the formulation process (Curtain, 2006).

According to UNFPA, one reason for young people's invisibility is to do with the "narrow focus of the poverty assessments commonly used by governments and international agencies. This is often due to the static view of poverty used which does not recognize the variable circumstances in which most young people find themselves" (UNFPA 2005: vii). Wulff (1995) suggests that youth have been subjected to certain levels of silencing and denial of personhood by communities and adults, which has led to their agency receiving less attention in society in general.

Exclusion of young people in development has further been well documented in development literature (Sommers, 2006; Pernia, 2003; Curtain, 2004; Larsen, 2007). Sommers (*ibid*) declares that 'they are a demographic majority that sees itself as an outcast minority' (Sommers, 2006: 12). Youths are expected to be passive recipients of services from adults and institutions and, as a result, they have not been actively and meaningfully involved in decision making and interventions about issues which affect them as a target group. As Pernia (2003) puts it, economists usually assume that 'a rising

³ This analysis was commissioned by UNFPA in 2005 (See UNFPA, 2005)

tide will float all boats'. In other words, the youth are assumed to benefit from the trickle down effects of economic growth, without necessarily being specifically targeted.

1.2 Youth in Malawi

The youth profile in Malawi indicates that out of the population of 12.3 million in 2005 according to the 1998 Population and Housing Census projection, 46% are young people 15 years and below (National Youth Council of Malawi, 2006). The World Bank estimates that 60% of the population of Malawi is below age 20 (World Bank, 2006: xvi). Of these, for every 100 females there are 96 males. The literacy rate amongst the youth aged 15-24 is estimated at 78% with slightly more males (81%) than females (74%) being literate (National Statistical Office, 2005).

Although youth constitute a significant proportion of the population, they lack basic opportunities that would enable them to develop their full potential. This has been compounded by the presence of a range of adverse conditions that impinge on the youth; the most perverse being poverty. The Integrated Household Survey (2005) estimates that 53% of Malawians live below the poverty line. This is because the economic base at national level has resulted in very minimal investment in real terms in the social sector by the government. In addition, the inability of the educational system to prepare the youth for the challenges of after school life has contributed to the enormous youth unemployment and under-employment as the system favours white-collar jobs. Unequal access to the already limited opportunities has further marginalized other youth groups such as young women and disabled and deviant youth.

1.3 Problem statement and Justification

Why is it important to specifically take into account young people's needs, views and ideas in development planning and poverty alleviation efforts? Young people's large share of the total population in all developing countries justifies providing them with their fair share of resources (UNFPA 2005: ix). According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) young people (defined as aged 10 to 24 years) account for 29

per cent of the population in low and middle-income countries (or 1.4 billion in number) (UNFPA 2005: iv).

If poverty is to be eradicated in developing countries, development frameworks have to target the significant proportion of the population: young people. If poverty for young people is in part about accessing opportunities and decision-making processes, then solutions must focus on the empowerment of young people themselves, especially those suffering the greatest discrimination and social exclusion (Larsen, 2007). Consultation, dialogue, and eventual partnership with young people and their organizations becomes essential to tackling more effectively the well-established patterns of inequality that sentence young people, their families, and their communities to reoccurring cycles of poverty (*ibid*). Logically, the terms of most Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRSs) should require that young people be involved and be a specific focus group in their formulation.

1.3.1 The Youth Bulge in Malawi: Sitting on a time bomb?

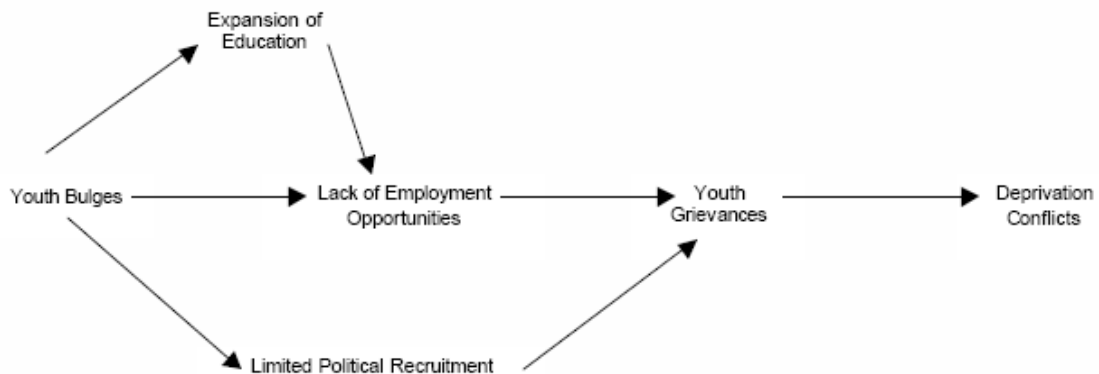
As stated in the preceding section, young people constitute a significant proportion of the population of most developing countries. Three months after the attacks of September 11, 2001, the *New York Times* asked, ‘Is the Devil in the Demographics?’ (Sciolino, 2001). In this section I will attempt to demonstrate that there could be a “devil” in Malawi’s demographics if young people are not given the attention they deserve in development, particularly in the PRS processes.

The term “youth bulge” is generally defined as the number of young people (generally between ages 15 and 24) as a percentage of the total adult population. A bulge, literally defined as an “irregular swelling” (Abate, 1998), should be observable in the young adult section of the population age pyramid. Rapidly declining fertility rates in most developing countries have resulted in a "youth bulge" in their populations – the largest in history – and this will be the next generation of workers, parents, citizens, and leaders.

The youth bulge in the population, in association with other key socio-economic indicators, is an important indicator of potential problems and opportunities for governments and society. One measure of the youth bulge that captures tensions between the young and older generations is the proportion of the population aged 15 to 24 years. For example, Curtain (2004) notes that the English Revolution of the 17th century, the French revolution of the 18th eighteenth century and most twentieth-century mayhems in developing countries have occurred when exceptionally large youth bulges in the population were present.

Curtain’s view has its origins in the relative deprivation theory and tends to see the eruption of political violence as a rational means to redress economic and political grievances (Sambanis 2001: 223). Motives for committing political violence can be economic (poverty, economic recession or inequality) or political (lack of democracy, absence of minority representation). Urdal (2004) believes unemployment causes grievances, especially if expectations are raised through expansions in education. Similarly, grievances arise if possibilities to influence the political system and attain elite positions are limited (Urdal 2004: 3). Urdal’s model is graphically represented as follows:

Figure 1: Urdal’s Model of Youth Bulge and Conflict



If not the bulge shape in and of itself, then why do youthful populations influence the risk of insurgency? Urdal, (*ibid*) argues that the presence of young adults is not as important

as the degree of alienation, frustration, and marginalization they experience. He provides evidence that the combination of youth bulges and poor economic performance can be explosive. This he says is bad news for regions that currently exhibit both features, often in coexistence with intermediary and unstable political regimes, in particularly Sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab world (Urdal 2004: 2)

According to the World Bank, Malawi has a very young and rapidly growing population, which is a key factor of Malawi’s persistent poverty. As indicated earlier, Malawi’s total population in 2005 was estimated at 12.3 million, of which about 60 percent is under the age of 20 (World Bank 2006: xvi). This means Malawi has a youth bulge and, if deliberate efforts are not made to cater for the needs of young people in development frameworks, this could be a recipe for civil unrest. On the other hand, if Malawi invests and actively engages young people in its development agenda, the youth bulge could be a “demographic bonus” to the country as discussed in the subsequent paragraphs.

The figure below shows the population projections which clearly depict Malawi’s youth bulge:

Figure 2: Malawi’s Projected Youth Bulge



Source: National Statistical Office Population Projections, 2005

In this research I will argue that Malawi is experiencing a Youth Bulge, but that government and other actors are giving a blind eye to the potential trouble that is brewing as a result of this youth bulge.

It is important to note, however, that much as the youth bulges in the developing countries cannot be wished away, the high number of young people has a lot economic, political and socio-cultural significance. The economic advantages are best explained by the modernisation theories, which see investment in industrialisation as the only way for development, and the neo-liberal approaches which focus on the market and high productivity to achieve development. For example, substantial investment in the education of the young could create a high quality labour force with high prospects of productivity which is conducive for investment and saving (Messkoub, 1999). Youth bulges also increase the growth of labour force and the total share of people of working age (15-60) which can increase productivity, incomes, contribution to national output and contribute to poverty reduction (Birdsall, 2001). The working youth will also benefit from better health. Furthermore, young people consume more in terms of fashion, media, food, technology than other age groups. This will result in higher aggregate consumption and higher productivity creating more opportunities (World Bank, 2007). A good example of this benefit of the youth bulge is the East Asian Miracle (Page, 1994). Malawi could also economically benefit from the large pool of energetic and versatile young people if the right policies and strategies are put in place.

My analysis in this research will focus on institutional structures of representation for young people as well as government policies, particularly the MGDS, Malawi's version of the PRS.

1.4 Research objective and questions

In this research, I will investigate the extent to which young people are engaged in development programming in Malawi. Particularly, I will examine the participation of young people in the formulation of the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy

(MGDS), which is Malawi's version of the PRSP, and the country's major development framework⁴. I will further examine the extent to which the MGDS is responsive to the needs of young people in Malawi and tease out the facilitating and/or constraining factors for youth (non)responsiveness of the MGDS. I will also attempt to put forth the potential implications of non-prioritization of young people in development processes, for possible consideration by development planners in Malawi.

In order to address the above issues, I have formulated the following questions and sub-questions:

Research Question 1: To what extent did young people participate in the development of the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy?

- a) To what extent is the Malawi Government operationalising the African Youth Charter and other conventions, to which it is a signatory, which call for participation of young people in the design of development programmes?
- b) Were there adequate structures of representation for young people at the various stages of the development process of the MGDS?

Research Question 2: Is the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy responsive to the needs of young people of Malawi?

- c) To what extent does the MGDS identify young people as a specific group affected by poverty?
- d) To what extent do issues⁵ related to young people feature across various thematic areas and sectors in the MGDS?

⁴ It has to be noted that in the spirit of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, donors are expected to align their programmes and planning frameworks to the national development frameworks (in this case the MGDS). Absence of a focus on youth in the MGDS may entail less prioritization of youth issues by donors as well.

⁵ By "issues", I mean those identified in the Malawi National Youth Policy and they include unemployment, poverty, marginalization, inadequate vocational training opportunities, inadequate access to secondary and tertiary education, child labour and exploitation, orphan-hood and harmful cultural practices.

- e) To what extent did various youth related literature including key policy related documents (such as the National Youth Policy) inform the preparation of the MGDS?

1.5 Research methodology and methods

In order to obtain answers to the research questions raised above, I used the social constructivist approach, which maintains that there is no one right answer and the researched are actively engaged in constructing their world (Laws et al, 2003). This is particularly relevant for research question 1 and its related sub-questions. Exploratory qualitative methods were used in order to establish the “descriptions and interpretations” of the phenomena as well as “learning about peoples’ feelings, thoughts and experiences” (*ibid*). For research question 2, I used discourse analysis⁶ to explore the level to which the MGDS responds to the need of young people of Malawi as highlighted in the National Youth Policy (2007).

Primary and secondary data was collected and analyzed as explained in the subsequent section.

1.5.1 Primary data

This study utilized information collected from key informants in youth non-governmental organizations⁷, government institutions and donor agencies in Malawi. A questionnaire was emailed⁸ to the respondents and the completed questionnaires were emailed back to the researcher (myself). The overall response rate was 72% (see Table 1 below). Follow-up on unclear or incomplete answers was done by telephone and email. The following is the breakdown of the respondents and the response rates:

⁶ See Gasper, D and R. Apthorpe (1996) for a detailed description of this methodology.

⁷ Only the NGOs registered by the National Youth Council of Malawi were sampled. This was done for practical reasons, since only the registered NGOs are compiled in a Directory from which the sampling was done.

⁸See reference to this in the limitations section (1.6)

Table 1: Summary of questionnaire respondents

Respondent	Number of questionnaires	Number of responses	Response rate (%)	Comments
District Youth Officer ⁹	29 ¹⁰	18	76	One district youth officer per district, for all the 29 districts in Malawi
Youth-led NGO ¹¹	58	44	76	Two NGOs were randomly sampled per district
Director of Youth in the Ministry of Youth	1	1	100	The questionnaire was filled by the Principal Youth Officer on behalf of the Director who was busy with other issues.
Director of the National Youth Council of Malawi (NYCOM)	1	1	100	The Director of NYCOM responded in person
Donor Agencies	3	2	67	UNICEF, UNFPA and the World Bank were served with the questionnaire, but only UNICEF and UNFPA responded
Ministry of Economic Planning and Development	1	1	100	This is the ministry that is responsible for coordinating the MGDS. The Principal Development Officer responsible for Population issues responded on behalf of the Ministry
Totals	93	67	72%	

⁹ District Youth Officers (DYO) are employees of the Ministry of Youth and are the government focal point for all youth activities in the district. Each district is supposed to have one DYO based under the supervision of the District Commissioner.

¹⁰ Although some districts did not have DYO at the time of this research, I assumed an “acting” DYO would be assigned by the district assembly to handle youth issues at the district level. I therefore still sent the questionnaires to all the 29 districts.

¹¹ A total of 131 youth NGOs had been registered by the National Youth Council of Malawi during the study period. For purposes of this study, two NGOs were sampled per district, one based in a rural setting and one based at the district headquarters (semi-urban setting), making a total of 58 sampled respondents.

Another important source of primary information for this research were minutes of the preparatory meetings for the MGDS. These were sourced from the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development and were provided “in confidence” to the researcher. Due to the qualitative nature of the research, primary data collection also included informal chats using social network sites such as Face-book¹².

1.5.2 Secondary data

The research also utilized secondary data to corroborate and provide empirical backing to the primary data. Typically, literature was reviewed to establish the analytical (Theoretical and conceptual) underpinnings of this research. Academic books, journals, thematic reports of international organizations, government documents and some websites were the main sources of secondary information. A critical assessment of the MGDS was also done to assist in responding to research question 2 and its respective sub-questions.

1.5.3 Data analysis

The data was analyzed in the spirit of ‘transcendental realism’ as put forward by Miles and Huberman (1994: 4). This approach has three main elements, viz data reduction, data display and drawing, and verifying conclusions. This being a qualitative research, particular attention was given to identifying the key themes that arose from the questionnaire responses. The thematic categorization was done by referring back to the research questions and the research objectives to ensure that the analysis remained focused.

1.6 Limitations of the study

This study collected data from institutions only (donor organizations, youth organizations and government institutions), while the concept of ‘participation’, on the other hand, is rooted more in social relations than just in formal institutions. The practicality of collecting data from the community leaders and the youth themselves was not possible

¹² This was important in order to interact with young people in an informal and friendly setting.

due to time constraints. It was therefore only possible to collect the information from institution-based individuals who had access to email/internet and mobile phone facilities. Furthermore, while I recognize and appreciate the role of local governance, political party systems, traditional leadership, diversity and inter-sectionality of youth, youth as social capital and various other vantage points from which to analyze youth participation, this paper could not delve into such issues due to time and space constraints.

The questionnaire was emailed to key informants on the assumption that the responses would be emailed back to the researcher (myself) for analysis. Much as my physical interaction with the respondents would have been ideal for collecting information, as it would have allowed for probing and modification of some questions, I could not travel to Malawi to administer the questionnaire personally in the interest of time and financial constraints. This 'remote' administration of the questionnaire compromised probity and the response rates of the respondents. Unreliable email and connectivity facilities in Malawi contributed to this limitation. Follow-up emails and phone calls were made to non-respondents, but some still never sent the completed questionnaires (Please refer to table 1 above for the response rates).

1.7 Organization of the paper

This chapter has provided the background to the study, introduced the problem and outlined the research strategy including the research questions, methods and methodology used. Chapter II will provide a review of dominant theoretical debates that are relevant to participation in general and youth participation in particular. It further describes the main concepts used in the paper and provides an overarching analytical framework of the study. Chapter III provides an analysis of the research data collected for this study and attempts to link the findings to the research question 1 and its sub-questions. Chapter IV mostly uses discourse analysis to examine the responsiveness of the MGDS to the needs of young people in Malawi. This is an attempt to answer research question 2 and its sub-questions. Chapter V draws conclusions from the study and sets forth the implications of the findings of the study.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.0 Introduction

This chapter positions the study within the relevant theoretical and conceptual underpinnings on youth in general, and youth participation in particular. These theories and concepts will be handy in explaining the situation of youth with regard to the MGDS in chapters III and IV, and will also give an analytical framework for this study.

2.1 Conceptualizing “Youth”

People tend to use the term youth and young people interchangeably and this is naturally understood in everyday discussions. A persistent challenge confronting people who work with youth is defining who they actually are. Definition of the most relevant age range that classifies “youth” varies a lot across countries, organizations and disciplines. For example, the African Youth Charter defines youth as every person between the ages 15 and 35 (African Youth Charter, 2006: 3). The United Nations, on the other hand defines youth as persons aged between 15 and 24, but further takes note that within the category of "youth", it is also important to distinguish between teenagers (13-19) and young adults (20-24), since the sociological, psychological and health problems they face may differ.¹³ Save the Children’s age range for youth is 13 to 25¹⁴, while according to the Lutheran World Federation’s Youth Programme in Kenya’s Kakuma Refugee Camp youth comprises the age range 7 to 40 (Sommers 2001: 3)

Concepts of youth, adolescence, and even what constitutes young people also demonstrate a lot of disparity. An adolescent is generally thought to be a subset of the youth category. The World Health Organization describes the overlapping complications

¹³ Source: <http://www.un.org/esa/> (accessed 13 June 2009)

¹⁴ Source: www.savethechildren.org (accessed 13 June 2009)

with the following description: “Adolescents are 10-19 years old; youth are 15-24; and young people are 10-24 years old” (WHO 2006: 1; Lowicki and Pillsbury 2000: 10).

Definitions of youth are further made difficult by the fact that in many parts of the developing world “youth-hood” may not be determined by age. “Youth-hood” is usually considered “a time of passage between childhood and adulthood”, or as “biological markers, in which youth is the period between puberty and parenthood” (Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation 2005: 3). In some cultures, male and female initiation rites mark the passage. Yet in others, females are only considered “youth” before marriage, and this in some cultures can occur at an early age, since they may marry and have children soon after reaching puberty, thus becoming categorized very early in life as young adults and no longer as youth or even children (Newman 2005: 11, Sommers 2001: 3-4).

In some other places like Darfur, the concept of youth or adolescence as a stage of development is unknown. Females are considered girls until they menstruate, at which point they become women (Heninger and McKenna 2005: 1). Motherhood tends to change the social status of female youth far more than fatherhood alters male youth lives. This particular fact challenges everyone engaged in youth programming.

Still other distinctions exist. Sommers (2001) for example talks about a veteran researcher who reported that a person may be considered a youth in Sierra Leone until his or her father died. And according to Johansson (2007), the idea of being young in contemporary society is more often defined by what one has achieved and the lifestyle one leads rather than a specific amount of accumulated years (Johansson, 2007 in Bergdof, 2008: 2).

As a result of this entire puzzle, youth, de Waal observes, ‘is therefore a problematic, intermediary and ambivalent category, chiefly defined by what it is not: youths are not dependent children, but neither are they independent, socially responsible adults’ (de Waal in Sommers 2001: 3). The implication of this confusion surrounding the definition

of youth is that youth lack specified rights in part because it is not entirely clear who they are. As it will be shown in section 3.1 (Chapter III), the way youth are conceptualised and perceived in different societies shapes the way they are engaged by communities.

2.2 Youth Agency and Power

The most common explanations of power in behavioural sciences focus on “the ability to impose one’s will on others”. Others also distinguish between “power over” *à la* Max Weber (1947) and “power to” *à la* Talcott Parsons (1960), the former being a zero-sum relationship, while the latter is non-zero-sum.

For purposes of this research paper, I will use the analysis made by Lukes (1974). Lukes splits his theory into three dimensions. The first dimension looks at **power as decision making**, where agent “A” influences the behaviour of agent “B”, registering resistance from agent “B”. The second prong looks at **power as agenda setting**, whereby “A” defines the agenda, preventing “B” to voice his/her agenda. The third dimension looks at **power as thought control**, whereby “A” defines what counts as a grievance in such a way that “B” accepts that s/he has nothing relevant to raise. This understanding of power dynamics will be handy as I look at the social relations that exist between adults and young people in Malawi and how this hampered or facilitated the participation of young people in the MGDS processes.

To complete my analysis using the dynamics of power, I will look at the issue of youth agency in light of Anthony Giddens who posits that “agency concerns events of which an individual is the perpetrator, in the sense that the individual could, at any phase in a given sequence of conduct, have acted differently. Whatever happened would not have happened if that individual had not intervened.” (Giddens, 1984: 9). I will also use the works of Alcinda Honwana (2008), who has demonstrated that youth have the agency to tilt the equation in their favour, but are constrained by the power structures and lack of opportunities. She argues that ‘agency is intrinsically connected to power. Power presumes regularized relations of both autonomy and dependence between actors in contexts of social interaction. All forms of dependence offer some resources whereby

those who are subordinated can influence the actions of their superiors. But that power can be constrained by a range of circumstances. Indeed, choice is always exercised within a specific situation defined by given constraints' (Honwana 2008: 12). This understanding of youth agency will enable me to determine the extent to which young people can exercise their voluntarism in the Malawian society and hence influence policy processes.

2.3 Youth participation and development

Youth participation can be a paradox. As Joerg Forbig comments, arenas for youth involvement in political and, more broadly, public life appear to be more numerous than ever before, yet few would claim that these opportunities have resulted in wide-spread and effective participation of young people (Forbig 2005: 5).

Many articles and publications suggest that there is a direct relationship between the real participatory power of young people and their readiness to get involved in the process of developing and implementing public policies. But "getting involved" can mean a lot of things. It may mean participation, and recognition, among others (Lauritzen in Forbig 2005: 5). Lauritzen goes on to emphasize that 'youth participation does not come cheap anymore; it has to be won in the context of a real offer to share power...'

According to Bergdorf "No one understands the thoughts, realities and needs of young people better than young people themselves" (quoted from Bergdorf's personal communication with Koenders – Bergdorf 2008:10). Meaningful youth participation is therefore imperative when designing policies and programmes that will have an impact on the wellbeing of young people. The youth of today are a huge focus group amongst social policy-makers, but they are all too often seen simply as a problem group instead of utilized as key partners towards positive development (Bergdorf 2008). Without the support of youth and exploiting their positive input, "the decision-making, implementing and evaluation of policies and programmes directed towards them will be less effective" (Almeida, Bergdorf & Nederveen, 2007).

A variety of definitions of participation have been offered¹⁵, but for purposes of this paper I will define the concept as:

“An active process by which beneficiary or client groups influence the direction and execution of a development [programme] with the view to enhancing their well-being in terms of income, personal growth, self-reliance or other values they cherish” (Paul, 1987, quoted in Oakley 1991: 16).

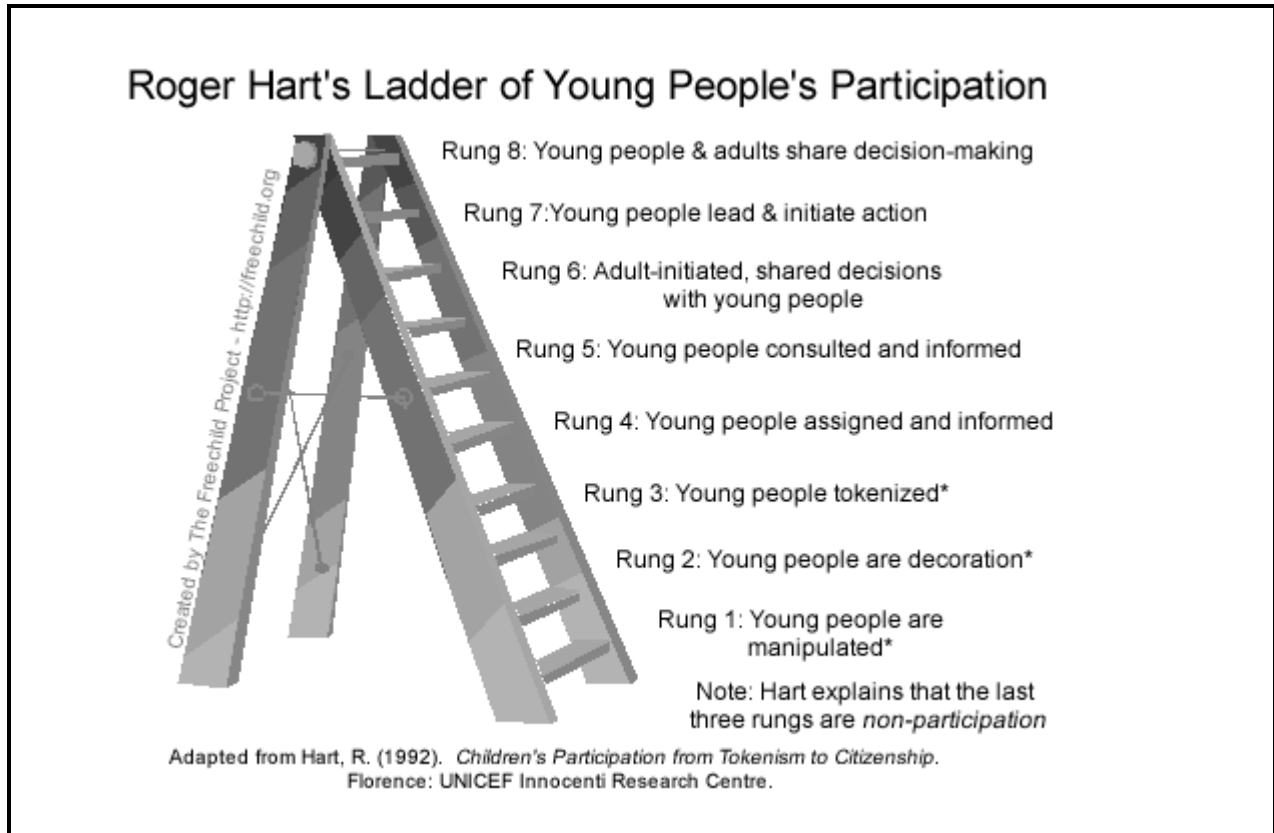
The discourse on participatory approaches is often divided into means/ends categorization (Oakley, 1991). The ‘means’ side emphasize on *efficiency* whereby participation is viewed as a tool for achieving better project outcomes while the ‘ends’ side accentuate *empowerment* where participation is considered a process that enhances the capacity of individuals to improve or change their own lives (Cleaver in Kothari, 2001). I am mindful of the fact that the term empowerment is also hotly contested among social scientists. Structuralists such as Weber, Marx and Freire view empowerment as associated with both the individual and class struggle (Cleaver in Cooke and Kothari, 2001). They consider empowerment as a zero-sum game in which power is limited and more for one means less for the other. On the other hand scholars like Talcott Parsons propose that power is variable and can increase, hence empowerment can occur within the established order, not affecting the powerful (i.e. empowerment is a non-zero sum game). For such scholars, knowledge leads to self-reliance and to participation. For purposes of this paper, I propose that we consider empowerment in light of the non-zero sum perspective.

Roger Hart (1992) developed a ladder of young people’s participation, a model for identifying and describing different levels of youth participation. This spectrum identifies eight types of youth participation and orders them on the rungs of a ladder. The Ladder of Participation shows young people-initiated, shared decisions with adults as the top form

¹⁵ See Oakley et al (1991)

of young people's participation, followed immediately by young people-initiated and directed initiatives. The Ladder of Participation is depicted in Figure 3 below:

Figure 3: Hart's Ladder of Youth Participation



Bergdorf (2008) explains the above rungs of the ladder as follows¹⁶:

1. **Manipulation.** This is the case when young people don't have any understanding of the issues and therefore don't understand their actions. For example when young people are consulted but do not get feedback at all. Adults use the ideas and get all the credit for them.

¹⁶ Adapted from Almeida, Bergdorf, & Nederveen, 2007 and <http://www.freechild.org/ladder.htm> (Accessed on 18 September 2009).

2. ***Decoration.*** This looks very much like manipulation but in this case young people might understand their actions. However, young people are just used to bolster the adult's cause (support their problem) in an indirect way. Adults do not pretend that the case they are fighting for is inspired by young people. An example could be young people wearing T-shirts related to some cause and may sing and dance at the event. Adults simply use the young people to bolster their cause in a relatively indirect way.
3. ***Tokenism.*** This is a situation in which young people appear to be given a voice, but in fact have little or no choice about what they do or how they participate. This rung of the ladder reflects adultism¹⁷.
4. ***Assigned but informed.*** This is where young people are assigned a specific role and informed about how and why they are being involved. This can be seen as the start of participation. Young people understand the aim of the project, they know who made the decisions concerning their involvement and why and they have a meaningful role. An example might be a community activity which was planned by adults, but youth joins in the activity
5. ***Consulted and informed.*** Project is designed and run by adults, but young people understand the process, are consulted and their opinions are treated seriously. The rung may materialise through youth advisory councils.
6. ***Adult-initiated, shared decisions with youth.*** Though the projects are initiated by adults, the decision-making is shared with young people. This rung can be embodied by participatory action research.

¹⁷ Adultism is discrimination against young people. It happens when youth are ignored, silenced, neglected or punished because they are not adults (adapted from <http://www.freechild.org/adultism.htm> accessed on 16 September 2009).

7. ***Youth-initiated and directed.*** When the conditions are supportive (adult support), youth can work together co-operatively in large groups and design and run their own projects. The rung symbolises youth-led activism.
8. ***Youth-initiated, shared decisions with adults.*** This would be the case when young people ask adults to join in a certain activity that is initiated by the youth. This rung reflects youth/adult partnerships.

The Ladder of Participation has to some extent been a controversial issue for many people working with and around young people. The debate (also known as the 7/8 debate) revolves around which of these levels of participation is actually the most meaningful? Many believe that shared decision making is most beneficial to both young people and adults. Others believe that young people are most empowered when they are making decisions without the influence of adults. Most often, this doesn't exclude adults but reduces their role to that of support.¹⁸ For purposes of this paper, and given the current levels of (non)participation by young people in Malawi, I propose that anything above rung 5 on the ladder is acceptable for the MGDS process.

2.4 Rights Based and Democratic Lenses

The notion of democracy can be interpreted in various ways, but in contemporary society the word democracy is generally used to describe a *representative democracy* where the active participation of the people is required to dictate the formation of political and civic life (Bergdorf, 2008). In situations where the people do not participate and dictate governance then a society is no longer representative of them and they technically cease to exist in a democratic society. This theoretical definition of a representative democracy is difficult or impossible to achieve in reality and thus various forms and levels of citizens' representation have come to be accepted and practiced in modern democratic societies. Instituting and preserving a democracy is therefore done by accepting a certain level of participation: a 'good enough' democracy (*ibid*). Participation is generally

¹⁸ Adapted from http://www.mcs.bc.ca/ya_ladd.htm (accessed on 18 September 2009)

recognized as an integral part of democratic ethos and paramount to building civil society. As Rajani (2001) states:

“Democracy demands all citizens take part in establishing the governance and key functions in society... Opportunities for participation in shared decision-making, listening to different points of view, and weighing the options and consequences can help build a critical appreciation of the democratic process”.

On the political front, in Malawi, at the age of eighteen a citizen is allowed to directly participate in elections through the voting process. Despite the fact that everyone of legal age *can* vote, there are clear differences in the frequency of voter participation amongst different socio-economic groups. We can generally establish that people in urban areas and women vote more often than, for example, minority men and women. The same applies for middle-aged people who vote more often than very young or very old eligible voters. Social-class and education levels also have strong influence on voter participation (Martikainen and Wass, 2007).

According to Johansson (2007) there are opposing explanations for why these groups do not participate in political decision-making processes. Government representatives argue that people have opportunities to participate, but simply choose not to utilize these opportunities. Johansson's research shows, on the other hand, that young people, for example, believe they have little or no opportunities to make their voices heard in the political sphere. She elucidates that there is a discrepancy between how the government expects citizens to behave in a democracy and how citizens themselves want to behave or how they are capable of behaving. These conflicting notions are a result of the simultaneous ideas of a theoretical ideal democracy and how a practical democracy functions in reality. In support of Johansson's assertion, I will attempt to demonstrate in the subsequent chapters that the avenues for young people's participation are simply non-existent in the Malawi PRS process, although Malawi enjoys a considerable level of democratic dispensation.

Young people's participation cannot be discussed without considering the struggle for equal rights. Participation is particularly important for disadvantaged young people, for it is through participation that such children learn that to struggle against discrimination and repression, and to fight for their equal rights in solidarity with others is itself a fundamental democratic right.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) highlights young people's right to participate. The CRC has significant implications for the improvement of young people's participation in society. Specifically, Article 12 and Article 13 of the CRC are relevant to this study. The CRC makes it clear that children are independent subjects and hence have rights. Article 12 of the Convention makes a strong call for children's participation:

'States Parties shall assure to the child¹⁹ who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child'.

It goes on to state in Article 13 that:

'The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice'.

Articles 12 and 13 of the CRC are consistent with the definition of youth participation as provided by Roger Hart (1992), highlighting young people's participation as a fundamental right of citizenship. '[Young People] need to be involved in meaningful projects with adults. It is unrealistic to expect them to suddenly become responsible, participating adult citizens... to learn these responsibilities; young people need to engage

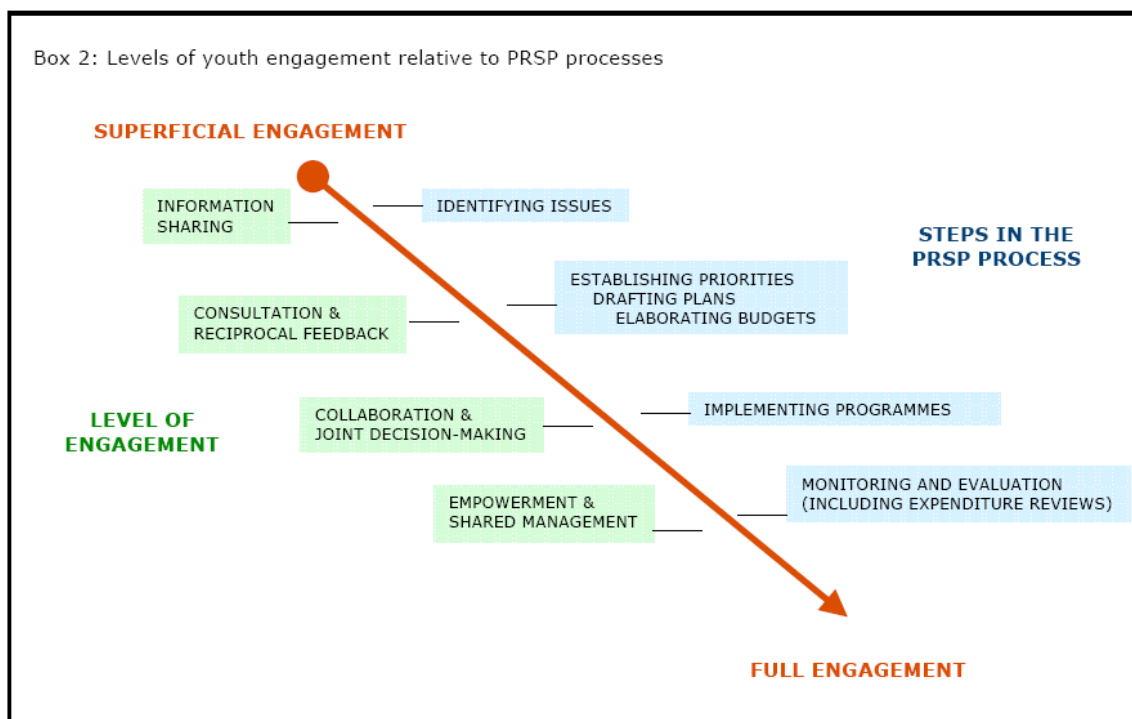
¹⁹ Recall that my definition of youth is anyone aged 10-24, while the CRC considers a child as any person aged below 18. The CRC therefore applies to the bulk of the group under this study.

in collaborative activities with other persons, including those who are older and more experienced than themselves' (Hart, 1992).

2.5 Youth and PRSPs

Julie Larsen²⁰ (2007) conveniently summarises youth participation (engagement) in the PRSP process as follows:

Figure 4: Levels of youth engagement in the PRS process (adapted from Larsen, 2007)



Larsen's framework maps out the various stages at which young people may be involved in the PRS processes. She proposes that young people need be engaged from identification of issues, prioritisation and costing of the issues, implementation of programmes and monitoring and evaluation of the PRS programmes. The practicality of this proposition, however, remains remote as the PRS processes are usually considered

²⁰ Julie Larsen is an Associate Adviser, Division for Social Policy and Development, DESA (UNFPA).

too technical for the average young person (see the discussion on the findings in chapter 3)

There are several considerations that underscore the importance of youth participation of poverty reduction strategies:

2.5.1 Participation could safeguard rights

Poverty is increasingly seen as both a cause and a product of human rights violations and no longer an issue that can be addressed solely through strategies that focus on economic growth and development. A human rights approach to poverty stresses that policies and institutions directed towards poverty reduction should apply the norms and values set out in international human rights law (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights: 2002). This context provides poverty reduction strategies the opportunity to empower the poor, rather than simply direct development efforts at them (Robinson, 2003). This approach also makes poverty reduction an obligation, rather than an act of welfare or charity, and compels policymakers to seek out and collaborate with vulnerable social groups in order to identify and implement appropriate strategies to escape their destitution (United Nations, 2006).

PRSP processes have considerable impact on young people, who form a significant proportion of the population and a large number of those living below the poverty line in a majority of developing countries (United Nations, 2005). Often the condition of living in poverty affects the ability of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged youth to defend their rights and responsibilities. Young people living in poverty are, owing to their situation, disempowered and excluded from society, and their capacity to secure their own rights may be extremely limited. Involving young people in the PRSP process then also becomes a way to build the capacity of young people to understand and participate in their economic and social rights. This may be particularly critical for youth living in chronically poor households, young women living in societies that disregard their basic human rights, and young people living with a disability, among others. Without engaging

young people, it is unlikely that their needs, including those of the most vulnerable within the age cohort, will be located within the demographic and poverty profiles that are critical to the prioritization of issues within PRSPs.

2.5.2 *Participation could expose unique aspects of poverty*

Young people's participation in the development of PRSPs may also improve decision-making and serve as a practical tool to achieving better policies and programmes. This is particularly well-documented in the area of adolescent sexual and reproductive health programming, where youth participation has shown to have significant positive effects on programme outcomes, including increased community support for health related projects and a commitment to sustaining the activities (African Youth Alliance, 2005).

It has also been noted that young people provide a unique perspective on the impacts of poverty on the family and household, for example, regarding decisions about education and the allocation of scarce resources such as money or food. Youth often “voice truths that adults no longer notice, or which socialized adults are wary of expressing, such as the link between poverty and family violence or substance abuse” (Save the Children, 2004: 30).

If young people can work with adults to articulate and present their experience of poverty, its manifestations in their everyday lives, how it affects their families, their schooling, their health, their aspirations, and how they could be supported to affect change, such information could be invaluable to poverty reduction processes. However, caution is raised against *data-mining*, the term used to describe using young people exclusively as information providers. Effective consultative processes with young people must be viewed as a first step in a continuum of increased participation, which ideally results in constructive adult-youth partnerships and a more full engagement. Otherwise, young people become relegated to providers of technical information and denied a wider say on the overriding issues of the PRSP (Brock et al, 2004).

A familiar, albeit endangered, view in development debates is that economic growth is the first priority for reducing poverty, after which should follow social considerations. Advocates of this argument purport that “a rising tide floats all boats” (Pernia: 2003) and that wealth will “trickle down” to the poor. This view generally prescribes modest funding for social policies, used mostly to diminish the unintended consequences of economic change through limited interventions in basic education and health. However, there is growing consensus that sustainable poverty reduction is a dual function of economic growth and income redistribution (Perry et al, 2006). Redistribution has faster impacts on reducing poverty than growth, but economic expansion is needed to sustain the process over time (Ortiz, 2006).

While social policies are often equated with services in education, health, employment, and social security, they are also about redistribution, protection and social justice, aiming to place people at the centre of policy-making. Designing good social policies requires understanding the needs of a country’s population from different perspectives and a common problem with existing strategies is generalizing about “the poor” (*ibid*). Youth are a group with substantial numbers below the poverty line owing to different causes of vulnerability and risk. Based on their own distinct experiences, young people can inject important social considerations into the poverty dialogue. If given the opportunity to be well informed and prepared, they can also work alongside adults to ensure coherence between the results of policy diagnostics and the establishment of priorities, programmes and budgets.

Without particular attention, it cannot be denied that the power dynamics behind PRSPs are stacked against youth participation. Between the mix of high-ranking government officials, international financial institutions, large donors, highly qualified advisers, and more organized segments of civil society, young people are at the bottom of the chain of influence. Yet young people can work to bring a measure of accountability and transparency to poverty reduction policies, assisting in a more equitable distribution of power. When policy-making is co-opted by powerful institutions and elites, policies

become biased and unaccountable to the majority of citizens, laying the groundwork for inequity, exclusion, and dispossession.

2.5.3 Participation can foster inclusive engagement in the PRSP process

Consultative processes with young people, while useful in soliciting information and identifying important issues, should be seen as part of a continuum leading to a more complete engagement in support of the overall PRSP process. Consultation is not an end product or final outcome in and of itself. Rather, it is a means to achieving other results with young people, such as obtaining accurate needs identification, building relationships, buy-in and trust, identifying mutual goals and priorities, exchanging information, and generating new strategies based on partnership (Larsen, 2007).

2.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter has established a theoretical framework that will assist in explaining the research findings in the next two chapters (Chapter III and Chapter IV). The way society constructs and perceives youth, power dynamics, and an understanding of the important role of youth in PRSPs are all paramount to explaining how and why bureaucrats engage or ignore young people in the PRSP processes. We will examine how these dynamics impacted on the MGDS processes in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

ANALYZING THE MALAWI GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY ALONG THE SPECTRUM OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION

'To speak, to participate, to have their views taken into account. These three phases describe the sequence of the enjoyment of the right to participate from a functional point of view. The new and deeper meaning of this right is that it should establish a new social contract. One by which children are fully recognized as rights-holders who are not only entitled to receive protection but also have the right to participate in all matters affecting them, a right which can be considered as the symbol for their recognition as rights holders. This implies, on the long term, changes in political, social, institutional and cultural structures.' (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Recommendations of the 2006 Day of General Discussion, 2006: 2).

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I will attempt to analyse the research data and attempt to respond to research question 1 and its related sub-questions. The analysis is based on my interpretation of the responses obtained from the key informants. I do not take some of the rhetoric and labelling in the responses for granted, but I will attempt to attach values to the way bureaucrats and society look at young people and their participation in policy development processes.

I will break down the analysis into six broad categories namely: Social Construction of youth as an impediment to participation; PRSP as a techno-functionalist process; (these two categories respond to the main research question 1); Downplaying the right to

participation (responding to research sub-question (a)); Youth representation and institutional factors; youth organizational capacity; and finally, the role of donors in pushing the youth participation agenda during the PRS processes (the last three categories respond to sub-question b of research question 1).

3.1 Social Construction of youth as an impediment to participation – community attitudes and stereotyping

Different constructions of youth emphasize certain characteristics of youth, while suppressing others. Thus, traditional images of youth as dependent are associated with such characteristics as passiveness, vulnerability, immaturity and/or lack of competence (James and Prout, 1990). Such constructions and portrayal of youth-hood as being dependent, in need of care, education and protection have led to legislation, policies and practices that have increased control over young people’s daily activities and have had the effect of denying young people rationality and agency (Invernizzi and Williams, 2008). Most of the questionnaires responses from youth clubs showed that young people are aware that adults, including policy planners, view them with a lot of cynicism and put-downs. A response by the Mzuzu Young Voices went as follows:

“Most of our views are not respected by adults. When they receive some respect, we know the ideas will be manipulated by adults for them to take full credit. This demoralizes us and de-motivates us to participate in discussions. When we keep quiet, they also find an excuse for not inviting us the next time they call a meeting. Participation is a real struggle for us”.

Adults can be actively or reflexively resistant to youth participation. This can be due to cultural dissonance, as many of the principles and practices of youth participation clash with assumptions regarding the role of young people in society. In Malawian culture, young people are not typically viewed as equal to adults. The discussion on power as ‘**agenda setting**’ and power as ‘**thought control**’ which we considered in the theoretical

framework (section 2.2) is applicable here. Young people may be expected to be deferential, obedient and keep their views to themselves. Adults may also resist youth participation because they do not want to share their decision-making authority and the power that it entails. In these instances, adults are willing to have young people participate but not if it brings changes to the current modus operandi. Participation is therefore mostly at decoration and tokenism levels in these cases. A questionnaire response from Counselling for the Adolescent and Youth Organization had this to say about power dynamics:

“It is vital to address the power dynamics that involve youth participation so as to ensure that young people’s involvement does have the capacity to change things. There should also be a focus on equipping adults to work well with young people. Usually it is young people who are under strain to adapt to adult-led working styles and practices. However adults involved in the process must be supported and trained in building respectful partnerships with young people. Perhaps having a framework that clarifies the roles and expectations of all stakeholders would be very helpful for effective youth participation. Often times youth participation disappoints both the adults and young people involved in the process because they were not sharing a similar set of expectations...As with any joint enterprise, it is important to learn about each others interests, responsibilities and abilities”.

At institutional level, the National Youth Council of Malawi also conceded that conceptualization of young people can be a challenge. The Council said there are different perspectives from which most policy makers view young people:

“Most public policy makers in Malawi view young people as either vulnerable or alienated to be protected or helped; a threat to civil order and responded to as such; or less commonly as an asset to be fostered”

Furthermore, in most cases youth are conceptualized in the same way as children, that is, on a passage to adulthood. This has led to interventions that are not fully developed to support the youth for who they are, but rather for what they will become in the future. Most of the interventions are geared towards making adults for tomorrow. Most youth clubs in this study bemoaned this tendency to look at young people as “leaders of tomorrow”. This perception of young people means that society does not seriously bring them on board as active contributors to policy processes and this is likely to have contributed to their marginalization in policy formulation, including the case of the MGDS, as we will see.

Ensuring participation of young people requires an intense paradigm shift among bureaucrats, and societies at large, in terms of their work – as they reconceptualise their role as not working FOR but WITH young people (Giertsen, 2001). It is important to take into account the fact that participation is a social act based on a pre-determined set of social relations; therefore, it is necessary to examine issues of social organization and hierarchy because they have important implications on the participation of different stakeholders in the activities that are relevant for their everyday life (Vieira da Cunha and Junho Pena, 1997). This discussion resonates perfectly well with the theoretical underpinnings I had raised in section 2.2, where it was noted that youth agency and power relations are a direct product of the way young people are conceptualized, perceived and treated by society.

3.2 PRSP as a techno-functionalist process

According to the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development²¹, The MGDS formulation process was country-led and owned. It involved wide consultations and participation among government, development partners, parliamentarians, civil society, the private sector and nongovernmental organisations (*ibid*).

²¹ This information was obtained through a questionnaire to the Ministry senior staff.

A Steering Committee was set up by Cabinet and it comprised the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Economic Planning and Development, Ministry of Trade, the private sector, the Central Bank and the Malawi Investment Promotion Agency. A Technical Working Group was also set up and it drew membership from the technical staff of the institutions represented in the steering committee.

The first round consultations on the basic framework and policy direction involved consultations first within Government, then with civil society, the private sector, donors and cooperating partners were also consulted. No youth serving organizations or any government official from the Ministry of Youth were part of this consultation process.

During the drafting phase of the MGDS, government identified a drafting team of twenty selected key stakeholders based on the proposed sub-themes. The twenty comprised mainly representatives of the private sector and government ministries relevant to economics and finance. It has to be noted that no youth representatives or any staff from the Ministry of Youth or the National Youth Council were represented during this drafting stage.²²

PRSP processes have often been dominated by a technical or functionalist orientation which is usually informed by the philosophies of utilitarianism, pragmatism, rationalism and/or some forms of liberalism (see Birkeland, 1999). Usually the main goals of such planners are to determine ‘optimal solutions’ with minimal ‘fuss’ and maximum ‘efficiency’ (Fraser, 2005). As a result, they seek to institute policies and programmes that are ‘scientifically proven’ to work, which usually means that they maintain the current social order, irrespective of whether they ‘mean to’ (Verspaandonk, 2001). Using the notion of pluralism and often seeing themselves as objective arbiters of conflicting interests, they may also help to negotiate ‘trade-offs’ and settlements. Not averse to overseeing change processes related to ‘re-structuring’, ‘re-aligning’ and ‘re-organizing’, many try to ‘standardize’ decision-making processes. Often the consequences of such processes – whether intended or not – are unfairly weighted towards those with a great

²² Confirmed through questionnaire

deal of social status, rather than those who have little (Fraser, *ibid*). Participation in such cases often revolves around expert-driven consultations with community ‘stakeholders’. Prominent office bearers and their subordinates often use community participation as a way to get others to ratify the views of ‘experts’ (*ibid*).

The situation for the MGDS was no different. The processes were deemed both technical and bureaucratic, making them incompatible and incongruent with most youth programming processes and activities. The Principal Development Officer in the Ministry of Economic Planning conceded that bureaucrats considered the MGDS development process too technical for ordinary people including youth, and particularly rural ones. He added that for them to produce a document that is acceptable by international standards (I assume the format and content is dictated by the World Bank to ensure conformity to the principles of market supremacy and retrenchment of the state), there was need to focus their energies on technicians who were conversant with the “language of the international community”. This may explain the absence of the National Youth Council of Malawi, the Ministry of Youth and other civil society organisations deemed incompetent in economic issues.²³

Alternatively, as Bishop (2002) and Ife (2002) put it, communitarian progressive and empowerment approaches could be the best way of ensuring egalitarian, democratic and inclusive orientation of the PRSP processes. In this approach, communities would personalize the connections they make with others and try to negotiate differences and/or conflicts. Using face-to-face interactions as well as electronic debates, forums, consultations and juries, empowerment-oriented community workers conduct research, create and implement plans, including plans to become involved in large-scale protests and contribute to wider policy and programme discussions (Hendriks, 2002; Weil, 1996).

To attain this communitarian progressive approach in Malawi, given the dire organizational capacities described in the preceding section, access to information and the

²³ I reviewed the minutes of eight preparatory meetings for the MGDS, convened by the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development, and found that all organizations that deal with youth, including government departments, were absent. The Ministry and NYCOM claimed they were not invited at all.

ability to demystify public policy reports, budgets, and related documents becomes essential to meaningful engagement. This reaffirms the need to allot sufficient time to consultative processes, as youth organizations may need a period to discuss matters among themselves, seek clarification, and reformulate their views. Processes must be transparent as much as possible and there must be provisions in place to ensure regular two-way communication, knowledge sharing, and reciprocal feedback. Adults working with young people on PRSP processes also need to find the balance between communicating issues clearly in terms that young people can understand, while not being condescending, over-simplifying issues, or imposing external viewpoints. Information needs to be exchanged between adults and young people in both directions to maintain an understanding of work that has been done, the reaction of the various constituencies and authorities, and the next steps for future involvement.

Because PRSP processes can be complex and elaborate, there is a risk that young people's contribution, when set against more experienced actors fluent in economic and planning issues, will be cheapened and not taken seriously (Larsen, 2007). The Ministry of Economic Planning ought to create acceptance of the concept of working with young people on the MGDS in order to counter bureaucrats' resistance to involving young people in the main aspects of development.

3.3 Downplaying the right to participation?

In this section I will examine Malawi's conformity to international covenants and charters to which she is a signatory, and which demand that governments respect the right of participation by young people in development planning.

To begin with, the African Youth Charter (2006) demands that state parties respect and uphold young peoples' rights to meaningful participation in civil and political processes.

Article 11 of the Charter states that:

'State parties shall:

- a) *Guarantee the participation of youth in parliament and other decision making bodies in accordance with the prescribed laws;*
- b) *Facilitate the creation or strengthening of platforms for youth participation in decision-making at local, national, regional, and continental levels of governance;*
- c) *Ensure equal access to young men and young women to participate in decision-making and in fulfilling civic duties'*

Article 14 (2c) goes on to say:

'[State Parties shall] Facilitate the participation of young people in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of national development plans, policies and poverty reduction strategies'

Another important international agreement to which Malawi is a signatory is the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). In its Programme of Action, the ICPD states as follows:

'Countries should aim to meet the needs and aspirations of youth, particularly in the areas of formal and non-formal education, training, employment opportunities, housing and health, thereby ensuring their integration and participation in all spheres of society, including participation in the political process and preparation for leadership roles.' (Chapter 4 - 6.13)

And in Chapter 4 - 6.15:

'Youth should be actively involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of development activities that have a direct impact on their daily lives.'

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) has already been dealt with in the last chapter. Another important legal instrument is the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which, in article 25, states:

‘Every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity, without any of the distinctions mentioned in article two and without unreasonable restrictions to take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives’.

From the analysis, we may conclude that Malawi is not respecting the international legal instruments to which it is a signatory. All the covenants and charters mentioned here require the state to allocate the ‘maximum of its available resources’ to the ‘full realization of the rights’ detailed in these agreements (*The nature of state party obligations, article 2, paragraph 1*). If the Malawi government does not live up to these agreements, the United Nations and/or the African Union ought to impose sanctions on the country. Unfortunately, enforcement of such agreements remains a challenge at the global level.

3.4 Youth representation and institutional factors

In this section I will give an account of the set-up of the key government institutions that are responsible for the interests of young people in Malawi. Based on the analysis of the responses to questionnaires, I will try to demonstrate that the current institutional capacity of the Ministry of Youth Development and Sports and the National Youth Council of Malawi are not favourable for effective youth representation in policy dialogue in Malawi, and particularly in the case of the MGDS.

3.4.1 Ministry of Youth Development and Sports

The welfare of young people in Malawi rests in the hands of Department of Youth in the Ministry of Youth Development and Sports. The structure of the government machinery under this Ministry is set up as follows:

Table 2: Staffing levels in the Ministry of Youth Development and Sports

Total Ministry Staffing Levels			Of which relate to Department of Youth (Current staffing levels)		
Position	Authorised establishment	Filled posts as of July 2009		Authorised	Actual
Principal Secretary	1	1		1	1
Directors	4	3	Director of Youth	1	1
Chief Officers	5	2	Chief youth Officer	1	1
Principal Officers	12	7	Principal Youth Officer	3	1
Senior Officers	1	1		0	0
Professional Officers	14	9	Youth Officer	3	1
Senior Supervisor	9	7		0	0
Supervisor	35	15	Regional Youth Officer	3	3
Senior Clerical Officer	5	5		0	0
Clerical Officer	75	35	District Youth Officer	29	18 ²⁴
Senior Subordinate	31	23		0	0
Subordinate	84	63	Assistant youth officer	29	0
Industrial Class	28	24		0	0
Totals	304	195 (64%)		70	26
				(Representing 32% of the Ministry total)	(Representing 37% of the authorised establishment)

Source: Author's summary based on questionnaire responses

²⁴ It may be worth mentioning that out of the 18 District Youth Officers, only 3 are female (DYO for Lilongwe, DYO for Mchinji and DYO for Mangochi). Further analysis may be necessary to examine how this gender imbalance translates into subjugation of young girls at district level and in national planning processes. Another interesting dimension would be the aspects of role modelling for young girls at the district level where male planners are dominant.

As it may be observed from Table 2, the Department of Youth is heavily understaffed both in terms of numbers and skills. The District Youth Officer (DYO) is the official government representative of youth at district level, yet we note from that only eighteen of the twenty-nine DYO posts were filled as of July 2009. This means that eleven districts had nobody at government level to represent the youth in the District Assembly, where all the district planning is done.

In a questionnaire response as to why the vacant DYO posts are not being filled, the Director of Youth at the Ministry headquarters explained by stating that ‘a government directive was issued in 2001, freezing all recruitment for non-essential positions as part of the Structural Adjustment Programme and civil service reform’. In a follow-up telephone interview, the Director conceded that other ministries such as Agriculture, Health, Education, Water and Irrigation, Tourism and Information have managed to employ staff even for the non-essential positions (veterinary officers, journalist, irrigation officers, agricultural extension officers, etc), way after the said directive was issued. Even the Department of Sports, which shares the same Ministry as the Department of Youth, has managed to recruit district sports officers and some staff at regional and headquarters levels. The Ministry of Youth has, however, never received the approval of the Department of Human Resource to recruit for the vacant positions of the DYOs although requests for approval were submitted as far back as 2003. This speaks volumes about the seriousness that is accorded by government to the Department of Youth and youth welfare in general.

We further note from the above table that the position of DYO is quite junior (Clerical Officer). The implication is that their voice in the district assembly does not carry the same weight as that of, for example, the District Health Officer, whose entry point at recruitment is Principal Officer. These sentiments were echoed by all DYO respondents to the questionnaire. One of the responses read:

‘Our offices are under-resourced and understaffed. My position is very junior as compared to district officers in other ministries [at District Assembly level]. As a result, whatever contribution I make at District Assembly meetings is not treated as relevant, as it is considered as emanating from a junior officer in the rank and file of government.’

True to the above concern, twelve of the eighteen DYOs that responded to the questionnaire reported that they were never invited to the MGDS district consultative meetings, while their more senior counterparts from the other Ministries were present throughout the process. It therefore follows that any debates on the MGDS at the district level never received any contributions from government representatives of youth at district level due to absence of DYOs in most of the districts and due to the junior level at which the DYOs are recruited. The foregoing may have had the potential of impacting on the sensitivity of the MGDS to the needs of young people in Malawi.

3.4.2 The National Youth Council of Malawi

The National Youth Council of Malawi is a statutory corporation established through an Act of Parliament in 1996. The Council is autonomous and independent and its major mandate is to promote youth participation in policy and community development and to allow youth to realize their full potential in all endeavours (National Youth Council of Malawi Act, 1996).

Among others, the aims of the Youth council are: to develop, promote, encourage and coordinate all forms of youth activities in Malawi; to carry out registration of youth organizations in Malawi; to provide advice to government and any authority either specifically or generally on matters relating to youth, sport and recreation; and to develop and institute guidelines for cooperation between government and other agencies operating for the youth in Malawi (*ibid*). According to its director, the institution’s programmes prioritize street youth, out-of-school youth, deviant youth and female youth. In effect, NYCOM is supposed to coordinate the implementation of all youth programmes in

Malawi, while the Ministry of Youth Development and Sports is responsible for policy guidance on issues affecting the youth in Malawi.

The Board of the National Youth Council of Malawi (NYCOM) is constituted of a total of twenty-two board members, broken down into various categories as follows:

- 7 youth representatives from 7 registered youth NGOs (one member from each NGO). They are nominated by the Minister of youth, on recommendation by the Director of Youth Affairs in the Ministry
- 3 members appointed by the Minister responsible for youth (Not necessarily from youth organizations).
- 3 representatives from religious institutions.
- 1 member from women's organization.
- 8 ex-officio members representing line ministries.

NYCOM is headquartered in Lilongwe, the Capital City, and has neither branches nor representatives at regional or district levels. It has six staff members and these are Director, Programme Officer for Reproductive Health, Programme Officer for Monitoring and Evaluation, Finance Assistant, Administrative Assistant and a Driver. We note that the Board of Directors is much bigger than the total staff of the institution. While this is not of direct relevance to this analysis, it speaks volumes about the prestige attached to being a board member as opposed to getting involved as a frontline worker for the youth.

In a questionnaire response, the Director of NYCOM indicated that the institution never participated in the development of the MGDS at any stage. Staff of the Council were not even aware that the MGDS was being developed until they saw an invitation to attend the launch of the country's development blueprint. He indicated that they also knew about it through the radio. The Director feigned ignorance as to why NYCOM was sidelined, but only speculated that:

'... the MGDS process was under the custody of the Ministry of Economic Planning, and they treated it as an economic document. Hence they saw

*no need to involve non-economic players like us, which is a wrong way of developing policy that affects the majority of the population, the youth...But we have participated in the annual reviews of the strategy from 2008 and we are ensuring that youth issues are brought to the fore in these reviews'*²⁵

The Director conceded that his institution was heavily understaffed to effectively represent the interests of young people in Malawi. The structure of the council is also not conducive for youth representation, considering that it has no offices in the districts, yet that is where most young people are based. My own analysis is that NYCOM is ineffective in pushing its own objectives as alluded to in the preceding paragraphs and the reasons range from lack of being proactive in pushing its agenda to non-functional institutional design.

To build acceptance around the concept of youth participation, it would need to be endorsed at the higher levels of bureaucratic institutions. Having participation of young people authorized at higher political and managerial levels can provide the necessary support and justification for those working to make it achievable on the ground. I assume if the President or Minister of Economic Planning had given a directive to ensure that young people are actively involved in the MGDS processes, the Ministry of Youth and the National Youth Council could at least have been involved in the process, albeit with little capacity to mobilize legitimate young people to represent the rest of the youths in Malawi.

3.5 Inadequacy of youth organizational capacity

In the majority of contexts, civil society participation in PRSP processes is still uncommon. For young people and their organizations, the struggle to be successfully involved in these processes is even greater (Larsen, 2007). Several factors have been identified as “enabling elements” that establish the ability of civil society organizations to

²⁵ I checked the minutes of six of the review meetings and noted that NYCOM was present in four of them and sent apologies in the other two.

promote the interests of the people they seek to represent. These include elements such as the freedom to associate, the ability to mobilize resources, the capacity to regulate and take responsibility for their own accountability, representation and legitimacy, as well as the ability to gather information and convey it articulately to decision-makers (Thindwa et al., 2003).

Despite the benefits of youth participation as alluded to in the foregoing chapters, youth organizations tend to be an underdeveloped segment of civil society and are disadvantaged in possessing the enabling factors for civic engagement in PRSP processes. All the youth organizations that responded to the questionnaire for this study indicated that they are both financially and materially under-resourced and depend heavily on the volunteer time to coordinate and manage their day-to-day operations. If they get funds from donors, such funds are ring-fenced for project specific activities and hence cannot be diverted to cater for on-going efforts of participation (e.g. transport, stationery, communication, etc). A typical example of this case is Pewani Youth Organization, based in the central region of Malawi, which reported being blacklisted²⁶ by UNICEF in 2007 for using project-specific funds to travel to the capital (Lilongwe) to attend a regional review meeting of the MGDS.

There is also the difficulty of representation and coordination, as organizing peer consultations and meetings require resources. The existing plethora of small and fragmented youth organizations makes it difficult for young people to coordinate their endeavours and makes it difficult for decision-makers when trying to choose suitable interlocutors. This issue was raised by the Ministry of Youth in response to a question regarding how they sample particular youths to represent others in policy making events such as the MGDS. Indeed the National Youth Council itself admitted that there are no existing criteria for making such decisions and they only rely on the District Youth Officers to provide names of youth that can articulate issues at meetings. It is therefore difficult to say for sure whether all young people have the opportunity to be involved and

²⁶ Once an organization or a government ministry is blacklisted by UNICEF, they can no longer receive funding for any other activity from UNICEF.

not just those well positioned because of income, education or family background. This typically translates into what Larsen calls “Superficial Engagement” and clearly falls under the rung “Manipulation” on Richard Hart’s Ladder of Participation, as we cannot establish if the selected youth representatives actually have an understanding of the issues and, therefore, also understand their actions (refer to Chapter II for details of these).

Like in many other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, information technology in Malawi is not well developed and access to computers in general, and internet in particular, is very limited. Internet usage in Malawi currently stands at 1% (NSO: 2008). Out of the 44 youth organizations that responded to the questionnaire, only 8 have a computer²⁷. None of them have their own access to the internet and have to use business centres to send and receive mail. Browsing for information is therefore costly. Effective participation in policy processes requires the ability to gather information and convey it articulately to decision-makers. The current Malawian situation does not make this condition easy for youth organizations and indeed hampers their participation. The Ministry of Economic Planning indicated that most stakeholders to the MGDS processes use email to send input, suggestions and comments for the review of the document. The same approach was used during the development process of the MGDS. Absence of computer and internet technology among youth organizations arguably contributed to their non-participation in the development process of the MGDS.

The issue of young people working as volunteers in their organization was also dominantly stated as one of the reasons why young people do not participate in community activities as well as policy dialogue. As a questionnaire response from Youth Empowerment and Civic Education (YECE) stated:

[...] Many young people attend school, help out with family-based economic endeavours, do domestic chores, or must generate family income, leaving them with little time to participate in other processes,

²⁷ These computers were acquired from the National Youth Council. They were a donation from a British charity NGO and they were donated second-hand. NYCOM upgraded the computers before donating them to the youth organizations.

including those that relate to youth participation. It may therefore be necessary to introduce some kind of reward for the volunteers in order to motivate them to consistently participate in organizational activities and national development processes’.

The need to allocate sufficient time and resources to working with young people on PRSP processes cannot be underestimated. Insufficient funding and hasty processes can become part of a vicious cycle that compromises the outcomes of youth involvement, thereby undermining the justification for working with youth on poverty reduction processes. It would be important for the National Youth Council of Malawi to work alongside young people in creating the enabling environment for effective engagement. This would require the allocation of sufficient resources by government, both in terms of financial input and time, to working with and strengthening youth organizations materially. Capacity building would also be crucial, both to develop specific skills (e.g. research methodology, project management, financial monitoring, etc.), to coordinate peer outreach, and for the strengthening of youth organizations as legitimate institutional actors.

3.6 Donors in Laissez Faire mode?

In a document titled “*Investing in Children and Youth: A Strategy to Fight Poverty, Reduce Inequity and Promote Human Development*”, the World Bank (2003: 2) states the following as the objectives of its strategy (emphasis provided by the author):

- 1. To strengthen the case - within the Bank, with client governments and with donors - for investing in Children and Youth as a key strategy for poverty reduction and human development*
- 2. To identify areas of emphasis for Bank intervention with Children and Youth, taking into account the Bank’s unique position and capacity to link investments in [Children and Youth] to overall development and building on its comparative advantages*

3. *To suggest modalities for mainstreaming Children and Youth issues within existing strategy instruments (ESW, CAS, PRSP, Operations, etc.).*

However, much as the World Bank did not respond to the questionnaire for this research (as stated in Chapter 1), a review of minutes of donor meetings with government during the development process of the MGDS showed that the issue of young people was never brought up in the discussions, not even by the World Bank participants²⁸ in the discussions. In the absence of such evidence from the minutes, we may conclude that the World Bank never pushed the agenda of youth participation in PRSP at country level, contrary to the objectives of its strategy as mentioned above.

UNICEF indicated that they considered youth participation as paramount and stated in a questionnaire response that

‘UNICEF has adopted the rights-based approach to children and young people, viewing participation as a human right and an end itself. Participation matters for its own sake, regardless of measurable or demonstrated benefits for various groups or purposes. Additionally, participation is recognized by UNICEF as integral to the democratic philosophy and to building civil society...’

Asked why the MGDS process left out youth participation despite UNICEF’s presence at the discussion table throughout the MGDS process, their response was that their ‘contribution during the MGDS was overshadowed by their push for the rights of children specifically as opposed to youth in general’. UNICEF admitted that they considered the distinction between youth and children as sensitive discussion²⁹ and, in the

²⁸ The World Bank was present at all the meetings between donors and government during the formulation process of the MGDS.

²⁹ While UNICEF’s mandate covers children (up to age 18), UNFPA deals with youth (from age 10 to 24). These overlaps in mandates seem to lead to “territorialism” by the two agencies and the each agency tends to blame the other for non-action on issues of young people.

spirit of division of labour with UNFPA, they assumed UNFPA would push the youth agenda while UNICEF concentrated on children.

UNFPA, on the other hand, indicated that they had ‘financially and technically’ supported the Ministry of Youth and the National Youth Council to participate in the PRSP process for them to ensure that youth participation was highlighted during the process. This was done, according to UNFPA, in the spirit of ‘putting ownership of national counterparts before technocracy’ and ‘allowing space for a Malawian design of the PRSP’. However, after the document was approved by the Head of State, UNFPA discovered that young people never participated and that they were not a specific target group for most of the pillars of the MGDS. UNFPA therefore made sure that in the subsequent review exercises of the MGDS, they would be present on the table and push the agenda of young people. A quick review of the minutes of the review meetings showed that UNFPA had hired a consultant to work with the Ministry of Youth and the National Youth Council and ensure that the two institutions presented key issues regarding young people in the review processes.

From the foregoing we may draw a conclusion that there is need for donors to enter into more intensive dialogue with government and civil society to ensure that what is said in the donor strategic documents and plans about youth participation and the need to invest in young people is also translated into reality at country level. In this dialogue with government, a harmonized – meaning reciprocally informed – approach would be absolutely imperative.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSING THE RESPONSIVENESS OF THE MGDS WITH A YOUTH LENS

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter I will attempt to respond to research question 2 of this study, which seeks to examine the extent to which the MGDS is responsive to the needs of young people in Malawi. I will analyze each of the thematic areas of the MGDS and examine whether the themes address the issues that affect young people in Malawi. The purpose is to establish whether lack of effective participation of young people from the policy formulation process (as observed in the preceding chapter) may have led to the document being less sensitive to the priority needs of young people in Malawi. By the end of the chapter, I will have responded to the main research question and its sub-questions.

4.1 Youth priority issues in Malawi

One of the plagues of contemporary participatory development initiatives, as identified by Botes and Rensburg (2000), is the paternalistic role of development professionals. The majority of development programmes that claim to target young people are initiated by adults and are rarely founded spontaneously by the youth themselves. Often professional “experts” dominate decision-making and manipulate, instead of facilitate, development processes (*ibid*). The common assumption is that “development experts” know best and can therefore design the best programmes for young people who “know less” (refer to the discussion on techno-functionalism which was elaborated on in the last chapter).

The needs of young people in Malawi are well outlined in the National Youth Policy, which was developed with close consultation of young people. UNFPA hired a consultant

who conducted district level consultation with young people, with the assistance of the National Youth Council and the Ministry of Youth, and came up with the following thirteen urgent issues that need to be addressed for young people (Malawi National Youth Policy, 1994: 3):

- Unemployment
- Early marriage and teenage pregnancy
- HIV/AIDS and STIs
- Smoking, drug and alcohol abuse
- Poverty
- Inadequate access to secondary and tertiary education due to fees
- Orphan hood mainly due to HIV/AIDS.
- Child labour and exploitation both at household and work places
- Youth marginalization and discrimination
- Inadequate technical and vocational training centres
- Inadequate sporting and leisure facilities
- Harmful cultural practices
- Environmental degradation.

The MGDS is built around five broad thematic areas namely sustainable economic growth; social protection; social development; infrastructure development; and improved governance. The activities in the themes have been ‘systematically prioritized and realistically costed taking into account [Malawi’s] limited resource envelope’ (MGDS, 2006: xii). In the subsequent sections I will examine each of the priority pillars of the MGDS and establish the extent to which they respond to the issues outlined by young people through the National Youth Policy.

4.2 Theme one: Sustainable Economic Development

Young people both male and female face serious constraints in accessing productive resources due to education and cultural factors. There is a large disparity between older people and young people. While the MGDS recognizes the need to maximize the

contribution to economic growth by among others empowering rural communities to be part of economic activities, there is no specific targeting of young people in the rural area, who are often marginalized and in hard to reach areas. There is only a mention of specific groups in the rural areas, that is women and people with disabilities. The idea of offering vocational skills was generalized and not specific to age groups, and notably in this case young people.

In the logical framework, the MGDS fails to recognize the role of key important sectors dealing with the young people, i.e. the Ministry of Youth Development and Sports and the National Youth Council of Malawi. While the other ministries could identify potential areas to target the young people, the two institutions have the technical capacity to deliver those services to the young people. Their absence in planning stages would eventually result in their inability to effectively implement the planned activities as well as monitor its effectiveness.

4.3 Theme two: Social protection and disaster management

The goal of Social Protection is to improve the life of the most vulnerable. The MGDS recognizes several groups as being vulnerable namely; the elderly, the chronically sick, orphans and other vulnerable children. The MGDS did not highlight the need to focus on the young person and yet they could easily fit into the category of the vulnerable and at risk group. The majority of young people in Malawi fall under the poverty cycle. Failure to deliberately target them with economic empowerment opportunities only pushes them further into poverty.

Through the MGDS, the government has indicated plans to provide opportunities for poor farmers and rural communities, so as to enable them to move out of poverty. There is no specification of who the poor people are such that young people, with whom we have interest in this paper, are losing out. Recently, Malawi has noted an increase in urbanization with significant proportions of people moving from rural to urban areas and mostly they are young people in search of economic opportunities. If this pillar could

target the poor rural youth, rural-urban migration could be minimized and the negative effects of urbanization could be avoided (UNFPA, 2007).

4.4 Theme Three: Social Development

The Social development theme recognizes that a healthy and educated population is necessary to achieve sustainable economic development growth as well as achieving and sustaining Millennium Development goals. There are three sub-themes, namely Health and Population; Education and Gender.

While the targets set for this theme are clear and gender responsive, the strategies that have been identified to reach the targets are weak. For example, there are no specific interventions related to sexual and reproductive rights of young people, especially the girl child who continues to be at risk, accounting for 50% of all maternal deaths and substantially contributing to neonatal and child deaths (Ministry of Health, 2005). The MGDS further falls short of segregating the data under this theme into specific age groups which is very critical when targeting activities to those who seriously need them. While fertility in Malawi is noted to be higher, there was no specific mention that it is much so amongst young people, which could have helped to raise concern among the policy makers on the need to focus on this age group.

HIV and AIDS continue to negatively affect the population. For the country to achieve an HIV-free generation, focus on young people is critical, hence the need to heavily invest in behavioural change programs targeting the young people. The MGDS is not explicit in its targeting for both urban and rural young people as well as having data that is segregated according to specific age groups.

In the section on nutrition, nutritional status targets are not disaggregated by age and sex. Strategies for raising awareness of nutritional problems and requirement for young people at different periods of their growth and physiology are also not mentioned at all.

Education remains a key element towards empowering individuals including young people. The MGDS sets out three goals at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. While targets are set specific to the young people themselves, it is important to remember that there are so many variables that limit the potential for young people to complete education. Community involvement is really critical both at primary level (which has been recognized by the MGDS) and secondary levels and their lack of participation in this area would hinder the whole government efforts in improving education in the country. There is no specific targeting of the many cultural aspects that negatively influence education completion especially amongst girls, such as early marriages (which is mostly done so that parents can benefit from dowry).

Science subjects continue to be a major requirement for most young people to enter into the job market or most training institutions, yet the majority living in the rural areas do not have access to lessons in these subjects (NSO, 2004). There are no specific key actions in this area indicating how government is planning to enhance the capacity for most young people to excel academically in science subjects especially those in rural areas.

4.5 Theme Four: Infrastructure

The MGDS recognizes infrastructure as one of the prerequisites for economic growth. In general infrastructure is grossly inadequate, unreliable and expensive. Under this theme, the MGDS has five sub themes namely transport, energy, water and sanitation; information, communication technology; science, technology and research. The strategies outlined for each sub theme do not specify the target population. While in areas of transport, energy water and sanitation, the target population could be generalized, the areas of information, science and technology could make a deliberate effort to target the young people. Targeting young people with modern information and technology will enhance the country's potential to be in line with the international community. Young people once equipped with this knowledge and skills both in urban and rural areas will enhance their ability to effectively participate in meaningful development and bring

advanced knowledge that the country needs through communication. As change agents, this is an area where they could add more value towards the development of this nation.

Research is also another area where young people could play a major role in coming up with creative ideas for the government as well as the private sector. Through research, young people could be key champions in the area of science and technology development including information dissemination as they are often mobile, creative and energetic.

Infrastructure also remains a sector that is heavily abused and vandalised by communities, and young people are not alien to this malpractice. Advocacy on the importance of safe guarding equipment remains a challenge. By using young people to channel this initiative, the government could benefit a lot in this investment.

4.6 Theme Five: Good Governance

This thematic area is cross-cutting and underpins the achievement of all the economic growth and social objectives outlined in the MGDS. The sub-themes outlined under the theme of improved governance require active participation of young people who are aspiring to take up leadership positions. Internalizing the core business of government towards improving governance at earlier stage will enable them to avert the many problems that come about when issues of governance are not well understood by the majority.

Economic growth may not be achieved if the population is not secure. Increased crime and violence, sexual exploitation of the women and girl child have recently been on the increase (YECE³⁰, 2007). This demands special attention to the group of people usually committing these crimes. Having a larger population of young people who are idle puts them at risk of engaging themselves in undesirable behaviours including criminal activities (*ibid*).

³⁰ YECE (Youth Empowerment and Civic Education) is a youth NGO that carried out a survey on youth involvement in crime in Lilongwe, the capital city of Malawi.

4.7 Chapter conclusion

An examination of the MGDS shows that the Strategy never took cognisance of the existence of the national Youth Policy and its priority issues. Issues of unemployment, reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, poverty and environment are addressed generically in the MGDS, without specifically targeting particular groups, especially young people. Furthermore, issues that directly affect young people such as harmful cultural practices, marginalisation, child labour and drug and alcohol abuse are completely left out of the MGDS.

From the foregoing, and in response to the sub-questions under research question 2, we may conclude that young people were not specifically targeted as a beneficiary group of the MGDS and the issues that directly impact on their well being, as outlined in the National Youth Policy, were not prioritised in the Strategy. The absence of young people from the MGDS development table and the weak institutional structures for addressing youth issues in Malawi may be a possible explanation for this unfortunate state of affairs. Social construction of youth as “children” may also be a possible explanation for this deficiency, as it is assumed that by addressing issues like orphan-hood, early childhood education and immunisation issues, development practitioners are also implicitly addressing youth issues.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR YOUTH AND DEVELOPMENT IN MALAWI

This chapter builds on the main findings from the qualitative analysis done in the preceding chapters and highlights the areas of this study from which conclusions may be drawn. It attempts to build on the findings based on the analysis done in the preceding chapters and thrashes out the potential implications of these findings for youth and development in Malawi.

From the preceding chapters, we may conclude that the absence of young people on the MGDS formulation table as well as in the content of the priority pillars of the strategy was a manifestation of the way society in general considers young people i.e. as children, as problematic and as mere recipients of adults' favours. The agency of young people is not recognised in society and those who wield power, the adults, do not provide the much needed political space for young people to realise their right to participate and to be heard. The ultimate effect of all this is the continued marginalisation and deprivation of young people in Malawi which perpetuates poverty and breeds grievances, with the potential of developing into a criminal-minded and violent youth.

This research has also shown that the institutional structures for dealing with issues of young people in Malawi are weak, understaffed, uncoordinated and incapacitated. Thirty-eight percent of the districts in Malawi do not have a District Youth Officer, which means there is no government custodian of youth issues at the district level. The fact that there were no responses to the study questionnaire from those district assemblies also means that no official is "standing in" for the DYOs in those districts. Furthermore, where DYOs exist, their position in the hierarchy at the district assembly level is not influential enough to direct policy (i.e. it is a junior rank, compared to other district officials). The implication is that youth issues are not brought to the fore during district

assembly planning meetings and discussions and hence youth issues are left out district plans.

The fact that the National Youth Council of Malawi is not represented at all at the district and regional levels also puts the extent of institutional representation of young people into question. A thinly staffed Youth Council, based in the capital, cannot effectively carry out its mandate of building the capacity of youth organisations at the grassroots level and coordinating youth participation in decision making. The capacity of the NYCOM itself needs development before it can carry out its mandate to handle youth issues in Malawi. Furthermore, the Council needs to decentralise and redefine its mandate to focus on attaining the participatory rights of young people as required by the various international legal instruments to which Malawi is a signatory. Until the capacities of NYCOM and the Ministry of Youth are enhanced, youth participation in development processes, including the PRSP, will remain a remote possibility and the two institutions may not legitimately represent the interests of young people in development planning.

Another institutional adversity is the relationship between the Ministry of Economic Planning (MEPD) and the Ministry of Youth (including the Youth Council). The MEPD views the MGDS as an exclusively economic strategy which should only be dealt with by competent technocrats (techno-functionalism). The Ministry of Youth is therefore not regarded as an important partner. After all, it is assumed, the economic benefits will trickle down to benefit the youth in the 'long-run'. This attitude needs to change and the MEPD must regard young people as actors and an asset for the economy, not as mere beneficiaries. Government institutions as well as civil society organisations that work with young people must therefore be given an equal voice in development planning, including the MGDS processes.

Although not directly touched upon in this study, it may also be paramount that young people should have greater access to their local representatives such as political councillors and members of parliament. This would stimulate the interests of young people to participate in planning processes and build trust in the systems after knowing

that local politicians understand and appreciate the issues that they are concerned about. Young people may also want local councillors and officers to be selected who represent the different socio-demographic backgrounds of the local community, including young people themselves. This would energise them to participate more in development initiatives and would also ensure legitimate representation in decision making bodies.

We may further conclude from this study that donors are not translating the mantras that appear in their strategic documents and policies into concrete action at the country level. Harmonisation of youth strategies at the country level would lead to avoidance of buck-passing and would enable them to push with one voice to impress upon government to adequately involve young people in planning processes. There now exists a wide body of research (c.f. World Bank, 2003, 2007; UNFPA, 2007; UNICEF, 1992, 2001; GTZ, 2008; and Save the Children Fund, 2004) about how to involve young people in development planning - perhaps donors can take up the challenge of disseminating the benefits of participation and share case studies of good practice which would help convince the government authorities who may still be resistant to these ideas. In other words, changing the mind-set of the bureaucrats with regard to youth involvement in the PRS processes may require continued “Drilling through thick boards with a keen eye, and with a passion” (Max Weber, 1905).

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Annex 1: Questionnaire to Youth Organisation

Name of Organisation:..... **Location:**.....

Position of respondent:.....**Date:**.....

1. How does your organisation define youth?
2. Young people face a lot of challenges in their day today life.
 - a. Can we say that boys and girls face the same challenges
 - b. What type of problems or challenges do the girls face in their day to day life?
 - c. What type of challenges or problems do the boys face in their day to day life?
3. Is there anything that can be done that these problems should be solved?
 - a. What can young people do to ensure that these challenges are dealt with?
 - b. What can the government do to ensure that these challenges are dealt with?
 - c. What can NGOs do to ensure that these problems are dealt with?
 - d. What can communities do to ensure that these problems are dealt with?

Youth's involvement in development work

1. Now we want to discuss something about development work in your area
 - a. What type of development work is taking place in this area?
 - b. How are the youth involved in different development work in this area?
 - c. In what ways would the youth want to be involved in development work in our area?
2. To what extent can we say that the government, NGOs and civil society organizations involve the youth in development work?
 - a. List the indicators or pointers that show that government, NGOs and civil society organizations adequately involve the youth in development work?

- b. List the indicators or pointers that show that government, NGOs and civil society organizations do not adequately involve the youth in development work?
- c. What would the youth want to see that would point to the fact that the government, NGOs and civil society organizations adequately involve the youth in development work?

Are the youth targeted in the national development agenda?

- 1. 60 percent of Malawi's population is made up of the youth and because of this, development work in Malawi has to take into consideration issues that affect the youth for the youth to benefit fully.

Malawi has articulated its development agenda in a document called Malawi Growth and Development strategy.

- a. Do you know what MGDS is? If yes what is the content of the MGDS?
- b. Were youth consulted in the development of this document and what issues were discussed during the consultations? Were there specific issues affecting the youth discussed?
- d. The government of Malawi has planned to do activities in the sectors outlined in the MGDS. What activities can we include in each of these sectors to ensure that the needs of the youth are addressed?
- e. What can the young do to ensure that these issues are taken into consideration in the development agenda?
- f. What can the government do to ensure that these issues are taken into consideration in the development agenda?
- g. What can the NGOs and civil society organizations do to ensure that these issues are taken into consideration in the development agenda?
- h. What can the communities do to ensure that these issues are taken into consideration in the development agenda?

Annex 2: Questionnaire to Government and Donor Institutions

Name of Institution:.....

Position of respondent:.....

Date:.....

Please detail the mandate of your institution

Please describe the structure of your institution (including approved positions and actual staffing levels)

How does your institution define young people? (Please describe in detail)

What is the position of your organisation with regard to youth participation? (Please describe in detail)

What role did your organisation play in the development of the MGDS?

Did youth participate in development of the MGDS?

If you answered yes to the above question, please detail how and at what stages young people participated. If you answered NO, please describe why they did not participate

What role did your institution play in ensuring that young people participated in the MGDS development process?

What role did your institution play in ensuring that the MGDS is responsive to the needs of young people in Malawi?

Please provide any other information which you believe is important for this study (You may use a separate sheet)

Annex 3: Key informant interviews (Ministry of Economic Planning)

I. How MGDS define young people

1. How does the MGDS define young people?
2. What factors were considered to define young people?
3. What should be the cut off point for the definition of young people in view of the many challenges they meet e.g. mass poverty, high unemployment rate, late marriages?

II. Were young people consulted in the development of the MGDS?

1. Who was involved in the consultation process? At National level, district level and community level?
2. To what extent were young people consulted during the consultation process?

Planning process?
Data collection?
Report writing?
Sensitization?
Launching?

III. Young people and poverty

1. How were the young people viewed during the process of the development of the MGDS? Were they viewed as homogeneous group?
2. Were gender differences recognized especially when looking at access to services like reproductive health?
3. Was there a distinction made between important age sub-grouping of young people such as 10-14, 15-19, 20-24 year olds in terms of differing needs and forms of support
4. Needs of young people differ greatly according to whether they are in pre-adolescence, early adolescence, late adolescence or post adolescence stages? In terms of vulnerabilities and risk, these will also differ greatly for males and females. Do you think there was any distinction made between the age groups in addressing the needs of the youth in the MGDS?
5. Was there any attempt to identify major subgroups of poor young, people with disabilities, school drop outs, unemployed, commercial sex workers, drug addicts, HIV/AIDS infected, pregnant girls, teenage mothers?

IV. Young people in MGDS action plans

1. How prominent are young people in the action plans of the MGDS?
2. Were young people identified as a group in poverty? If so did they result in concrete actions
3. Does the implementation framework of the MGDS highlight youth as a target group?
4. To what extent do district implementation plans include young people as target group?

V. Youth bulge and MGDS response

1. Malawi population indicates that 60% of the population are the youth which indicates that Malawi has a youth bulge. What are some of the challenges Malawi is facing due to the youth bulge?
2. What is your response to the current youth bulge?
3. What should be put in place to avoid any form of conflict in the future due to the youth bulge?