



Youth Inclusion in the Governance of Ghana's Natural Resources & Environmental (NRE) Sector: The Gaps, Opportunities & Recommendations

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June, 2019



Background:

The need to address gender inequality and social exclusion in all socio-economic development agenda has gained strong attention globally. Governments have made [legally] binding commitments to ensuring gender responsiveness in all decision making processes. Building on these commitments, the 2030 Agenda, including its Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), recognize the interlinkages between gender equality and the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development and call for integrated solutions with the aim to “Leaving No One Behind”.

In recent times, the issue of natural resources and environment management has increased owing to their inter-relatedness and cross-cutting nature as well as their inevitable impact on development agenda. They include Climate Change; Biological Diversity (Biodiversity); Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH); Forestry; Fisheries; Oil and Gas; Food Security; Land Degradation/Desertification; Renewable Energy; International Waters; Mining and Wildlife. Hitherto, in a quest to demonstrate good governance in the management of the natural resources and environment sector in particular, the Government of Ghana launched the Natural Resource and Environmental Governance (NREG) program from 2008 – 2012 with support from the Agence Francois de Development (AFD), Department for International Development (DfID) of the United Kingdom, the European Commission (EC), the Royal Netherland Government (RNG) and the International Development Association (IDA - WB) to address governance issues related to the mining and forestry sectors and to improve environmental management with the overall objective of ensuring economic growth, poverty alleviation, increasing revenues and improving environmental protection. The program was

Increasingly, development partners are acknowledging the need for **extensive consultation** involving local communities, indigenous peoples, civil society organizations, private sector, women, men, girls, boys and vulnerable groups including persons with disabilities in addressing environmental challenges. Yet in the planning, implementation and evaluation of interventions, the inclusion of young people as relevant actors has been poorly executed. Even where issues of social inclusion are specifically discussed, little attention is paid towards empowering young people consciously to participate. Though some efforts have been made, there is still a lot more that needs to be done in enhancing the access of young people to public participation and decision making.

Key Observations:

The following are some key observations on why there is little youth participation:

1. Incomplete Governance Framework:

There are a number of documentations both at national and international levels that point to the need to involve young people in decision making processes.

For example, the National Youth Policy of Ghana (2010), Government pledged to undertake the following practical approaches:

- make the youth active participants in the protection, preservation, and improvement of the environment;



- provide alternative livelihood programs for the youth who engage in negative practices that affect the environment.
- provide regular rewards for young people whose ideas and activities ensure better understanding, appreciation and preservation of their local environment.

Thus, with the Policy coming into force in 2010, the next appropriate step was the need to develop the necessary laws and/or regulations to execute the ambitions of the policy. Unfortunately, this has not been realized, rendering the policy dormant. Indeed, the new Youth law, the National Youth Authority Act, 2016 (ACT 939) arguably provides no solution to this problem.

This incomplete governance structure explains why the various national environmental policies (such as the National Climate Change Policy, National Environmental Policy, Forests and Wildlife Policy, National Biodiversity Policy and National Water Policy) and programmes (such as the Climate Change Master Plan and the National Action Programme to Combat Drought and Desertification) have very little space or provision for youth inclusion in the conceptualization, planning and implementation processes. Indeed, since the exploration of oil in large quantities, the discussions concerning young people are centered on how they stand to benefit (as beneficiaries) and not as participants in decision making.

Again, as part of expressing its commitment to youth development, the government of Ghana admitted that *"the Youth all over the world have been acknowledged as an important human resource with the potential to contribute significantly to national development and therefore must be accorded such recognition and be involved in national development by government and other stakeholders"* (National Youth Policy, 2010). Specifically on environmental issues, the policy also recognizes the role of the youth in ensuring good environmental practices noting that young people should be provided with adequate knowledge and information on environmental issues to help them understand the country's biodiversity. And that they require to be sensitized on good environmental practices and be encouraged to adopt same in their every-day life. Section 5.2.1 of the National Youth Policy (2010) specifically states that, *"the views of the youth and their participation in national development must be sought. The government and other stakeholders must consciously and consistently involve young people in decision-making"*.

Also, government concedes that even though children and youth are vulnerable to the impact of climate change, they can also be agents of change in the fight against climate change (National Climate and Green Economy Strategy, 2016).

Unfortunately, all these have not translated into action owing to non-existent or ineffective systems or structures.

2. Non-implementation of International Obligations:

Ghana is enjoined by the rules of engagement as a party to the various Multilateral Environmental Agreement (MEAs), including the famous Rio Conventions notably the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) that she has accented to. Discussing Article 6 of the UNFCCC which bothers on *Education, Training*



& *Public Awareness* for example, the 33rd session of the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI) in its decision charged parties among others to:

- a. Enhance the involvement of, and create training opportunities for, groups with a key role in climate change communication and education, including journalists, teachers, **youth**, children and community leaders;
- b. Foster the participation of women, **youth**, indigenous peoples, civil society groups and relevant stakeholders in decision-making on climate change at the national level and their attendance at intergovernmental meetings, including sessions of the Conference of the Parties, the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol and the subsidiary bodies;

Article 5, clause (D) of the UNCCD, also states that *“In addition to their obligations pursuant to article 4, affected country Parties undertake to: (d) promote awareness and facilitate the participation of local populations, particularly women and **youth**, with the support of non-governmental organizations, in efforts to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought; and...”*

We however note that no systems or structures have been established by government to operationalize the above commitments towards youth inclusion. A case in point is that while government religiously participates in all the annual Conference of Parties (COPs) meetings under the auspices of the UNFCCC, the views of young people are not solicited in the development of the country’s position in the negotiations. Similarly, there is limited evidence to show that young people were actively involved in the development of Ghana’s Nationally Determined Contributions (Gh-NDCs) as part of the Paris Climate Agreement requirement.

3. Fragmented youth-oriented interventions

The National Youth Authority (NYA), an agency of the Ministry of Youth and Sports is mandated to undertake programmes focused on youth empowerment. It is expected to organise programmes to sensitise and inform the youth on critical matters including governance, civic responsibilities, career development, and ethical leadership among others.

In spite of such clearly defined role of the NYA, several parallel youth-oriented programmes exist, leading to incoherent interventions and dissipation of limited resources. Even where interventions are youth-oriented, young people themselves are usually engaged as mere “event participants” without providing them the space to actively contribute or add their voice throughout the decision making process on the interventions targeted at them. For example, government intends to select a climate change youth ambassador as well as organize annual youth/music/drama festivals on climate change (National Climate and Green Economy Learning Strategy, 2016). Such interventions agreeably can lead to increasing public awareness on climate change but at the same time the basic fundamentals in terms of youth inclusion in these processes are not in place.

There are similar programmes targeted at young people in other Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) but difficult to connect them for cross pollination of ideas, knowledge, experiences as well as learning and sharing among the beneficiaries.



4. Youth 'exclusion' in decision making spaces:

Increasingly, stakeholders such as government and development partners are keenly "actualizing" the need to ensure women inclusion at all levels of decision making processes in the name of meeting gender equality and women empowerment obligations. Unfortunately, such efforts are not the same for the youth even though girls and boys form an integral part of gender. A case in point for example, is the composition of the National Climate Change Committee (NCCC) made up of representatives of the following bodies: (1) Ministry of Environment, Science, Technology and Innovation; (2) Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning; (3) National Development Planning Commission; (4) Ministry of Food and Agriculture; (5) Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration; (6) Ministry of Energy and Petroleum; (7) Energy Commission; (8) Ministry of Health; (9) Environmental Protection Agency; (10) Forestry Commission of Ghana; (11) Council for Scientific and Industrial Research; (12) Forestry Research Institute of Ghana; (13) Ghana Health Service; (14) National Disaster Management Organisation; (15) Ghana Meteorological Agency; (16) Abantu for Development; (17) Environmental Applications and Technology Centre (ENAPT Centre); (18) Conservation International, Ghana; (19) Friends of the Earth, Ghana; (20) Embassy of the Netherlands; (21) the Department for International Development, United Kingdom of Great Britain and (22) Northern Ireland as listed in the National Climate Change Master Plan.

Conspicuously missing is youth representation contrary to relevant provisions in the National Youth Policy and African Youth Charter. This situation is no different in other natural resources and environmental sectors.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) did set to roll out the following programmes: (1) *Organise a bi-annual forum for all organisations working on the issues of climate change;* (2) *Initiate an annual climate change youth conference;* (3) *Introduce one public debates/durbars in each of the 10 regions annually;* (4) *Introduce climate change environmental clubs in each basic and second cycle institutions;* (5) *Introduce annual environment day competitions in high schools on climate change (tree planting, drama, exhibitions);* (6) *Initiate annual Miss Climate Change Ambassador and integrate climate change discussions on radio and TV and;* (7) *Showcase climate change issues, public fairs and exhibitions* (Ghana's 3rd Communication Report to the UNFCCC).

These programs we concede are laudable however it is unclear how EPA is actively engaging young people in the planning, implementation and evaluation of these interventions especially those with direct focus on young people. The EPA has the institutional mandate to conduct **Strategic and Environmental Assessment (SEA)** and **Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA)** on intended projects but arguably there is very little effort and information to demonstrate active youth inclusion as important stakeholders in such processes.

We however want to acknowledge recent marginal efforts by government to involve youth in climate change adaptation mechanism. Ghana's National Adaptation Plan Framework (2018), states that "*during the national consultations, there was a consensus among the youth NGOs focusing on environment and climate change issues that the participation of youth in climate change adaptation has been quite limited to date, contributing to low levels of awareness among the demographic*".



Conclusion:

The need for active youth participation in the governance of the NRE sector cannot be overemphasized especially in the light of increasing demand for extensive consultations in managing the sector. The youth are often labeled as the future leaders thus sustainable development cannot be attained without their active participation. They need relevant information and capacity to function in any leadership position. Furthermore, they possess skills, energies and abilities which are valuable resources that must be discovered, developed and deployed effectively towards the [collective] achievement of environmental goals of the various sectors in the areas of Climate Change; Biological Diversity (Biodiversity); Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH); Forestry; Fisheries; Oil and Gas; Land Degradation; Renewable Energy; International Waters; Mining and Wildlife. Undoubtedly, the surest way to guarantee sustainability of the global development agenda including Agenda 2030 is to empower and carry young people along the entire process in line with the "Leave No One Behind" mantra of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Policy Recommendations:

We hereby recommend that there must be the need to:

1. Institutionalize youth inclusion in the decision making process at all levels (sub-national, regional and national).
2. Establish a dedicated funding mechanism to support youth-led mobilization and participation in local, national and international consultation processes.
3. Institute a reward system to incentivize outstanding young people pursuing environmental actions as a way of motivating more young people to join the advocacy as change agents.
4. Establish a centralized monitoring and evaluation unit to present a holistic picture of the impact of investments on young people.

About Strategic Youth Network for Development (SYND):

SYND is a youth-oriented NGO which focuses primarily on contributing to ensuring good governance in the natural resources and environmental sector through active youth inclusion. Our thematic areas of work are **Climate change, Biodiversity, Forestry and Energy for All**.

SYND is the convener for the Youth in Natural Resources and Environmental Governance (Youth-NREG) Platform

Our website is: www.strategicyouthnetwork.org