

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT INTERVENTIONS IN GHANA: POLICY AND PRACTICE



Prepared By:
DAVID KORBOE
for

Education for Empowerment (EfE) Programme

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AAG	ActionAid Ghana
AIDS	Acquired Immune-Deficiency Syndrome
ARHR	Alliance for Reproductive Health Rights
AYF	Ashaiman Youth Federation
BECE	Basic Education Certificate Examination
BFT	Business and Financial Times
BGMS	Better Ghana Management Services
BUSAC	Business Sector Advocacy Challenge [Fund]
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CoP	Church of Pentecost
COTVET	Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training
CST	Communication Service Tax
DACF	District Assemblies Common Fund
DFID	[UK] Department for International Development
DP	Development Partner
DSIP	Development of Skills for Industry Programme
DSW	Department of Social Welfare
G4A	Global Forum for Action
GAR	Greater Accra Region
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEBSS	Graduate Entrepreneurship and Business Support Project
GETFund	Ghana Education Trust Fund
GoG	Government of Ghana
GRA	Ghana Revenue Authority
GSGDA	Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda
GSS	Ghana Statistical Service
GYEEDA	Ghana Youth Employment and Entrepreneurial Development Agency
ICCES	Integrated Community Centre for Employable Skills
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KOYA	Konkomba Youth Association
LESDEP	Local Enterprises and Skills Development Programme
LSBE	Life Skills Based Education
MASLOC	Micro-Finance and Small Loans Centre
MELR	Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations
MESW	Ministry of Employment and Social Welfare
MLGRD	Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoFA	Ministry of Food and Agriculture
MoFEP	Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning
MoGCSP	Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection
MoH	Ministry of Health

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

MoI	Ministry of Interior
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
MoTI	Ministry of Trade and Industry
MoYS	Ministry of Youth and Sports
MPSD&PSI	Ministry of Private Sector Development and Presidential Special Initiatives
MTDP	Medium Term Development Plan
NACP	National AIDS Control Programme
NADMO	National Disaster Management Organisation
NBSSI	National Board for Small-Scale Industries
NDC	National Democratic Congress
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NHIS	National Health Insurance Scheme
NPP	New Patriotic Party
NSCS	National Security Council Secretariat
NUGS	National Union of Ghana Students
NYEP	National Youth Employment Programme
NYETF	National Youth Employment Task Force
NYA	National Youth Authority
NYP	National Youth Policy
PDA	Participatory Development Associates
PPP	Public-Private Partnership
rLG	Roagam Links Ghana
SADA	Savannah Accelerated Development Authority
SDF	Skills Development Fund
SDG	Sustainability Development Goal
SHS	Senior High School
SSSS	Single Spine Salary Structure
STD	Sexually Transmitted Disease
STEP	Skills Training and Entrepreneurship Programme
SWA	Sanitation and Water for All
TaMA	Tamale Metropolitan Assembly
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNFPA	United Nations Fund for Population Activities
VTI	Vocational Training Institute
WASSCE	West Africa Senior Secondary Certificate Examination
YESDEC	Youth Enterprises and Skills Development Centre
YESP	Youth Enterprise Support Programme
YiAP	Youth in Agriculture Programme

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report seeks to assist *IBIS in Ghana* with identifying possible priority actions for programming with respect to the important subject of youth development. In seeking to impact the youth situation, it is important to note from the outset that Ghana's youth development challenges are huge and complex. Influencing that agenda will, therefore, be a challenging task. However, it is precisely such heavy-duty efforts that have potential to contribute to genuinely transformative change of the kind that is lasting. From the global development literature, one can expect a demographic dividend – in, for example, lower fertility rates and improvements in the country's human capital profile, economic situation and governance – when young people as a whole receive more reflective attention and empowerment.

The study draws mainly on first-hand information obtained from interviewing officials managing a range of public youth development initiatives. These formal interviews were augmented with a sampling of opinions and experiences of young people in four diverse localities – Ashaiman, Bantama, Birimso and Kpobiman.

Today's generation of young people is the largest ever in Ghana's history (GSS, 2012) and yet, policies for the social sectors often fail to properly target them or analyse their unique priorities and needs. As a result, the youth situation continues to be characterised by a yawning gap between weak employment

opportunities, low productivity and inadequate earnings on the one hand and high aspirations on the other. Indeed, compared with the older generation, the youth are 3.5 times more likely to lack employment (Gyampo, 2012) and the IMF recently forecast that some “6–7 million jobs ... will need to be created in the next two decades, to absorb new entrants into the labour market” (IMF, 2013).

Repeatedly, youth interviewed in the study's 18 focus groups were keen to work their way out of poverty and to set themselves onto more prosperous trajectories. However, they are confronted with a dearth of real opportunity (driven, in part, by significant deficits in their human capital asset base), compelling many to accept livelihoods which compromise their dignity and/or safety – e.g. *ashawo* work (remunerative sex), *kaya* (head portage, typically by females), *troko* (push-cart work), *galamsey* (illegal mining), *macho* (illegal protection work) and burglary.

History shows that when people's legitimate aspirations are persistently ignored in the face of growing inequality, the resulting frustration fomented untold dangers. Indeed, recent political economy assessments identify youth unemployment and underemployment as some of the main threats to the stability of the Ghanaian state¹. This message needs to be taken very seriously indeed by all with a genuine interest in Ghana's development.

¹ See, for example, CID (2011); Fox et al (2011); Prempeh (no date) and Throup (2011)

In acknowledgement of the unusually high youth unemployment rate, successive Ghanaian governments have attempted to roll out a diversity of employment-oriented interventions for the youth. However, the current study finds serious weaknesses in both policy and programming. It denies the Ghanaian collective of the distinctive energy, resourcefulness and courage of the youth. In so doing, it does not only harm today's youth; it ultimately undermines prospects for the future of the entire state as well.

From a review of the existing literature,² one can distil five key intersecting areas in which adolescents and other young members of Ghanaian society experience significant deficits:

- * sub-optimal and non-empowering education and skills development;
- * income poverty and unavailability of jobs (particularly skilled ones);
- * lack of voice and inclusion in the national development agenda;
- * frequent abuse (verbal, physical, sexual and psychological); and
- * lack of accurate information on healthy living and sexual and reproductive health.

Overall, girls and young women appear to experience these deficits disproportionately.

On the face of it, the National Youth Policy (NYP) provides the guidance around which youth development agendas are framed.

However, the opposition New Patriotic Party (NPP) has tended to distance itself from the final document, potentially denying it the desired national appeal. The policy does correctly diagnose the structural drivers responsible for perpetuating youth poverty and inequality and which undermine their life trajectories. However, typical of public agendas in Ghana, the policy is not accompanied by a credible action plan wherewith to facilitate its rollout.

Both in the policy and informally, Ghana's definition of "youth" extends well beyond the internationally agreed age range of 15-24. This creates avenues for the older generations to "raid" the policy space, leaving large swathes of genuine youth excluded from interventions intended for young people.

GYEEDA stands out as the most significant of the public initiatives targeting youth development in Ghana. For an organisation of its size – and superintending the scale of funds it expends³ – it is disturbing that the agency has operated without appropriate legal backing since it metamorphosed from the NYEP in 2012. Throughout its life, GYEEDA has been poorly managed. At the central level, the new chief executive is optimistic about the agency's future and has promised steps to clean

² E.g. Darvas and Palmer (2014); Gyampo and Obeng-Odoom (2013); King et al (2006 a, 2006b); Ismail (2009); Palmer (2009); PDA (2010); UNICEF (2011a, 2011b); Tulane University (2009); WCF (2012) and YES Ghana (2012)

³ See <http://vibeghana.com/2013/08/02/the-gyeeda-report-for-the-busy-citizen/>

up the agency. However, the continuing lack of youth involvement in the formulation and review of the agenda does not match his mood of optimism.

Historically, there has been a tendency to subsume the youth sector under more conspicuous ministerial agendas – e.g. education or sports. The NYA, which one might expect to be leading the policy effort, has been very much a lame duck. In practice, NYA is considerably less resourced than (and wields little *de facto* power over) the institutions which it ought to be coordinating and monitoring. The resulting lack of coherence and coordination results in significant duplication, with several service providers overlapping training services in the same localities. The study also finds a lack of uniformity across service providers when it comes to the terms of equipment support. In the non-state sector, players with the greatest influence (technically and financially) in the area of youth development include DFID, UNFPA and UNICEF.

Across the public youth interventions assessed, there is a tendency to combine training with internship, but the training is typically so condensed and the quality so poor that it is failing to achieve its objective of facilitating *self-employment*. In large part, the self-employment strand is merely offering paid internships, with very little by way of sustainable benefits beyond the pay-cheques which participants receive over the two-year programme period.

Throughout the course of the study, participants complained that the interventions have served

largely as a patronage mechanism for appeasing youths loyal to whichever government is in power. In several cases, beneficiary selection processes have been opaque, with adolescent females in rural areas enduring the gravest marginalisation. Before being enrolled in the public initiatives, some participants had been compelled to prove their political leaning by producing their party cards; others said they had to “*give something*” by way of “*key money*” to various officials before they gained access to the interventions.

The process of determining modules for a locality is neither market-led nor evidence-informed. In accessing the available training “*modules*” in the diversity of interventions, girls face the additional hurdle of gender stereotyping. Weak monitoring, delays in releasing allowances and deficits in youth ownership of the interventions contribute to high attrition rates in the interventions. This is very wasteful, considering the increasingly challenging state of Ghana's public finances.

Aftercare for programme graduates has been weak, with only about 1:18 YESDEC graduates receiving start-up support. The huge lapses in monitoring and aftercare are partly explained by the fact that the service providers are paid according to the number of recruits they enrol. This creates no incentive to undertake effective monitoring of the intervention, tracing of completers or to check participant abuses such as multiple registrations.

Informants perceived a high level of partisanship in the allocation of staffing positions as well as in recruitments. The seven best known companies providing such contract services are all subsidiaries of just two private companies – the Agams and Jospong Groups (Table 5).

In the near term, prospects for improved public sector financing of the youth agenda and skills sector appear dim. In the six years since the Communication Service Tax (CST) was instituted as a dedicated source of financing for youth development, the Act has been breached persistently, with the state quick to divert the resources collected to other competing uses.

With regard to programming, a composite approach is recommended – one which includes both (i) initiatives that *narrowly target affected youth* with empowering actions as well as (ii) *other actions of a more universal nature* with a strong potential to transform the larger system with the kind of broad improvements which enhance opportunity and security downstream for the youth as a whole. Considering too that youth programming is a new area for IBIS in Ghana, *an iterative approach is strongly recommended* – one in which the implementation of an informed menu of ideas is complemented with a deliberately reflective/proactive monitoring agenda and a strong emphasis on process documentation.

Specific menu options presented for IBIS's consideration are:

A. Support to clarify and flesh out aspects of the National Youth Policy on areas such as:

- * Section 6.1.14 – governance, democracy and leadership;
- * Section 6.1.16 – youth in conflict prevention and peace-building; and
- * Section 6.1.19 – youth patriotism and voluntarism.

B. Assistance to develop youth-friendly summaries of major state policies, laws and pro-youth agendas, the purpose being to educate them on their rights and the obligations of the state and, through such, facilitate their engagement with current policy processes and agendas.

C. Other concrete examples of areas where youth advocacy and support might be useful are:

- * Ensuring genuine inclusion in the review of the NYP, due in 2015;
- * Demanding accountability for funds allocated to public programmes such as GYEEDA which ostensibly aim to equip the youth with occupational skills;
- * Challenging inequity in *de facto* allocation of programme benefits (e.g. unfair urban bias, multiple access, patronage);
- * Demanding improved responsiveness from their assemblies in, for example, the sustained delivery of basic services; Insisting on a resolute abidance with formal rules in public budget and expenditure processes, given the increasingly sycophantic nature of Ghanaian

- * politics coupled with the impunity and indiscipline characterising public procurement/ accounting at both decentralised and central levels;
- * Support to ensure greater transparency in programme eligibility and participant registration processes in order to reduce the incidence of extortion, demands for sexual favours and other hidden costs entailed in accessing youth interventions.

D. Support the youth in accelerating and deepening advocacy towards reversing the indifferent quality of education which the majority endure across Ghana's public schooling system. Without such improvements, gains from any programming investments will be shallow and cannot be sustained.

E. Consider supporting the identification of promising youth leaders and politically-conscious youth groups, and developing their capabilities to undertake self-advocacy.

F. Consider facilitating an initiative to identify and reflect on “best fits” in skills training and entrepreneurship development.

G. In the interim, and in the absence of comprehensive research indicating the skill needs of the economy and industry, support the youth to appraise the available skills training modules via a simple matrix comparing the most significant socioeconomic variables. An initial shortlist of appraisal variables could be:

- * Availability of a ready market (for the

products and/or services for which the training seeks to build labour expertise),

- * Profitability (potential rate of return on investment),
- * Availability of relevant inputs (including finance, workshop space/ land, equipment and supportive aftercare),
- * Reliability of income stream (consistency in terms of year-round demand for the goods/ services), and
- * Ease of starting up (affordability and accessibility of the initial investment).

H. Another potentially high-traction area which IBIS might consider supporting is advocacy for ICT connectivity, especially for the youth. A pilot initiative led by youths and deliberately designed to foster iteration, lesson capture and targeted communication with the key state institutions responsible for youth affairs and for rolling out the public ICT connectivity project could facilitate the harnessing of best practice and scaling. Such a system has immense potential to serve simultaneously as a platform for constituency building, reflection and iteration, idea exchange, joint initiatives between youth groups and even online mentoring.

I. Youth clubs would be one way of rolling out Proposal E. A pilot associational strengthening initiative with a small number (for a start, say two or three diverse groups at decentralised level) would be worth considering in the context of a learning initiative.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this report is to help identify priority actions for IBIS in Ghana programming in the area of youth development. The report sets out to assess the range of state-financed youth development initiatives currently operating in Ghana, with a focus on interrogating the match between the intent and letter of the interventions on the one hand and how they are implemented on the other. It is important to note from the outset, however, that there is relatively little by way of age-disaggregated data on adolescence and youth in Ghana.

In seeking to impact the youth situation, it is important to note that Ghana's youth development challenges are huge and complex. Influencing that agenda will, therefore, be a challenging task. However, it is precisely such heavy-duty efforts which contribute to genuinely transformative change of the kind that lasts. The potential demographic dividend – in, for example, lower fertility rates and improvements in the country's human capital profile, economy and governance – is promising if young people as a whole receive more reflective attention.⁴ The task will demand a sense of:

- * *ambition* (because a transformative agenda cannot be achieved with less);
- * *persistence* (because the process will need time to deliver its outcomes);

- * *collaboration* (because this ship is too big and multifaceted for a single organisation to turn by itself); and
- * *realism* (because the deficits which a transformation-oriented youth agenda will seek to reverse are varied and deep).

The study's conclusions are largely consistent with the government's own recent assurances in the form of the Senchi Consensus⁵ – particularly its positions on the importance of improved policy credibility and coordination, zero tolerance for corruption, enhancement of inclusion and equity, curtailment of waste and discipline in public management of the Ghanaian economy.

1.2 Methodology

The study draws mainly on first-hand information from officials managing a range of public youth development initiatives, augmented with a sampling of opinions and experiences of young people at Ashaiman (a mainly migrant urban settlement with strong links to the economies of Accra and Tema), Bantama (an indigenous city-centre neighbourhood in Kumasi), Birimso (a rural community in the Eastern Region) and Kpobiman (a peri-urban community north of Accra). The elicited perceptions were bounced off a small number of independent development

⁴ See, for example, a paper on poverty traps by Poverty Education-- <http://www.povertyeducation.org/poverty-traps.html> ; also Collier's (2007) discourse on poverty; CSAE (2013) and Hamilton et al's (2005) revealing treatise on the grossly underestimated value of intangible capital (mainly human capital and functional institutions)

⁵ GoG (2014b): National Economic Forum: Changing the Narrative-Building a National Consensus for Economic and Social Transformation. Accra: Office of the President

professionals and activists with experience on the dynamics of the Ghanaian labour market and youth fronts. The youths were interviewed in a total of 18 focus groups – mostly single-sex with a few mixed groups. Together, these dialogues have facilitated an appreciation of the political economy of youth development initiatives and their impact on the prospects for Ghana's youth to achieve their aspirations.

During the course of the study, officials of the state organisations tended to be extremely wary of granting interviews. This is because some of the most significant youth and social protection initiatives have come in for adverse audits and received hostile coverage in the print press over the past year. As a result, many of those who eventually agreed to be interviewed did so anonymously and on the understanding that this document would be used principally for the purpose of assisting IBIS to develop its youth effort and that its distribution would be limited mainly to those involved in developing and fleshing out that effort.

1.3 Problem description

Even though properly disaggregated and historically comparable population statistics for the youth (as defined in Ghana's youth policy – i.e. age 15-35) are not immediately available, the number of young people aged between 15 and 24 increased fourfold over the 50-year period between the 1960 and 2010 censuses. As a result of the rapid growth of this segment of the population, **today's generation of young people is the largest ever in Ghana's history,**

regardless of which definition of youth one uses.⁶

Despite the sharp rise in youth numbers, policies for the social sectors often fail to properly target the youth or analyse their unique priorities and needs. This is troubling because the youth years are such a critical period in the life cycle – with very specific social, emotional and economic needs. Across the globe, the youth stage is often characterised by a distinctive combination of energy and vulnerability. Their inquisitive minds and yearning to fashion out exclusive identities for themselves exposes them to a line-up of predatory behaviours with a potential to control and wreck their lives. In Ghana, these risks include alcohol and drugs, porn and unprotected sex, identity fraud and internet scams, illegal mining and other get-rich-quick schemes, street gangsterism and party political violence (see, for example, ARHR, 2013; CID, 2011; PDA, 2010 and Prempeh (n.d.)). Clearly, there is a need for dependable support designed to enable them overcome these predators and also assist in developing their capabilities, thereby facilitating attainment of their legitimate aspirations.

Currently, there exists a yawning gap between low employment opportunities, weak productivity and low earnings on the one hand and high youth aspirations on the other. According to ISSER (2010), the formal sector is only able to cater for some 5,000 (i.e. 2%) of the 250,000 or so youths who enter the labour market

⁶ According to GSS (2012), those in the 15-35 age bracket make up some 26 percent of the total population while those aged 15-24 years constitute 19 percent. See also Darvas and Palmer (2014)

annually. Yet, Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) data show the formal sector as accounting for less than 14 per cent of all employment in Ghana (Table 1). Since the introduction of the Single

Spine Salary Structure (SSSS), the wage bill has become increasingly untenable, making any prospects of a significant rise in state employment for the youth a dim reality.⁷

Table 1: Economically active population aged 15 years and older by sex and employment sector

Employment Sector	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
Public	8.1	4.5	6.3
Private Formal	9.9	4.2	7.0
Private Informal	81.0	90.9	86.1
Semi-public/ Para-statal	0.2	0.1	0.1
NGO (Local and International)	0.7	0.3	0.5
International Organisation	0.1	0.0	0.0
Total	100	100	100

Source: Ghana Statistical Service. Population and Housing Census, 2010

On top of this grim national picture, Amankra (2007) and subsequently Amankra and Burggraaff (2012) estimate from their labour market studies that the youth's share of the nation's unemployed population is in the region of 60%, with females disproportionately represented in the deficit.⁸ **Compared with their older competitors, the youth are about 3.5 times more likely to be unemployed** (Darvas and Palmer, 2014; Gyampo, 2012; ISSER, 2010, 2011, 2012), with the youth unemployment statistic more than doubling since 1992. Of equal concern is the fact that Ghana's official unemployment statistic has been racing since the turn of the millennium, rising from 2.8 in 2000 to 3.6 in 2005 to 5.8 by the close of the decade (Table 2, below). Even then,

analysts such as King et al (2006a, 2006b) and Palmer (2009) cast serious doubt on just how unemployment is measured in Ghana. For the 2010 census, Ghana Statistical Service defined “employed persons” to include anyone 15 years or above who had worked – even for family gain – for a mere one hour within the seven days preceding census night. Considering that formal social security is available to only a small fraction of the adult population in Ghana, Amankra and Burggraaff (2012) contend that many youths are compelled to take on occasional piecework in order to survive and that such piecework cannot properly be classified as being “economically active.”

⁷ The precise scale of the wage bill problem is unclear, with members of the executive quoting different figures, but the statistics range between 60% and 85% of state revenue (the latter cited by then Minister of State in charge of Finance and Allied Institutions, Fifi Kwetey, in a March 2014 speech - <http://www.citifmonline.com/?p=4386>. Yet, the public sector only accounts for some 2% of the entire population.

⁸ It has to be said that the measurement of unemployment has been an area of some discomfort among economists and social scientists. Nevertheless, this has to be an alarming statistic.

Table 2: Economically active population by employment status and sex

Employment Status	2000			2010		
	Both Sexes	Male	Female	Both Sexes	Male	Female
Self-Employed	65.8	61.2	70.5	64.8	60.0	69.4
Employee	14.2	19.6	8.7	18.2	25.3	11.4
Unpaid Family Work	6.1	5.1	7.0	11.6	8.7	14.3
Other	3.5	4.0	3.1	5.8	6.1	5.3
All Employed	97.2	96.8	97.5	94.2	94.6	93.7
Unemployed	2.8	3.2	2.5	5.8	5.4	6.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number	5,580,104	2,724,481	2,855,633	10,373,678	5,056,848	5,316,830

Source: Ghana Statistical Service. Population and Housing Census Reports, 2000 & 2010.

As recently as 2013, the IMF⁹ also forecast that some “6–7 million jobs ... will need to be created in the next two decades, to absorb new entrants into the labour market.” This is a tall order by any measure, representing more than half of the current labour force. The majority of those for whom these jobs are required are, again, the youth. All of this suggests very real barriers which the youth face in accessing the labour market.

Causes of the high and continuing youth unemployment rate are varied and complex but in the author's assessment and echoing analyses by ISSER (2013), King et al (2006a, 2006b) and others -include:

- * the rapid increase in the youth population noted above;
- * the indifferent quality of the public basic education system, which leaves its products entirely unprepared for a modernising labour market or with the potential and courage to innovate;
- * the continuing lack of coherence between skills training delivery and the demands of the labour market (which is, in turn, fed by the paucity of relevant research on the latter);
- * shrinking of public sector job opportunities, owing to a labour attrition policy; and

⁹ International Monetary Fund

- * the failure of the private sector to create adequate jobs owing, in part, to challenges with unreliable energy supplies,¹⁰ lack of affordable credit capital (as government crowds out the private sector through public borrowing) and a string of other business-unfriendly barriers (such as corruption, patronage and targeted obstructions which tend to be placed in the way of businesses perceived to be linked with the political opposition).¹¹

Repeatedly, youth interviewed in the study's 18 focus groups were keen to work their way out of poverty and to set themselves onto more prosperous trajectories. However, with the dearth of opportunity (driven in part by deficits in the human capital asset base), many experience situations of adverse incorporation – a state in which short-term gains derived from personal (typically economic) pursuits entail significant costs to society or the wider economy, or compromises the dignity and/or safety of the participant. Examples cited during the study's focus group discussions include *ashawo* work (commercial sex), *kaya yoo* (head portage by females), *troko* (push-cart work), *galamsey* (illegal mining), *macho* (contract killing/ illegal protection work) and burglary. Adolescent females are particularly vulnerable to unsafe sex with multiple partners, STDs¹² and unplanned

pregnancies because of poverty. A common outcome is that the youth of today are increasingly broad-brushed in the print and broadcast presses as “*violent*”, “*deviant*” and seeking to “*get rich quick*.” In separate studies by ActionAid Ghana (AAG),¹³ the Alliance for Reproductive Health Rights (ARHR)¹⁴ and Participatory Development Associates (PDA),¹⁵ researchers found poor adolescent girls exchanging sex for as little as GH¢1 or in equivalent mobile phone top-ups. On the basis of the 2012 Sentinel Survey, the National AIDS Control Programme (NACP) reports that nearly 2% of young people aged 15 to 19 years are HIV-positive, predictably much higher than the national prevalence rate of 1.37%.

On the positive side, the majority of such adversely incorporated youths interviewed were willing to acknowledge the social/ legal inappropriateness and risks associated with the livelihoods and practices into which they find themselves trapped by the sheer lack of opportunity. Several of the more politically-inclined among them –

¹⁰ According to a recent World Bank survey of the expansive informal sector, the continuing capriciousness of power supplies and the lack of access to credit present the heaviest burdens for the country's numerous small, labour - intensive enterprises scattered across the informal sector, where growth is most inclusive (BFT, 2014b).

¹¹ The air of despondency across the business sector is reflected in a recent (3rd June 2014) public statement by Kwesi Botchway, a one - time presidential aspirant of the current governing party in which he described “*a nation reeling in widespread disaffection ... [and] a mood that is marked by some frustration and rising cynicism about any and all utterances, explanations and assurances by government ...*”

¹² Sexually transmitted diseases

¹³ AAG (2012): Young Women: Life Choices and Livelihoods. Accra: ActionAid Ghana

¹⁴ ARHR (2013): 2013 Maternal Health Scorecard. Accra: Alliance for Reproductive Health Rights

¹⁵ PDA (2010): Participatory Poverty and Vulnerability Assessment (PPVA). Accra: DFID, UNICEF and World Bank

typically males in Ashaiman and Bantama - expressed a desire to break free of the cycle of violence into which they have become bound, often at the behest of politicians and their party functionaries, especially around election seasons.¹⁶

History suggests that when people's legitimate aspirations are ignored and inequality left to fester, it breeds dangers. A recent political economy scan of Ghana by Fox *et al* (2011) identifies “*the growth of youth unemployment and underemployment*” among the country's most pressing challenges. The report notes further that “*both the NDC and the NPP have been less than responsible in exploiting the problem of lack of sufficient jobs for youth in Ghana today for narrow partisan gain.*” In another recent assessment, Throup (2011) concludes similarly, that “*the main threats to Ghanaian stability will [include] youth unemployment.*”

Having recognised the unusually high youth unemployment rate, successive Ghanaian governments over the last decade have attempted to set up a diversity of employment-oriented interventions for the increasingly youthful population. Globally too, there is increasing recognition that “*Generation Y*” (as they are known in some quarters) can no longer be ignored. Indeed, the world's memory is still fresh with images from the Arab Spring in the Middle East and North Africa, where discontent with high youth unemployment rates contributed to destabilising entire states, some of which were previously considered

invulnerable.

Ghana's youth are a rather heterogeneous group and the priorities of a 15-year-old adolescent tend to be quite different from those of a 24-year-old. This heterogeneity is accentuated if they are of opposite genders and live in divergent geographical spaces (e.g. a young man in Accra – Ghana's primate city – vis-à-vis an adolescent schoolgirl in a remote village in the rural savannah). Yet, a cursory review of the content of the Ghanaian print press reveals a worrying impression – a perception of the youth as an undifferentiated group of restless, unreasonable and undisciplined people actively searching for perverse pathways to affluence. While it is true that there are some who are manipulated by self-seeking politicians to foment trouble and whose activism can be a threat to society, there is no hard data suggesting that these are anywhere close to a majority. Still on the subject of heterogeneity, there is also a small minority who are well-educated, highly skilled and flourishing economically, albeit in isolation. Their knowledge is largely unavailable to the larger majority of poorly-educated, low-skill youth who are eking out a living under challenging circumstances and with little opportunity to exit the vicious circle of impoverishment.

The above suggests that **programming will have to be more discerning, with interventions better targeted to respond to different levels of education, socio-economic condition and gender.** The needs of those who are stark illiterate will

¹⁶ Several were also irritated by the fact that while their votes are actively courted by politicians during election season, they quickly become invisible once elections are over- except when “*our energy is required for communal labour.*”

differ from those of other youths with a WASSCE¹⁷ or polytechnic qualification. The former would benefit from some basic functional literacy and numeracy skills whereas the latter may require some assistance to build their confidence to innovate and/or consider self-employment as a credible option.

Logically, the serious weaknesses in youth policy and programming can only hold development back as they deny the Ghanaian collective of the potentials of this large segment of the population. Rather than see the youth as some nuisance to be wished away or managed as an after-thought, a more productive paradigm would acknowledge their often distinctive energy, resourcefulness and courage as a developmental resource. Intuitively, the continuing neglect of this valuable asset must cost the nation considerably in future productivity growth and is an unpardonable waste of potential.

Ultimately, the wellbeing of both the youth and the wider Ghanaian state are intimately linked with the quality of the education available to the majority – in particular, the degree to which schooling equips participants with the critical thinking skills and confidence needed to participate fully in civic processes. As Botero et al (2013) establish so persuasively in their paper, “Education, Complaints, and Accountability,” enlarging youth access to an empowering education is also vital for curtailing corruption and similar vices. Their research found that “*as education levels in a country rise, so does the*

number of complaints when officials misbehave, which raises the expected costs of misconduct and thus encourages better behaviour – asking for fewer bribes, avoiding abusing people, showing up to work. Through this entirely decentralised process ... the quality of government improves.” However, for now, poverty, gender and geography conspire with ineffective schooling quality to keep large swathes of youth from achieving a functional level of literacy and numeracy, from transitioning up the education ladder and from developing their life potentials.

1.4 Priorities in the literature

From a review of the existing literature, it is possible to distil some five or so intersecting areas in which adolescents and other young members of Ghanaian society experience significant deficits. These include:

- * sub-optimal and non-empowering education and skills development;
- * income poverty and unavailability of jobs (particularly skilled ones);
- * lack of voice and inclusion in the national development agenda;
- * frequent abuse (verbal, physical, sexual and psychological); and
- * lack of relevant information (including mis-information) on healthy living and sexual and reproductive health.

Against these areas of deficit, the field study also identified a consistent passion for ICT¹⁸ among youths interviewed, especially males.

¹⁷ West Africa Senior Secondary Certificate Examination

¹⁸ Information and Communication Technology

Overall, girls and young women appear to experience the above deficits disproportionately. Adolescent girls in particular lack voice in decision-making processes concerning their futures and their sexuality and reproductive health. Prejudicial and intractable gender-based norms and practices continue to coalesce with poverty and skill deficits to substantially limit the development of their capabilities and income earning potentials. Adolescent girls who were interviewed in the course of this study asserted that male youths played a significant role in the range of gender injustices and exploitations they had experienced. These range from sexual and emotional blackmail through taunting and

bullying, leaving disproportionate shares of household chores on them, and physical abuse. Contrasting this, the global literature on “life-skills-based education” (LSBE) reveals that adolescent boys and young men who have been gender sensitised do not only live their own lives in more gender-aware ways but are also more likely to engender and protect gender-sensitive behaviours and contribute actively to dismantling gender-unjust cycles among their peers.¹⁹

Based on the youth literature on Ghana,²⁰ Table 3 presents the author's crude categorisation of who are most immediately affected by each of the key concerns identified above.

Table 3: Youth cohorts most directly affected by key deficits

Priority area	Adolescents	Older youth
Sub-optimal and disempowering education	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ,especially ♀ in rural areas	
Deficits in marketable skills		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Income poverty	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> , especially in rural and migrant urban enclaves	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> , especially in rural and migrant urban enclaves
Lack of employment opportunities		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Abuse (verbal, physical, sexual, psychological)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ,especially ♀	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ,typically ♀
Exclusion from national policy dialogues		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ,especially ♀ and rural areas
Lack of relevant information on SRH ²¹	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

The next section will explore the credibility of existing public initiatives and the extent to which they inspire hope for addressing the priorities of Ghana's youth.

¹⁹ See, for example, Arnot (2004); Devine and Jensen (2003); Haywood and Mac an Ghaill (2003); Kirkby et al (2005); UNICEF et al (2004) and UNESCO (2008)

²⁰ Particularly Darvas and Palmer (2014); Gyampo and Obeng-Odoom (2013); King et al (2006 a) PDA (2010); UNICEF (2011a) and WCF (2012)

²¹ Sexual and reproductive health

2. THE STATE'S RESPONSE

2.1 National youth policy

On the face of it, the National Youth Policy (NYP) of 2010 provides the framework around which youth development agendas are to be framed. In Section 5.1 of the policy, the document articulates a vision of “*an empowered youth contributing positively to national development.*” In reality, however, there is little awareness of the policy and scant evidence of efforts at implementing it. Even more fundamentally, and almost incredibly, the age band in the youth policy does not align with the disaggregation in the census reports. Two possibilities suggest themselves from this observation—either the subject of youth development is not a genuine priority to the state or else the lead institution responsible for youth development—the National Youth Authority (NYA)—lacks the clout needed to make a credible case with the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) for such a disaggregation. It is also, of course, plausible that both hypotheses apply simultaneously. Indeed, the rest of the evidence from the study would support this last line of reasoning. For example, a content analysis of the Senchi Consensus shows that, for all the numerous action points agreed, not one specifically mentioned the youth, and the only reminders to proactively prioritise young people came from two international participants – not representatives of the Ghanaian state.

For some two decades beginning in the early 1990s, successive governments paid lip service to the subject of a youth policy, with each succeeding administration overturning aspects of the preceding draft, yet failing to complete or

ratify the revised version. This unfortunate situation was possible because, unlike some of Ghana's other policies, there has never been a requirement to present the youth policy to Parliament, rendering it easy to abandon.

Owing to the history of the policy's development described above—particularly the fact that successive governments have been quick to throw out content introduced by their predecessor—**the opposition New Patriotic Party (NPP) has tended to distance itself from the final document.** With the NPP support base accounting for about one-half of the population, the implication is that the NYP cannot be said to enjoy national consensus.

In fairness, the policy does correctly diagnose the structural drivers responsible for perpetuating youth poverty and inequality and undermining their life trajectories. These include the lack of genuine voice and political consciousness, their inability to access an empowering basic education and the lack of skills that are marketable and relevant to the modernising economy. Quite typical of public agendas in Ghana, however, **the policy has not been accompanied by a credible action plan** and there has been little decisive implementation so far, particularly in the broad area of political empowerment and active citizenship. Thus, four years into the life of the policy, there is little evidence to suggest that much has changed regarding these important drivers.

The youth policy is also tall on rhetoric when it comes to acknowledging the potential of the youth and about fostering youth influence and access to facilitative assets such as a good education, skills and financing. The small handful of efforts which the study encountered were of a largely partisan nature, aimed at mobilising youth votes or, not uncommonly, to undertake dirty tasks for politicians (e.g. threatening or silencing opponents) in return for equally improper favours (e.g. fast-tracking their access to project benefits or ceding to them rights to the lucrative management of urban public places of convenience).²²

The study also finds that there is currently little information available regarding how the policy is being rolled out or how effective it is proving to be. Except for a couple of youth organisation leaders,²³ youth interviewed in the course of this study were unaware of the NYP, let alone familiar with its provisions to facilitate their access to a fair share of the national cake.

According to Section 11.2.1 of the policy document, *“the policy shall be reviewed ... at least once in every five years ... in line with other government policies.”* Given the lukewarm attention to the policy thus far, the opportunity to review the document in 2015 is one which ought to be taken seriously. That effort is one which IBIS can contribute proactively to by providing relevant education to civil society and assisting to nurture youth voice. This is also important because a strengthened youth policy –

one with genuine youth input – would be harder for a successor government to overturn in the event that the ruling National Democratic Congress (NDC) loses the 2016 elections.

Both in the policy and informally, Ghana's definition of “youth” extends well beyond the internationally accepted age range of 15-24. This creates avenues for the older generations to “raid” the policy space, leaving large swathes of genuine youth excluded from benefiting from youth interventions. Even the head of the particular NYA office²⁴ that was sampled in this study was himself patently over the age bracket. Across the country, “youth” clubs and other “youth” groups include men and women in their forties and fifties. This creates real challenges since Ghanaian culture, particularly in the rural areas, tends to defer to people who are older. While one must acknowledge that there are many citizens aged over 24 who remain unprepared for independent adulthood, that fact does not qualify them as youth. The latter have several other important physiological and emotional needs and aspirations which would slip through a blanket policy.

2.2 Representation in policy dialogue/ development processes

As Gyampo (2012) observes in a recent reflection, “development plans have been formulated and implemented with little or no participation of the youth.”

²² The management of urban public latrines has been quite a lucrative endeavour, with little required by way of accountability.

²³ Curiously, the leaders were themselves over 35 years old-which is beyond the relevant age threshold, even by the NYP's generous eligibility criteria.

²⁴ Namely, the Tamale Metropolitan Assembly (TaMA) office

Of the youth leaders interviewed, none of those falling in the genuine youth bracket had any idea who had “represented” them in the development of the NYP or how these so-called “representatives” had been selected. In a discussion with staff of Participatory Development Associates who have been involved in a series of recent consultations with some adolescent and youth groups, it was disclosed that representation tends to be scant and selective, determined without broad consultation and is almost exclusively “limited to males in the capital city.” Yet, the overwhelming majority of Ghanaian youth – and especially the most impoverished – live in the rural hinterland. By contrast to the lack of proactive attention by the state to developing genuine youth voice and representation, the Church of Pentecost (CoP) and some other religious institutions are investing in mentoring and developing their youth and providing them with hands-on opportunities to grow their potentials and deploy their skills. Indeed, some of the more active youth met in the course of the study confirmed that they had started their journeys in active citizenship by participating in such church-based youth groups.

Even the National Youth Employment Task Force (NYETF) established to facilitate the implementation of the youth employment initiative only had a cosmetic representation of youth. According to the guidelines, representation was to be sourced from “*Office of the President, Micro-Finance and Small Loans Centre (MASLOC), Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoYS), Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning (MoFEP), Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD),*

Ministry of Private Sector Development and Presidential Special Initiatives (MPSD&PSI), Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA), Ministry of Trade and Industry (MoTI), Ministry of Communications, Ministry of Education (MoE), Ministry of Health (MoH), Parliament, Ministry of Mines, Lands and Forestry, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Interior (MoI), National Security Council Secretariat, National Disaster Management Organisation (NADMO), National Employment Task Coordinator and [merely] two representatives of the youth groups in Ghana” (GoG, 2006:12). Clearly, the youth were just a small minority.

2.3 Youth development initiatives

This section presents brief profiles of the key interventions facilitated by the state. While some of these are wholly intended for the youth, others have a broader remit but are beginning to include youth-targeted responses in acknowledgement of the scale of Ghana's “youth bulge”. Despite the efforts, the interpretation of youth development in the publicly-funded interventions tends to be very narrow and limited to efforts around employment. There is also considerable ambiguity between which elements are *programmes* and which one are merely *services*. For example, while LESDEP and YESDEC describe themselves (both during the interviews and in their brochures) as programmes, their peer contractors – e.g. Azongtaba and Roagam Links Ghana (rLG) – are consistently described as service providers.

2.3.1 GYEEDA²⁵

²⁵ Ghana Youth Employment and Entrepreneurial Development Agency

By a long margin, GYEEDA stands out as the most significant of the public initiatives targeting youth development in Ghana. Initially designed as a programme (the National Youth Employment Programme, NYEP), GYEEDA has been transformed into a full-fledged agency through a re-branding exercise during the run-up to the 2012 general elections.

For an organisation of its size – and superintending the scale of funds it expends²⁶ – it is very surprising that the agency has operated without appropriate legal backing since it metamorphosed from the NYEP.²⁷ This singular act of bypassing Parliament undermines Ghana's democracy as, in effect, it shows disregard for the representatives of the people and places undue power in the hands of the executive arm of government. Only now are plans underway to seek the relevant legislative (parliamentary) backing to regularise the agency as the apex body with a remit to facilitate youth employment and coordinate entrepreneurship within the public and private sectors.

Throughout its life, GYEEDA has been poorly managed. Several of its high-ranking officials have been indicted for such levels of graft as to

seriously dent the agency's moral authority and the clout it requires to champion this challenging agenda effectively. An entrenched lack of transparency has allowed the scheme to be milked by unscrupulous agents both in and outside the public sector and to serve as a tool for political patronage. A recent account by a ministerial fact-finding team describes a programme characterised by persistent create-loot-share arrangements between the previous management and its service providers (see also Section 4, below, on sector governance).²⁸ In a reader-friendly summary entitled “*The GYEEDA Report for the Busy Citizen*,” Asare (2013) attempts to distil the most advocacy-relevant findings from the fuller 164-page report, identifying five major laws that have been breached.²⁹

Despite ongoing efforts to clean up its image and restore a semblance of credibility to it, the fact that the agency's lack of legislative authority slipped the censorious eyes of Ghana's Parliament and the youth (who ought to be the primary stakeholders) remains a source of grave concern. First, it indicates that Parliament is failing the

²⁶ According to Asare (2013), “In the 4-year period spanning 2008 to 2012, GYEEDA received GH¢949,661,017 ... by June 2013, GYEEDA also owed an additional GH¢259,000,000. Thus, total spending by GYEEDA in this 4-year period exceeded GH¢1,000,000,000.”

²⁷ See <http://vibeghana.com/2013/08/02/the-gyeeda-report-for-the-busy-citizen/>

²⁸ An interactive version of the GYEEDA Report can be accessed by navigating the sidebar at the left-hand side at <http://datablog.peacefonline.com/pages/blog/32/>; see also <http://www.myjoyonline.com/opinion/2013/december-10th/ghana-infrastructure-fund-is-it-another-create-loot-and-share.php>; <http://thechronicle.com.gh/minister-mp-cited-in-gyeeda-scam-abuga-pele-authorized-payment-of-2-3m-for-no-work-done/>; and <http://elections.peacefonline.com/pages/politics/201307/169970.php?page=3&storyid=100&>

²⁹ These are Article 181, 252 (3) of the 1992 Constitution, the Financial Administration Act, 2003 (Act 654), the District Assemblies Common Fund Act, 1994 (Act 455), the Public Procurement Act, 2003 (Act 663) and Part III of the Criminal Code (referring, among others, to crimes of embezzlement, forgery, willful loss to the state and fraud).

youth in its oversight responsibility. Hence, the youth will have to become more actively involved in protecting their stake in such programmes as the watchdog role cannot safely be left to Parliament. Second, it also suggests that greater investment is needed in building policy literacy and programme ownership across the youth.

At the central level, the new chief executive of GYEEDA is optimistic about the agency's future. He acknowledges the challenges which have, hitherto, plagued the programme and created public disaffection for the agency and, over a trial period, intends to revise the policy of two-year internships downward to one year in an attempt to curtail inefficiency. The agency also plans to re-examine the viability of existing vocational modules to ascertain their marketability, returns and sustainability. Those that fail the test will be expunged from the current list, allowing the agency to sharpen its focus on a smaller range of priority areas. An electronic register has recently been developed to facilitate tracking of enrolments, and especially to curtail multiple registrations. A similar system will allow payments of allowances to be done through the underused e-zwich electronic platform to limit leakage and improve tracking in the payment processing system.

Weighed against the CEO's assurances, however, the continuing lack of youth involvement in the formulation and review of the agenda does not match his mood of optimism. Gyampo's (2012) observation that

from the outset, "*the youth were ... marginalised in the formulation and implementation of the National Youth Employment Programme, a programme intended to ... deal with unemployment among them*" persists unabated.

2.3.2 LESDEP³⁰

LESDEP was initially touted as a decentralised poverty response under the ambit of the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development. The expectation, therefore, was that districts would drive the effort in a truly localised way – determining the shape of their unique variants, in consultation with their youth and in harmony with their Medium Term Development Plans (MTDPs). Though LESDEP prefers to identify itself as a programme, the study's two interviews with their representatives (at national and regional levels) clearly show the *de facto* LESDEP to be a private sector contractor providing services to the state (largely GYEEDA). Underpinning this rather inexplicable twist in the identity of LESDEP is the fact that the training agenda is no longer driven by districts but by the service provider.

2.3.3 YESDEC³¹

In its early life, YESDEC was simultaneously superintended by two ministries – the then Ministry of Employment and Social Welfare (MESW, now Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations, MELR) and MLGRD. This is because YESDEC, as a service provider, had contracts to provide youth training and business development services to both GYEEDA (under MESW) and LESDEP (under MLGRD). Over time,

³⁰ Local Enterprises and Skills Development Programme

³¹ Youth Enterprises and Skills Development Centre

MLGRD). Over time, YESDEC became more associated with MoYS. Like its peer service provider, LESDEP, YESDEC also describes itself as a programme.

2.3.4 rLG³²

Like YESDEC and the de facto LESDEP, Roagam Links Ghana (rLG) is another private contractor that has provided services to GYEEDA and MoYS. The study found that rLG's training is entirely supply-driven. According to an officer interviewed in the Tamale office, rLG simply has to tell GYEEDA how many trainees they have space for.³³ However, while rLG provides training and internship services directly, LESDEP and YESDEC deliver their services mainly through NBSSI³⁴ (entrepreneurial training) and master-craftsmen/women (technical training). In essence, LESDEP and YESDEC function primarily as intermediary institutions, adding little value in the process yet creaming off significant surpluses.³⁵

2.3.5 MASLOC³⁶

At the central level, the Micro-Finance and Small Loans Centre (MASLOC) has recently initiated efforts to reach the youth more effectively through deliberate actions such as relaxing its collateral requirements and providing services like financial and entrepreneurial education which cater more directly to their needs. Another positive feature of the centre's emerging

approach is its acknowledgement of partnership as a key element in the strategy to reach out to the youth. The youth initiative is built on the solidarity approach, whereby youth will be facilitated to join up in groups to access business loans. However, from a brief discussion with the Tamale office, these efforts have yet to penetrate to the sub-national level.

2.3.6 BUSAC³⁷

Like MASLOC, the Business Sector Advocacy Challenge Fund (BUSAC) is not a youth-specific facility. However, BUSAC does strive to make its services accessible to the youth. In the Northern Region, for example, BUSAC welcomes business advocacy and business management proposals from youth groups, particularly those involved in food crop farming.

2.3.7 SADA³⁸

The Savannah Accelerated Development Authority (SADA) has a remit to coordinate (rather than implement) development in the savannah region. However, a quest for visibility led the institution to become side-tracked into guinea fowl and afforestation schemes devised as initiatives to employ 5,000 youths under an ostensibly public-private partnership (PPP) with Asongtaba. These schemes became so tainted with

³² Roagam Links Ghana

³³ The situation is similar for LESDEP.

³⁴ National Board for Small-Scale Industries

³⁵ In one interview, a past officer of YESDEC described the organization as "a facilitator of internships ... assisting GYEEDA exits (sic) and GYEEDA recruits."

³⁶ Micro-Finance and Small Loans Centre

³⁷ Business Sector Advocacy Challenge Fund

³⁸ Savannah Accelerated Development Authority

allegations of high-level corruption as to seriously dent SADA's credibility and to compel the Presidency to order a suspension of SADA's involvement in the PPP.

2.3.8 NYA³⁹

Somewhat surprising for an institution that is expected to be largely responsible for policy-making and coordination, NYA does deliver some skills training in a set of regional institutes spread across Ghana's ten administrative regions. While the numbers enrolled are relatively small (around 75 per region annually) and the facilities poorly maintained, the NYA programme is the only one among the diverse skills training interventions encountered during the course of the study which is of a duration (four years) likely to achieve genuine proficiency among its completers.

2.3.9 YESP⁴⁰

The Youth Enterprise Support Programme (YESP), to be seeded with a sum of GH¢10m, is the latest in the raft of poorly-thought-through investments in youth development. It follows a similar pledge by the president in September 2013, in which he mentioned that: *“Ghana has created the Youth Jobs and Enterprise Development Fund to provide young people, who account for more than half of its population, with entrepreneurial skills and access to start-up funding.”*

Across the organisations interviewed, there was a huge imbalance between their focus on participant numbers on the one hand and the quality of skill acquisition on the other. This is because the service providers tend to be paid based on the number of individuals enrolled, a situation which partly accounts for why so little effort goes into ensuring that the same person does not appear on the registers of multiple service providers (ref. Section 2.4, below).

2.4 Coordination of the youth effort

Historically, there has been a tendency to subsume the youth sector under other more conspicuous ministerial agendas – e.g. education or sports – and, practically, the youth remain largely side-lined in the national development discourse.⁴¹ The division of the diverse skills training interventions between several disparate ministries seriously undermines the coherence of the youth development effort. Without exception, all key institutions interviewed (DSW, GYEEDA, LESDEP, MASLOC, NYA, SADA and YESDEC) conceded the lack of coherence and the fact that the agenda lacks any semblance of credible coordination. When one considers the vast number of discrete institutions and ministries actively involved in developing, financing and implementing youth development initiatives, one can only imagine the loss of potential synergies and efficiencies that the lack of coordination must be costing the state. The return, very recently, to decoupling the

³⁹ National Youth Authority

⁴⁰ Youth Enterprise Support Programme

⁴¹ There is a view within the ranks of some social policy analysts - and a well-reasoned one at that - which holds that the lack of genuine inclusion in national policy processes is quite deliberate, and driven by a desire to make policy more amenable to manipulation for patronage purposes.

NYEP/ GYEEDA remit from the youth ministry is likely to bring in its wake further challenges of coordination. Table 4 presents the range of interventions and the relevant institutions with mandates for youth development. Some have exclusive remits for youth development while several others have initiatives and products that are ostensibly youth-oriented.

The NYA, which one might expect to be leading

the policy effort, has been very much a lame duck and not particularly keen to grant interviews during the course of the study. Curiously, apart from the interview with NYA itself, not even a single representative of the state-funded interventions interviewed mentioned the youth policy or referenced it as a backdrop to any actions being considered or deployed by their institution or the state.

Table 4: Youth development interventions with superintending ministries

Relevant intervention	Lead ministry
BUSAC: business advocacy and management training for associational groups, grants for procuring technical services	
DSIP: apprenticeship and institution - based technical training	Ministry of Education (MoE)/ COTVET ⁴²
GEBSS: business incubation and venture capital	Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations (MELR)
GYEEDA: internship - based training ostensibly to facilitate self-employment but in reality also to fill vacancies in formal sector institutions	Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations (MELR), previously Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoYS), and before that Ministry of Employment and Social Welfare (MESW)
ICCES: ⁴³ technical skills training	Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations (MELR)
LESDEP: technical and internship - based training	Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD); but also provides services to Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP), Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations (MELR), and Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoYS)
MASLOC: entrepreneurship training, venture capital	Office of the President/ Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning (MoFEP)
Skills Development Fund (SDF): venture capital	Ministry of Education (MoE)/ COTVET
Youth Enterprise Support Programme	Office of the President

⁴² Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training

⁴³ Integrated Community Centres for Employable Skills

(YESP): entrepreneurship training, venture capital	
Youth in Agriculture Programme (YiAP)	Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA)
NBSSI *: entrepreneurship training	Ministry of Trade and Industry (MoTI)
NYA *: policy coordination, skills training, leadership training	Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoYS), previously Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS)
SADA *: youth employment and skills training	Office of the President

* NBSSI, NYA and SADA are, of course, institutions rather than interventions

In practice, NYA is much less resourced than (and wields little *de facto* power over) the institutions which it ought to be coordinating and monitoring. The authority also lacks a presence in the majority of Ghana's 216 districts, further undermining its coordination capacity. In the Northern Region, for example, NYA is active in just two of the 26 districts, though it has offices in three more. While the coordination function lags, the authority expends its energies on “*registering and formalising*” youth groups across the country. It is informative that the overwhelming majority of institutions interviewed saw DSW as a *potentially* more durable and less patronage-prone organisation to coordinate the current youth agenda, given its ostensible bias towards social protection. While DSW has not been fit for purpose in the past, its capacity is gradually growing, through technical assistance support from donors – most notably DFID. Its staff also tend to be more passionate about inequality. For now, however, the department remains largely excluded from national youth policy dialogues. In the process, the draft GYEEDA Bill – currently before Cabinet – seeks to make the coordination

function a remit of GYEEDA, with representation from a range of other bodies such as Dept. of Cooperatives, GES,⁴⁴ GHS),⁴⁵ NYA and the private sector. It will be important for the youth to get proactively involved in shaping the bill to secure that it serves *their* interests, as the primary stakeholders whose lives it aims to impact.

The lack of coherence and coordination results in considerable duplication, with several service providers overlapping training services in the same localities. On top of these concerns, duplication also creates avenues for participants to enrol with multiple service providers (either simultaneously or in turn, and sometimes in multiple districts for the same initiative), benefiting unfairly from the public purse. Among its adverse outcomes, an official of the agency reported how completers often re-enrol unnoticed in other training initiatives. The GYEEDA investigation also reported on how coordination deficits contributed to enabling the “*withdrawal of unclaimed beneficiary allowances*” into private pockets.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Ghana Education Service

⁴⁵ Ghana Health Service

⁴⁶ Report of the Ministerial Committee on GYEEDA, a.k.a. GYEEDA Report

The continuing fragmentation of the effort entrenches the problem of inequity. While certain localities lack attention (either because none of the initiatives exist in their area or because training centres are too remote), other localities can be flooded with interventions. Thus, in sum, the lack of coordination means that youth policy, planning and projections are taking place in a chaotic environment. Symptomatic of failed coordination, the current study was informed of youth *“jumping between service providers in the Ablekuma North District,”* with some benefiting several times over from Asongtaba/ rLG, LESDEP and YESDEC. When public resources are as scarce as they have been in Ghana lately (and are likely to be in the medium-term), this must be a real cause for unease.

Further, there is a lack of uniformity across service providers when it comes to the terms of equipment support. While MASLOC charges nominal interests on its loans, LESDEP's loans are interest-free. GYEEDA and Asongtaba support are even more generous, taking the form of grants.⁴⁷ Loan recovery periods also vary significantly. While no one option can be said to be better than the others without a proper analysis, it is nevertheless the case that the lack of consistency does undermine beneficiary *willingness* to pay back loans, though one must also acknowledge other factors affecting this attitude.⁴⁸ The naming of modules also varies across the different interventions and service providers so that, for example, what is referred to

as *“hairdressing”* by one service provider, another may call (or even subsume under a broader theme of) *“beauty care”*.

Several factors contribute to the weak interest in coordinating the skills development efforts of the diverse providers. These include the fact that service providers are paid according to the number of trainees they account for. The practice results simultaneously in duplication and proliferation of efforts, as service providers have little incentive to screen applicants, collaborate, follow-up their graduates or eschew individuation.

Though NYA has not been very effective thus far, the authority remains an important player in the arena of youth development. That is because the government still requires them to be consulted in the development of all significant youth initiatives, particularly where the initiative has financial implications for the state.

In the non-state sector, players with the greatest influence (technically and financially) in the area of youth development include DFID, UNFPA and UNICEF. At the time of the interviews, DFID was preparing to invest substantial resources in the sector. UNICEF has also demonstrated significant passion for the agenda and is partnering UNFPA to co-fund a situation analysis of Ghana's young people. When completed, that study should provide additional guidance to IBIS in its youth programming initiative.

⁴⁷ This information on Asongtaba was provided by LESDEP-Tamale.

⁴⁸ LESDEP reports loan recovery rates of the order of a disappointing 20% in Tamale and roughly double that in Accra, compared with 70-80% for MASLOC. Repayment periods vary by institution as well as by the size of the credit and generally range between six and 24 months.

3. INTERVENTION MANAGEMENT

3.1 Approach to youth development

Current state policy in respect of youth development (the NYP) targets support to the youth through two ostensibly distinct strands. The first is through enlarging access to secondary education and training opportunities. The second strands seeks – on paper at least – to facilitate self-employment through a range of state-led interventions. However, the strategy lacks clarity in terms of who has pivotal responsibility for the skills agenda. **It remains unclear whether which ministry leads the skills development effort – education, local government, the youth and sports ministry, or employment and labour relations,** now that GYEEDA has been relocated away from MoYS.

In large part, certificated training is delivered with a strong bias towards theoretical learning in a range of vocational training institutes (VTIs) which lack well-equipped workshops. It is telling that skills training accounts for less than one per cent of the expenditure of the Ministry of Education (MoE).⁴⁹ Non-certificated training tends to be delivered largely by master artisans and, under schemes like GYEEDA, this is being increasingly sub-contracted to them through intermediaries such as LESDEP and YESDEC.

In the more skills-specific state interventions, there is a tendency to combine training with internship, but the training is typically so condensed and the quality so poor that it is failing to achieve its objective of facilitating *self-employment*. A single artisan is often

responsible for training about 50 programme beneficiaries (often in addition to their regular apprentices). When one factors in the fact that the entire duration of actual training can be as short as three to six months (LESDEP even cited one week to three months), one has to wonder what the effect will be on the proficiency of graduates being churned out by the programmes/ interventions. Further, having between six and ten modules on the typical initiative (LESDEP has as many as 25) raises similar questions about the quality of oversight.⁵⁰

Officials of LESDEP and YESDEC observed that sizeable proportions of their participants are already self-employed (or regular apprentices) who are merely supplementing their meagre incomes through the public facility.⁵¹ **Thus, in large part, the self-employment strand is merely offering paid internships, with very little by way of sustainable benefits** beyond the pay-cheques participants receive over the two-year programme period. At the very least, it seems odd that a programme describing itself as mainly facilitating artisanal *self-employment* assesses its effectiveness by the relatively high numbers it is able to place in public sector internships (overwhelmingly non-artisanal) and related permanent employment.

⁴⁹ Source: Budget statements for the past four years

⁵⁰ This renders monitoring and iteration more challenging.

⁵¹ It is, of course, conceivable that some of these enrol in the initiatives with the healthier intention of upgrading their skills.

These worrying outcomes of NYEP/ GYEEDA were always predictable, considering that **the earliest justification for commencing such a programme was not to harness the youth's energies but to avert threats to national security** (based on a March 2005 security briefing for the erstwhile Kufuor Administration).⁵² Indeed, the initial 10-person task team assembled to brainstorm a strategy included as many as six members from the National Security outfit alone. While there is no concrete evidence to that effect, it seems likely that this was influenced by Ghana's chequered history with coup d'états. In any case, the chosen strategy was one of promptly appeasing the urban-based youth, who were perceived to pose a threat to the government's survival (Gyampo, 2012) rather than a carefully-thought-through investment in developing the youth's capabilities and facilitating them to establish their own businesses. In the process, the much smaller and more gradualist Skills Training and Entrepreneurship Programme (STEP) of the then Ministry of Employment and Social Welfare (MESW) was hastily transformed and up-scaled into the NYEP (Darvas and Palmer, 2014; Palmer, 2009).

Even so, a more troubling concern has to be the common complaint that recruitment onto the initiative has served largely as a patronage mechanism for appeasing youths loyal to whichever government is in power – currently, the National Democratic Congress (NDC). The

Ghana Police Service's *Visibility* project – introduced in the run-up to the 2012 general elections – is perceived as an avenue for recruiting youths loyal to the ruling party. Indeed, a senior government appointee disclosed during this study that the overwhelming majority of the programme's graduates who find jobs are merely absorbed directly into the state security apparatus.⁵³ Recent statistics from the newly created Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations (GoG, 2014a) lend credence to the patronage hypothesis, revealing a more than threefold increase in such absorptions over the course of the 2012 election year alone (from 108,000 to 457,779).⁵⁴ Another official, from YESDEC, also reported a high level of “*political interference in beneficiary selection*” while a respondent at Ashaiman observed that the scheme has been used by both the NDC and the NPP – i.e. the largest two political parties – “*to pave the way for [youth] votes.*”

Some youths interviewed reported that succeeding in enrolling in an intervention did not guarantee that they would receive the allowances due them. Conversely, others with strong party loyalties are able to claim the allowances without participating in training. There have also been allegations – both in the Ghanaian press and in previous fieldwork by this author – of unexplained deductions being made from beneficiaries' allowances.

⁵² See, for example, Gyampo (2012)

⁵³ In practice, the Fire Service, Immigration Service, Police Service and Prisons Service

⁵⁴ These are classified as “*unemployed youth linked to employment opportunities through Government interventions.*” While the table in that report assigns the rise to the period 2012-2013, a closer reading of the report shows that it was actually compiled halfway through 2013, suggesting that this hike happened mainly during the 2012 election year.

3.2 Participant selection and profile

The age band used in the interventions (generally 18-45, even 50 in some cases) differs from that specified in the NYP (15-35) and from the global definition of youth (15-24). Even the chief executive of a major public institution involved in equipping the youth with employable skills opined that the youth comprise “*whoever consider themselves as youth; ... some are even 70 ... and who are we to say they aren't youth?*” Various other officials acknowledged that some *retired* health workers and teachers have been enrolled as paid *interns*. This raises serious questions around the objectiveness of selection processes and the *de facto* agenda.

In several cases, youth interviewed complained of opaque selection processes. Ultimately, the lack of objective targeting criteria means that programme agendas and benefits tend to be captured by the oldest and most influential – typically through affiliation with whichever party happens to be governing at the time. In the words of a YESDEC official, “*the programme was intended mainly for the kind of youths you find in the informal sector, but even university graduates are competing with them.*”

The study also found that adolescent females in rural areas endure the gravest marginalisation. Not only are they consistently excluded from formal policy-making and its benefits, but also from traditional and household decision-making processes as well. The burden of funding short-term housing in the district and regional capitals – which is where most training takes place is a further

factor constraining the effective participation of the rural youth, especially the female segment. Yet, the GYEEDA programme is repeatedly flaunted – in national economic policy statements and other government pronouncements – as a social protection instrument. If that (i.e. social protection) really is the intention, then GYEEDA ought to more resolutely prioritise the most vulnerable rather than merely targeting the average.

Some of those enrolled in the public initiatives said they had been compelled to “give something” by way of “key money” to various officials to pave the way for their inclusion in the interventions. Some female participants reported demands made on them for sexual favours by agents of GYEEDA. At Ashaiman, it was reported that “*staff sometimes even demand to see an applicant's party card.*”

3.3 Demand for skills training

The trade areas (a.k.a. “modules”) available under the public interventions often differ by district (and sometimes by clusters within a district). On the surface, this apparent flexibility would seem reasonable. However, the process of selecting modules from the larger menu is typically done without consultation with the youth. At best, it is the voices of the local leaders (e.g. Assemblypersons and traditional rulers) that may be sought. It is common knowledge, however, that community leaders are typically well beyond the youth age band. Their realities thus tend to be very different from those of the youth, who generally fail to ask relevant questions for sheer lack of awareness and because they are reluctant to offend those in authority.

The process of determining modules for a locality is also not market-led. Neither is there any form of data-informed guidance to assist the youth in selecting suitable modules. As a result, youth graduating from training are often unable to market their services. YESDEC, for example, observes that their “*most successful exiters (sic) have been those with a ready market for their products*” – e.g. bead makers who had been contracted by a bead exporter on an “*out-grower*” basis. This reinforces the importance of driving skill choices by a marketability criterion rather than by mere speculation and subjective intuition, as is the case currently.

In accessing the available modules in the diversity of interventions, girls face the hurdle of gender stereotyping. The majority of girls have been socialised to accept this artificial divide without question and some girls are prevented from entering some technical trades by this barrier. The non-empowering education system is partly responsible for this situation. There are no counselling services to assist children to objectively identify their unique strengths and interests upon which they can build future careers. Even within the public training initiatives, such services are scarce. In the comparatively more rewarding ICT training module (for which rLG is the lead service provider), females are seriously outnumbered – by a ratio of 5:1 in some classes. The use of

English as the exclusive medium of instruction on this module restricts entry largely to SHS⁵⁵ and polytechnic leavers and urban dwellers. Within a context where *de facto* literacy levels are low even among completers of the basic cycle, this means that basic school dropouts and the poorest are not the main beneficiaries of certain modules.⁵⁶ This explains why several low-return modules – e.g. “*fashion and garments*” and “*beauty care*” continue to dominate among girls even when these markets are already quite saturated. By contrast, the modules on rural transportation (a.k.a. “*Motor King*”) and mobile phone repairs are highly sought after among male youths across the initiatives. Both of these are perceived to be considerably more lucrative, mainly because of the high demand for such services.⁵⁷ However, gender stereotyping has kept these as male-only preserves.

Some interventions are characterised by geographical inequities in the availability of modules. For example, YESDEC makes room for as many as ten modules in the Greater Accra Region (GAR) but only two in the Upper Regions and three in the Northern Region.

According to GYEEDA's Northern Region Coordinator, “*the modules which take the form of internships are the most popular*” partly because they offer participants better prospects for absorption into the public service, but also because the allowances for

⁵⁵ Senior high school

⁵⁶ By contrast, SADA's defunct youth employment projects (in afforestation and guinea fowl production) had a stronger bias towards uneducated youths and school dropouts. As noted elsewhere in this report, however, issues with the legitimacy of the interventions have led to the state suspending its involvement.

⁵⁷ While the demand for mobile phone repairs is indeed high, relatively few of the graduating trainees have the wherewithal to set themselves up.

the “*trades and vocations*” modules tend to go unpaid when the government experiences difficulties with its revenue.

As a result of the weak monitoring system (Section “3.4”), delays in releasing allowances (Section “3.3”) and deficits in youth ownership of the agenda (Section “2.2”) , attrition rates can be high (reportedly around one in four on a three to six-month training journey with YESDEC). Rural youths have particular difficulty staying the course because of the added burden of paying for housing in the urban centres where the training takes place. Around September each year, hordes of trainees who have managed to pass their BECE simply leave for SHS, a situation which does not only end up wasting training resources but also enables corrupt officials to rake in unclaimed allowances, as unearthed in the GYEEDA probe.

From the interviews with the youth focus groups, the high dropout rate is also a reflection of a lack of faith in self-employment (influenced by a range of factors including a saturation of the markets for their products and services, the inadequacy of aftercare and the sheer constraints in establishing oneself in self-employment). It was common to hear youth in the focus groups opine that “*it is easier/ safer having someone else pay you a wage*” than to opt for the often tortuous and uncertain road of self-employment. The Northern Region Coordinator for GYEEDA phrased it someone differently, thus: “*the youth are more interested in earning an income immediately.*” The raft of barriers mentioned by those interviewed include

the lack of access to finance, difficulties in securing land rights for their workshops and the deficient quality of training received in the public interventions. With these hurdles, even the fortunate few who manage to get the start-up kits often sell them for cheap rather than using them to set themselves up in self-employment (Section “2.4”). This is particularly so when the kits are handed out as grants (e.g. with GYEEDA and Asongtaba).

3.4 Post-completion support

Aftercare for programme graduates has been weak. Of some 35,000 youths trained so far by YESDEC, only about 2,000 (say 1:18) received start-up support⁵⁸ and monitoring tends to be weak and cosmetic with most of the service providers interviewed. While rLG claims to support all its graduates with basic set-up kits paid for by the state, past trainees interviewed challenged this assertion. The latter position is corroborated by DSW, who observed a high level of disillusionment among disabled youth who were trained by rLG but who never received the “*exit kits*” they had been promised. As a result (but also because of deficits in the quality of training), only a small minority of those trained are applying the skills. Both rLG and DSW observed that fewer applicants are registering for that training package than before.

From interviews with service providers and exited trainees, **the quality of post-graduation monitoring too is questionable, overall.** Monitoring is simply not accorded the importance it deserves. As a result, monitoring officers are invariably

⁵⁸ Interviews with YESDEC officials.

too few relative to the number of beneficiaries. GYEEDA has only four officers responsible for monitoring, out of a labour force of 738. Even where data is available, it tends to be of poor quality and is hardly employed for decision-making. The GYEEDA probe report echoes this observation thus: *“80% of management staff expressed the opinion that management does not use reported information and reporting systems to guide operations.”*

The huge lapse in monitoring is partly explained by the fact that the service providers are paid according to the number of recruits they train. This creates no incentive to undertake effective monitoring of the intervention, tracing of completers or to check participant abuses such as multiple registrations.

Notwithstanding the generally poor performance of the public interventions in terms of aftercare, there have been some isolated positive examples of responsive monitoring. MASLOC pays much greater attention to monitoring – through a monthly cycle of visits by officers with responsibility for distinct geographical zones. In another example, YESDEC retrained a batch of female hairdressing graduates in shampoo production (to augment their incomes) when it emerged from a monitoring mission that the hairdressing business was crowded and failing to turn a decent income.

4. GOVERNANCE OF THE YOUTH INITIATIVES

Informants perceived a high level of partisanship in the allocation of staffing positions as well as in recruitments. This perception finds corroboration in the GYEEDA probe report, which observed “... *no recruitment policy in place ...*” and that “*the majority of staff (90%) were appointed without clear criteria.*” Stated more bluntly, leadership positions tend to be allocated to well-known activists of the ruling party. Just as an example, the current study found that GYEEDA's Coordinator for the Northern Region is simultaneously the ruling party's Regional Youth Coordinator. This practice – which is by no means limited to GYEEDA or the ruling party – allows corrupt and ineffective leaders to protect their positions by surrounding themselves with hand-picked “*selectorates*.”⁵⁹ CID (2011) postulates that because such “*selectorates*” are appointed on the basis of criteria other than merit, their fortunes are highly dependent on their benefactor remaining in position. As a result, there is a tendency for them to expend significant energies propping up the leader through sub-optimal decisions and milking the system as fast as they can.

This has adverse consequences not only for equity in accessing training places but ultimately for youth unity, implementation effectiveness and the credibility of the agenda as well. The study experienced first-hand that, in many of the state offices listed above, very

little work goes on. During the course of the fieldwork, strings of public offices remained locked as late as 11 o'clock. Yet officers who had arrived at work very late left early, with no information on when they would next be at post. The youth on both sides of the political divide need guidance to appreciate that, ultimately, it hurts their longer-term prospects and the economy as a whole when officers of a party they support act so irresponsibly. Only when the youth understand and accept that a non-partisan approach to youth development is the right one can real progress begin to be made on that front.

The inventory below (see Table 5) of the lead sole-sourced service providers is indeed revealing. **The seven best known companies providing such contract services are all subsidiaries of just two private companies – the Agams Group and Josphong Group of Companies.**⁶¹ Both are widely perceived to have inappropriate commercial links with the ruling party, raising serious questions regarding how service contracts are awarded (see also Asare, 2013 and Awuni, 2014). The GYEEDA report concluded scathingly that all of the training/ module proposals submitted to GYEEDA by service providers were unsolicited, the interventions “*supply-driven*” and lacking in proper appraisals to determine their economic viability and sustainability. The report similarly found that none of the service providers qualified to have been sole-sourced under the Public Procurement

⁵⁹ The concept of *selectorates* was developed by de Mesquita et al. in their seminal reflection of 2003. A selectorate refers to the group that a ruler depends on to hold on to power—see also Besley and Kudamatsu (2009).

⁶⁰ <http://www.rlgglobal.com/AGAMS-Holdings>

⁶¹ <http://josphongroup.com/>

Act (PPA). In the long run, such inappropriate practices dissipate limited funds meant for youth development and, thus, ought to be challenged.

Table 5: Service providers to Ghana's public youth interventions

Service provider	Parent company
Asongtaba Cottage Industry and Exchange Programme	Agams Group
Craftpro	Agams Group
rLG	Agams Group
Better Ghana Management Services (BGMS)	Jospong Group of Companies
LESDEP	Jospong Group of Companies
YESDEC	Jospong Group of Companies
Zoomlion	Jospong Group of Companies

4.1 Financing of youth development

The twin issue of financing and sustainability is particularly relevant at this stage of Ghana's development history. For one thing, concessional funding is already beginning to dry up, following Ghana's re-classification as a middle-income economy. Recent interviews conducted by the author with a range of Ghana's Development Partners (DPs) in the latter part of 2013 also indicate clearly that DPs are becoming increasingly frustrated over the executive's apparent vacillation in tackling perceived sleaze across the economy (see also below).⁶² The cases range from payments for which no effective service was rendered to contrived judgement debts equivalent to the entire agriculture budget (BFT, 2014a). The sense that the state lacks a will to tackle corruption is causing some DPs to reappraise the purpose of their investments. Unless these lingering perceptions of increasing

corruption are addressed, citizens too will continue to feel that their taxes are being wasted, making them unwilling to cooperate with tax authorities. In the long run, shortfalls in tax revenues will further limit opportunities for the state to invest credibly in youth development.

In the near term, prospects for improved public sector financing of the youth agenda and skills sector appear dim. The country's fiscal strength continues to deteriorate, the external debt to GDP⁶³ ratio is rising (currently 55.4% of GDP), the cedi continues to depreciate under the strain of inflation (around 15%) and fiscal deficits are increasingly becoming unsustainable (IMF, 2013), with nothing concrete on which to hang any hope for a quick resolution (IMF, 2014; Roubini, 2014). These have provoked a string of demonstrations and strikes in recent times.⁶⁵

⁶² Other state institutions aside of GYEEDA and SADA who have been cited in the spate of recent high-profile cases include Ghana Revenue Authority (GRA) and some staff of the Ministry of Justice (MoJ).

⁶³ Gross Domestic Product

⁶⁴ According to the Governor of the central bank.

⁶⁵ See, for example, Africa Confidential article entitled "Ghana: Red is the Colour" <http://www.africa-confidential.com/article/id/5721/Red-is-the-colour>

In its Country Report for May 2014, the IMF describes a state of affairs characterised by “mounting public debt ... high interest rates and a depreciating currency [which] have begun to weaken private sector activity.” This does not cut a hopeful picture for the economy or augur well for job creation (IMF, 2014). The Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda (GSGDA) objectives of shared growth and job creation rely on macroeconomic stability and the reallocation of resources from current to capital spending, and yet rising public debt and wanton corruption are crowding out priority public expenditure and private sector activity. Citizen voice, especially youth voice, to demand better protection of the public purse against abuse will be essential for mobilising the resources needed to refuel the economy and drive the objectives of the GSGDA.

Indeed, the rise in indiscipline in Ghana's public expenditure management compelled the Head of European Union delegation, Claude Maerten, to express DPs' concern over public spending and the performance of the public sector. In a speech at the launch of the Government/Development Partners Group, Maerten observed: “*The fiscal performance last year was an unwelcome repeat of Ghana's recent history of poor fiscal performance in an election year.*” In an uncharacteristically blunt tone, the ambassador added: “[A] large deficit creates serious risks ..., jeopardizes growth opportunities, constrains new investment, and adds to debt, in a context where public debt has risen quickly – levels are around what they were before the major debt relief a decade ago. ... Corruption ... reduces the value of

public spending, and has wide-ranging and serious development consequences beyond this – deterring responsible businesses and investors, undermining the rule of law, weakening accountability and public trust.”

Against this backdrop, it is worrying that funds expressly legislated for youth skills training are so poorly managed. **Ever since the Communication Service Tax (CST) (a.k.a. the “Talk Tax”) was instituted in June 2008 – via the Communication Service Tax Act (Act 754) as a dedicated source of funding for youth development in Ghana – the Act has been breached persistently**, with the state quick to divert the resources collected to other competing uses. In the process, disbursements often fall far behind – sometimes by as much as a year. Yet, the Minister of Finance is asking for the law on statutory payments to be rolled back to give him more leeway to reallocate public resources.⁶⁶ Put another way, the minister reckons that the government's considerable discretion over the allocation of tax revenue is still not enough. However, his request would flout the law. The Ghana Education Trust Fund Act 2000 (Act 581), for example, states categorically that “*the object of the Fund is to provide finance to supplement the provision of education at all levels by the Government*” and ring-fences for its use a dedicated “... two and one half percent out of the prevailing rate of the Value Added Tax to be paid by the Value Added Tax Service to the Fund ...” The Act further specifies that “*monies of the Fund shall vest in the Board of Trustees and shall be paid into bank accounts that shall be opened by the Board with the approval of the Accountant-General ... [and that] the Value Added Tax Service shall within 30 days of*

⁶⁶ See <http://www.myjoyonline.com/news/2014/July-11th/lets-revisit-laws-on-statutory-funds-seth-terkper-ignites-debate.php>

receipt of Value Added Tax revenue pay directly into the bank accounts opened under subsection (1) the proportion of the Value Added Tax revenue that is required to be paid into the Fund under section 3 (a)." In other words, this statutory fund is not at the Government's discretion to dip into.

Were Ghana's Parliament to accede to the Finance minister's request, the schemes/ expenditures affected would include youth employment, education sector investment, the DACF,⁶⁷ the Road Fund and the NHIS⁶⁸ – almost all of which are already in arrears. This would set a very dangerous governance precedent, render forward planning impossible and threaten the longevity of the youth employment agenda. **It clearly does not inure to the benefit of the youth and, thus, ought to be resisted with**

resolute advocacy grounded in relevant data on outstanding debts and appropriate references to the relevant legislations. The recent case brought before a fast-track High Court compelling the state to refund all such monies illegally borrowed from the GETFund should encourage other constituency-based groups wishing to bring similar class actions.⁶⁹ In order to secure the sustainability of financing for youth enterprise development (and consistent with the post-2015 agenda which highlights sustainability as a key issue going forward), the advocacy effort should also seek to influence the shape of the GYEEDA Bill while the opportunity exists before it is passed into law by Parliament.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ District Assemblies Common Fund

⁶⁸ National Health Insurance Scheme

⁶⁹ See <http://www.myjoyonline.com/news/2014/July-10th/court-orders-ministry-of-finance-to-pay-debt-owed-getfund.php>

⁷⁰ None of the youths met (including their leaders) was aware of any effort to engage the youth in the development of the bill.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

This section presents a menu of nine opportunities and options which IBIS may wish to deliberate on and pick from. These options are, of course, all informed by the findings of the study.

It is clear, from the preceding discussion, that the impression that self-employment is a soft option is not borne out by the evidence and this assumption underpinning the public youth training agenda needs to be challenged. Fortunately, most – though by no means all – of the hurdles are quite surmountable with proper advance planning, inclusive programming and sheer commitment to duty. However, these obviously do not come automatically in the Ghanaian public system and will need some solid and persistent advocacy to bring about the desired change state. The increasing state of hardship – while undesirable – does present a window of opportunity for the youth to get their voices heard, if advocacy is focused and data-driven.

As explained above, the range of youth deficits and needs is diverse and a “one-size-fits-all” approach would be entirely inappropriate. A composite approach would, thus, be preferable. To that end, the recommended actions may be categorised under two broad packages. There is a clear need for some initiatives which narrowly target affected youth with empowering actions. But it is also important to include other actions of a more universal nature which aim to

transform the larger system with broad improvements and, through such, enhance opportunity and security downstream for the youth (and even the nation) as a whole.

Considering that youth programming is a new area for IBIS in Ghana, an iterative approach is strongly recommended – one in which the implementation of an informed menu of ideas is complemented with a deliberately reflective agenda and a strong process documentation component. While the current *ex-ante* analysis is relevant, the youth agenda is an adaptive problem and cannot be understood *fully* in advance or pre-planned as a linear strategy.⁷¹ This is especially so because of the dearth of disaggregated (youth-specific) data, labour market information and objective data on the demands of the market.

The specific options are itemised below. It is important to note that they are not mutually exclusive.

A. NYA identified a few key areas of the National Youth Policy which IBIS support could usefully help to clarify and flesh out.

These include:

Section 6.1.14 – on governance, democracy and leadership: if pursued in collaboration with IEA and the political parties, the effort could help address

⁷¹ See, for example, Jacqueline Fuller’s article, “Google Giving: Calibrating Moon Shots” -at <http://www.ssireview.org/effective-philanthropy/entry/google-giving-calibrating-moon-shots>); also “The Strategic Plan is Dead-Long Live Strategy” -available at <http://www.ssireview.org/blog/entry/the-strategic-plan-is-dead.-long-live-strategy>

- * the increasing trend towards the increasing trend towards divisive, “*zero-sum*” politics in which a contesting party either wins fully or loses fully;
- * Section 6.1.16 – youth in conflict prevention and peace-building: again, this would be most effectively undertaken in collaboration with political parties and relevant NGOs⁷² such as GHANEP⁷³ and WANEP;⁷⁴ and
- * Section 6.1.19 – youth patriotism and voluntarism.

B. On the advocacy front, youth-friendly summaries of major state policies, laws and pro-youth agendas would be helpful. This effort will aim to distil the most youth/poverty-relevant instruments and policy messages and present them in short, easy-to-read publications. The purpose would be to (i) communicate effectively with the youth and marginalised segments of the citizenry, (ii) educate them on their relevant rights and the commitments and obligations of the state, and (iii) facilitate their engagement with current policy processes (such as the GYEEDA Bill currently in the works) so that they can demand action and accountability for major commitments by the government – such as the Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda and the Senchi Consensus.

A topical example of the kind of information that ought to be disseminated more widely among the youth is the oath of office freely

sworn by all ministers of state. The oath commits ministers (i) to serve Ghana with sincerity; (ii) to uphold, preserve, protect and defend the state Constitution; and (iii) to the best of their judgment and at all times freely give counsel and advice for the good management of the public affairs of the state. Properly disseminated, this could be a powerful tool in the advocacy drive for better governance and accountability.

C. Other concrete examples of areas where youth advocacy and support might be useful are:

- * Ensuring genuine inclusion in the review of the NYP, due in 2015;
- * Demanding accountability for funds allocated to public programmes such as GYEEDA which ostensibly aim to equip the youth with occupational skills (ref Section 4.1);
- * Challenging inequity in *de facto* allocation of programme benefits (e.g. strong urban bias, multiple access, patronage); a useful reference point here is the GSGDA, which makes a strong case for distributing the benefits of national development more equitably;
- * Demanding improved responsiveness from their assemblies in, for example, the sustained delivery of basic services such as sanitation, water, refuse management and de-silting of drains in line with the Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) Compact which Ghana signed in 2010;⁷⁵

⁷² Non-Governmental Organisations

⁷³ Ghana Network for Peacebuilding

⁷⁴ West Africa Network for Peacebuilding

⁷⁵ Ghana signed up to the SWA partnership in 2009 when it was called Global Forum for Action (G4A), but has made very little progress towards implementing its commitments.

- * Insisting on a resolute abidance with formal rules in public budget and expenditure processes, given the increasingly sycophantic nature of Ghanaian politics coupled with the impunity and indiscipline characterising public procurement/ accounting at both decentralised and central levels (ref Section 4);⁷⁶
- * Support to ensure greater transparency in programme eligibility and participant registration processes will also reduce the incidence of extortion, demands for sexual favours and other hidden costs entailed in accessing youth interventions (ref. Section 3.2).

D. The narrow focus on skills training ignores the broader structural drivers such as the low quality of public basic education which perpetuate youth poverty and inequality. By themselves, GYEEDA-type schemes which merely seek to absorb participants into the few public sector job slots won't cut it. While they may appear to be useful as a stop-gap measure, there are only so many public sector vacancies which low-skill youth can fill before the bubble bursts and no more low-skill youth can be absorbed. Even if more of higher-skill jobs are created in the economy, the poor with no/ little education and human capital cannot be employed in these jobs. By contrast, a solid investment in education and

knowledge-based human capital will, over time, prepare the youth for higher-skill positions as well as to innovate and create their own jobs. As separate studies by Jones (2009),⁷⁷ Acemoglu and Robinson (2012)⁷⁸ and Hamilton *et al* (2005)⁷⁹ demonstrate so persuasively, attention to human capital development constitutes one of the most high-return investments a nation can make, with demographic dividends in the form of wealth creation and governance especially. Thus, **IBIS may wish to support the youth in accelerating and deepening advocacy towards reversing the indifferent quality of education which the majority endure across Ghana's public schooling system.** In part, this will require stepping up advocacy to prioritise expenditures targeting quality improvement within the wider sector.

E. Consistent with the post-2015 agenda of “*leaving no-one behind*,” consideration should be given to championing and facilitating efforts which address the underlying drivers of youth inequality and their exclusion from decision-making. Such an effort will entail, in part, **identifying promising youth leaders and politically-conscious youth groups and developing their capabilities to undertake self-advocacy.** The effort would include assisting youth to join up into credible and more democratic organisations to claim their rights and hold agents

⁷⁶ See, for example, the Auditor-General's annual reports on the state of Ghana's public accounts.

⁷⁷ Jones, B (2009): The Burden of Knowledge and the 'Death of the Renaissance Man': Is Innovation Getting Harder? *Review of Economic Studies* 76, 1: 283-317

⁷⁸ Acemoglu, D and Robinson, J (2012): *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty.* New York: Crown Publishing

⁷⁹ Hamilton, K, G Ruta, K Bolt, A Markandya, S Pedroso-Galinato, P Silva, M Ordoubadi, G-M Lange and L Tajibaeva (2005): *Where is the Wealth of Nations?: Measuring Capital for the 21st Century.* Washington DC: World Bank

of the state to account for their stewardship of pro-youth policies, programmes and youth-relevant resources.

F. The question of entrepreneurship development certainly needs some attention. Clearly, skills training will need to become much better aligned with the needs of these sectors as drivers of future productivity growth and socio-economic transformation. In addition, it is important to appreciate that training *per se* does not create jobs; a supportive enterprise environment (with appropriate aftercare, credit and reliable markets) is essential to facilitating the transition from training to jobs. In the current dispensation, the lack of a supportive enterprise environment means that many youths who graduate from skills training programmes and venture into self-employment are unable to turn a profit and eventually fall back into unemployment, under-employment or opt for skill-less options such as petty trading.

With the prospect of employment in Ghana's public and formal sectors becoming increasingly constrained (Section 1.3), it makes absolute sense to invest in supporting advocacy for credible improvements in the quality of existing public entrepreneurship development programmes (including aftercare support) as a way of facilitating young people to earn a living. This is not only useful for the youth themselves; it is also beneficial to the state as a whole. Major forecasts on the global economy seem united in suggesting that future innovation and economic growth will depend strongly on

future leaders possessing entrepreneurial skills and related attitudes. With their population at an unprecedented high, youth entrepreneurship will be a key tool for cultivating the human capital necessary for the future, unleashing their creative potential and fostering sustainable growth in the spirit of the post-2015 sustainability development goals (SDGs). **Thus, an initiative to identify best practices in skills training and entrepreneurship development may be another worthwhile investment.**

G. **In the interim, and in the absence of comprehensive research indicating the skill needs of the economy and industry, a simple matrix comparing the most significant socioeconomic variables could be helpful in assisting youth in appraising the available modules from a more informed perspective.** The following shortlist of appraisal variables is suggested for a start:

- * *Availability of a ready market* (for the products/ services for which the training seeks to build expertise),
- * *Profitability* (rate of return on investment),
- * *Availability of relevant inputs* (including finance, workshop space land, equipment and supportive aftercare),
- * *Reliability of income stream* (seasonality of demand for the goods/ services), and
- * *Ease of starting up* (affordability and accessibility of initial investment).

H. **Another potentially high-traction area which IBIS might consider supporting is advocacy for ICT connectivity, especially for the youth.** This would be a multi-

pronged yet relatively low-cost investment – one that builds on the youth's widely-acknowledged passion for ICT.⁸⁰ The intervention should be responsive to the existence of a digital divide along gender, geographic, educational and economic lines. For now, ICT use among the youth would appear to be highest in the capital city and lowest in the savannah, and also higher among boys, those with higher levels of education and those from middle-class homes.

For the better part of the last two decades, the education ministry has mooted similar ideas (for enhancing digital connectivity) and even recently secured some dedicated funding from the World Bank towards that end. However, the nation's recent history with managing public resources and agendas falls far short of expectation. It is in that light that it is vital for the youth to become more proactively engaged with this process from the outset in order to protect their unique interests, pre-empt leakage and thereby secure the greatest mileage from the agenda.

A pilot initiative led by youths and deliberately designed to foster iteration, lesson capture and communication with the pivotal state institutions responsible for youth affairs and for rolling out the public ICT connectivity project could facilitate the harnessing of best practice and scaling. By

guiding and promoting expanded access to digital resources, the effort would enhance opportunities for youth self-improvement and life-long learning. To this end, it is noteworthy to mention that DFID is piloting innovations with solar-powered ICT for lesson delivery in rural schools. It would be helpful for IBIS to follow this pilot closely as it takes root with the view to drawing lessons from it.

It is important to emphasise that this proposal holds far greater potential than merely a tool for academic learning. To maximise its additional potentials, the initiative ought to be conceived to serve simultaneously as a platform for constituency building, reflection and iteration, idea exchange, and joint initiatives between youth groups. Online mentoring could be a particularly useful pillar of the initiative and would allow carefully selected volunteers to support the youth to reflect on their citizenship rights, form healthy and responsible views of life and gender,⁸¹ and appreciate the role of global benchmarks in all areas of social/ economic endeavour. For additional traction, the online mentoring component could be augmented with occasional face-to-face sessions with youth groups. The fact that the youth years are that stage in the life cycle where individuals generally look to launch out on their vocational paths, explore and begin stable family-oriented relationships and attempt to establish and shape their unique identities makes the period a fertile one for assimilating new ideas.

⁸⁰ Indeed, today's youth are also known in parts of the social press as the "Net generation."

⁸¹ Anecdotal evidence from workplaces visited in the course of a previous skills sector study suggests qualities such as sheer diligence, reliability, honesty and humility to be highly sought after in the modern job market.

By building on these unique features of the life cycle, and taking advantage of the youth's disposition for dreaming big, this singular effort could help address existing multiple gaps in the range of youth priorities identified earlier – including education access and quality, skills and enterprise development, voice and inclusion, and information on life skills and SRH. Considering that female youths already lag behind their male counterparts in the priority areas identified by the youth (see Table 3), special efforts should be made to reach girls/ young women in this initiative.

I. Youth clubs would be one way of rolling out

Proposal E. A dated but still relevant cross-country study by Hamilton *et al* (2005) shows the importance of trust relationships to wealth formation of the type that is really transformative. Based on the evidence, the study concludes quite persuasively that even in developing nations, intangible drivers such as “*esprit de corps*” (commonality of purpose/ social capital) and functional institutions contribute several times more to wealth creation than do the more tangible drivers such as physical and natural capital, which are difficult to exploit in the absence of the former. Thus, for the youth to become active citizens benefiting from and contributing to a vibrant economy, we will need to pay more attention to assisting the youth to build trust between themselves and to value and protect social and national institutions as key drivers of prosperity. Such an effort will also better enable youth to access business credits which are based on the solidarity model. To this end,

a logical intervention would support promising constituency-building efforts (through, for example, visionary and democratically-managed youth clubs), with the purpose of strengthening youth voice, facilitating their democratic participation and enhancing their access to venture capital.

Even with over 4,000 youth groups registered by NYA (Gyampo, 2012), it is hard to find strong, effective youth-oriented civil society groups and think tanks in Ghana. For a start, “youth” groups tend to be dominated by leaders who are themselves beyond the relevant age bracket. Nevertheless, during the course of the fieldwork, Ashaiman Youth Federation (AYF) – which IBIS helped nurture through the PPLG programme – emerged as one local youth organisation with some potential. AYF has succeeded in bringing together some 50 youth clubs but they lack a development focus. In the northern savannah, ethnic-based youth associations (such as KOYA)⁸² are common but these too vary considerably in terms of their agendas as well as their capacities and effectiveness. The National Union of Ghana Students (NUGS) is a potential force to reckon with, but has increasingly compromised its neutrality in recent years.

A pilot associational strengthening initiative with a small number (for a start, say two or three diverse groups at decentralised level) would be worth considering in the context of a learning initiative designed to build youth capacity to responsibly demand and catalyse change. Through such group-

⁸² Konkomba Youth Association

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building and strengthening interventions, the youth can be more effectively empowered to demand greater responsiveness from their assemblies with regard to basic services such as refuse management and de-silting of drains. At the national level, they could also become more effective at demanding accountability for funds allocated to public programmes such as GYEEDA which ostensibly aim to equip the youth with occupational skills.

Here also, anecdotal evidence from the interviews suggests that females are hugely outnumbered by males in the mixed-gender groups. While several all-male groups were encountered, no all-female groups were mentioned. Thus, this (constituency-building) initiative should also include a component which prioritises the formation and nurturing of some all-female groups.

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