



# Youth And Child Advocacy Network (YACAN) in collaboration with Youth CSOs and DYCs

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## POSITION PAPER

### *A call for an integrated, holistic and inclusive National Youth Policy for Sierra Leone: A Policy Recommendation from youth organizations in Western Area Rural and Urban*

Thursday, 16<sup>th</sup> April 2020

#### Executive Summary

The government of Sierra Leone is obliged under domestic and international laws to comply with the need for policy responses to systemic youth issues. The Commonwealth Youth Programme Africa Region (CYPAR) has developed a holistic youth policy framework with positive, proactive and workable approach to supporting the development of youth policies across the Commonwealth countries. This strategic policy approach represents a mix of consultative agreements on policy and legislative framework at the local, regional and national levels among various levels of governments, ministries, departments, communities, youth organisations and other stakeholders. In line with the principles of the CYPAR, Sierra Leone has undertaken youth policy reforms that require periodic reviews in order to meet the demographic youth situation.

The Ministry of Youth Affairs (MOYA) on Monday 5th August 2019 launched the “2014 Revised National Youth Policy Review process at the Ministry of Information and Communications Conference Room, Youyi Building in Freetown. At the launch event, the Minister of Youth Affairs, Mr. Mohamed Oman Bangura committed that the review process will be done in a “collaborative, visibly transparent and inclusive way”. He called on youth to be actively involved in the review process stating that “*we are handing over to the young people to decide what the policy and strategic development of their lives will be for the next five years*”.

The deputy Commissioner of the National Youth Commission (NAYCOM), Mr. Emerson Kamara at the same launch event expressed that “the most effective ways to bolster youth development include “developing robust stand-alone youth policies and integrating young people into sectoral policies of line Ministries”. He stressed on the need to build synergies to address the perennial youth problems in Sierra Leone.

On Monday, 23<sup>rd</sup> March, 2020, Youth And Child Advocacy Network (YACAN) held a one day policy review consultative process that aimed at identifying existing gaps in the revised 2014 National Youth Policy. The session discussed priority areas, policy options and key challenges related to the formulation/ planning, implementation and monitoring of the 2014 National Youth Policy of Sierra Leone. The process was facilitated by Mr. Charles Lahai, a local consultant with several years of experience working in the youth sector. Breakout sessions were held to enable participants to deliberate and make policy recommendations about the policy models and their respective implementation strategies.



## Introduction

*“Youth policy often fails young people. Knowing what to do is in many ways the easy part of devising policy. Making sure it gets done, and done well, is more difficult. Youth policy has had at best mixed success in ensuring smooth transitions for the young, for at least three reasons: i). Poor coordination among policies and sectors that affect youth and limited accountability for youth outcomes, ii). Weak voice of young people in monitoring and providing feedback on the quality of policy and service delivery, iii). The paucity of proven successes” (World Development Report 2007).*

One of the major factors that have affected the implementation of National Youth Policies in Sierra Leone can be attributed to a change of political regimes and uninformed competition among stakeholders who seek to influence youth policy at different levels.

Sierra Leone has experienced some degree of stakeholder participation, inclusivity and consensus among young people on the development of a nationally owned youth-centred policy framework that seeks to address national youth development priorities. However, political regime changes have influenced limitations in consensus building and inadequate youth participation and inclusion about how government can implement appropriate strategies to address the growing youth challenges. These challenges have also been compounded by limited resources availability as well as political will. This pattern and approach has further rendered national, district, chiefdom and zonal youth structures weak and dysfunctional.

A National Youth Policy framework that is ambiguous and without a shared vision is likely to bring detrimental effects not only on the youth but the nation as a whole. The review of the revised 2014 NYP should therefore take into consideration the need to build on social capital. With the presence of youth structures at the national, district, chiefdom and zonal levels, there exist an opportunity to maximise resources, promote inclusivity, set targets and priorities and redefine the contextual youth policy framework. In this regard, the involvement of the National Youth Council (NYC) in particular, and other Youth Organisations and Youth Serving Agencies in the current National Youth Policy review process will in no small way inject formal collaborative models rather than confrontational models. Formal collaborative models will ensure unhindered access, and would not necessarily mean that NYCs have influence over policy making, but rather ensure that the 2020 reviewed National Youth Policy is properly implemented in a way that planning and formulation will involve as many people as possible, especially those who will be directly affected by the policy.

This youth consultative review of the 2014 National Youth Policy for Sierra Leone is therefore part of a collaborative, inclusive and consultative strategic process led by Youth And Child Advocacy Network (YACAN) with support from OXFAM International in Sierra Leone.

## Approach

Representatives from twenty five (25) youth organisations including the District Youth Councils (DYCs), Western Rural and Urban were brought together in a one day consultative meeting to discuss the current policy, identify gaps and challenges and make policy recommendations focusing on the policy framework, core youth priorities and implementation and monitoring mechanisms. Breakout sessions, presentations and plenary discussions led to the development of this position paper with policy recommendations to the government of Sierra Leone for inclusion into the revised 2014 National Youth Policy.

*On this note therefore,*

Recognising that the wider policy environment should have an impact on the Sierra Leonean youth in particular and the society in general;

Considering that the revised 2014 NYP should not stand alone, but is rather influenced by other public sector policies;

Noting that the revised NYP is carefully planned to achieve the desired effects on the youth and their communities;

Ensuring that the revised 2014 NYP is driven on the motive of a shared vision for youth;

Reaffirming our commitment to ensure that the revised 2014 NYP process is properly planned, formulated, implemented, monitored and evaluated in a participatory and inclusive manner with input from the youth who are directly affected by its implementation;

We the representatives from the 25 youth organisations including the District Youth Councils, Western Urban and Rural, in the Western Area of the Republic of Sierra Leone, having gone through the various sections of the revised 2014 National Youth Policy, notes the following key concerns for consideration and subsequent action by the Government of Sierra Leone through the Ministry of Youth Affairs and the National Youth Commission of Sierra Leone;

**Policy Gaps:**

We observed that the revised 2014 National Youth Policy is conspicuously unclear about the complimentary and supportive policy implementation roles of the National Youth Commission (NAYCOM) and the National Youth Councils' in the rolling out process as well as influencing the policy review. The apparent tyranny of participation creates limitations as to who participates, how they participate, for whom they participate and when they participate in the policy implementation.

We note with concern, the depth and breadth of the policy, including coverage, coordination and links to other policy areas (e.g. formal and informal education including internship programs for graduates and under graduates, Tech Voc programmes in all government and government assisted schools/institutions), gender and disability ( e.g. increase in percentage of female and PWDs representation in all MDAs), housing, health, entrepreneurship and livelihoods, governance and decision making, etc, and coordination and impact of the policy including its influence upon decisions about its funding.

**Challenges:**

One of the key factors that affected the implementation of a sound National Youth Policy with a strategic vision for the youth has been associated to political or regime changes. The revised 2014 youth policy gave birth to the development of a strategic and programmatic document called the "Blue Print to Youth Development" as a means to respond to the perceived lack of conceptual standards of the previous policy. Other challenges identified in the implementation of the revised 2014 National Youth Policy included; less female youth participation in key programmes, limited access to opportunities ( including, information, jobs, scholarships, political interference, lack of capital for entrepreneurship and enterprise development, limitations in the functions of NAYCOM and the NYCs.



## **Key Priorities for the Revised 2014 National Youth Policy:**

We believe that a policy with a vision for youths should be built on the following key priorities; inclusion, information, participation, healthy lifestyle, formal and informal education/learning, employment, gender and disability, coordination, collaboration and partnerships and a supportive legal framework that ensures adequate budgetary support and rights based approach to youth empowerment and development. Lessons should be drawn from the 2018 World Bank Report which notes the high dropouts of females in Secondary School and the UNDP National Human Development Report and other body of knowledge that links TVET with Adolescent Girls and young women.

## **Policy Recommendations:**

The policy recommendations discussed in the consultation is hereby summarized to be customized to suit the Sierra Leone context, taking cognizant of the stage of the demographic transition and making the reviewed youth policy more effective, participatory, rights-based, goal-oriented, comprehensive and cross-sectorial.

### **1. Shared Vision and Redefinition of Youth:**

We noticed a variation in the definition of youth age brackets at the UN, Africa Union and Commonwealth levels. Therefore, a concerted effort should clearly redefine the youth age brackets to meet acceptable standards, identify and categorise specific youth groups with clear policy statements and programmes designed to give priority attention to these groups.

### **2. A coherent national framework for Youth**

A well-articulated bottom-up grassroots policy framework with actual programmes and sets of SMART national objectives for youth, and budget commitment developed with key stakeholders including, NAYCOM, NYCs, Youth groups and other MDAs. This is especially important if Sierra Leone is to succeed in decentralizing public service delivery as a growing national development trend. Accountability will be easier if there is an established, clearly discernable linkage between the development of youth and the overall national development plan.

### **3. Address Gender and Disabilities**

A policy that serves as an instrument to raise gender and disability-sensitive and holistic responses to needs and aspirations within the government Ministries, Departments, Agencies and the wider community but also as a vehicle based on the ideals, commitment, energy and creativity of young women and persons living with disabilities.

### **4. Integration of the reviewed policy into the country's national policy planning and implementation mechanisms**

The Policy must ensure that youth issues are well integrated into national policy planning and implementation mechanisms as most of the policy provisions will also be implemented by traditional line Ministries. This will enable the line Ministries to understand their roles and responsibilities in building and maintaining a specific constituency for youth issues and fit qualitative and quantitative targets to be achieved within a specified period of time.

## 5. Key Components, Structure, Coverage and Coordination of the Policy:

The key components of the policy framework should ensure effective capacity for delivery, wider coverage to ensure that the policy is popularised and accessible across national geographical boundaries. The policy framework should be strategic enough to set in place provisions that will promote effective collaboration, partnerships and coordination mechanisms, competence and professionalism ensured at all levels and available state and non-state funding to support the policy's budget / cost .

## 6. Legislation of the National Youth Policy:

We recommend the legislation of the revised 2014 National Youth Policy in order to protect the pattern of its implementation especially in such areas including; changes in key stakeholders, such as board or staff of the National Youth Council, changes in the position of Minister or civil servants, and dealing with external events, such as political and economic crises. Lessons learned in the past shows that these factors were often linked in a way that political change leads to changes in key stakeholders in the state and could mean changes in policy and policy reforms.

Policy legislation will ensure a high degree of participation, inclusion on the development of a conceptual, unbiased nationally owned policy framework that will address national youth priorities.

## Conclusion

On behalf of YACAN and all the 25 Youth organization including the District Youth Council in Western Area Rural and Urban that participated in the process, we present this position paper to the Minister of Youth Affairs for government's consideration and action in the review of the revised 2014 National Youth Policy for Sierra Leone.

Sign.....

Date: 16 April 2020

Name: Hassan Fuad Kanu

Position: Executive Director YACAN

- Youth and Child Advocacy Network (YACAN)
- Center for Coordination of Youth Activities (CCYA)
- Youth Association in Development Organization (YADO/WARD-C)
- Empowerment for women and Girls Initiative Sierra Leone
- Western Urban District Youth Council (Rep)
- Western Rural District Youth Council (Rep)
- AID-SL
- Initiative for Women and Girls Empowerment (IWGE)
- Network Movement for Youth and Children Welfare
- Forum for Person with Disability
- Kanikay Community Action Group
- Africa Youth Coalition against Hunger (AYCAH-SL)
- ECOWAS Youth Council

- Child Welfare Society
- Youth Action Movement Sierra Leone (YAM-SL)
- G.L.O.R.Y
- Giving Hope to children
- Kissi town Community Youth Action Group
- Education for all Coalition Sierra Leone (EFA-SL)
- Dwarzack community Girls and young women group
- O'Bangs Youth Organization – Gbendembu Goderich
- Harmonic Youth Development Organization
- District Youth Council waterloo rep
- Krio Heritage Organization
- Youth and children Advocacy panel