



The Status of Youth Participation in Political Parties in Malawi and Zambia

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Executive Summary

Since 2016, Green Forum (GF) and CYLA-Zambia have jointly implemented the Program for Young Politicians in Africa (PYPA) in Zambia and Malawi in which more than 150 young politicians from political parties with parliamentary representation have received extensive training in political leadership. In the five years since the launch of the program, alumni in these countries have gained sufficient capacity to exert a degree of influence in their parties. However, evaluations show that youth still face considerable obstacles to exert real influence in their parties' decision making processes. This study, commissioned by Green Forum and CYLA-Zambia aims to understand why.

To establish the extent to which youth meaningfully participate in their political parties, the study undertook to establish (a) the positions they hold in the parties; (b) the existence and functioning of youth wings; (c) the existence of youth policies; (d) how youth are perceived by older party members; and (e) youth's own perception of their level of influence in their parties. Responses were qualitatively obtained through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with senior party officials, political analysts, and other political party stakeholders, and through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with young people, primarily PYPA alumni from all ten political parties involved in the study. These parties are AFORD, DPP, MCP, PP, UDF, UTM, FDD, MMD, PF and UPND.

The findings show that youth have a negligible presence in parties' national governing structures, implying limited involvement in decision-making processes. There are very few youth MPs and/or local councilors in relation to the proportion of young people in the wider population.

The apparent lethargy of youth wings does not help this situation. While youth wings exist in all ten parties surveyed, their roles and functions fail to match expectations. For example, youth wings' main roles in political parties – mobilization and security – are functions that seem to be of greater benefit to older party members than to youth. Furthermore, the lack of financial independence of youth wings deprives them of the autonomy they might have.

The absence of youth policies is another sign that parties tend not to prioritize youth issues. Although four out of the ten political parties in the study said they have youth policies, only one has an agreed youth policy, the other nine are in draft form, and none have been introduced. The absence of youth policies prevents parties from having significant policy direction that accommodates youth interests.

While certain older party members view youth involvement in political parties positively—many older party members interviewed did not describe youth favorably. A majority of older respondents claimed that many young people join political parties for material gain. Perceptions such as these hinder the creation of political space and influence for youth.

The youth surveyed said they had minimal influence on decision-making processes in their respective parties. They mainly attributed this to regressive tendencies among older party members that weaken the agency of young people in terms of making meaningful contributions to their parties.

Findings suggest that the following are obstacles to youth influence in political parties:

- Unwillingness of parties to promote youth interests, including the failure to adhere to the AU's definition of youth being people aged 15 to 35.
- Absence of voluntary party quotas that could help create space for young people, for example guaranteeing representation of youth in parties' decision-making bodies.
- Failure of older party members to recognize the significance of youth contributions.
- Perception of youth as threats to the political careers of older party members, which prevents youth from taking positions of influence in parties.
- Failure of young people to promote their own meaningful participation in parties
- Prevalence of dependency syndrome among young people – youth seem reluctant to invest their resources to independently increase their influence in parties.
- Lack of commitment and resilience among youth characterized by a tendency to seek quick fixes, especially for their financial wellbeing.

The increase in youth participation in political life since the establishment of multiparty democracy in Malawi and Zambia indicates young people's growing interest and rightful demand for political space. However, it appears that older party members are failing to acknowledge this. Youth continue to struggle to achieve real influence in decision-making and are relegated to the margins of party processes. The problem is not one-sided. Youth themselves also sometimes lack the creative drive to nurture and sustain their agency. Consequently, no specific constituency can be held responsible for the limited influence of young people. But considering the generally underprivileged position of youth in society in general, and in politics in particular, retrogressive political cultures reinforced by older party members cannot be ignored, as they amplify the lethargy of the agency of youth.

It is therefore imperative for political parties to understand their role in creating conducive environments for youth and other marginalized or socially excluded groups. Party leadership need to start listening to youth, create genuine space for youth engagement and acknowledge that youth are not a threat but a useful resource.

This can be achieved by implementing the following recommendations:

Adopting the AU age definition of youth

To achieve meaningful inclusion for young people, political parties should adopt and respect the AU age definition of youth (15-35 years) in internal party documents and procedures. This would accord 'real' youth – under 35 years of age – recognition and influence within the parties.

Ensuring guaranteed representation

To ensure that youth participate in the decision-making processes of their parties, political parties need to make constitutional guarantees regarding youth representation. One way for parties to do this is to introduce youth quotas whereby young people would be guaranteed certain positions within parties' key governing structures, thereby ensuring a minimum degree of youth representation. To ensure independence, these positions should be elected rather than appointed.

Strengthening the autonomy of youth wings

Parties need to recognize the significance of youth wings and equip them to function properly. Youth wings should not be a symbolic gesture but originate from a concerted desire to create greater political space for youth. This can be achieved, for example, by allowing youth wings to hold their own elective conferences in which they freely elect their leaders and propose policy issues for the attention of the mother party.

Developing party-specific youth policies

Parties need to develop cross-sector youth policies that cover all decisions and policy areas that affect young people. These might include gender equality, social protection, unemployment, education, housing, and more. The process of developing youth policies should be done with considerable input from young people.

Enhancing multiparty youth platforms

There is need for youth to coalesce their agency and work together within their political diversity to fight for common causes. Conceived within the "united we stand, divided we fall" context, this is critical for breaking the individualistic approach to agency, which the older party members have exploited.

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Acronyms

AFORD	Alliance for Democracy
CYLA	Centre for Young Leaders in Africa
FDD	Forum for Development and Democracy
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
DPP	Democratic Progressive Party
GF	Green Forum
GP	Green Party
KII	Key Informant Interview
MCP	Malawi Congress Party
MMD	Movement for Multiparty Democracy
MP	Member of Parliament
NAREP	National Restoration Party
NDC	National Democratic Congress
NEC	National Executive Committee
NGC	National Governing Council
PP	People's Party
PF	Patriotic Front
PYPA	Program for Young Politicians in Africa
SG	Secretary General
UDF	United Democratic Front
UPND	United Party for National Development
UTM	United Transformation Movement
VP	Vice President

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1. Introduction

For a democracy to be representative, young people must be engaged in formal political processes and have a say in formulating the politics of today and tomorrow. Inclusive political participation is not only a fundamental political and democratic right, it is crucial to building stable and peaceful societies and developing policies that respond to the specific needs of younger generations¹. The presence and considerable agency of young people for political change is well documented in southern African politics following the emergence of multiparty democracy in the early 1990s. However, young people's political activities and relevance are often pushed to the margins. For many years, political leaders at national and party level have used the "tomorrow's leaders" adage to reduce young people's meaningful participation implicitly and systematically in political activity. Although there is a growing regard for youth as "the leaders of today," their influence remains limited. Young people's democratic right to participate in and influence social and political processes in political parties is limited by "old-timer" politicians. This limits youth opportunities in political contexts and, critically, limits much-needed political space for their meaningful participation in decision-making processes.

Former UN Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon, recognized the importance of youth involvement in politics during the 2010-2011 International Year of the Youth, dubbed "Our Year Our Voice". Moon called on greater youth involvement in politics. He said that young people should "be given the chance to take an active part in decision-making at local, national and global levels" (UN, 2011). The idea being that young people who participate actively in their community are more likely to become engaged citizens.

1.1. Program for Young Politicians in Africa (PYPA)

Political parties remain the bedrock of political participation and democracy. To improve the status of youth participation in political parties, the Program for Young Politicians in Africa (PYPA) seeks to strengthen the capacity of young politicians active in politics with leadership skills and knowledge to contribute to a more democratic, representative, and non-discriminatory political system effectively and sustainably. The rationale is to address and challenge age-based power structures that prevent young people from meaningfully participating in and influencing political processes.

PYPA beneficiaries are young politicians from Malawi and Zambia. Since 2016, with support from GF and through the Centre for Young Leaders in Africa (CYLA)-Zambia, young politicians from the two countries' parliamentary parties have attended capacity building training sessions to enhance their roles in their respective political parties. The idea is to create long-term and sustainable empowerment for an underrepresented group in politics: young men and women. Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) backs PYPA's intervention. HRBA regards young politicians as "right holders" and "duty bearers." (PER 2019-2020, 2020).

1.2. Rationale behind the study

After five years of PYPA support, alumni may have been expected to have increased their participation and influence in their political party settings, for example by occupying positions with influence where they have the ability to shape party policies. However, evaluations

¹ www.aceproject.org

suggest that there are considerable obstacles that prevent youth from accessing political space to establish meaningful engagement and participation. This study, commissioned by Green Forum, through CYLA-Zambia, attempts to understand what these obstacles are and establish the current status of youth participation in political parties in Malawi and Zambia. To gauge meaningful youth participation, the study focused on the following key questions:

- What is the current situation regarding youth influence in political parties in Malawi and Zambia?
- What prevents PYPAs and other youth from exercising meaningful participation in politics?
- How can the position of PYPAs and other youth in political parties be strengthened to achieve meaningful participation?

To assess the current influence of youth in political parties in Malawi and Zambia, the study looked at the following indicators to use as baseline data:

- Formal positions in parties occupied by youth, including establishing which parties have elected youth and MPs, local councilors, and youth in other key positions, e.g., national executive committees (NEC).
- Existence of youth leagues, including describing their structure and functions, influence in main party structures, level of autonomy, and funding.
- Existence of youth policies and the status of implementation of party-specific youth policies.

Building on this baseline data, the study sought to:

- Establish how party leadership and members perceive youth members.
- Establish how youth perceive their level of influence in mother parties.

2. Conceptual exploration: youth participation and youth organization

2.1. Defining youth

The study uses the AU definition of “youth” as persons within the age bracket of 15-35 years (African Union Youth Charter, 2012). Malawi and Zambia Youth Policies also recognize 35 years of age as the limit of the youth spectrum (Zambia Government, 2015; Malawi Government, 2013).

2.2. Understanding youth participation

Youth participation is vital for efficient political processes. As Edwards (2008:17) sees it, it is the only way to ensure the social inclusion of youth. Social inclusion refers to ensuring the involvement of individuals who have difficulty in participating due to poverty, lack of

education, religion, language, race, etc. As Özer (2011) observes, young people are considered to be among disadvantaged groups in terms of social inclusion.

In this study, youth participation is strongly connected to young people's ability to participate in decision-making processes. Thus, while the majority of youth are considered to be actively engaged in political processes at various levels, their roles and functions are often confined, for example, to charity activities in their communities and cheerleading at party rallies. This hinders their agency to meaningfully contribute to party decision-making processes. In terms of this study, therefore, participation entails the ability of youth to exert considerable influence on party affairs through engagement without having to force their way through.

The significance of participation in organizational theory and organizational life in general is widely recognized. However, effective participation is not guaranteed, and its existence and quality are dependent on a number of factors. Kanyadudi (2010), for example, suggests that effective participation can be achieved when those concerned understand its importance and cultivate willingness to put that understanding into effect. This defies the rhetorical facets of participation and, instead, promotes the deliberate creation of space for engagement for the realization of personal growth, satisfaction, and human dignity. Accordingly, the creation of avenues for participation empowers people and enhances their understanding and the desire to actively participate in community life. Participation engenders organizational efficiency, particularly when it comes to making effective decisions and owning and implementing decisions. People are more likely to be willing to implement decisions they helped make themselves than decisions imposed on them from above.

The existence and quality of participation is also dependent on political culture (Kanyadudi, 2010). A political culture entails a set of shared views and normative judgments held by a population regarding its political system. It is built on the beliefs, opinions, and emotions of those in a political organization. In African politics, where youth now support and/or join political parties in considerable numbers, their agency is often restricted. For example, leadership positions, which shape policy and party direction, have tended to be the preserve of older party members.

In terms of participant political culture, typically found in plural or democratic political structures, people tend to be active and motivated to interact with political systems as a whole. In general, participant political culture stresses rights and obligations, political competence, and obedience. Thus, an effective constituency of youth ought to form part of efforts to realize and nurture a participant political culture.

Meaningful participation also depends on the availability of a variety of tangible or intangible resources. These may include ideas for improving a country; rules and structures (constitution); leaders; members; and resources (financial and in-kind). These are key to enable and/or unlock the agency of young politicians. Besides participation and resources, the existence of strategies such as effective internal communication; membership recruitment; explaining and 'selling' ideas to the public; and strategic resource mobilization among others are also key to enable young politicians to develop, grow, and contribute meaningfully to the political process.

2.3. Youth organization

Political parties in Malawi and Zambia have tended to enjoy considerable youth support. However, youth participation has been informal and often related to support during campaigns and rallies. While acknowledging the significance of the general base of youth support, this part of the study focuses on formally constituted youth organizations recognized as youth wings or youth leagues. As the two terms are used interchangeably, this study uses the term “youth wing” to refer to “independent” youth organizations of political parties.

Youth wings are critical platforms for young people to cultivate political skills and demand political space for meaningful participation in party structures. In fact, while still under the umbrella of mother parties, youth wings are meant to be autonomous, thereby strengthening and broadening political space for meaningful participation. Correctly structured and empowered youth wings can create reasonable space for youth empowerment.

3. Methodology

3.1. Approach and design

This study is based on a qualitative approach which is effective to obtain lived experiences of study subjects and understanding their experiences, perception, beliefs, attitudes, and behavior in their respective settings. A qualitative approach is thus useful when researching the cultures of political parties.

3.2. Sampling technique and sample size

The study adopted a purposive sampling approach, which helped to identify and select information-rich cases. Moreover, the nature of the research design and the aim and objectives of the study necessitated this sampling technique.

3.3. Data collection methods, tools, and analysis

The study used two primary methods of data collection, namely key informant interviews (KII) and focus group discussions (FGDs). These methods were preferred for their ability to obtain information from respondents with informed perspectives on the study’s main objective. Further to this, these two methods were deemed relevant because they allow a free flow of ideas and information between the researcher and study subjects.

Two sets of FGDs were arranged, each one consisting of 25 young male and female participants from various political parties in Malawi and Zambia. Since an FGD ideally accommodates a maximum of 12 participants, interviewees were divided into groups according to political party to discuss prepared questions. Each group then presented their findings followed by a plenary session.

Table 1. Summary of sampled population, rationale for inclusion, and method of data collection

Sample	Sampled population		Reason for inclusion	Method of data collection
NEC members i.e., party VPs, SGs, and senior members	Malawi	21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine and shape party policy Considered door openers/gatekeepers for youth influence in decision-making 	KII
	Zambia	14		
Youth league leaders	Malawi	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On the NEC Lead young men and women in their political setting 	KII
	Zambia	3		
Civil Society Organization leaders	Malawi	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Political party stakeholders Promoters of human rights, social and political empowerment 	KII
	Zambia	2		
PYPA Alumni	Malawi	25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subjects of the study Beneficiaries of the PYPA program Members of youth wings 	FGD
	Zambia	25		
Other youth (party affiliation but not PYPA alumni)	Malawi	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Different constituency of youth with no targeted training 	KII FGD
	Zambia	6		
Total number of respondents	117			

Source: Consultant's compilation.

3.4. Ethical issues and study limitations

To facilitate voluntary participation, CYLA-Zambia prepared and sent introductory letters to secretary generals and/or administrative secretaries of various political parties in Malawi and Zambia. This facilitated booking appointments with respondents. At every meeting, the subject and the aim of the study were communicated to enhance the respondents' familiarity with the exercise. Respondents were also asked if they agreed to having their voices recorded for data collection quality purposes. Anonymity was also guaranteed to respondents so that no names of individuals and those of political parties are mentioned in the report's findings. Respondents are presented in the report as either "FGD participant" or "KII participant" followed by their country. A statement was also made regarding data rights. Respondents were assured that data obtained in interviews would only be used for the purpose of this study and that GF remained the proprietor of all such data.

4. Findings

This section presents the findings of the study by establishing (a) formal positions occupied by youth in the political parties; (b) the existence and functioning of youth wings; (c) the

existence of youth policies; (d) perception of youth by established party leadership and members; and (e) perception of youth on their ability to exert influence in political parties.

4.1. Formal party positions occupied by youth

The presence of youth NEC members, MPs and local councilors were mapped to ascertain the extent of youth in positions of influence. Offices of SGs and/or administrative secretaries of the political parties were approached as credible repositories of such information. These senior party officials were requested in advance to provide this information on the day of consultations. With the exception of two political parties, (one in Malawi and one in Zambia), no “credible repository” was able to officially provide this data. While several parties acknowledged that such information was unavailable, others only promised to revert with information but failed to do so, despite several reminders. A majority struggled to produce information as they tried to obtain it from memory. This resulted in the consultation acquiring patchy, incomplete, and unreliable statistics.

4.1.1. Challenges to mapping

a. Weak administrative and organizational capacity

The lack of reliable data on positions held by youth points to a larger problem in the parties: their weak administrative and organizational capacity. This observation echoes with a view expressed by a prominent official from a key partner organization of political parties in Malawi:

“The political parties are completely disorganized. They do not have any database. We struggle with things like...let’s say if I pick up the phone today and call, let’s say [this SG], and say that I want to meet district governors [in this region] so can you give me the contacts? It will take like three weeks before my request is granted. Because they will be like, who is who and where? They do not have that data. So, if the party itself does not have that kind of database, it becomes difficult for us to know who is where.... No party knows how many youths belong to their party because they don’t have databases. They don’t have strict membership criteria to show who’s who.” KII NGO official, Malawi.

b. The “Youthfulness factor”

Another difficulty with mapping youth positions is that nearly all senior party officials tended to describe individuals as “youthful” when, in fact, their ages fell outside the official age bracket of 15-35 years adopted by the governments of Malawi and Zambia. For example, a senior party official of one party in Zambia stated that “age is just a number and to be a youth, one just has to be a youth in their heart,” (KII, party official, Zambia). Participants from various political parties from both countries who were sent to consultations as youths by their parties were older than 35. A register taken at an FGD session in Malawi showed that some participants were more than 35. The failure of political parties to adhere to the prescribed age range pushes ‘real’ youth to the margins of meaningful participation in political parties.

4.1.2. Mapping

Despite these challenges, a mapping (see Table 2 below) was made with the help of selected PYPA alumni. These were either members of NECs, personal aides to senior party officials (SGs or VPs), or those active in youth wings.

However, the fact that these figures did not originate from “credible repositories” makes this data somewhat unreliable. This was compounded by a number of other factors. First, some political parties, such as UDF in Malawi, are guided by a constitutional provision that caps the definition of youth at 40. Second, because some members attained their positions at 35 or younger, parties use the incumbency factor to claim that they have a greater proportion of youth in their membership than is actually the case. Third, nearly every political party seemed to have adhered to the “youthful” interpretation of youth and therefore recognized everyone with a youthful appearance as young.

Successful mapping would thus have to be enabled by first, an independent and rigorous headcount of who is who and the positions they hold in political parties. Second, there has to be a deliberate move by political parties to create a national database for their members across all party structures.

Table 2: Formal positions in political parties occupied by youth

Political Party	NEC representatives below 35 years	MPs below 35 years	MPs (total)	Local councilors below 35 years	Local councilors (total)
AFORD	5	0	1	0	2
DPP	3	1	57	15+	161
MCP	5	0	59	15+	162
PP	3	0	3	0	4
UDF	8	0	10	2+	20
UTM	3	0	5	5+	40
FDD	3	0	0	0	1
MMD	1	0	0	0	0
PF	5	0	61	50+	699
UPND	5	1	90	50+	1069

Source: The consultant’s compilation.

Notes: 0 = does not have; + = could be in excess of the given number.

4.1.3. Appointment vs election

It is worth noting that youths’ attainment of certain positions, particularly in NECs, may not be based on merit alone. Some obtained these positions through official appointments by their party leaders. In one party in Malawi, for example, the entire NEC, which includes many ‘youths’, was constituted through appointments (KII senior party official, Malawi). Similarly, in Zambia, the leader of one party is also mandated to make appointments of people into

their party's main governing structure (KII, senior party official, Zambia; FGD party youths, Zambia). While these exist in constitutional provisions, such acts may compromise the offering of legitimate spaces for meaningful youth participation. Since appointed youths may seek to preserve and sustain loyalty in the "never bite the hand that feeds you" context, such presidential prerogatives may weaken the agency of young people in general to constructively contribute to the life of their parties.

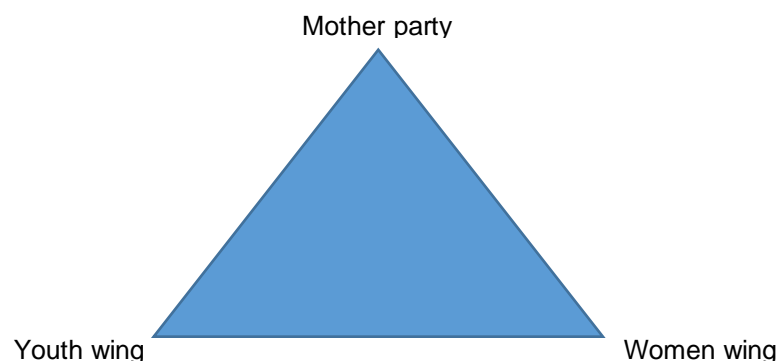
4.2. Existence and functioning of youth wings

To achieve meaningful youth involvement, political parties need to take clear steps to enable and enhance youth participation. One such step includes formally constituted youth wings. If well-structured and empowered, youth wings can offer a critical powerbase for youth in political parties. This study, therefore, sought to establish the existence of youth wings in all ten of the political parties and undertook to assess how well they function. By functioning, the focus was not necessarily on their generic roles and/or purposes. Rather, *the study endeavored to unearth their ability to exert influence* on their respective mother parties. To ascertain this, the study undertook to establish (a) the existence of youth wings; (b) the functions of the wings; (c) their structure; and (d) their sources of funding.

4.2.1. Existence of youth wings

A review of the parties' constitution shows that all the ten political parties have youth wings embedded in a trinity of the parties' main organs namely the mother party, the women's wing, and the youth wing itself. This broadened organization of the parties is a significant move towards including generally marginalized and socially excluded groups in society. An analysis of the parties' constitutions and other attendant documents, such as campaign manifestos, revealed a desire by parties to recreate the political platform by promising a level-playing field to women and youth.

Below is a diagrammatic presentation of the structure:



Source: Consultant's interpretation.

While the majority of the constitutions only introduce the existence of youth wings and spell out the roles of their leaders, no elaborate and comprehensive purposes of these organs are made. In other words, no specific emphasis on youth wings in terms of, for example, their functions and significance to the growth of the parties is made.

4.2.2. Functions of youth wings

The ACE Electoral Knowledge Network (2021) provides a textbook list of the functions of youth wings:

- Constitute powerbases for members, facilitating networking and the formation of personal and/or issue-based alliances.
- Provide a training ground for young members who wish to excel in party structures.
- Provide a place for young people to influence party policy development and leadership selection.
- Extend outreach to young voters to make parties more credible to young people.

Using these as a basis, this study sought to establish what youth and senior members of the parties consider and understand the functions of youth wings to be. The rationale here was not necessarily to obtain accurate results in the framework of textbook functions, but to gauge the depth and the relevance of their espoused functions. This was deemed key to arriving at suitable conclusions regarding the effectiveness of the youth wings in terms of ushering in spaces for youth participation in the political parties.

The responses obtained during the study indicate a considerable alignment of the majority of youth wings' functions to those stated above. A summary is presented in Table 3 below. One commonly cited key function of youth wings is the mobilization function, which entails encouraging individuals to participate in politics. Sentiments from both FGDs considered the securing of party membership and/or support as one critical manifestation of mobilization, itself enabled by the "high levels of political energy" in youth. This was aptly contextualized by one FGD participant who said: *"We are drivers of party mobilization because we have the energy and we have the capacity to move around,"* (FGD youth participant, Zambia). This was echoed by another participant in the same session: *"We are foot soldiers for mobilization of party members...we mobilize the youth for the party, which is our primary mandate. Sometimes we can also mobilize other members of the party, not just the youth,"* FGD participant, Zambia.

The electoral period is the most critical time for the mobilization function. Substantial evidence exists about the role of youth in driving turnout in Malawi's 2019 (African News, 2019) and Zambia's 2021 general elections (Marima, 2021). This came out clearly in one KII:

"For me, I would say that we are held highly since the elections...the youths campaigned vigorously, actually. If there are people who campaigned vigorously, it is the youth. Because what we did was, we had to zone ourselves...that made us to go flat-out to the whole country because we had to say this group goes to southern, northern...so that we make sure we touch everywhere. So, we actually worked hard."

Another commonly cited function of youth wings is that they act as a pool from which parties and senior party officials obtain security protection. This has been acknowledged by youth and senior party officials. In particular, it is common to see young men and women providing

militarized security at party functions and senior party officials. This was confirmed by one senior party official:

“Our youth are well-organized. They would walk alongside the president’s car, ensuring her security. Even at the political rallies, they would form a ring to block who could stray to the stage. Our youths are not cheerleaders. Our youths are focused on development. They focus on development. They want to ensure the president delivers development message without being interrupted. That is all. Most of the time we use them for chitetezo (security). We do not use them for kujiya (cheerleading); we do not use them to intimidate others; or to break other people’s property; or to force people to attend our rallies; we do not have that type of youth.” KII senior party official, Malawi.

During the FGDs, youth acknowledged the following function:

“As young men [and women] in the political parties we are really powerful. We are supposed to protect and defend the party. Whether it means physical, sometimes intellectual, what have you, but at all costs the party needs to be protected.” FGD, youth participant, Malawi.

While some youth seem proud about their security agency evidenced by their apparent readiness to *“beat unruly people in the party to bring sanity”* (FGD participant Malawi), none of the textbook functions of youth wings accommodates this security function. It appears that senior party leaders exploit the political and socio-economic vulnerability of youth to their benefit. Furthermore, if this practice becomes entrenched, it may prevent young people from doing anything more than subsisting on the margins of the parties’ core activities.

These two functions aside, the youth wings also have a number of functions which are summarized Table 3 below.

Table 3: Summary of the functions of youth wings

	Functions
AFORD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Publicize the party ● Conduct youth activities and inter-party activities ● Protect the party and its members ● Beat unruly people in the party so as to bring sanity
DPP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mobilize support through campaigning ● Provide morale and entertainment ● Provide security^[1]_{SEP} ● Co-ordinate party functions ● Fundraising
FDD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Serve as a recruitment tool

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide security to senior leaders • Serve as a genesis of advocacy for inclusion of youth, women and PWDs
MCP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare leadership for the party • Provide a platform for young people's full participation in politics
MMD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobilize party support • Represent youth interests
PF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-ordinate youth affairs
PP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advance youth policies championed by the party • Lobby older party members to address concerns of the young • Give hope to youth so that they get a guarantee about their future in the party
UDF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a platform for youth to collectively influence party organization and policy matters
UPND	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage youth affairs • Drive party mobilization • Provide security
UTM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobilize youth support for the party • Provide a platform for youth engagement in the party

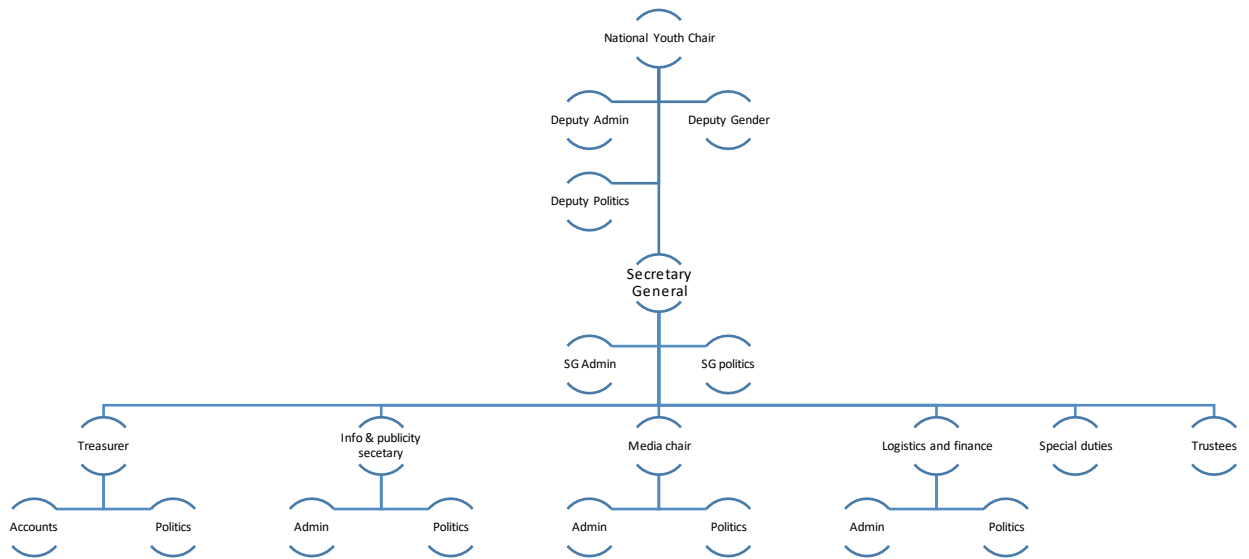
4.2.3. Structure of youth wings

The existence of youth wings in political parties may not necessarily mean that they are able to represent the interests of all youth in respective parties. The report sought to establish if youth wings are well-structured to ensure that they promote youth participation. By 'well-structured,' the inference is two-fold: first, the youth wings must have a clear organizational structure (organogram) with distinctively articulated roles for every position. The assumption is that the presence of a well-defined organization structure reinforces the legitimacy of the organ, its adherence to order and its promises to well-defined mandates for efficient service delivery. Second, youth wings must have a national presence that cascades to the regional, district, constituency, and ward or area levels.

All ten political parties demonstrated the presence of these structures for the study. However, the most distinctive difference in the structures of the ten youth wings is the organizational structure in terms of, for example, numerical composition, nomenclature for certain positions, and, in certain cases, constitutional obligations of members. Nonetheless, the existence of well-structured youth wings signals a move towards youth participation which should be encouraged. The diagrams below provide details about the structures².

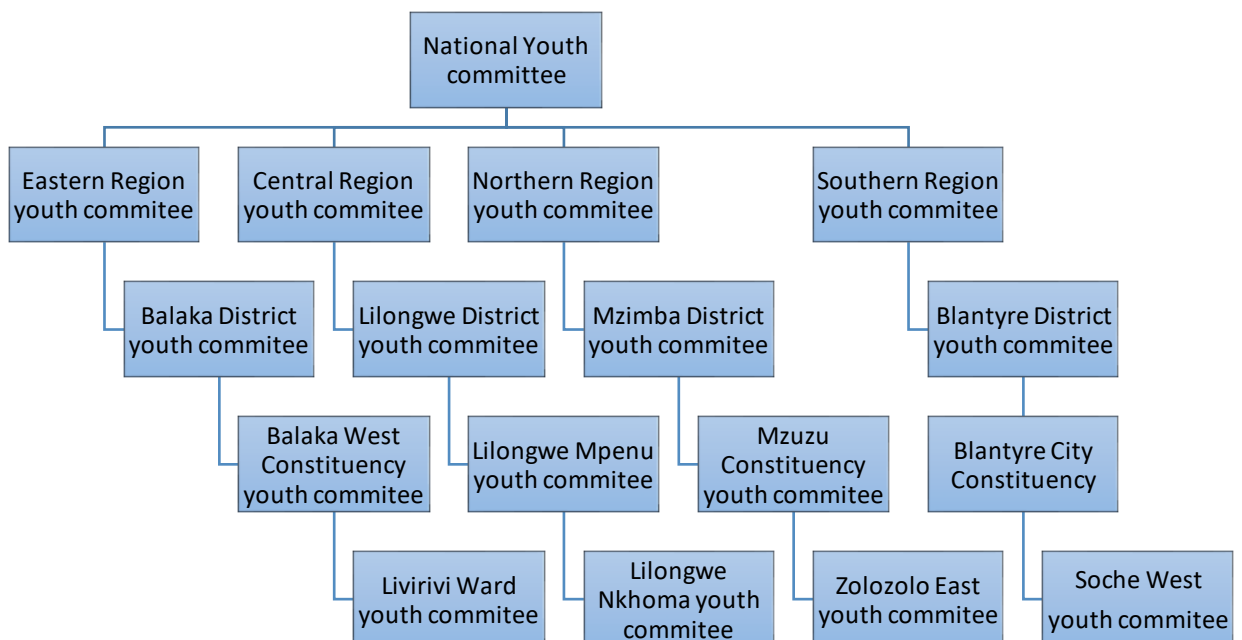
Organization Structure (modeled from UPND)

² The diagrams only provide a generic representation of the structures.



Source: Consultant's interpretation.

Geospatial structure (modeled from UDF with actualized examples)



Source: Consultant's interpretation.

Such apparently comprehensive structures suggest youth participation is likely to grow in the political parties. Thus, while not all young people might participate at NEC level, the existence of youth wings at every structural level of parties promises space for youth participation.

However, the fact that the structures are in place does not equate to their actual capacity to function. As one participant observed: *“we have a structure, which is well defined on paper, but on the ground practically, it is not well structured,”* FGD participant, Malawi.

“Primarily I think if they have that structure, the chairperson, the secretary, the treasurer, normally I think they have been using these youths as a token of...more less like tokenism to say yes, we have these structures we do engage them but not necessarily using them meaningfully to engage in decision-making processes.” KII, political party stakeholder, Malawi.

This erodes the prominence of youth and their agency to transform the political party landscape.

The majority of parties consulted said that only the chairperson of their youth wings sits on their NECs. Other parties said around three members of their youth wings do so. This suggests that despite the size of the youth constituency, very few young people participate in decision-making processes at party level. This is compounded by the continued presence of older people in positions that are ordinarily meant for youths.³

4.2.4. Sources of funding

Funding is one of the most critical factors for the prosperity of youth wings. In particular, sustainable funding can enhance the autonomy of youth wings, and therefore promote meaningful participation of young people. To become self-sufficient, it is imperative that organizations generate their own funding through various activities. However, the findings show that no youth wings have access to independent funding nor are they guaranteed funding from their mother parties. Many youth wings depend on the generosity of donors and supporters, music concerts, fundraising dinners etc. However, the inconsistency of such funding makes it unsustainable. The most consistent and prominent source of funding tends to be from party presidents. This nurtures a dependency syndrome. This suffocates the agency of youth to play a vocal role in their parties. The lack of independent funding deprives youth wings of their autonomy, thereby limiting their ability to influence decision-making.

The majority of youth wings acknowledge the need to become self-sufficient by seeking alternative sources of funding. As one participant explained during an FGD session in Malawi:

“In terms of source funding, we do not have any [of our own]. We also depend on the president. However, the youth have embarked on a membership recruitment drive, people are now going to be buying membership cards. And we believe this is one way of trying to depart from the system where we depend on one person and try to move towards a direction where a party is self-sufficient and will be

³ For instance, a youth leader is supposed to be younger than 36 years of age.

able to implement its activities without waiting for one person to fish out the resources.” FGD participant, Malawi.

Table 3: Summary of the existence and functioning of youth wings

Political party	Existence	Functions (well founded)?	Structure (well defined?)	Sources of funding (sustainable?)
AFORD	Yes	Not entirely ⁴	Yes	Not sustainable ⁵
DPP	Yes	Not entirely	Yes	Not sustainable
FDD	Yes	Not entirely	Yes	Not sustainable
MCP	Yes	Not entirely	Yes	Not sustainable
MMD	Yes	Not entirely	Yes	Not sustainable
PF	Yes	Not entirely	Yes	Not sustainable
PP	Yes	Not entirely	Yes	Not sustainable
UDF	Yes	Not entirely	Yes	Not sustainable
UPND	Yes	Not entirely	Yes	Not sustainable
UTM	Yes	Not entirely	Yes	Not sustainable

Source: Consultant’s interpretation.

4.3. Youth policies

A policy is a set of rules, principles, guidelines, or frameworks adopted or designed by an organization to achieve long-term goals. Policies are formulated to direct and exert influence on all major decisions to be made in an organization and keep all activities within a set of established boundaries (Safeopedia, 2021). Political parties may develop youth policies to work systematically with issues that affect young people, for example gender equality, social protection, unemployment, education, housing, and more. The focus of this study was on independent youth policies, carefully crafted into documents that can be easily accessed and used at will.

⁴ Some of the stated functions, e.g., security, does not resonate with the generally agreed textbook prescribed and desirable roles or functions of the youth wings.

⁵ The youth wings have considerable reliance on party leaders and other well-wishers for funding.

4.3.1. Existence of youth policies

During the study, only four out of the ten political parties (two in Malawi and two in Zambia) consulted claimed to have developed independent youth policies albeit three of them were said to be only drafts. However, none of the documents was immediately available for review even in their draft format. At an FGD in Malawi, for example, one participant had even claimed that their party’s youth wing policy had been formally adopted, an assertion which he failed to substantiate during a follow up to the inquiry. His failure to locate the youth policy document as well as the inability by the other parties to make the documents available only suggests an implied rather than an actual existence of the youth policies.

4.3.2. Explaining the deficiency of youth policies

This study revealed a number of factors that explain the absence of youth policies in the political parties:

- a) Young people have failed to be sufficiently active in the development of youth policies. This is compounded by an element of ignorance among young people about the necessity of youth policies.
- b) There is lack of capacity and/or expertise among youth to draft stand-alone policies.
- c) There is a general tendency among leaders to disengage from young people. In an FGD in Zambia, this was contextualized as follows: “It matters less when it doesn’t matter to them.”
- d) The “Julias Malema factor” is another important explanation for mother parties’ reluctance to promote the development of youth policies, as outlined by one senior Zambian party official:

“[Our party] does not have a well-documented youth policy. It does not have one at all. In fact, a few times we have tried to develop it and encourage its development, it has been resisted because people fear the offshoots like Julius Malema of South Africa. We fear that we may be creating a parallel structure. But now you find that just because of that simple fear, everything that you can try to develop as policy around youth gets thrown away together with the dirty water.” KII, senior party official, Zambia.

Table 4: Summary of the status of youth policies

	Existence of policy (reported or verified)	Status of implementation	Youth involvement in policy development?	Which party documents mention the youth?

AFORD	No	N/A	N/A	Manifesto; constitution
DPP	No	N/A	N/A	Manifesto; constitution
MCP	Yes	None	None	Manifesto; constitution
PP	No	N/A	N/A	Manifesto; constitution
UDF	Yes	In draft form	Yes	Manifesto; constitution
UTM	No	N/A	N/A	Manifesto; constitution
FDD	Yes	In draft form	Yes	Manifesto; constitution
MMD	No	N/A	N/A	Manifesto; constitution
PF	Yes	In draft form	Yes	Manifesto; constitution
UPND	No	N/A	N/A	Manifesto; constitution

Source: Consultant's compilation.

4.4. Perception of youth among party leadership and members

The study sought to establish how party leaderships perceived young party members. To qualitatively capture perceptions, older party members were asked why they think youth joined or join their or any other political parties. This was put in the following way: *“What would you say is the motive/motivation for the young people’s participation in political parties?”* This generated mixed responses from older party members as presented below.

4.4.1. Pursuit of a “good face”

Several older party members interviewed indicated that youth are attracted by party leaders who have a “good face”. This refers to the ability of a leader to radiate appeal, inspiration, hope, and moral values. FGDs with youths also corroborated this finding. One FGD participant in Zambia said: *“The time of joining the party, our party president was the only attractive, influential female party president.”* One young person said they joined a political party because its leader: *“represented a beacon of hope and inspiration to so many youths in this country. This is why many youths fell for him and supported him immensely.”* KII youth wing leader, Malawi. A view echoed by a senior party official in Zambia:

“Because of the moral uprightness of the leaders. They are looking for spiritual role models. They can easily find them in church, but they want political guidance. So, if there is one motivation, it is that they want to be mentored, they want to be guided.”

4.4.2. Search for material gain

In contrast, some older party members believe that youth join politics for material enrichment, pointing to the behavior of young people having secured positions in political

parties. The way many young people frequently switch their allegiance from one party to another might support this view. Consequently, youth earn less respect from elders and fail to generate acceptance from parties as critical agents to their prospects. Senior party officials commented as follows:

“Like any human being, when [they see] people at the party levels ... driving motor vehicles, being driven...it attracts them that one day [they] would like to be like them...the ambition of becoming the President, the ministers, and so on and on. They have not come really to the point where they can say [it is] because of party policies. Because we do not have ideologies in our parties....”
KII senior party official, Malawi.

*“Most of the youths in this country join political parties because they want something. Most of them are after what they can take from the political party... and obviously the first thing that comes to mind is **cash, cash**, money in the pocket. And this is why if you look at the people that defect from one party to another, most are youths because they are in search for greener pastures. We have had many here... Or I can give a simple example of [this individual] who was our youth. He was given a very good position. But he left for another party where there was power, where there was money. So, money is an attraction, an allurements. So, my perception of most of the youth is that very few youths go there to achieve the political [success],”* KII senior party official, Zambia.

4.5. How youth perceive their ability to exert influence

Among the youth and party officials consulted, there is a general view that the importance of youth in politics ends at the point where older party members achieve their political goals. Youth serve as political tools for the wellbeing of established politicians. Malawi’s Chichewa language epitomizes this in the adage: *“Chikondi cha nkhwangwa chokoma pokwera,”* which means that an axe is only useful and is firmly clasped when taken up a tree, but loses its usefulness and gets violently dropped to the ground once the job is done.

The findings show that youth, as a collective, generally lack the ability to exert influence on their political parties. As indicated earlier, mere active participation during campaigns, for example, does not necessary imply any meaningful participation in political parties. Youth widely acknowledge themselves that they are only useful to parties to perform certain duties, (FGD participant, Zambia), and that they possess “no influence at all” (FGD participant, Malawi). As one participant observed:

“Our participation is below average. We are looking at it from the context of...whereby the central committee [NEC], the mother body of the party where party decisions are being made from, yes, we are there at the bottom [lower structures]. We present issues to people when they come down there, but when we go up there, they [elders] talk about what will benefit them...what they wish to be aligned with. What benefits them is what they are going to pass.” FGD participant, Zambia.

“We [want] to be honest. It [the level of influence] is very little or no influence at all. Because despite having a stand-alone youth wing, which provides the opportunity to contribute ideas, those ideas are rarely taken on board more especially when it comes to issues of organization structure, issues of funding, and the like.” FGD participant, Malawi.

The majority of youth in the FGDs and non-politically affiliated participants in KIIs, saw their lack of influence as a by-product of a political landscape filled with conceited older party members who see little or no value in them.

5. Discussion

This study has identified several obstacles to the meaningful participation of youth in politics. These are discussed in this section and serve as the basis for the recommendations presented at the end of this report.

5.1. Lack of trust in youth among party leadership

The study suggests that there is a reluctance among older party members to promote youth interests in political parties. Most striking is the parties’ apparent unwillingness to create deliberate space for youth participation in NGC structures. Lack of quotas for NEC positions, and the tendency of parties to disregard the age factor for youth leader positions, underline the challenge. Indeed, some youth wing leaders are more than 50 years of age, which some senior party officials have acknowledged and even defended. For instance, when asked why their party has a youth leader who is not a youth, one senior party official argued:

“Yes, we would want the youth to be given an active role. But you must also appreciate ... the fact that if the zeal of the youth is not controlled, you would end up having things that are outside the constitution. So at least you need to have somebody that would be mature enough to conduct youth business within the context of maturity, in the context of legality and constitutionality and stuff like that. So yes [this man] may not be a youth according to the UN definition of youth...” KII senior party official, Malawi.

This suggests that youth still require guidance from older, established politicians, and implies that young people lack the capability to perform effectively and efficiently. Furthermore, some older party members seem paranoid about the presence of youth. This could be due to the rising potential of youth in many ways.

“There are some people in the NEC who are complaining that, look, we have given our youths too much space... They have complained to me. They have come to me to say [SG] we are giving our youth too much space... There are some people who say [the youth] should not attend [NEC meetings]. [They ask] what are the youth doing here?” KII senior party official, Malawi.

It is for such reasons, therefore, that the influence of the youth in the political parties is insignificant and as one senior party official in Zambia stated *“it is not their [the youth’s] fault,”* KII, senior party official, Zambia. This highlights the apparent perpetuity of their membership,

which encourages the development of monopolistic tendencies. As one senior party official in Zambia noted:

“This is a political party in which if you go across the country one of the things you are going to find is that some of the people who are in our structures at leadership level are those that were there when we formed this political party long time ago and they refuse to nurture, they refuse to include others... and so the youth would rather go to a newer place where they feel included.”

5.2. Disregard of youth contributions among older party members

There is a prevailing tendency by older party members to disregard youth contributions. While youth may have positions in party hierarchy, their input tends to be overlooked. This, coupled with already poor representation in parties’ top ranks, further restricts space for young people to participate. As one young top-ranking party official in Zambia noted:

“I think some of the challenges ..., you know being young, there [are] lot of innovations that being young come with. And some of... these old [times find it] very difficult to relate with your ideas and also when [you seem to be against any motion they raise], there is that tendency [of saying] that he is still young, he doesn’t understand how things are.” KII participant, Zambia.

This corresponds with the finding relating to the minimal level of autonomy of youth wings. More independent, well-functioning youth wings provide the necessary space for participation in addition to generating respect and acceptance by older party members towards youth. This was acknowledged by a senior political analyst:

“There are a number of issues in the political parties that hinder the youth’s ability to exert influence. Because it is not just about participation but meaningful participation and consistent meaningful participation... One challenge is to do with the autonomous (sync) of youth wings which [are] embedded in their constitutions. But I think the extent at which these political parties give autonomy to the youth wings...is a lip service. ...[it is] mere kind of rubber-stamping youth participation.” KII participant, Malawi.

5.3. Absence of guaranteed youth representation

Guaranteed youth representation refers to ensuring youth involvement in decision-making processes of political parties. In this regard, it is imperative for national governing structures to have legitimate⁶ youth representation. There are different ways to guarantee youth representation in national governing structures. The first is to automatically create seats on NECs for national youth wing leaders. In certain cases, parties may also provide seats for members of the national youth committee. The second way is to create and legitimize a quota for youth positions on NECs. Interestingly, these two approaches were mentioned in the study. One party in particular from Malawi indicated that its constitution prescribes a mandatory presence of ten youths on its NEC. This excludes those that may join the national

⁶ By legitimate, the best practice is to have the youth of less than 36 years of age in those positions.

governing structure through other channels, implying that the party's NEC can accommodate as many young people as it wishes.

All ten of the parties surveyed said that they ensure the automatic inclusion of youth wing leaders on NECs. While all senior party officials surveyed praised this practice, it is, however, not universally welcomed. Indeed, the presence on NECs of national youth leaders or other young members below the age of 35 is not necessarily constitutionally guaranteed. As stated earlier, none of the ten political parties adheres to the generally prescribed age range (15-35 years), implying that anyone at any age can sit on NECs as a youth leader. A guarantee for youth to sit on an NEC is not necessarily affirmatively guided by age but rather by the mere fact of being the leader of a youth wing. At an FGD session in Zambia, this particular viewpoint ignited a sarcastic grammatical interpretation around youth leadership. Those outside the prescribed age bracket were labeled as "leaders of the youth" and those within the age bracket got the label of "youth leaders." Thus, the former is looked at in the context of "military commanders" while the latter implies young people in leadership positions but with similar aspirations as youth.

5.4. Youth as threats to older party members' political careers

The study uncovered an overwhelming feeling among youth regarding their presence in parties as threats to older party members. In particular, older party members seem unwilling to accommodate youth in certain positions of influence.

"Just to be natural and not sugarcoat anything, as youth we are seen as threat. For them they believe that for you to hold a political position, it is not justified by the noise that you have but for them it comes with age. So, when a young person seems to be vocal out there, you have it all going on accordingly that is considered to be a threat to them because everybody tends to be on your side, it is a disadvantage to somebody who is holding that position at that particular moment. So as a result, you are looked at as a threat." FGD participant, Zambia.

One of the reasons young people find themselves in this position is their relatively better levels of education than most old-timers. This gives them an edge in many respects, including technological knowledge. It is on this basis that older party members feel that according to the youth enormous spaces could be detrimental to their political careers. As one stated:

"They look at us, they look at how brilliant we are, we are threats to them, serious threats. it is a culture that is endemic [across all parties] ... you guys think you are educated; you are smart, and you are pompous. So, they do not want to hear [about us], they are not comfortable with us." FDG participant, Malawi.

Fear of youth among older party members affects the growth of parties in many respects. In particular, it suffocates progressive initiatives, particularly those designed and implemented by youth in an effort to create their own political space for engagement. This is a lost opportunity for parties to be innovative and to attract further support from voters.

“To be honest, it is not easy [to initiate empowerment programs]. It is tough. Recently we had an issue where, there is a certain group in [our party], an affiliate group....they opened a bank account of which the main party [this party], has no bank account. Then after two days, the account was blocked. Some senior party [officials] went to the bank and told the bank that we do not recognize these guys. These guys are just troublemakers. So, you see, [this party] is a party that is full of insecurities. Whenever you want to bring in change, the more the heavy tides they are...Even some of us, we reached the extent of nearly being manhandled...” FGD participant, Malawi.

5.5. Lack of agency among youth

Older party members act as gatekeepers to the corridors of power, according to many young people surveyed. On the other hand, there has also been a recognition of the lack of agency among youth to collectively push for their interests in the parties. The significance of this was highlighted by one political party stakeholder:

“Unfortunately, politically, the spaces are not given, like, on a silver platter. So young people have a task, have a role to demonstrate that they are capable of being key people, key stakeholders in the political landscape. Until that, politics is about competition...so if they are not ready, if they are not organized to demonstrate their capability, to demonstrate what they are bringing in the political landscape, to demonstrate that they have skills or that they can influence or that they can bring something exciting to the political landscape then the space won't be given to them as simple as that.” KII participant, Malawi.

A political party stakeholder noted that:

“Young people do not have that zeal, that energy, that excitement that they belong to a political party, and they would want to use that belonging to the party to influence change in terms of policy direction. So, we have young people that are very excited to participate in politics. We have young people that are given positions at NEC or at National Governing Councils but they are not well-conversant on how they can use their numbers whether they are three of them in the NEC or the NGC, they are four of them or two of them, the number two, three or four has to be defined by what they present, what they say or what they feed the main political party in terms of what young people aspire to see as their political party is trying to get the leadership mantle...” KII participant, Malawi.

Another study participant also attributed this lack of agency among youth to their lack of interest to promote the common good of the entire constituency of the youth. He observed that:

“Most young people that are in politics, it is either that their interest becomes first than the interest of other people and the nation at large. ...You will have a young person who is a member of parliament [...] check what he says in

parliament. Does it represent the youth? does he represent the youth of his political party in that parliament? You find that most of the time they are dragged, they are pushed to say things that are not even youth related, that are not even making sense in terms of the direction of this country. If we have young people what we expect is that they are going to present things...that will give hope, things that will create happiness in young people, things that create excitement that we have young people in this country that are talking about young people, that are talking about challenges that young people are facing in this country.” KII participant, Malawi.

5.6. Dependency syndrome

Another issue that emerged was the prevalence of dependency among youth. Young people do not seem willing or able to invest their resources to independently push for greater influence in the parties. More often than not, youth tend to seek financial support from older party members. This is regarded as the most critical generator of negative reciprocity from older party members as they tend to exploit young people’s weak financial position to their advantage. This in turn obscures the relevance of youth and underlines their own perception as “political tools” ready to be used (and abused) at will by older party members.

“We have youthful leaders on the NEC of our party. And I will tell you. If you propose, for example, that we want to hold a national policy committee meeting on such and such a date, who is able to sponsor himself or herself for this meeting? Out of ten youths, only perhaps one, at best two will say they will sponsor themselves. What does that mean? Are they prepared to sacrifice for the betterment of the party? That is the problem of our youths.” KII senior official, Zambia.

“In my view, this is what is spoiling the politics of our country. Because if you call people for an interactive meeting, the first thing they will look for is what is it that I will get out [of the meeting]? So even them, when putting people in positions, they would look who has got what to support us? So, not necessarily in political parties [but] even in constituencies if you look at the quality of the MPs or whatever, they put people not necessarily that they will drive the economy, they will drive positive policies or whatever, but they are people who would give them money during elections, and they are able to vote for [as little as] MK2000. To them even if they suffer for five years, they will wait [for the next election]...” KII senior party official, Malawi.

5.7. Lack of commitment and resilience among youth

Youth also appear to lack commitment, resilience or perseverance. Rather, they tend to look for quick fixes, especially for their financial wellbeing, which becomes frustration if not successfully achieved. In most cases, this creates a nomadic political life among the majority of young people. Consequently, youth are regarded as less serious, a situation that compromises their agency in their search for wider space for meaningful participation.

“What most youths want is that if they belong to party X, Y, let it win the following day. So, for most of them, their main concern is to quickly climb a

political party as a ladder to getting those positions. Now, when the party cannot give them that, then most of them become disillusioned, some of them, you know end up trotting from one party to another. So (1), lack of commitment to the ideals of the party they support. (2) [there is] crisis of rising expectations. Some of them think because they joined a political party, the political party must be the government the following day. It does not work like that. Sometimes you have to be in a position for a number of years...In short most of them have soft skins. If you want to succeed in politics, you must have a thick skin but at the same time be focused and stick to the ideals your party stands for.... Most of them, you dangle a bag of money in front of them, they will forget policies and jump for that bag of money.” KII senior party official, Zambia.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

The increase in youth participation in political life since the establishment of multiparty democracy in Malawi and Zambia indicates young people’s growing interest and rightful demand for political space. However, it appears that older party members are failing to acknowledge this. Youth continue to struggle to achieve real influence in decision-making and are relegated to the margins of party processes. The problem is not one-sided. Youth themselves also sometimes lack the creative drive to nurture and sustain their agency. Consequently, no specific constituency can be held responsible for the limited influence of young people. But considering the generally underprivileged position of youth in society in general, and in politics in particular, retrogressive political cultures reinforced by older party members cannot be ignored, as they amplify the lethargy of the agency of youth. It is therefore imperative for political parties to understand their role in creating conducive environments for youth and other marginalized or socially excluded groups. Party leadership need to start listening to youth, create genuine space for youth engagement and acknowledge that youth are not a threat but a useful resource. This can be achieved by implementing the following recommendations:

a. Adopting the AU age definition of youth

To achieve meaningful inclusion for young people, political parties should adopt and respect the AU age definition of youth (15-35 years) in internal party documents and procedures. This would accord the ‘real’ youth – under 35 years of age – recognition and influence within the parties.

b. Ensuring guaranteed representation

To ensure that youth participate in the decision-making processes of their parties, political parties need to make constitutional guarantees regarding youth representation. One way for parties to do this is to **introduce voluntary youth quotas**. Young people would be appointed to positions within parties’ key governing structures, thereby ensuring a minimum degree of youth representation.

c. Strengthening the autonomy of youth wings

Parties need to recognize the significance of youth wings and equip them to function properly. Youth wings should not be a symbolic gesture but originate from a concerted

desire to create greater political space in the interest of meaningful youth participation. This can be achieved by, for example, by allowing youth wings to hold their own elective conferences in which they freely elect their leaders and come up with policy issues for the attention of the mother party.

d. Developing party-specific youth policies

Parties need to develop cross-sector youth policies that cover all decisions and policy areas that affect young people in a number of different areas. These might include employment, education, health, leisure, culture, and more.

The process of developing the youth policies should be done with considerable input from young people.

e. Enhancing multiparty youth platforms

There is need for youth to coalesce their agency and work together within their political diversity to fight for common causes. Conceived within the “united we stand, divided we fall” context, this is critical for breaking the individualistic approach to agency, which older party members have exploited.

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