Youth Transitions to Adulthood: Changes, Trends and Implications for Preparing the next Generation of Africa*

Joseph Lah Lo-oh
University of Buea
Cameroon

Introduction and Background

The young are any country's greatest resource and hope for the future. But the situation is different in Africa with adverse circumstances confronting African children and youth who express awareness of their responsibility and unfortunate fate, growing up as Africans (Nsamenang 2002). Most of these young people's vision for adulthood is ill-fated by difficult economic social political cultural health and psychological conditions which have left most of Africa's children and youth hopeless and grudging in pain. Health care services economic resources and social services are unevenly distributed across the continent so that majority of adolescents are left lavishing in abject poverty unemployment under-sholarisation and a difficult labour market economy. For this reason, partially the issue of emerging adulthood has become primordial in most developing economies. Recently, in 21st century psychological research the issue of transition and the future of adulthood have become central issues in research on adolescence (e.g. Arnett 2000 2004; Shanahan 2000; Shanahan Porfeli & Motimer 2005; Cote 2000). However this new, brand of research is relatively not only new but also very scarce in developing economies like Africa. Besides adolescent psychology has also been branded as a "Eurocentric enterprise" where research "efforts have failed to capture what adolescence truly is in its global context" (Nsamenang 2002: 61). Rather scholars have tended to create or recast African and other non-western images of adolescence in the shadow of Euro-American adolescence so that no direct images of African adolescents are recorded.

With the absence of such quality research many questions about the developmental paths of African children and youth especially their pathways to adulthood have remained unanswered, or worse still unasked (Nsamenang 2007). Cameroonian youth for example especially those in high school, sometimes have demonstrated irresponsibility in their youth and the path to their adulthood so that we begin to wonder whether or not they ever reflect about the future of their adulthood. It is visible how a lot of African youth especially those from Cameroon today seem to proceed with life as if tomorrow or the future of their adulthood will never come (Nsamenang 2002). Many of them are ambivalent about taking on adult roles and responsibilities (Arnett 2004). Although they take a certain satisfaction in moving toward self-sufficiency they also find it burdensome and onerous to pay their own bills and do all the other things their parents had always done for them (Arnett 2007). Sometimes, they view adulthood as dull and stagnant the end of spontaneity and the end of a sense that anything is possible.

Moreover the economics of adulthood including characteristic changes and challenges of becoming financially independent autonomous personally and socially responsible emotionally stable and self-reliant also form a significant part of the problems of youth transitions. The economic social political and experiential situation around young people today enkindles feelings of a bleak future. Even the value of education especially in Cameroon as a pathway to adulthood has taken a downward trend since the 1990s with a lot of educational wastage (Mbua 2003). Many more young people though with high academic certificates are roaming the major streets of Cameroon without jobs. In this wise education or schooling to many young people and even some parents, is no longer a valid gateway to successful adulthood. It is no longer a concrete collateral for autonomy financial independence responsibility and other exigencies of adulthood. Young people and their parents report views of a future that is completely bleak (N'Sambuka & Allen 2002).

However, the arduous task of becoming adult remains impending and challenging, especially for African young people. Social and economic inequalities in the African continent continue to mark the challenges of the Africa's child and youth life courses. While wealthier urban children and youth are beginning to experience problems with over-nutrition some rural youth still face nutritional deprivation (Nsamenang 2007). Unemployment and crime rates are dramatically higher among rural youth and young adults. Wealthier youth and those in urban areas are more likely to be in school than their poor rural counterparts and thus enjoy significant advantages in a labour market that increasingly rewards credentials and not basic skills. The mark of rural poverty is clear in the elevated livelihood of rural youth participating in the labour force in the high percentage of working youth employed in agriculture and in the large-scale youth and young adult migration into urban settings. In the midst of all these Africa's children and youth also suffer the effect of disease especially HIV/AIDS and malaria increasing rates of unemployment alcoholism and drug trafficking corruption and embezzlement which continuously predict a bleak future for the future of African youth. This, somehow, is at the centre of explanations for why Africa's youth perceive adulthood the way they do and why they eventually become what they become in their adulthood.

Demographic Trends Affecting Next Generations in Africa

The world population is currently estimated at 6,571,414,237 (UNFPA 2007). It is projected that by 2050 this population would reach nine billion making a 38 per cent jump from the 2007 figure and more than the 1.6 billion people believed to have existed in 1900. The continental spread of this population is such that of every 100 people 61 live in Asia 14 in Africa 11 in Europe nine in Latin America five in North

America and less than one in Oceania. Out of every 100 babies, 57 are born in Asia 26 in Africa nine in Latin America five in Europe and less than one in Oceania. It is also important to report that sub-Saharan Africa remains the region with the highest fertility (Smith 2004). Incidentally we find that only 17 per cent of the world's population lives in industrialised countries while rapid growth is forecast in the least developed nations. For example the population in Burkina Faso Burundi Chad Congo the Democratic Republic of Congo Guinea-Bissau Liberia Mali Niger and Uganda is projected to triple between 2005 and 2050 (UNFPA 2007). Such projections tie with demographers foreseeing declining aged populations in many industrialised nations; and growing younger populations in the developing world (African Development Forum 2006; LIoyd 2005). This means that fertility rates will likely remain low in regions where babies are most-wanted and highest in regions where poverty and hunger are prevalent – the situation of Africa. This increase is owed to the high fertility rate that underlies Africa's youth demographics.

The foregone projections if true then future global population growth will be heavily concentrated in Latin America Africa, and South Asia. Concretely by 2050 Africa's population is expected to spring from its present estimated 900 million to almost two billion while South Asia's is projected to swell from 1.6 billion to nearly 2.5 billion. Every 18 per cent of women 15-19 years of age gave birth in central Africa 6 per cent in Southeast Asia one per cent in Western Europe (Population Reference Bureau 2000). The age structure of the world's population indicates 1.8 billion people under age 15 years (27.4%) 4.8 billion people age 15-64 years (65.2%) and 483 million people are 65 years plus (7.4%). Furthermore two billion people under the age of 20 are in the less developed regions of the world. In the case of sub-Saharan Africa 45 per cent of the population was under 15 years in 1998 making the African continent the youngest world continent. Africa's child and youth cohorts make up over 60 per cent of the total population (Nsamenang 2002).

These analyses indicate that a significant proportion of sub-Saharan African population is children and youth. But they still represent the most affected population cohorts in the continent. Infant mortality declined in Africa to 105 per 1000 live births in 1997 but is still the highest in the world. Of the children who survive through age six nearly one-third of them are chronically malnourished (Nsamenang 2007). This precarious situation is currently worsen by the devastating AIDS pandemic which left 11 million orphans in 2001 closed to 80 per cent of the world total (UNICEF 2003). This situation is exemplified in a Uganda survey showing that every fourth house-hold hosts a child to parents who have died of AIDS (Baguma 2006). This is expected to grow to 20 million by 2010 if urgent attention is not rendered.

Another serious problem plaguing the growth of children and youth in Africa is the war and civil conflict within states causing internal and out-of-country displacements. In 1999 at least 85 per cent of the total displaced persons in the continent were children and women (The World Facebook 2006). Today 20 per cent of sub-Saharan Africa's total population of children below six years is seriously at risk (Nsamenang 2007). These precarious concerns have led to declining life expectancy so that people expect to live just 36 years in Zimbabwe 38 in Zambia and 40 in Malawi (The World Facebook 2006). This means that children and youth have become the greatest investment of societies if they expect to develop and meet the standards of world global economies. Countries, especially those south of the Sahara, need to begin to seek and advocate new frontiers with novel insights on how to assist young people through their transitions inadvertently building and preparing next generation Africa.

In terms of current youth participation in the world of work youth account for 45 per cent of the total labour force in Africa hence the need for Africa's development effort to reflect this demographic fact. However more than 50 per cent of that youth is illiterate, and instead of being in school or training centres more than 300,000 of them serve rebel movements as bush soldiers. As a result of this demography many young people have little or no skills and are excluded from productive economic and social life existing without hope and support (Nsamenang 2002). Those that have some education exhibit skills irrelevant to current demand in the labour market and at a time when educational and skill requirements are increasing resulting in millions of unemployed and underemployed youth (African Deve-lopment Forum 2006). This calls for urgent need to improve the quality of education and training for the youth in the African continent.

Basic Characteristics of Young Adulthood: Implications for Generational Scheduling

But what marks the on-set of adulthood in children and youth? There are many perspectives that explain the on-set of adulthood (young adulthood) its basic characteristics and responsibilities. Developmental psychologists usually focus on physical cognitive and emotional characteristics. From that perspective most young adults have completed the process of physical maturation usually attaining full adult height and full development of secondary sex characteristics. Cognitive changes during these years may constitute a framework for subjective adulthood perception among transitioning adoles-cents. According to developmental psychologists most young adults aged 18 and over will move into adult roles and responsibilities and may learn a trade work and/or pursue higher education; fully understand abstract concepts and be aware of consequences and personal limitations; identify career goals and prepare to achieve them; secure their autonomy and build and test their decision making skills; and develop new skills hobbies and adult interests (Huberman 2002). Emotionally most transitioning young people will begin to move into adult relationships with their parents; see the peer group as less important as a determinant of behavior; feel empathic; have greater intimacy skills; complete their values framework; carry some feelings of invincibility; and establish their body image. Sexually young adults may begin to enter into intimate sexual and emotional relationships; understand their own sexual orientation although they may still experiment; understand sexuality as connected to commitment and planning for the future; shift their emphasis from self to others; and experience more intense sexuality (Huberman 2002).

There are also specific characteristics and traditional practices that mark the coming of adulthood in African societies. Here the socio-cultural dimension of adolescence is marked by a set of cultural norms and practices that govern the transition

from childhood to adulthood (Tchombe 2007). Examples of such norms are initiation rites marriage changed ways of dressing circumcision rites cultural initiation schools ritual expectations and ceremonies (Shumba & Seeco 2007; Tchombe 2007; Araria 2007). After performing these norms the individual is regarded differently now as an adult. For example among the Setswana of Botswana the transition from boyhood to manhood come with certain privileges and responsibilities (Shumba & Seeco 2007). These practices including adolescent hedonistic conceptions of life set them to think and regard the future of their adulthood in subjective terms. The major adult transition for Africans is that young people achieve in life by being auto-nomous self-reliant responsible for self and others self-sufficient self confident independent and above all interde-pendent collective and supportive to the well being of their kin and community. And so, they do not need to graduate from school pick up jobs get married and have children before they are capable of doing these. They are begun to be nurtured right from childhood through traditional practices like hunting fishing farming cooking and caregiving towards responsible adulthood. These explain the power of agency and subjectivity in Africa's children and youth cohorts.

But according to traditional demographers (e.g. Hogan & Astone 1986) the attainment of adulthood include a cluster of transitions, beginning with the completion of school entry into the labour force and exit from the parental household followed by marriage and parenthood. Brown Moore & Bzostek (2004) also describe key characteristics of young adults in relation to educational attainment and financial self-sufficiency health behaviours family formation, and civic involvement. Meanwhile other research think of the attainment of adulthood in terms of the acquisition of the skills and attitudes needed to perform adult roles (Richter & Pandey 2006). However by either of these standards and based on their subjective assessment many young people have not yet become fully adult because they are not ready or able to perform the full range of adult roles and they have not forged a stable identity of who they are and where they fit into in society (Furstenberg Kennedy McCloyd Rumbaut & Settersten 2003).

According to Arnett (2000) young people in their late teens and early twenties are not adults but emerging adults. Unlike adults they are undergoing a period of exploration where they can test out a variety of possible life courses in love work and worldviews since they have not yet entered the enduring responsibilities that are normative in adulthood (Benson & Furstenberg 2003). On this account young people today especially those in developing economies such as sub-Sahara Africa middle-class whites minority groups and those from working class families do not define the attainment of adulthood based on traditional societal events (Benson & Furstenberg 2003). Rather, they see adulthood subjectively depending on what they are capable of doing as individuals and with the means available. This may account for why basic characteristics of adulthood today are shifting away from traditional demographic events such as leaving school finding a full time job getting married and having a child to more subjective personal feelings of individual autonomy personal responsibility self control and financial autonomy which are arrived at through self-assessments person agency and voice; and not by societal demand.

A study conducted in South Africa (Richter & Panday 2006) finds that across Africa south of the Sahara there is a high degree of consensus that adulthood comes with ability to set up and maintain an independent family and household that is financially sustainable safe and provides a nurturing environment. This makes conceptions of adulthood across African youth more subjective than demographic. As such, African youth transitions are underpinned by the need to establish financial and residential independence from parents and the associated requirements of economic self-sufficiency through education or sound schooling. These transitions may also be embedded in, and dictated by, the peer culture where being with and hanging out with peers may shape or reshape youth strides towards adulthood from the perspective of group influence or peer culture.

Keeping with the indicators outlined by Arnett (1998, 2000) explaining the shift from event markers of adulthood to subjective markers emphasizing the psychological, personal and emotional establishment of youth independence and responsibility for their own family, Richter and Panday (2006) also discuss reasons for the shift within the African context. Accordingly African young people spend more time in school, experiencing delayed entry into the labour market and increasing the gap between youthood and adulthood. They also have to contend with inordinately high rates of unemployment, so that the completion of education does not always lead to a job. The result is that ensuing characteristics such as marriage, parenthood, and so on are also delayed. Contrarily, employment, and particularly full-time employment remains the key to self-sufficiency for most young adults (Brown Moore & Bzoste 2004) especially in Euro-American societies. This difficulty has made the transition to adulthood in Africa today more or less a psychological emotional and personal experience far from traditional social event markers.

Global Youth Transitions

The transition to adulthood is a period of social psychological economic and biological transitions and for many involves demanding emotional challenges and important choices (LIoyd 2005). The transition to adulthood was compressed and standardized during the first half of the twentieth century then stretched out and individualized during the later part of the century (Hayford & Furstenberg 2008). The implication of these changes in the transition to adulthood for other life course stages is unclear. Some scholars argue that the delay in the adoption of adult roles means that adolescence is being extended (Buchmann 1989). To other researchers the increasing length of the transitional period and the later entry into full adult status suggest the development of a new life stage labeled young or emerging adulthood (Arnett 2000; Hendry & Kloep 2007). Whichever way social definitions of what it means to be an adult for oneself or for others have evolved in response to changes in the transition to adulthood (Furstenberg Kennedy McCloyd Rumbaut & Settersten 2003).

For many decades scholars all over the world held that entry into adulthood was delineated by five transition markers: completing school leaving home beginning one's career marrying and becoming a parent (Shanahan 2000; Settersten 2006). By assuming these roles youth were thought to relinquish the hallmarks of adolescence including dependency on

parents immature behaviour that reflects experimentation with roles and indecision about one's identity; and in turn the newly acquired adult roles brought with them strong expectations for adult behaviour (Shanahan Porfeli & Motimer 2005).

However based on these five criteria the global percentage of youth in their twenties and thirties who would qualify as adult has decreased significantly in recent decades (Mortimer and Aronson 2001). For example education has extended into the late twenties and early thirties family formation has been postponed and many young people plan on remaining single and childless well into their thirties if not indefinitely (Casper & Bianchi 2002) cited in Shanahan Porfeli & Motimer (2005). They also argue that by the end of the 20th century most adults hold expectations about the timing of these markers but they do not view off-time transitions as deserving of disapprobation. These social changes have prompted new views of what constitutes adulthood. Among these views are "emerging adulthood" (Arnett 2004, 2000) which now constitutes a phase of the life course extending between adolescence and adulthood; similarly "youthhood" (Cote 2000) "adoles-centhood" (Nsamenang 2005 2002) or "contestable adulthood" (Horowitz & Bromnick 2007) suggesting a new phase of life during which "psychological adulthood is hopefully attained through personal strivings" (Shanahan & Longest 2007:7).

Emerging adults unlike full adults are undergoing a period of exploration where they can test out a series of possible life courses in love work and worldviews because they have not yet entered the enduring responsibilities that are normative in adulthood (Arnett 2000; Barry & Nelson 2005; Furstenberg Kennedy, McCloyd Rumbaut & Settersten 2003). It is because young adults are in this period of exploration that their subjective sense of adulthood is based less on traditional socio-demographic markers but more on individualistic markers and attitudes (Settersten 2006; Arnett 1998, 2000; Shanahan Porfeli & Motimer 2005; Benson & Furstenberg 2003). For these reasons the transition to adulthood is characterised by heightened risk-taking behaviour and self-exploration of numerous domains (Arnett 2000 1998) which empty in the acquisition of the skills and attitudes needed to perform adult roles (Furstenberg Kennedy McCloyd Rumbaut & Settersten 2003). It is largely a period when late adolescents and early adults begin to figure out what they want to do and how they might go about it. It presupposes that a developing adolescent acquires a set of characteristics that enables him or her to perform expected adult behaviours (Benson & Furstenberg 2003; Saetermoe Beneli & Busch 1999; Furstenberg Kennedy McCloyd Rumbaut & Settersten 2003).

In terms of age norms there has been disagreement on when exactly the transition process lasts. However various researches have outlined indicators with Arnett 2000 1998; Stoep, Beresford, Weiss, McKnight B. Cauce, & Cohen, (2000) citing 18 to 25 years. Meanwhile Furstenberg Kennedy McCloyd Rumbaut & Settersten (2003) argue that many adolescents do not complete the transition to adulthood these days until their late 20s or even early 30s. Yet to others (Benson & Furstenberg 2003) the timing of demographic transitions varies by socioeconomic position. The most prevalent issue is that it does indeed take much longer to make the transition to adulthood today than decades ago (Furstenberg Kennedy McCloyd Rumbaut & Settersten 2003) and the process has become more ambiguous and occurs in a less uniform and more gradual complex fashion (Settersten 2006). Behind this is the fact that it takes much longer to get a full-time job that pays enough to support a family than it did in the past.

Changes and Trends in Youth Transitions

Over the last 30 years virtually all event markers of adulthood have been shifted to older ages (Furstenberg 2000). For instance a higher proportion of students completed high school in the 1990s than in the 1960s and more students now enrol into university education pushing forth the age of leaving school. Also, the median age for marriage and first birth has risen steadily since 1970s (Casper & Bianchi 2002). In addition, the timing of these role changes has become more varied across individuals and within individual life courses (Buchmann 1989; Shanahan 2000). For example it has become more common to have a child before marrying and to re-enter school after spending sometime in the labour force (Hayford & Furstenberg 2008). The net result of these changes is that most people are taking longer to go through the full set of transitions into adult roles and some are delaying marriage and parenthood indefinitely. The changes are also implicating youth definitions and perceptions of what adulthood is and how they would eventually get there. This explains why commentators such as Nsamenang (2007) Galambos and Leadbeater (2000) and Wyn (2005) have charged researchers to place the participants' voice at the centre of the research process to properly encapsulate the experience of life during these transitions.

Contemporary sociological theorising also explains the changes in the transition to adulthood indicating that the transition is not only prolonged and destandardised but also uncertain and reversible (Horowitz & Bromnick 2007). According to Stauber and Walther (2002) today's young people have to manage shifts between dependency and independence and back to dependency as a result of switching trajectories either through personal choice or force for example unemployment or relationship break down. From this perspective changing states of semi-dependency have replaced the dichotomy of dependency in youth and autonomy in adulthood (Biggart & Walther 2006) explaining why 18- to 25-year- olds tend to describe themselves as young and adult at the same time (du Bois-Reymond & Stauber 2005).

In trying to understand this extended and heterogeneous life transition the question "when does adolescence end?" has become a key issue for research in the 21st century. Arnett has undertaken a prolific series of studies addressing this issue. His findings somewhat point to a consistent pattern leading him to conclude that markers of the transition to adulthood are "intangible gradual psychological and individualistic" (Arnett 1997:15). Arnett (2000) sees the time between adolescence and adulthood as being separate from either period labelling it "emerging adulthood:" an empirically distinguishable phase when young people see themselves as being too old to be adolescents but not yet full-fledged adults. With this a new strand of research has escalated in the field of adolescent research. Research into emerging adulthood has highlighted that young adults reject traditional role transitions in their conceptions of adulthood and instead place importance on

responsibility decision making and autonomy (Arnett 1997 1998 2003; Greene Wheatley & Aldava 1992). In Arnett's (1997) fixed choice questionnaire the item "Accept responsibility for the consequences of your actions" was the most popular of his 40 items as being necessary for adulthood (Horowitz & Bromnick 2007). Cross-cultural replications of Arnett's theorisation revealed that this emphasis on responsibility and other markers of independence are not confined to white Americans (e.g. Facio & Micocci 2003). Similar findings have been reported using qualitative open-ended data collection techniques leading to a consensus among many that the transition to adulthood is marked by a coherent set of criteria (Horowitz & Bromnick 2007). My ongoing research also partly focuses on this set of coherent criteria but from adolescent perceptual perspectives of adulthood in African societies. It is aimed at determining whether African youth (in Cameroon) define the future of adulthood using the same set of coherent criteria or basically in ways typical of African worldviews and then further tests them against the transition agency of formal schooling otherwise "education".

African Youth and the Transition to Adulthood

Africa's youth are immersed in a triple inheritance (Mazrui 1986) of Arabic-Islamic cultural fragments and Western-Christian legacies that have been superimposed on a highly resilient but ruthlessly haggled indigenous Africanity (Nsamenang 2005). The African worldview conceives of the youth as growing out of childhood and poised for an adulthood that lies in the future (Araria 2007; Nsamenang 2002). And in African social ontogeny adolescence is regarded as a "way station" between the stages of social apprenticeship in childhood and the full social integration in adulthood beginning with social entré a brief transitional period that may be approximated with puberty that marks the beginning of adult life (Nsamenang 2002; Serpell 1994). African young people are considered the bridge to Africa's future and the hope of the continent. Adolescence and young adulthood are typically marked by rituals rites of passage and initiations into diverse sacred societies. For example there is *goat sacrifice* and corn *flour sacrifice* for deceased maternal aunt or uncle and for deceased father among the Kom people of Cameroon; *bogwera* (for boys) and *bojale* (for girls) among the Setswana of Botswana; and among the Nara ethnic group of Eritrea there is a ceremony to celebrate manhood and womanhood at age 14 (Shumba & Seeco 2007; Tchombe 2007; Araria 2007; Nsamenang 2002; Serpell 1994; Erny 1987; Jahoda 1982; Mckinney Fitzgerald & Strommen 1982). In most of these societies these traditional practices mark the adolescent's coming of age or transition to adulthood.

In the past young people around the world tended to move directly from childhood to adult roles but today the interval between childhood and the assumption of adult roles is lengthening (LIoyd 2005) moving towards and across youthood and adolescenthood (Cote 2000; Nsamenang 2002) otherwise prolonged adolescence.. Compared to the situation 20 years ago LIoyd (2005) argues that young people today are entering adolescence earlier and healthier; more likely to spend their adolescence in school; more likely to postpone entry into the labour force; and more likely to delay marriage and childbearing. As a result of these changes young people, especially those in the developing world including Africa, have more time and opportunities than ever before to reflect about what their futures would be and acquire the information and skills necessary to become effective participants in decisions about their own lives and futures.

Among the Setswana of Botswana adolescence is referred to as *go itlhalefa* literally meaning a period of self-discovery and usually beginning at about age 11 to adulthood (Shumba & Seeco 2007) and emphasising the psychological significance of identity formation and understanding. The Bamileke of Cameroon conceptualise three phases of adolescence (Tchombe 2007). They term the 6 to 12 years *mooh-goh* "girl child and *mooh seup* "boy child" marked by circumcision socialisation into practical life and participation in community activities. The 12- to 15-year-olds are referred to as *tchieu-goh* "young girl" and *tchieu-seup* "young boy" characterised by identity formation retreat and isolation. Finally the 15-to 20-year-olds are known as *Goh* "girl" and *Seup* "boy" with capacities for marriage submission to parents elders social laws and regulations. These conceptualisations give the youth more natural outlets for their interests and powers allowing them to grow up freely into full responsibility in their community (Tchombe 2007). However some African societies for example those of Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo do not consider adolescence as a stage of life (Bangurambona 2007; Ntotila 2007). Rather they maintain a developmental trail that is continuous beginning from childhood and running to adulthood with opportunities for training for independent and autonomous livelihood.

Next generations analyses from Africa's current demographic trends are critical for five interrelated but often ignored reasons (Nsamenang 2007). First nowhere are children born with the knowledge responsible values and skills with which to face adolescence or cope with the challenges of transition into adulthood. Children learn them during ontogeny from an early age in African cultures. But the institution whose role is to prepare Africa's next generation the school seems oblivious of this fact of African cultures. This is because education curricula in African countries are deficient in stark local realities and systematic national content as well as oblivious of national skills needs and labour market requirements.

Secondly having been forced-fit into European Enlightenment narratives which are ways of organising thought and child life that are alien to most people around the world (Cannella & Viruru 2004); parental societal and official attitudes worldwide now marginalise and underrate the young therein constricting youth potentials and narrowing analytic frames and visions.

Thirdly all children face difficulty in the tortuous transitions from conception through adolescence to the maturity and responsibility of adulthood sometimes due to often paradoxical conditions coexisting in the same societies such as affluences and poverty or indulgence and deprivation. The resilience inherent in some of the daunting youth conditions have not even been recognised much less documented. There is blindness to developmental pathways and transitions that have never been imagined by western disciplinary theories.

Fourthly factors responsible for population growth make for both problems and possibilities. While higher population densities might engender higher crime rates and greater chances of epidemics

population explosion could generate a larger workforce and a bigger consumer base which can boost economic growth if properly harnessed. With this young people could begin to get close to financial independence with fewer problems.

Finally next-generations analyses tend to be framed from western ideological positioning of transmitting universal (western) knowledge skills and policy frameworks instead of from a post-modernist platform of every society transmitting its cultural curriculum and patterns of livelihood. All these underscore the African garden metaphors which connote a gradual unfolding of human abilities and serial attainment of levels of maturity and valued compe-tencies at various "way stations" of human ontogenesis (Nsamenang 1992). In addi-tion next-generation analysis for sub-Saharan Africa neglect the resilience and resourcefulness with which youth in most countries in the region encounter negotiate and surmount significant obstacles to the transition to adulthood.

According to Nsamenang (2007), discourse on Africa's youth has not transcended the rhetoric of "calamity" that visualises casts and intervenes the young as problematic cohorts in the tedium of global imperatives offered to humanity by western civilisation. There is little understanding and doubtful data on the circumstances and imagined futures of Africa's huge next generations in their own experiences and voices. There are no published studies in the literature directly assessing the future expectations of African youth (Nsamenang 2007). Much of what has won the discourse in the literature is based on expert observations of researchers prying at adolescents (e.g. the discourse of African adolescents in Arnett 2007). The danger of data-scarce discourse and interventions is that they are driven by assumptions that misguide policy formulation and programming and falsify anticipated outcome indicators (Nsamenang 2007).

The Case of Cameroon

Cameroon is one of the 47 nation states in sub Saharan Africa (SSA) located in the Central African sub-region. Sub-Sahara Africa "stretches from the northern borders of Mauritania eastward across the Sudan to the horn of Africa and the Indian Ocean islands and down to its southerly border the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa" (Nsamenang & Lo-oh in press; Tchombe 1999). Therefore Cameroon is situated in Central Africa (CA) stretching northwards to the Sahara desert and emptying southwards to the Atlantic Ocean it is one of those occupying Sub-Sahara Africa. Cameroon shares boundaries with Nigeria to the West Chad to the North East Central African Republic to the East Congo Gabon and Equatorial Guinea to the South. Cameroon has a coastal line of 402 kilometres (km) which boards the Gulf of Guinea. It has an area of 475 000km squared. Land constitutes 466464km squared while water makes up 8536km squared. The country Cameroon is predominantly rural and agrarian so that most of its nationals live and work in rural areas (Tchombe 1999). The country's population increased from 13.5 million in 1995 to about 17 million in 2005 (MINPLADAT 2006). The distribution shows that about 79 per cent of the population are francophone while the rest (21%) are Anglophone. The population has more youths (56.3%) and women (50.1%). About 70 per cent of youths from rural areas immigrate to urban towns in search of jobs and educational opportunities. The literacy rate is about 64 per cent with more illiterate women (53.4%) than men (39.2%). Unemployment rate increased from 08.10 per cent (2001) to 10.70 per cent in 2005 while graduate unemployment was highest at 13.40 per cent. The family structure has gradually shifted from polygamy in the eighties to monogamy in the advent of the 21st century.

Like other SSA countries, Cameroon displays diversity in flora and fauna topography political regimes demographic profile ethno-linguistic composition (Nsamenang & Lo-oh in press; Lo-oh 2007) and colonial historical legacies. In fact it has often been referred to as "Africa in miniature" given its outstanding diverse characteristics peculiar of the rest of the continent. Cameroon like the rest of Africa is richly endowed with natural resources and human capital but it cannot afford to finance its human development services or fund research of its developmental contexts without foreign aid (Nsamenang & Lo-oh in press). This could be partly explained by the continent's inability to use youth potentials or manage them to fruition the "imposition of foreign ideological systems" (Lo-oh 2005 p.115) and imposed western expertise and tech-nologies (Nsamenang 2007) which heavily orient and determine the pathway for progress and development in Africa. Nevertheless by the year 2000 many African communities including Cameroon are entering the first wave of experiential learning and adoption of digital technologies in education and other facets of their development (Fuchs 2003), thereby gradually shading the digital gap. The expectation is that by the year 2015 Africa's naivety would have been eliminated so that it is able to succinctly face its problems (one of them adequately empowering the youth and preparing them for work and adult life) with inevitable solutions.

In Cameroon, countless situations and places in both urban and village settings expose children and youth to daily risks and vulnerabilities (Nsamenang 2007). These are milieus where young people especially girls are at heightened risk and easy susceptibility to HIV infection unwanted pregnancy and other reproductive health risks. Action research has identified some of these risk factors as social vices ignorance mispercep-tions peer pressure cultural traditions powerlessness and ineffective or absent parental support and guidance (N'Sambuka & Allen 2002). Most of these risks are brought about by rapid changes in the social arenas and political spheres (Nsamenang 2007). In a baseline survey in Bamenda Cameroon young people reported promiscuity (82%) unem-ployment (53%) and HIV/AIDS (37%) as major risks that endanger their imagined futures of adulthood. Like youth parents also expressed views acknowledging the bleak future for today's youth. Among impediments mentioned some of the youth voiced disconnectedness from service providers life skills and serviceable developmental information and topical issues in their communities and the world. Acceptable youth services especially counseling entrepreneurship education job shadowing programs can be effective mechanisms of dealing with transitioning youth problems and preparing them for responsible adulthood. Such programs have worked in Ghana Uganda and Kenya (Moya 2002) and could also work elsewhere in the continent.

However in Cameroon the current arrangement for youth and educational offerings are in about six government ministries even though other ministries offer specific training programmes. Firstly

the Ministry of Basic Education is in charge of nursery and primary education; the Ministry of Secondary Education is in charge of secondary general and technical education; the Ministry of Higher Education is responsible for university education at both professional and academic levels; the Ministry of Scientific and Technical Research addresses research endeavours as a whole; the Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training is in charge of youth employment and vocational training; meanwhile, the Ministry of Youth Affairs provides quality assistance towards youth development. We realise that the historic and political background weigh heavily on the country's educational system. The existing difference in structure examination duration practices and basic qualifications has been undergoing harmonization since 2002 (MINEDUC 2002). But the educational system has remained centrally examination oriented.

Problems Affecting Generational Preparation and Investment

Sub-Sahara Africa displays diversity in flora and fauna topography political regimes demographic profile ethno-linguistic composition and status of scientific and service disciplines like psychology and developmental science (Nsamenang & Lo-oh in press). In spite of these the region has the worst performance of any region of the world on virtually any measure of living standards including per capita income access to clean water life expectancy infant mortality and prevalence of diseases particularly HIV/AIDS (LIoyd 2005; Nsamenang 2002). Various development strategies and approaches have been offered as solutions to the continent's problems ranging from the large scale infusion of external financial and other capital resources to alternative approaches that emphasise "endo-genous" self-reliant sustainable deve-lopment and/or "development from within" (Bell 1986; McDougall 1990). Despite all the development efforts the major problems faced by the majority of African peoples have still not been resolved. In paradox most African countries are rich in natural resources, including petroleum gold diamonds timber wildlife (Nsamenang 2007). Another paradox is that even with its rich natural resources the continent has not been able to fund its education and youth programmes. Rather there have been reports of such resources being harnessed and exported to feed the western world, with nothing in return.

Despite some upturn in economic growth rates poverty is still widespread and, in many parts of the continent, extremely high. Investment remains subdued limiting efforts to diversify economic structures and boost growth. Furthermore a number of countries have only recently emerged from civil wars that have severely set back their development efforts while sadly new armed conflicts have erupted in other parts of the continent (e.g. the crises in Sudan Congo Zimbabwe Northern Uganda and so on). These conflicts and other adverse factors, such as health (e.g. HIV/AIDS and malaria) poverty corrupt practices and greed have led to some loss in economic momentum in the region over the past decades, making it impossible for smooth transitions to occur.

The new technological age is also leaving the African youth poorer in ICT knowledge skills and global reach (Nsamenang 2007). For example according to internetworldstats.com (2007) Africa contributes 14.2 per cent of world population but has only 3.0 per cent of global internet users. While the benefits of ICTs are obvious an often ignored but crucial fact is that ICTs alienate huge but restive cohorts of African youngsters from their cultural roots. For example the new phenomena of Internet negotiated marriages scamming or fraud transfusion of new cultural and moral values and so on constitute the web of Africa's youth transition which needs to be reshaped and re-examined to effectively prepare the future hope of the continent. There is need for Technology-Assisted Youth Programs where young people could be trained and guided in ICT use. This would eventually provide access to information and, as a result, bring them closer to the global economy.

Sub-Saharan African countries therefore face major challenges: to raise growth and reduce poverty and to integrate themselves into the world economy. Economic growth rates are still not high enough to make a real venture in curbing poverty and increasing the chances for finding work and bridging the gap between school and work and also preparing for adulthood. There is the absence of political will and love for nation-building which translates to poor policy and decision-making including policy implementation. It becomes compelling to examine how the transition to adulthood is changing in developing countries including Cameroon and what the implications of these changes might be for those responsible for designing youth policies and programmes in fact those affecting adolescent reproductive health.

Conclusion

It is common knowledge that any serious policy for social political and economic development in a developing society like Africa has the responsibility to recognize the importance of young people especially in promoting social progress reducing political tension and maximizing economic performance. Again the pace depth and scope of any society's development depend on how well its youth resources are nurtured deployed and utilized (African Development Forum 2006). Youth have several potential advantages for national social and economic development. The social advantages include a greater degree of mobility versatility openness adaptability and tolerance while in economic terms young people provide dynamism in the supply of labour required for faster economic growth (ADF 2006).

An increasing number of countries in sub-Saharan Africa are showing signs of economic progress however reflecting the implementation of better economic policies and structural reforms. These countries have successfully cut domestic and external financial imbalances enhancing economic efficiency. They have given greater priority to public spending on health care education and other basic social services. Nonetheless on the overall the economic and social situation in sub-Saharan Africa remains fragile and vulnerable to domestic and external shocks and the region has a long way to go to make up for the ground lost over the past decades.

However Africa's children and youth do not merit their undesirable and unfortunate condition. They need to be gainfully and creatively guided prepared and assisted through childhood adolescence to adulthood. This paper has demonstrated that attempts to lead Africa's effective generational preparation has witnessed a number of issues unaddressed distorted ignored or taken for granted. First and foremost, it is very important for African nation states and western collaborators

to shift from a narrative of turmoil and tragedy to one which handles young people as assets which need to be nurtured cared for and directed early in life. Again in the attempt to surmount their awful circumstances African youth demonstrate resilience and resourcefulness. These are attributes which deserve research attention discourse and programmatic enhancement. This brings forth new frontiers of child and youth research shifts from demographic to subjective transition trajectories to adulthood.

Moreover it is important to shift from the disaggregated data on youth into building evidenced-based images of young people in every country and for the continent. The contemporary image of Africa's youth has been revealed largely by observers who are cut off from local conditions and realities confined with their computers uncritical of bad data and ignorant of how people live are prone to construct for themselves and their colleagues costly worlds of fantasy prophesying doom and prescribing massive programs which are neither needed nor feasible (Chambers 1997). It is increasingly important to begin to seek scientific understanding of African youth from their own voices and experiences. Their experiences and perceptions are surely an important source of data (Smith 2005). They should raise important theoretical questions and expanded visions of the social contexts of children and youth and their preparation for adulthood and the workforce.

Furthermore the magnitude of high risk of HIV transmission war conflict hunger and poverty demand a better understanding of the phenomena and the consequences for reproductive health social and economic empowerment and responsible adulthood. This requires significant scientific research strides. In addition parental and familial resources including societal institutions remain central agencies in preparing the next generations. But the situation is more difficult for African parents families social institutions including governments which have to complete this heavy duty amidst competing contexts of indigenous and imported factors. Current interventions in Africa are not mounted on Africa's normative systems and achievements. Instead intervention programmes concentrate not on enhancing indigenous African skill repertoires knowledge systems and generative capacities but on perfecting mechanisms to bypass and/or replace them (Nsamenang 2007). Africa will not develop from implanting Euro-American civilisation onto its indigenous heritage but will make progress and transition into sustainable modernity through creative renovation and updating of early imported designs to suit the realities of Africa today.

The progress of Africa hinges more on listening to and learning from the African worldview seeing a holistic and integrated way of looking at the family and the universe in order to see things in a new way (Callaghan 1998). Renascent Africa will require an education system that is deeply rooted in the African soul – the family – and retains Africa's participative spirit and processes in sense of community with responsible and intergenerational shift. However in today's world of globalisation youth programs and transition efforts will largely depend on balancing and enhancing in the local context the benefits of institutions educational systems and service packages that reflect both local and global forces. In this way many more of the problems of transition would be overcome making way, for effective generational preparation.

Note

* This paper is a breed of my on-going PhD Research on "Adolescent Subjective Perception of Adulthood: Its Effects on Attitude to Schooling as a Transition Process"; and an on-going Jacobs Foundation funded research on "Africa's Youth and the Future of Work: Developing Strategies, Building Skills and Preparing the Next Generation of Cameroon".

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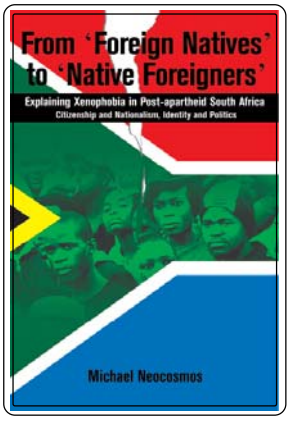

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The events of May 2008 in which 62 people were killed simply for being 'foreign' and thousands were turned overnight into refugees shook the South African nation. This book is the first to attempt a comprehensive and rigorous explanation for those horrific events. It argues that xenophobia should be understood as a political discourse and practice. As such its historical development as well as the conditions of its existence must be elucidated in terms of the practices and prescriptions which structure the field of politics. In South Africa, the history of xenophobia is intimately connected to the manner in which citizenship has been conceived and fought over during the past fifty years at least.